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Cover: Photograph of Imre Varga's Wallenberg Memorial by Károly Szelényi; Archive Photograph of Raoul Wallenberg, MTI Photo

György Konrád

On Raoul Wallenberg

• March 19, 1944 the Germans occupied Hungary. One hundred days later the entire country, with the exception of Budapest, was declared free of Jews. Under the instructions of the Sonderkommando, the Hungarian gendarmerie and the SS had deported the entire Jewish population of the provinces, the vast majority to Auschwitz. Thus by the time Raoul Wallenberg arrived to take up his post in Budapest, in July 1944, as Third Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs at the legation of neutral Sweden, the Jewish children and elderly from the provinces had already been fed to the ovens in Birkenau. Their fate, at least, no longer counted as a humanitarian affair. There remained only the Jews of Budapest—more specifically, those living in the core of Pest, for those in the outskirts had likewise been despatched to Auschwitz.

The fate of Budapest's nearly one hundred and fifty thousand Jews was still an open question. Although plans had been made for their deportation, at the last moment the Regent, Miklós Horthy, paid heed to external pressure with the support of troops loyal to him and was able to impede (temporarily) the implementation of these plans.

When Wallenberg arrived in Budapest, the Hungarian leadership, Jewish community leaders and diplomats from neutral countries (and through them, the allies) were familiar with the accounts of escaped camp inmates. They must have been well aware of what the fate of the Jewish labour lent to Germany actually was (assuming they had not already been struck by the fact that those taken

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the novelist, has been President of the Akademie der Künste, Berlin—Brandenburg, since 1997. His books in English include A Feast in the Garden (Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1992) and Stone Clock (under preparation). away for work included the babies, the elderly and the invalids). In the official parlance of the time, the Hungarian state had "leased" my young classmates and my cousins to the German state as labourers.

The head of the Roman Catholic Church in Hungary asked, *post facto*, that Christian converts be returned and and that the others be treated humanely.

A pastoral letter to all the parishes in the country on the subject was delivered to the postal authorities in one bundle; not a single one arrived at the two thousand addressees.

In particular, the state secretary at the Ministry of the Interior and the commander of the gendarmerie treated the deportation as a labour of love: they concentrated gendarmes in Budapest and planned to link the deportation of all the Jews to a *coup d'état*.

However, a commander of an armoured brigade, loyal to Horthy, surrounded all gendarme barracks with his tanks. The message was: withdraw or be blown to smithereens.

For the moment, the match was over.

Individual missions and inclinations, whether aimed at eradicating or saving lives, ineluctably took over.

Within days, Wallenberg knew what was most important to know, and reported it. The only question was who could be saved, and how, of those remaining, if, of course, someone was prepared to stake their lives, to say: "I will try to save as many human lives, to free as many people as possible, from the claws of the murderers." In and of itself a role is not enough, a legation secretary responsible for humanitarian affairs is not predestined to become a hero, the archetypical champion of saving humans, in less than half a year; even as an intelligent young man from a good family, he was not predestined to develop into a genius in the protection of humans.

The circumstances weren't hopeless. He enjoyed the support of King Gustave and Minister Danielson, the contacts and financial resources of the War Refugees Board, not to mention Sweden's stance as a neutral power, which ensured diplomatic protection even for Hungarian citizens on the territory of the allies at war with Hungary; a country whose Red-Cross activity (from saving lives to providing food and medical assistance) could not fail to be respected.

The legations of the neutral powers (diplomats from Sweden, Switzerland, the Holy See, Spain, and Portugal) consulted and joined forces in offering protection to the persecuted Jews, referring to fundamental, Christian and humanitarian principles, as well as to Hungary's historically good reputation.

Together they represented the legitimate international community, and it was through them that Roosevelt's message arrived: the guilty would be punished.

By the summer of 1944 the Red Army had reached Hungary's borders. No longer was it possible to avoid thinking that the Germans and their allies had already lost the war.

If Horthy was able to halt the deportation of Budapest's Jews before it began, the question arises: if he had tried, might he not have prevented that of the Jews in the provinces? Undeniably, Hungary's state administration smoothly managed the process of ghettoization and deportation. Eichmann was quite satisfied, saying he could not have managed without the Hungarians' cooperative zeal. That tells us about the mentality of the state machinery.

Just as there was a loyal commander of an armoured brigade among the more or less Germanophile officer corps, so too, scattered about government offices and command headquarters there were a good many people who were not at all enthusiastic about the annihilation of the Jews, and, on the presentation of official-looking documents were willing to release groups and individuals. Wallenberg took this into account.

He grasped that he had no choice but to deal with those on the spot, those with power, for human lives depended on those.

He'd drink a toast with the devil himself, if in so doing even a single life could be saved, he said.

He understood that executioners, too, have souls, moods, whims, affections, even. The phone calls came, that here and there, Jews under Swedish protection were being taken away. And so the legation secretary would turn up in his Studebaker, (the subject of several "attempted accidents"), with his Homburg and dark-blue overcoat; more than once he came upon amiably smiling acquaintances among officials meting out orders in the rounding up and loading of Jews into the railway wagons. There must have been some among them he had previously bribed, from whom he had already bought a few lives. There must have been some with whom he'd exchanged greetings only days before in the Arizona night-club, on whose glass podium, lit from below, were staged revues remarkable for the age, and where both the legation secretary and the gentlemen from the Gestapo had their very own boxes.

He demonstrated firmness coupled with amiability in citing memoranda, agreements, special permits, and conjured-up legal arguments (always addressing his message in the name of the Royal Legation of Sweden to the Royal Government of Hungary).

He dared, and did, raise his voice even when standing face to face with unscrupulous murderers.

He was a gambler, daring and cowardly. He called himself *Hasenfuss* (fainthearted); for he had it in him to fear bombs and two-faced negotiating partners, but he could keep his fears under control, and indeed he believed that a Swedish Legation secretary was, in point of fact, inviolable.

He could fear, but he could take risks as well.

Unarmed, he found himself from time to time ordering about armed drunkards. Though he recognized that his life hung by a hair, he could not stop himself. In the morning he was in the lion's den, and even when it was a miracle that even he could get out, in the afternoon he went right back in, for he wanted to bring out those who had thought that they had been offered protection.

More than once he was heard to say that he was truly a coward, but he was brave enough to allow himself to acknowledge this. He had the power to imagine, so he knew whom he confronted. It did not take much of an imaginative leap to recognize his enemies for the unscrupulous murderers they were, who

would have been able to do away with him—without as much as a belly-ache afterward—even if they had exchanged a laugh over some joke the night before.

And the legation secretary remained serious about his role, dealing with all authorities, all those actually in power, everyone whom lives depended on, as credible, respectable, responsible individuals to be taken seriously.

Irrespective of what he may have thought of this or that person in authority, he treated them as the representative of one serious state treats that of another serious state; which is to say he was an actor bar none, so much so that few could make heads or tails of him.

Those who had known him earlier must not have really known him, for they could not know what had become of him.

No, they could not have known what he had perceived, how many people he had to see lying at the side of a road shot in the head, so as to pry out a few others from their place in line, trusting in his luck, using papers which in all probability he had drafted on the spot.

Sometimes it worked, sometimes not, sometimes he'd enchant those in authority, at other times he'd encounter headstrong resistance.

There were fanatical commanders who made up for their lack of success at the front by destroying Jews, and raised the shooting of Jews into the Danube to the level of sport.

There were party minions, Arrow-Cross gendarmes, who were simply too worn out to lead another group of Jews down to the lower quay (after already sending two groups that day swimming into the icy Danube.)

The various local party headquarters of the Arrow-Cross became autonomous, leaving streetcorner thugs, freed convicts, crack-brained militants, bourgeois-hating, racist proletarians, fanatic street orators, to get their hands on uniforms, arm bands, and machine guns; to pour their way into buildings occupied by Jews, randomly selecting those to be shot, but not before getting them to strip naked, so as to divvy up the loot.

Thieving-murdering, arm-band adorned gangs now reigned in a city where central authority had collapsed. Even if there had been central authority, how-ever, it wouldn't have opposed the anti-Jewish action—such as the slaughter of children hidden away in convents and monasteries and in church orphanages.

Some killed only for necklaces and wedding rings.

They did not dare catch a tram out to the front, in case brother party members got the loot for themselves.

Wallenberg understood how worthless a person's life had become.

That everyday survival was mere chance.

In a peevish mood, he'd greet his closest colleague in the morning: "Ah, so you're still alive? Mere chance!"

He might have said this of himself.

In any event he created an industry in which hundreds of its employees were Jews who were in possession of protective Swedish passports. Learned, self-sacrificing souls worked alongside him, more than a few heroes and chance-takers among them, nursemaids and doctors, lawyers and transport workers, black-marketeers and monks. He was their soul; they needed his ever-regenerating will and unifying, organizing, creative force. Then again, he too was capable of hopeless despair.

All was done for, there was no going on.

Then he got wind of a clever trick which could save a few people: he came round, and went on. He had countless diplomatic notes sent to Hungary's Foreign Minister and every other authority.

At first he managed to get the minister to sign a few, but then he alone signed them, stepping on the stage, as it were, as Sweden herself, establishing his independence from his occasionally dumbfounded colleagues, who both marvelled at, and feared for him, and to an extent feared that Wallenberg's game of chance would backfire on themselves. Exceptional people, they were, but in Wallenberg there was an extra something.

This improvisor believed that by going and concentrating he had a shot at victory; that he'd manage to sufficiently sweet talk someone so he could pull a few people from the line and provide them with papers, addresses, and money—that hypnosis, coupled with a tidy sum, would, if only in part, work this time as well.

Surely he understood that this game of saving human lives was a battle of wills, and that, unarmed as he was, he was stronger than many an armed man; but that his strength was inseparable from the opponent's snobbery; that he came across not as an enemy, but as a neutral, courteous man of the world: a negotiating partner who, while instinctively superior, coupled refinement with an amiable demeanour.

Probably all those in authority, if only for brief moments, happened upon the humanitarian chord within themselves, when in Wallenberg's company.

The legation Third Secretary managed to make even the Arrow-Cross Foreign Minister something of his own man, subjecting Baron Kemény, the black sheep of an eminent historical family, to an offensive on a number of fronts. For one thing, he told him that after the war he'd be more leniently judged were he to spare those under protection.

The Arrow-Cross rule began on October 15—by which time the establishment had begun to sober up, after the regent's dilettante "bail-out" attempt ended in fiasco—with the declaration that there is no difference between Jew and Jew, no exceptions, no exemptions. Every last one of them was subject to extermination.

All of Wallenberg's successes were concessions to this position of principle.

To achieve this he, too, had to pretend that he drew a strict distinction between those Jews with Swedish contacts and those without—those without protection, that is—suggesting, in other words, that Jews were of interest to him

not as Jews, nor more generally as human beings, but exclusively as individuals bearing on the Swedish national interest and so provided with Swedish passports, and who would thus in all probability be admitted to Sweden.

Although he took seriously the importance of drawing a distinction between those Jews under the protection of the Swedish Crown and those without, when he had the chance he saved unprotected Jews; thus transgressing his own boundaries, which was why he himself partly kept them secret.

The intimate relationship that the legation secretary, said to have had a way with the ladies, cultivated with the baroness, the wife of the Foreign Minister, resulted in numerous humanitarian measures. The following thought must have crossed Wallenberg's mind in those intimate moments: how many lives was he buying with his passionate service? The present author has met older ladies who had undertaken the deadly risk of offering people shelter—American pilots whose planes had been shot down, resistance fighters, Jews—because they'd fallen in love with the Swedish diplomat.

I do not exclude the possibility that this idealistic gambler, capable of irony as well, perceived the double-entendre nature of his behaviour with at least a shred of enjoyment.

He perceived within himself an almost maniacal tendency toward formalities, which saw him, in the several diplomatic notes he would send a day, exhibit no little courtesy in protesting against the abuses of power (murderous, vile acts) of those in authority; in referring to incidents in which children had been taken away from shelters set up for them; bedridden patients were shot; about sundry other acts of torture and killing. So too, he perceived in himself a dreamer of a con-man who brought a fictional system into being, fiction based on fiction without a real foundation, and more or less managed to lead the enemy astray.

The fiction at the bottom of it all was, of course, that he was not an enemy, but neutral. Of course he was an enemy, of course he was not neutral. But if he did not play this role, he would have had no role to play; and then the only question would have been, who shoots first.

The only option left would have been to shoot and run, but instead he went off to hold talks with the persons in charge and decision-makers—talks naturally accompanied by conversation, and the pretense: there are things we do agree on, are there not? Indeed, if he wanted to achieve anything at all, he was not to argue over principles, but instead to beguile the other in the spirit of something fundamentally shared, a common language of sorts; because, for example, the negotiating partner was incapable of wholly equating the word Christian with the word Aryan, and so by way of exception happened upon some formula of mitigation and exemption.

He escorted those who were taken away, tagged along with them, had their movements watched, again and again he requested their return—not all, of

course, only those under Swedish protection, officially four thousand five hundred, unofficially seven thousand.

There were many more of us under Swiss protection. In the shadow of Consul Carl Lutz, a more reticent man, there sprang up an entire rescue factory composed of Jewish activists, including communist and Zionist sympathizers. The large numbers did not come without the drawbacks of inflation; the Swiss *Schutzpass* offered a lesser degree of protection.

Those who wanted to do something, those not averse to the aesthetics of resistance, hooked up with the various underground groups devoted to saving lives and forging documents.

Saving lives was deadly dangerous, but somewhat less so than not saving lives and simply waiting for misfortune to do what it would. Wallenberg did what he could to keep the flame of hope burning in those who worked with him, for by looking at himself he knew just how fallible and weak people are. When scare-mongering was punishable by death, he established a press service to ensure that they could keep track of where the front was. He climbed Gellért Hill to see where the Soviet advance units were. It was in keeping with the mood of those final days that, completely surrounded, the most crack-brained of all the Arrow-Cross gang leaders got the upper hand: those inclined to crown their reign, seeing its collapse within days, by machine-gunning, en masse, all the Jews right in the closed ghetto, on Klauzál Square. Yet another plan called for every single apartment house in the closed ghetto to be blown up or burned down. I repeat, closed ghetto: its windows were boarded up, its streetcorners bordering the outside world were closed off. There was no escape.

This was, properly speaking, the ghetto in the Erzsébetváros district in the centre of town: the neighborhood of synagogues and the Orthodox community, old apartment houses with no mod. cons., all in all, one of the city's most colourful districts, abounding in cinemas, hotels, night-clubs and brothels, gold-smiths' workshops and printers' offices, coffee houses, and working class taverns, mingled with streets with seedy joints known sarcastically as the "House of Lords", since those under police supervision were packed into them like sardines. This was the true ghetto, whose denizens could not metamorphose into future Swiss, Swedish, or Portuguese citizens.

Then there was the creation of diplomats from the neutral powers, the so-called "international ghetto", a grouping of protected buildings around Szent István Park in the Újlipótváros district, where in the twenties and thirties numerous comely modern apartment houses went up, built in the spirit of modern urbanism and Bauhaus architecture, for middle-class families.

I, too, lived in one of these buildings, under Swiss protection, which, though effectual in many respects, could not save the residents of the adjacent room from being shot on the Danube bank; whereas we, five kids left under the care of our lovely young aunt, were saved when an Arrow-Cross man said:

"These five kids yours?"

"Only one," replied my aunt. "The parents of the other four have gone."

"And they're left in your care?" asked the soldier with an arm-band.

"That's right," said my aunt.

"Well, then, God speed," said the soldier, and went after the others, who had already rounded up quite a few individuals.

Those they'd rounded up never returned, with the exception of a young man who, only lightly injured, unfastened himself from his father, to whom he'd been tied. Swimming and clutching the ice floes he finally staggered out of the Danube near the Chain Bridge.

Those who, like him, managed to swim their way out often received a helping hand from the city police, who tended to be phlegmatic, not fanatic, sometimes even humane, providing those fumbling their way out of the river with a change of clothes and taking them home.

The varying demeanour of various authorities allowed people deliberately engaged in life-saving efforts a bit of room to manoeuvre, for one could play, as it were, on this field of conflict. Thus Wallenberg was heartened when he succeeded in having a hundred police officers sent into the ghetto: this, too, meant a bit of security, for up to that point the Arrow-Cross gangs had been shooting the Jews at whim there.

To return to the subject of how the two ghettos differed: there was a certain air of elitist favouritism in the make-up of the international ghetto compared to the closed ghetto. We were under some nominal protection. The more intrepid women left the building without their yellow stars when they went off in search of food for the thirty people in the two-room flat. We would have been more, but the warier among us had taken refuge in the air-raid shelter which had been fashioned out of the cellar, while we were looked after by ladies, fashion designers and dance instructors wearing ski boots and Fairchild sweaters, upstairs in the flat, where, though the danger of being cut down by stray small arms fire was certainly greater, the surroundings were more befitting to human dignity.

It is none too easy to determine who fared better, for the very nature of the international ghetto whipped up the class hatred festering within the Arrow-Cross detachments all the more passionately, made up, as they were, of those from the lower rungs of society—so that the coupling of murder with robbery must, to them, have meant a sense of justice. They were inclined to repeat this experience over and over again. The plan set out for those final days called for us, those under protection, either to be shot on the Danube bank or rounded up and taken to the closed ghetto to undergo the final reckoning and realization: the building of a great mound of corpses on Klauzál Square.

Things had got to the point where even we were led down in front of the building, where we stood for hours while they decided where to take us, there were too many of us to simply be shot on the Danube bank, when along came

two odd characters in somewhat less-than-standard uniforms who, having told off the Arrow-Cross in no uncertain terms, ordered us back into the building.

Now, I don't know who our two rescuers were, but I have no doubt that that is what they were: even among Wallenberg's people there were some who, by donning sundry disguises ranging from military uniforms to monastic hoods, proved themselves intrepid enough to save people from likely death.

So I am hard put to say who they killed with more relish. The day after our liberation, I accompanied the aunt I have mentioned to the hospital in the closed ghetto, which had previously been a school, and was to become a school again after the war, but on January 19, 1945, it was a hospital, and from its relatively high second floor, peering out the hallway window, I saw a mound of corpses reaching as high as me.

In one of the wards we found my aunt's mother: shot. The bullet had entered her left cheek and had exited through her skull behind her ear. She was still alive, and happy to see her daughter. She died the next day.

No doubt Wallenberg passed through that hospital and saw what I saw. So too, he must have noticed that the coffee house on the corner of the square was packed to the ceiling with corpses.

In any case, the others stayed alive, so the complete annihilation of the ghetto residents never came to pass. Even wholesale murder requires the cooperation of a good many people.

The same goes for the saving of lives.

Yet there are always some who tower above the rest. We might say that the colourless bureaucrat who managed to send the most Jews to their deaths, Adolf Eichmann, thus fulfilling the wishes of that other Adolf, was a genius of state-of-the-art annihilation.

The genius for saving life was neither mechanical nor grey, but enigmatic.

Whence came the force which, radiating outward like some passing delirium, paralysed commonplace, sedulous murderers just long enough to save a few people among those condemned to die?

Wallenberg had to make decisions ceaselessly, most often on the spot, and such decisions were necessarily not solely humanitarian but cruel. For when he saved *A*, he had to give up the idea of saving *B*, and if by chance he managed to secure the freedom of *B* as well, there were still all the other letters of the alphabet.

Whence the inspiration to decide between political expediency and the beseeching whispers of compassion? What's more, to decide now one way, now another. And when a house-full of people he used to visit, whose spirits he had nourished with hope, whose mouths he had nourished with food, whom he had joked with; when several hundred people, that is, are killed just like that, and he is facetiously informed that they are all swimming in the Danube by now, and when Wallenberg utters, "But why?" what does some nonentity of a captain reply? "Because they were dirty Jews." When even this much was enough of an explanation, Wallenberg must have sensed something of hell, a hell free of all vestiges of romance, for in point of fact the Devil is dumb, though by noting this I do not mean to make light of its dangers. Yes, the children in the orphanage were slaughtered, while others stayed alive. He, too, went into hiding, for by then he was a hunted man.

By January 17 Wallenberg felt he had fulfilled his humanitarian mission more or less, and perhaps he had already set himself another task, perhaps that of feeding the hungry, something large-scale to be sure; so he'd already taken up contact with the Soviet army. In the company of a congenial NKVD captain, he bid his colleagues farewell and headed east toward Debrecen, the seat of the provisional democratic government, where he hoped to meet Marshall Malinovsky, commander of the 2nd Ukrainian Front.

He had got into the habit of going right to the top.

There was a lot of money in his briefcase, perhaps as much as a million pengős, and other valuables. He had got used to always having on his person that most important of working resources, on the assumption that he would have to buy off yet more weapon-toting men. In all probability his money, valuables, his high-quality Swedish possessions, were all taken away. He was not seen by either Malinovsky nor by the new Hungarian government. He must have seemed suspicious, maybe an American spy, maybe a double agent. The NKVD imagination was ill-equipped to make heads or tails of him.

Of his further fate I have nothing to say. Neither the Swedish government nor his family went especially out of their way to press for his release, and whether he died, or was killed, in 1947, as Andrei Gromyko claimed, or else lived on, one thing is certain: resignation stamped a seal of permanence upon his absence. Not long ago Wallenberg's half-brother looked me up, with an older friend of mine, a Swedish journalist acting as intermediary, for he thought he had come upon a lead that might lead to Wallenberg's supposedly copied and hidden diary. Enthusiastic though I was, the lead proved to be false.

As I leaf through the late Jenő Lévai's book and read the legation's memos and his colleagues' disciplined reports on the humanitarian missions, I want very much to understand more closely this saintly adventurer and exemplary Swedish patriot, of whom, I have noticed, young Swedes know awfully little, for Count Folke Bernadotte occupies the dais reserved for the real man who saved the Jews.

A statue of Raoul Wallenberg is not far from my present home. My young children were afraid of the tall, sad gentleman, but I reassured them: he was a good man, he loved children.

On Klauzál Square, meanwhile, where the hecatomb of ghetto residents was to have risen, not long ago the playground was refurbished. The children like the new playthings; among them are the children from the nearby Jewish school, mingled together with the neighbourhood Gypsy kids and all the others.

Translated by Paul Olchváry

Sándor Tar

What Makes Us Want to Live?

(Short Story)

My mother is combing her thinning yellow-white hair in front of the mirror, her face is streaming wet, she'll wipe it in a moment, but first she passes out, her eyes suddenly turn upwards, she keels over, I make a grab at her, try to catch and hold her, too late, we slip down beside the washing machine, the comb clatters into the bath, with the soap, toothbrush, dentures, hairpins and everything else her hands brushed against as she fell, it's alright, I say, almost in relief that this too is behind us now, her head falls onto my shoulder, she is somewhere else, towels, drying sheets, underwear rain down on us, I gather strength and indifference. We sit on the concrete floor in puddles of water, two embryos, the world is half a square metre under the washbasin, now would be the best time to die.

Water is dripping, trickling down on us, a rusty puddle has collected beneath us, now I must drag eighty years weighing sixty kilos back inside to her bed, I can't let her die here among the floor swabs, bottles of bleach, washing powder, strands of hair, all kinds of dirt and used razor blades, I ought to stand up. A vacant face in the mirror, in the beginning, months ago, there was terror and confusion, I pulled at her arm as you'd pull at a well-pump, tried wet cloths, water, heart massage, not any more. I watch my mother in this crumpled-up position, squeezed between the washing mashine and the bath, she is breathing. One of her slippers comes off her foot in the corridor, the other leaves a black streak on the floor as I take her under the arms and drag her, panting, as far as the room,

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in the doorway I have to stop to rest, she, coming to, begins to flail her arms, trying to crawl somewhere, anywhere, on all fours, back to some kind of life, the whimpering half-consciousness of nightmares, of night-time and daytime visions, wait a bit, I pant, arranging her legs so they won't break, we'll get going again in a minute. There are bruises

on her arms, on her knees from the fall, the stained nightdress barely covers her, her tragic and shameless prostratedness, she reaches up into the air for us to go. Back in bed she has a face again, smiles tiredly, I fell, she says, cooling perspiration on her forehead, her face, you did, I say, and don't think of anything at all.

We have fallen in every corner of the flat, in the corridor as I was taking her to the toilet, in the toilet itself when she stood up, when she sat down, at the washbasin before washing her hands and after, in the kitchen, sweeping Zsófi's pans to the floor, at the window; at other times, simply back into bed, the barely touched paprika soup trickling from the small plate onto the quilt, the sheets, books fell from the shelves, Broch, Cendrars, Mándy, the copper plaques of my proud prizes scattered (two of Bölöni), a miners' lamp off the table; the television just fell flat on its back as if in laughter and stayed that way, it makes no difference to her, just takes up space, in the daytime we just sit, would talk, but more often just wait. The room is all over the place. I do not put anything back in its own place anymore, everything stays where it has fallen, I just kick it aside if it gets in the way. The curtain is torn, from beside its drooping, tattered sails we watch the wind tugging at the bare trees outside, sometimes the sun shines in, at other times rain beats on the cracked panes; on the table, used hypodermic syringes, broken fragments of vials, suppositories; Canaletto's vista of Dresden has fallen behind the bed, beneath it is a washbowl in case she wants to throw up bile, spittle.

The telephone still works, my mother hears the tiny tinkles from within its cracked carapace, if and when! Someone's coming! I whisper into the receiver, just in case, but it's already bleeping, or someone excusing themselves. The front door is open too, a torn sweater left in the crack so no one will ring the bell, but no one ever comes any more, even Zsófi comes as rarely as possible, always more restless, on edge, there is only the soft siren of the draught to rouse me, or the noises from the stairway, the tramp of feet, somewhere a radio is playing.

But as to what makes us want to live, this way, or some other way, even I can't tell. I think I did know it once. The years run by, life fades like a flower, my mother sings, she has forgotten the rest of the words. And what will make us want to die?

Slow Freight

(Short Story)

Are we poor, dad?

That we are, son. Not very poor, just sort of hard up.

And why are we poor?

I don't know the answer to that.

Because someone else stole it?

Stole what?

I don't know. Tibi Kárász said we're so poor that even the mice in our house go hungry.

Tibi Kárász is a twit.

And he said I was so skinny that if I blinked my foreskin would slip up my pecker.

You tell that Tibi Kárász that I'll give him a kick up the arse, and a right belting besides, 'cos he's a silly bugger. Who does he think he is?

You're going to belt him?

I will. He can go to blazes, him and his sort. Don't you have anything to do with him, don't even speak to him.

I don't, he speaks to me.

Well then walk away when he comes up to speak to you.

If I walk away he shouts after me.

Don't listen to him. Don't even look at someone like him.

Best thing would be if you belted him one. So that the others see you doing it. Will you belt him?

I will.

When?

I'll see, let's just leave it for the time being.

All right.

We're not rich, but we don't go hungry. And you've got plenty of clothes. You go to school, don't you?

Yes.

I never stole anything, I never robbed anyone, not like others. Your father's

always made an honest living, worked hard for everything we've got. We've even got a place to live. There's many who don't even have that. Isn't that right? Yes.

And you're not skinny. Neither am I. It's just the way we're built. And anyway, you'll always have everything you need, if I have to work my fingers to the bone getting it. You'll see. Did he say anything about me?

No.

It isn't my fault I'm the way I am now, you know that. And besides, I'm still worth as much as the next man. I can give you everything you need. Do you ever go hungry?

No.

Well then?

Don't cry, dad.

I'm not crying, it's just that that little shit got my back up.

Are your nerves all shot to pieces?

They are.

What's my pecker, dad?

Nothing. Baloney. Never you mind about anything a foul-mouthed, fat pig like that thinks up.

The boy was wearing a man's shabby brown winter coat, unbuttoned, slipping off his shoulders and hanging down to his feet so his trousers could not be seen. He was kicking up sand with his dirty black boots and eating an ice cream. His father was standing beside him, leaning against a tree, a piano accordion resting on his foot, his hands in the pockets of his blue track suit, a checked scarf around his neck, a small peaked cap on his head. They were standing in front of a small, old-fashioned station, waiting for the train. From time to time the man turned his thin, unshaven face to look at the boy, and sucked his teeth. He had several ways of sucking his teeth, most times he seemed to say cheese, other times it sounded like check, or tsup, when he sucked the front ones, the boy knew them all, after eating his father would use a matchstick to clean the spaces between his teeth, sometimes said chupp, then swallowed. And sometimes he said yum-yum and made smacking sounds as well, but that was just kidding, to make him laugh, and he would laugh hee-heehee in a high, shrill voice, but it wasn't real laughter, just pretending. In school the other kids called his father the rower because of the way his arms moved as he walked. And they said he was a goldbrick, a skiver.

Let's go, the train's in.

I haven't eaten my ice cream yet.

Chuck it away, I'll get you another one. Chuck it away, we don't want people to see it!

Why not?

I've told you! We have to look like we're poor. Not very poor, just hard up. If they ask, we're poor. Fix your hair, not like that, wait! There.

Tibi Kárász said I was so ugly that a sparrow wouldn't take horse-shit from my hand.

I don't give a shit about Tibi Kárász. I don't want to hear his name again, 'cos I don't know what I'll do.

And that...

And watch how you talk too.

But it was him who said that...

I told you to stop it, see? And chuck that blasted ice cream away, how many times do I have to tell you! And be quiet when we get on!

It'll be good, if you belt him one. Give him a kick too, okay?

Go on, you go first.

It was a yellowish autumn afternoon, behind the shabby station building lay a parched field of maize, further off a couple of houses with a wide, grassy dirt road winding between them and a cow grazing on a tether. There were very few people waiting to board the train. They would have let him get on first, seeing he was lame, and that he had a boy with him, and an accordion hanging from a strap around his neck, but he just waved them ahead, he'd get on last. Then he nudged the boy, go on, he said, then he too clambered up with his bad leg. A woman wanted to help, but he said no, I'll manage, it's alright, I'm used to it. You see, he said, when he was standing on the carriage platform too, a stranger can't help, because I might miss my hold and fall off. I hope you don't mind. The woman did not say anything, stood her bag between her feet and stared out of the window. The boy was about to go into the carriage but his father grabbed his shoulder. Aren't you coming inside, he asked the woman, no, she said, I'm getting off at the next stop. There's another who's scared she'll starve if she gives you a forint, his father muttered in the doorway.

Your eyes are wet, dad.

Just the frost melting.

There isn't any.

Go on ahead!

Did you wet them?

Sssht...quiet, you. Go on, get going.

There was frost in the morning when we left.

The carriage was full of smoke, though there was hardly anyone inside. He closed the door behind him, stopped, took off his cap and said good day to you all in a loud, clear voice. My name is István Balog, let me play you something. Then he took up the accordion, compressed the bellows and ran his fingers up and down the keys. I am writing this letter by the camp fire, he began in a slightly unsteady voice, but on a starlit, summer night was better. The boy was standing beside him, he gave him an encouraging nudge; he did not feel like singing along with his father yet, maybe later. His father had told him he needn't always.

Why do I have to sing, dad?

You don't have to, only if you feel like it.

And if I don't?

Then you needn't.

And if I never feel like it?

Why shouldn't you? I sing too, don't I?

You don't feel like it either. You were crying just a minute ago.

That's different.

It isn't much cop if I don't sing, right?

Where did you get that from?

The man with the beard said so, the one we met on the way. The one who gave you the hundred note.

But he didn't give it to me, just pretended to.

We shouldn't have sung for him, should we, dad?

We didn't sing for him, we sung for everybody.

You never can tell beforehand, can you?

Tell what?

You told me that you never can tell beforehand what a person's going to turn out like.

No, you can't.

He didn't feel like singing now because you never could tell beforehand. He stood beside his father and it felt as though all his hair were standing on end. It didn't hurt, but that was how it felt. Every night his father would wet his hair and twist locks of it around bits of wood or pencils, then he'd tie something around his head and that was how he had to sleep. One time near Téglás a black-haired woman said he was like a little blond angel. Since then his father always musses up his hair and that is how he has to sleep, like a woman, with a kerchief round his head. If Tibi Kárász were to see him like that! He won't ever see him, but he'll know anyway, because he can see anywhere he wants. Perhaps he can see him even now. His father was playing, singing, making his voice quiver, swaying to the music, not looking at anybody, just up at the luggage-racks, giving his head a nudge with his elbow now and then not to stand there gaping, but to pay attention. To what? There were hardly any people sitting in the carriage. He could see an old man beside one of the windows, wiping at the glass and staring outside, the person sitting opposite him doing the same. They all stare out of the window as if we were taking up a collection, his father would say, keep staring out until their necks get all stiff and twisted. A younger girl with long hair was reading a book, she did not look up at them either; over on the other side two older boys sitting opposite each other were laughing, he couldn't see anyone else. His father wasn't going to sing here for long, he'll finish any moment now, and then thank them for listening to him, and ask them to contribute a little something. And he'll start doing the rounds with the hat, holding it out to each of them in turn. You don't have to hold it out for long, his father had told him in the beginning.

If they don't put anything in the hat, go on to the next one.

Alright.

But if you see them fumbling in their pockets, give them time to take the money out.

How long should I wait?

Until they get the money out and put it in the hat.

In the morning that man took out a handkerchief.

They're not all like that.

Just there's some who like to put one over you, right?

Right.

I'll count to ten, and if...

That's too long.

To five then.

Alright. But you can wait a bit longer if you see they're just playing for time...

How do I know they're playing for time?

Only the girl gave them money. She was holding it ready in her hand, threw it into the hat. The boy thanked her and went over to the older boys, but they did not give him anything. Neither did the two old men. There was a woman sitting in front, holding a sleeping child in her arms, she kept her eyes fixed on the child, never even raised them; a basket full of apples stood beside her, she didn't give him any, though they usually do. Twenty forints, not bad to begin with, his father said happily.

You cold?

No

It'll be better now. More passengers. Women going to market.

We could go too. There are a lot of people there.

That's different. There's too many begging there.

We don't beg, do we?

No, we don't. We're artists.

Wandering minstrels?

That's right. But you sing too, alright?

Alright.

If you feel like it.

Yes.

I'll play something you like too.

Alright.

People like it when children sing.

And I've got a nice voice, haven't I?

You have. The teacher said so too, didn't he, and he's the kind who means what he says.

The one who gave me chewing-gum?

Yes.

He had given him chewing-gum that you could swallow, round, like a sweet, he didn't tell his father about it except much later, when Tibi Kárász told him that the chewing gum would get him all bunged up from his mouth right down to his asshole and he'd have to be cut open and that's how he'd die. But his father made him drink a glass of brandy, and he didn't get all bunged up.

Balog was known as Crippled Balog at the railway ever since he'd been injured in a freak accident by shunting a train. By rights the doctors should have amputated his foot, but he wouldn't let them, he'd said, I'd rather you cut off my head, here, and showed them where. He was a cheerful man even then, and for a long time afterwards, though his foot was badly mutilated; he was operated on several times until the foot regained some kind of shape, but he couldn't work, could barely walk. He should have had another couple of operations to straighten out his foot, get the bones moving, but by then he'd had enough of it all. After every operation he'd be chewing on the corner of his pillow with the pain for weeks, and he said he just couldn't take any more. He'd never get his foot back anyway. By that time he did not feel like joking anymore, it was agony just to turn over in bed. Then he slowly learned to walk again in that peculiar, contorted way of his, swaying from side to side, wrenching his body forward from the shoulder first, following with a twist of the waist while his hands jerked up in the air and he bit down on his lips so hard his teeth drew blood. No crutches, he told his wife joyfully, who promptly burst into tears. Then he was pensioned off, but it did not make him any happier, getting pensioned off makes no-one happy at forty. Later on, his walking improved a lot, there was just the burning sensation in his sole and foot, and he tired very easily. Still he hit upon this idea of going about and playing the accordion, because he was going out of his mind with boredom at home. But that was not the only trouble. Do I disgust you, he asked his wife once, no, she said, of course not, and besides he couldn't help it, it wasn't his fault.

But you're not like you usually are.

Well, for God's sake, how could I be? Or do you think nothing happened? I'm the same person, the same man I was before.

Why are you badgering me with all these questions now?

Because if you want to leave, then I want to know. I won't try and hold you back, you're still young.

And the boy?

Aha. The boy. So that's what's holding you back.

I'm sorry, but I simply can't stand it! I never could stand the sight of a cripple, what can I do, it revolts me! I feel sorry for you, but still, oh dear God! How am I supposed to bear to lie beside you, how? You don't understand, how could you! I've tried everything, but I still can't bear it!

Alright.

Still, we're alright otherwise, aren't we? I might get used to it in time, get drunk or something, God knows what I'll do, I've been to the doctor even, to get him to help me somehow.

And what did he say?

He said there was nothing he could do. I'd either get used to it or I wouldn't.

Does it bother you as much when I'm sitting?

Not so much. Only when you walk, when you're moving.

Then it bothers you a lot.

Terribly.

Alright.

What do you mean?

Nothing. I just thought it would be better if you left.

Where?

Don't make as if you didn't know what I meant.

She did go, in the end. They agreed that they wouldn't get a divorce, she wouldn't take the boy with her, and wouldn't make a fuss. It'll be like if you'd gone on a long visit, see? You come when you like, you know that. That's all we'll tell the boy, the rest we'll leave till later, and when he's older, he can go visit you whenever he likes. I can't think of anything better, it isn't your fault. I know it's silly but bring the kid something now and then so he'll know he's got a mother too. I'll give you the money for it. I'll tell him you've gone to visit some relative who's been taken sick.

He'll learn the truth from someone else.

Then we'll go on lying.

I might not come for some time, now.

Don't

They'll say I left you in the lurch.

And?

What do you say?

Me? Nothing.

They were standing in a noisy, dark connection between two carriages, it was cold, the steel plates of the flooring were rocking beneath their feet, the boy hunched up inside his coat, he was cold. Let's take a rest, said his father, and pulled the boy to him, rubbing his back, his shoulders. This was the only place they could take a breather, everywhere else was crowded, there were people standing on the carriage platform with bundles, bags, cans, the train was slowly filling up as they got nearer to Debrecen. Let's make a move, said Balog in a little while, there's not much left to go.

In the buffet car a group of tipsy pensioners was making a racket, some of them were already singing when Balog joined them. They were very glad to see him, he started playing at once, accompanying them, the boy just stood there, then his father began to play she's left me, the one I loved so much, right in the middle, they all fell silent, stop, cried a fat man in a wheezing voice, play it from the beginning! It was a long, sad song, the boy joined in too later on, his father kept nudging him with his elbow, when we see each other once again. God, if only I could go back home. How come you know all these old songs, they later asked Balog, he just smiled. That's a long story, he said in the end. Let's hear it then, they said, we've got time enough, haven't we?

They brought him a beer, and he told them that his father had been wounded at the front, that's how he'd got home. And from then on he'd played music on the trains, and he as a child had accompanied him everywhere. That was the gist of it, but of course he embroidered it a bit, and the boy recalled that it wasn't always the same story that he told. Well I never, they all said when he'd finished, and now you're doing the same thing with your son! And what happened to your foot, if you don't mind my asking, said the fat man. My foot, sighed Balog, I could get used to it if it was just my foot. When he said that the boy would start tugging on his hand, wanting to be gone, he didn't like the part that came next, but he knew it was no good, his father wouldn't come. Because by then his father would have begun spinning them a yarn about his foot, especially if he'd been given something to drink, and not a single word of it was true. He never even told them that it happened when he was working for the railway. When his father came to the part he hated, he would walk off. You see, his father would say, pointing a finger after him, the boy can't even stand hearing it again, he was so shook up, had to be brought back from the dead! He hanged himself! That little kid, they said, astonished, what did he use to hang himself? His mother's stocking, he was that fond of her, while she was alive! Why, is his mother dead then, asked someone who had not been paying attention, but Balog just made a discouraged gesture, I'd better go after him, he would say, in case he tries something again. Then at other times he would show them the scars on his stomach: that boy is living with one of my kidneys, that's where they took it out! And I told the doctors, take my heart too, if you must, and my eyes, my brains, anything he needs, everything! and by then he'd be crying, and the women would be crying with him, and the boy too, when he finally came upon him, in the toilets mostly, or on a platform where there was nobody about. Why do you say such things, he would shout at his father, why do you have to lie? I've never been sick, never! And your foot isn't bad because I needed the bone! And mum isn't dead either! You're always lying! Let me be! Sometimes someone would go after them to give them a few words of comfort, or a little something for that poor unfortunate child, and then his father would say please don't, we're not beggars. It's just that sometimes it does good to open your heart to someone. And he really would refuse to accept anything, just wiped his eyes, and the child's face, sighed great sighs, there, there, he would mumble to himself till he'd calmed down.

The boy heard the shuffle of his steps before he saw him, looking pleased and happy as he drew nearer, he knocks that foot against everything, he thought to himself on the empty platform, and sighed. There you are, son, his father cried

as he squeezed himself through the sliding-door, you should have gone the other way, we've already been this way! The boy did not reply, set off in the other direction without a word, stopped on the carriage platform at the other end, waited until his father had gone through the door, let it close behind him. They sent you some chocolate, his father said, here you are. D'you hear me? The boy stopped. Let's stop here a bit, alright? Take a breather. You can eat your chocolate while we wait. We've been asked to a wedding, he said later, shall we go?

Or are you angry with me?

No.

What?

No, I'm not angry.

You look down in the dumps to me.

I'm just tired.

There's one more car before the buffet, there's usually a lot of people there too. And then we'll get off?

Yes.

And go home?

That's right. We'll stoke up the stove and go to bed.

And stay in?

Yes. But you can go out to play if you like.

I don't want to go anywhere.

That's fine too.

The next carriage was full of boisterous children, probably on their way back from an outing, they could hardly make their way through them. The boy held his father's hand and walked on ahead without looking left or right. Luckily his father did not want to play and sing here, because they would have been laughed at, and Tibi Kárász would surely hear about it. And know that he was wearing boots, not like those the other boys here are wearing, and his coat! He has got a proper coat, but he has to wear this one when they come on the train, because here they're poor. Maybe Tibi Kárász is here on the train right now, and any minute now he'll be hearing his voice: what's new, Scarecrow? You look like something the cat's brought in! He lowered his eyes but he could still see them whispering behind him, nudging each other, choking with stifled laughter, and when they'd be out of here, the laughter would burst out. Look at them, they would say, look at the two raggedy-asses! He walked so quickly his father could barely keep up with him, stop a bit, he said when they were outside on the carriage platform, let me get my breath back.

In the end they didn't get off after all. Can you stick it just a little bit longer, his father pleaded, there were plenty of people in the next car too, mostly women, and they usually did well where there were women. They sang Mother, you're a good woman, and here too people started asking questions, so the boy went forward, he didn't hear his father say, look at that child, he's been put back together out of me. What you see before you is what was left of me after, besides

him. They couldn't get off at the next one either, because the people there had been expecting them, news had travelled quickly, they didn't even have to sing, Balog had to show his scars straight off, here. He lived with my heart for two days, that's where it was taken out, and we were both hooked up to it. In the next carriage it was his back he bared: the boy couldn't breathe, they connected a tube from my lungs to his so he wouldn't choke. Then it was his knees: believe it or not, he's got my knee-caps, he doesn't even know about it, I signed a paper that I'd never tell him.

They were somewhere near the front of the train, the sound of the engine came from quite close, Balog said they would get off after the next one, he'd had enough too. The gangway was draughty, they crossed over to the next platform, this'll do fine, we'll stop here, he said, and slowly lowered the accordion to the floor. He took out a knitted hat from his pocket and put it on the boy's head. Dad, the child said later, there's someone lying there. Where, his father asked. Over there, you can only see his legs. Balog walked forward a couple of steps, and then he saw him. It was a young man, lying at the front of the corridor, he must have been struck down right by the door, his head, his face was covered in blood, he was wearing jeans and a windcheater, his shirt was torn in several places. Let's get away from here, son, he said quickly, better not even look. Go where, asked the boy, aren't we getting off? Let's go back, we'll get off there, come on. Open the door! The boy just stood and stared at the man lying on the floor, it seemed to him that the body had moved, was twitching faintly, then the door of the toilet suddenly swung open and two men came out. Dear oh dear, one of them said at once, what have you two been doing? He had black, curly hair and long sideburns reaching down to his mouth. Well, take a look at that, said the other, they've gone and done the Finder good and proper. This one was black too, but not so much, and steel teeth glittered in his mouth as he spoke, now he shouted at Balog, hey! Then they just laughed, come on, let's go, said the curly one, we've got to have this out! Please, Balog said, we did not knock anyone out, I'm a wandering musician and we were just about to get off with my son here. You did not knock him out, said the one with false teeth in a menacing voice. Of course not, said Balog, how could I have, with this bad.... Well, who the fucking hell struck him down, then? Lightning? They had manoeuvred him into the corner now, the boy was standing further off, staring at them roundeyed. Or do you think it was me, shouted the one with false teeth, hey? Well? You've only got to say so! Say it was me, 'cos it was! He looked at the other one and began to laugh loudly, patting Balog's shoulder, there, no need to get upset like, he'll be up in a minute. Hey, he shouted at the man on the floor, wake up! Then started kicking the soles of his feet. Leave him, said the curly-haired one, let him sleep, come on, let's go! So you're a musician, you say? That's right, said Balog, collecting himself after the scare, we're on this train a lot. Can you play this, asked the one with false teeth, what can you play? I can play everything,

Balog replied quickly, almost everything. The two men glanced at each other, and laughed again, come on then, said the curly-haired one, do your stuff!

Balog did his best to get out of going with them, brought up the boy, a mere child still, sickly, might have a fever even now, starts raving sometimes, never mind, they said, he can rave all he likes here, we do the same thing at the yard. He spoke of being tired, of his wounds, showed them his bad feet, great, said the one with sideburns, made for rapping, those, come on, get going. The boy stared from one to the other confusedly, while the men pushed them ahead towards the interior of the car, which was full of smoke and very noisy. They were greeted with loud cheers, a crowd of people, clearly together, was gathered, sitting and standing, around a bag strewn with cards and money, a rowdy party of men and women. I brought a musician, said the curly-haired one, he wants to tell you something, shut your mouths! I don't have anything to say, Balog protested, pulling the boy close, laughing constrainedly, then he thought that perhaps it would be better if he did what they wanted. Alright, he said, because they were threatening him by then, just one then, because we're dead tired. A bottle was thrust into his hands and he was told to drink, then the boy was made to drink as well, however hard he protested, then someone picked him up and threw him up into the luggage-rack. You hungry, a thickly painted mouth asked him, want a banana? There you are! It's clothes he needs, someone laughed, just look at him! Why don't you get him some proper clothes? Balog hemmed and hawed, saying the boy had plenty of proper clothes, but not to wear on the train, what would be the use, they'd only get crumpled, then he began to play something, louder, they shouted, no one can hear anything! Shut up! Balog started with Krasznahorka, they listened for a while, then a bull-necked, bald man broke in, saying he'd have to do better than that, they weren't going to a funeral, couldn't he play something more cheerful? Give him something to drink, liven him up!

Balog did not really know how to play the accordion, he just knew a couple of positions to accompany the songs he'd learned from his father, he'd never tried to learn any new ones, there'd never been the need. Now he struggled to keep in rhythm at least while the others sang, but did not really succeed, and they slowly stopped singing, and said old man, you stink. Get the hell out of here, you're not worth shit. You're a dead duck, said the curly-haired one too, not a musician. Go on, give him something, don't want him to say we're cheap. No, no, leave it out, don't, Balog said to appease them, I didn't give satisfaction, I don't deserve anything. Still, said the one with false teeth, you got to get your hourly wage, right, boys? Got change for a thousand, someone asked, and laughter broke out. And how did you get to be such a damaged piece of goods, asked a skinny, consumptive-looking fellow, what happened to you? Why don't you walk properly? Wouldn't it be easier? They had another laugh over that, isn't that expander too heavy for you, they asked, and took the accordion from his neck and started pulling at it as if it were an expander, had a contest, who could

pull it out how many times, pulled it out above their heads, behind their backs, in front of their chests, then one of them caught on, hey, he said, you play the keyboard because it's easier to pull it out that way! They laughed again, and people give him money for it, a rip-off artist, that's what he is! Here, here's your money, beat it, get lost, where's the kid? Where did you put him?

They lifted the boy down from the luggage-rack, stared at him admiringly, lovely big teeth he's got, someone said, still got them all? Yes, said the boy, and look at his muscles! The bull-necked one groped his arms and laughed, that's something like it! It even bends! Got your weenie too? And all your marbles? The boy nodded, smiling, those huge men passed him from hand to hand, then someone lifted him high, I'll take him, he said, but don't you dare piss on my clothes, you hear me? The boy laughed, he couldn't see his father's face, but he felt fine, just fine, the bull-necked man told him to grab hold of his hair, but he didn't have any hair, not a one, so the boy laid his face on his bald head, wrapped his arms around his neck and laughed, laughed. Hey, the curlyhaired one shouted, that'll be enough now! Let them go! Sumi, you carry the instrument after the old man, and accompany the guest to the door, make sure he doesn't come back! You want another drink? No? Fine. They took the boy out first, his father after, grabbing him under the arms so he didn't have to walk a step, the one following behind carrying the accordion, then when they reached the carriage platform, the one walking in front lifted the boy down from his shoulders, there, he said, we've arrived. Put it there, he said, holding out his huge palm, and the boy struck it with his own, that's right! Great! Then he opened the door, the boy felt a gentle push, heard a single word, whoops, and was flying. His father after him. Then the accordion. The train continued on its way.

It's a mercy we're small and skinny, said his father, struggling to get up. And that the scrub's that thick around here. Did you hurt yourself bad? No, said the boy, back on his feet almost at once, kicking at the grass as if nothing much had happened, and smiled. His father was finally sitting up, panting. God damn the bastards, he began, then continued with a string of expletives, what a dirty trick those rotten, lousy sons-of-bitches had played on them. Never seen the like. Beats everything, it does. But he wouldn't leave it at that. The scumbags! To do that to a cripple and a child! What are you laughing at?

Nothing.

You were laughing at something! Were you laughing at me?

They threw us out like you throw a cat out to shit.

Well, that certainly is very funny. We could have broken our necks. Let me see if you're alright, come over here.

I'm OK.

I told you to come over here! You could have internal injuries!

Where?

I've got to feel you all over. If it hurts, say so.

Alright.

And don't grin at me like that.

The boy laughed, his two pearly white front teeth gleamed wetly, a drop of saliva glistened at the corner of his mouth, he said it felt ticklish, having his father feeling him over like that, which wasn't true, he just had to laugh at the whole thing, the way that hairless man threw them out of the train, perhaps they'd come and fetch them, and then everyone would laugh, the curly-haired one and the one with false teeth too, and the bald one would pick him up again and tell him to grab onto his hair, which he hasn't got. You're a right one you are, said his father, and started tickling him for real, then sitting there on the ground gathered him into his arms like a baby, and said, well, that was a close shave. Later he stood up, looked around, aha, he said, I thought so, we're near Apafa. It's not too far. Plenty of freight trains along this line, passing at a walking pace, we'll take one of those, alright? Alright, he asked again, because the boy did not reply, just stared before him with the remains of laughter on his face. Alright, he said in a little while. Like the last time, his father continued, but only when it's going real slow, I'll tell you when. Later he went to fetch the accordion, his face was sad as he brought it, well, there's plenty wrong with it, he lamented, it will have to be repaired. It's torn too. He turned it over and over in his hands, tried it out, then put it down, sighing.

They sat silent for a while, then the boy got up and went over to the tracks, looking round, but nothing was coming. Then a passenger train came, clacking by them rapidly, then nothing came for a long time. Then a freight train came, but also very fast. Sit down, do, said his father, don't go near the tracks, it'll come, never fear, I know this line, they sometimes shunt them right back here.

Am I strong, dad?

Of course.

They said I had muscles. Is that it?

That's it.

Then I could jump on the train. Even if it was a fast one.

No one can jump on a fast train. They'd get their hands torn off.

Not even you?

Not even me.

Because you're soft like a breeze?

Did they say that on the train too?

That you were a softie, and wimpy.

You can't even pronounce it.

That bald man was strong, wasn't he, dad?

Yes.

And you're weak.

So?

The boy did not reply, his face grew sad, he too sat down in the dry shrivelled grass. Then a train went by again, but in the wrong direction, then another two, then nothing came again.

Dad.

Yes.

You're not going to belt Tibi Kárász.

Why not?

Because you're weak.

Get off, will you!

It's true. He'll paste you.

Did he say that?

Yes. And that you'd just grin like a rabbit at a weasel.

Come over here.

No.

I'm not going to hurt you! It's just that I couldn't hear quite clearly what you learned on the train. Mummy would be proud of you if she heard, he added morosely. Did Tibi Kárász say something about her too?

He did.

What?

There was a slow rumble, like when a train's coming. Balog stood up, then the boy, sounds like it's a slow one, said his father. Maybe it'll do. Come on, let's go lie in ambush! Then he caught hold of the child and pulled him close, but the boy wriggled out of his arms, the train's coming, he cried eagerly, wait, his father warned, don't rush! If it's too fast we'll wait some more, you hear me? Alright, the boy cried over his shoulder, but you could see he wasn't really paying attention, just watching for the train now. Flatcars, said his father, when the freight train came up alongside them, it might do. Don't go so close! Wait for me, it'll slow right down in a minute!

He kept his eyes on the boy as he scrambled up the gravelbed. Fast as lightning! He clambered after him hastily, panting, wait, he shouted as he pulled himself up, then he saw the boy grab hold of one of the steps, hang on there for a moment! and then he was up. I'm coming, he shouted, stay where you are! Sit down! He managed to grab hold of the step at the other end of the car, that's alright then, he thought, once I've got hold of it, it's mine. The train was pulling him along, but it was nothing, and the boy was running towards him along the plateau, sit down, he shouted, I'll be up in a moment! Something kicked him in the face. A boot. Another kick. Two white explosions. He let go of the steel then, he couldn't hold on any longer. There wasn't any point.

Translated by Eszter Molnár

László Csaba

Bad-Tempered Boom

whole decade has passed since the Hungarian government, sensing the unstoppable sinking of the Soviet Titanic, gave up experiments aimed at adding market elements to the socialist model and committed itself to a true market economy. The first two-day meeting of the reform committee was held in February 1988, at the holiday home of the Ministry of Finance at Pünkösdfürdő, and the guestion where political constraints were to lie was decided: Miklós Németh, Secretary to the C.P. Central Committee, guaranteed the neutrality of state security organizations. August 1988 saw the creation of reform committees, and in November of the same year a reform programme was published, proclaiming a self-regulating market economy based on private ownership and a reorientation towards the West as its objectives.

These goals were for the most part realized. And yet the greater majority of the Hungarian public feels disillusioned, inter-

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est in public affairs has declined drastically, as has been made only too clear by voting levels of 69 per cent in the 1994 and 57 per cent in the 1998 elections. This loss of confidence is pretty general, something that is not so hard to understand if we consider that by 1998 Hungary has only succeeded in regaining half the 18 per cent GDP loss the transformational recession of 1989-92 so far. Consumption per head had fallen by 10 per cent by 1992, i.e. much more slowly than GDP, but since 1993 it has hardly grown at all. One and a half million fewer are economically active, and the discrepancy between the wealthiest and poorest deciles has grown from 1:6 to 1:8 (Sík-Tóth, eds., 1998). Differences in lifestyle that were formerly largely hidden have since become obvious, indeed ostentatious. At least another couple of years are required for Hungary to return to "pre-crisis" level, and in the meantime the development gap, in both an absolute sense and on average, has not decreased, indeed it has grown. Given the growing differentiation between rich and poor, there are many for whom this growth is far from insignificant. Meanwhile, the many satellite television channels, a host of tourists, and the welcome extension in the range of available consumer goods has made living standards more perceptible by the day, thus increasing tension between the desired level

of consumption and the present realistic level. Some claim that perceptible economic growth and the revival of domestic income are but the fruit of statistical doctoring, others that they are a basis for genuine hopes for the future. There are those whose vision for their children includes a doubling of national income, others who see the country's fate as one of personal and financial depression stretching as far into the future as noone would care to imagine. Those in the know about longterm predictions can only describe the uncertainties: quantitative predictions for political use and the statistics they utilize rely on an equally weak basis (Hetényi, 1998).

The style of transformational politics

ungary is now almost liturgically listed as a model of gradualist transformation. For a variety of reasons this is unjustified. True, at the time of the collapse of the socialist system, Hungary's economy did not demand the drastic stabilization measures employed in Poland or Russia. But this is little more than a difference in trade cycle policy and modes of economic management: from the point of view of creating the institutions most crucial to defining the nature of the new economic system, it is largely cosmetic. Adjusting to the minds of the average voter, governments all chose the golden middle way. In fact, this is not what happened. In Poland there was a single bout of "shock therapy". in Lithuania, Russia, Romania and the Czech Republic there were two. Over the space of a decade Hungary was to see the introduction of no fewer than three comprehensive, systemic reform packages, all of which amounted to shock therapies.

The liberalization of foreign trade was largely driven through in the 1989–91 period, ending six decades of isolationism. In the same period all markets for means of

production and almost all prices were liberalized, and firms in state ownership were transformed into companies and privatized en masse. The governing authorities played a crucial role in initiating these processes—including spontaneous privatization—while the end result was largely determined by organic social dynamics, independent of the government's intentions. However much certain lobbies and government forces attempted to stop these three elements, separately or as one, they simply lacked the necessary powers. In other words, the transformation was strongly rooted in real social conditions, rather than those perceived by certain political forces. This is supported by the visible defeat forces opposed to such measures suffered in 1991 and 1994 on all three fronts. Attempts to create price and wage cartels turned to dust. Steps demanding trade protection foundered in the face of a majority with opposed interests and of a newly-found press freedom. In the long run, through the various stages of privatization, it proved impossible to limit the determining role played by management and foreign interests.

In January 1992, at the high point of étatist ideology, as if by some special delayed action, tiered market governing legislation was enacted—uniquely in the region. The independence of the central bank, which started with the loss of its commercial banking functions and limitations on the financing of the budget, continued with the gradual suspension of the implicit subsidy of government activities. The bank only fully became independent in 1997, but without the deadlines and guarantees included in central bank legislation and related international obligations, this process could hardly have been completed.

The law on financial institutions prescribed that commercial banks, which were only formally such after the bank reforms of 1987, be turned into genuine

financial institutions, and that, by the end of 1996 at the latest, they be privatized. That this objective was attained on schedule took the majority of observers by surprise. The safety, prudential, transparency and other bank operation requirements including that of disclosure—at first heavily affected the financial results of these banks. Yet it was obviously a criterion of their transfer to private ownership that—in addition to the accountancy legislation discussed below-a framework be created for financial reporting, procedure and operation that was up to Western standards. In the absence of these, it may have been possible to transfer this and that to private ownership around 1990, though without basic conditions for trade, and given the predictable recession caused by transition, this would have been perceived as a legally punishable example of administrative fraud and institutionalized swindling-primarily not because of the resulting compensation demands from Western firms, but because the ongoing problems of reputation so incurred would have led Hungarian banks to be grouped together with those of the Balkans and the Near East. This would have delayed Hungary's development as a future member of the European Union and as a target for serious strategic investors, until the year 2000 at least.

In the other transitional countries the toughening of actuarial legislation only took place in between 1995 and 1998. The initial result of the fact that Hungary dealt with this issue earlier was that state income declined: partly because of the disappearance of formerly artificially exaggerated bank profits and the sizeable tax income they represented, partly because of increased tax write-off opportunities and amortization freedoms for entrepreneurs. On the other hand, we must appreciate that domestic companies which survived the critical storms induced by the transfor-

mation to a market economy can largely give credit for their survival to these opportunities. This is especially true of small and medium-sized firms.

The fourth and final piece of legislation was the Bankruptcy Act, harsh even by international standards. A tightening of the 1986 act, it represented a radical leap forward, especially in terms of the institutionalization of the obligatory declaration of bankruptcy and the establishment of a strong position for small credit providers. The number of bankruptcies—previously no more than a few hundred and limited to small firms-rose to tens of thousands, including large corporations. The stringent cleansing of the market this induced could not be undone by the relaxation of the law in June 1997. For it is clear that in this way: 1. the problem of interfirm payment failures (queueing), which is still so acute in Russia, was solved; 2. loss-making economic units were eliminated, that is, the process of market cleansing was begun.

Later Finance Minister Lajos Bokros (1993) termed the simultaneous introduction of the four laws supply side shock therapy. It was thanks to these reforms that Hungary waved goodbye to decades of simulated market behaviour, replacing it by a genuine market economy.

The third radical reform measure—despite the narrow-mindedness accompanying its introduction—was the Bokros package of March 1995. As students of these policies stress (Kornai, 1996; Antal, 1998), the series of measures intended to prevent the budget deficit from reaching dramatic proportions was only of secondary importance. The real, long-term change was that the "package" made clear to the Hungarian people the inevitability of reform of the country's welfare model. The debates of the past two years are no longer concerned with whether it is possible to maintain the "achievements" of the Kádár age (though

some are of this opinion), but what the direction and moral nature of the marketing reforms should be. In the meantime, public administration and, in part, social security were turned into a unified state financial system, and the opportunity was given for additional private sector institutions to be formed, especially in the fields of pension funds and education. All this goes to show that the dismissal of Lajos Bokros in February 1996 did not mark the end of long-term restructuring.

It is clear from the above that Hungary cannot be reckoned a country where transition is slow and gradualist.

The politics of improvization?

In the past decade it has become a cliché to say that economic policy is based on improvization, and that it lacks long-term vision. This misconception, no less popular than the previous one, is most readily found among those who, thanks to their experience in the planned economy, expect a government to elaborate large-scale sectoral plans. In reality all three main elements of Hungarian economic policy display long-term vision.

Between 1990 and 1994 state expenditure as a percentage of GDP stabilized at around 62 per cent, but by 1998 this had dropped to 45 per cent. Even by international standards this is an adjustment of unprecedented proportions. Thanks to this, the level of state redistribution slackened to the level considered acceptable by European OECD countries, which is a much better indicator of the extension of the economy's private sector than the lists of privatization data that are conventionally doctored in all countries in the interests of international reputation or competitiveness. If we take into account that, despite the stress on neo-liberal principles, the level of state redistribution in Western

European countries has hardly slackened in the last 15 years, the Hungarian figures are more than an adequate refutation of the argument that the country's economic policy is featureless.

Throughout the decade, monetary policy has concentrated on supporting price stabilization and the balance of payments-two fundamental, albeit relative values. The only exceptional period was that of 1991-3, when the politician appointed as governor of the central bank decided to use an artificial squeeze on interest rates to serve the government's desire to stimulate the economy. In addition to disrupting the external balance—as a delayed effect-Hungarians had to pay heavily for this in those aspects of the Bokros package of March 1995 which targeted inflation and sought to put curbs on the domestic market.

One of the successes of monetary policy was that there was no adjustment inflation of the kind experienced in Poland. Romania or Russia, which in those countries destroyed the value of the life savings of millions. Fiscal policy, experience and not least the limited credibility of government institutions have meant that inflationary expectations have remained high. Today, lack of credibility is the main barrier to the success of an anti-inflationary policy (Vincze, 1997). This is in addition to the fact that the economy's smallness and openness and the convertibility of the forint mean that there is less and less room for manoeuvre for an independent monetary policy.

Exchange rate policy took shape as the resultant of these two component policies. Between 1989 and 1992 the central bank implicitly used the exchange rate as a nominal anchor in the battle against inflation, but the deficit in the current account in 1993–4 forced the bank to carry out unannounced devaluations, thus damag-

ing the credibility of this tool of economic policy. The crawling peg regime, introduced together with the Bokros package is, on the one hand, a sensible compromise between the need for price stabilization and that of maintaining the balance of payments. On the other hand, it puts a straight-jacket on economic policy which limits the room for manoeuvre of every economic actor in the long-term. The whole technique is dependent on the stabilization of expectations, on the establishment of trust in the government, and on dependable teamwork between government institutions with differing duties. These demands are not easy to satisfy in practice. The more politically-dependent Finance Ministry may easily find itself ineffectual in its attempt to block wage and pension increases, and thus attempt to balance the budget by reducing interest rates—a method that has already been seen to fail in the past. Decision-makers can be led into the dangerous illusion that the system allows the level of devaluation to be chosen freely. This is quite simply an error (as detailed in Erdős, 1998). A similar misunderstanding can arise if, following the thinking of the eighties, they wish to use steps toward a fixed exchange rate to "drive" players on the money markets towards the exchange rate level predicted or desired by the fiscal authorities. Such measures could lead to an unjustifiably high exchange rate—which would in time be pushed down by the market-and the loss of hard-won credibility. Therefore this policy is not advisable in an election year. In a small, open economy, exchange rate policy gradually disappears as an autonomous tool, even if certain politicians would rather not accept this. For in this instance inflation must be beaten first, and only then will the exchange rate be stabilized

Unique characteristics of time transformation

Theoreticians, especially in the modern Anglo-Saxon tradition, often question whether economic theory and economic policy can have a national profile, and regularly fail to recognize transformational eco-nomic policy at all. For only good (coherent) and bad (inconsistent) economic policies can be modelled theoretically. From an inspection of the Hungarian experience, however, it is possible to describe some important characteristics of transformational economic policy which represent deviations from what took place in similar countries.

The fundamental tool of transfer to private hands has been and will always be market sale. Hungary made little use of the various forms of mass or popular privatization methods which artificially widen the class of small investors. Though some of the political world holds the various governments to blame for this, studies of changes property relations (Voszka, Mihályi, 1998) suggest that the various techniques used for preferential privatization became common without any particular announcement. These plans-made in the name of social justice-in fact strengthened the existing dominant position of management, and changes to the balance of value and countervalue, over and above the general rules, were to the advantage of this group. In an indirect way this also went to show that deviations from the "British style" resulted in social and efficiency losses, while the slow pace that was held to blame only existed in the imaginations of those who ideologically opposed it. The Hungarian bank and public utility sectors have seen the removal of many taboos whose removal would be still unthinkable in certain Western European countries.

The openness of the foreign trade system survived repeated attacks. The existence of external competition was a key element in the development of Hungarian market relations. Thanks to the significant share of the market won by foreign capital, the unit price of Hungarian exports was 30-40 per cent higher than that of the other Visegrád countries. The 44 per cent proportion of Hungarian exports represented by machinery and equipment is twice that for Poland and the Czech Republic, indeed it exceeds that of Spain and Greece. Internationally, analysts tend to see this as evidence of successful microeconomic restructuring.

If we make a comparison with the other Central European countries, we immediately see that Hungary has achieved significant advantages with regard to the reform of the financial regulation system (Bonin, 1996). The key difference rests on the widely criticized reform package of 1992, which sought to prevent the reform of financial and banking institutions being postponed indefinitely, and to prevent losses generated within banking from being spread across the national economy. The bank consolidation programme, often demagogically opposed by its detractors, made public the fact that the large banks had lost their start-up capital, and made clear that making the financial institutional system work would be in the public interest, and that for this reason an implementation of the principle of "everyone should be responsible for his own business risks" was unacceptable, as banking risks were borne by investors, including small investors. Finally, it held that bailing out the banks can only be a one-off exercise if the banks are subsequently sold to investors who would not require the help of the Hungarian state, but who could satisfy the technical and financial criteria of the banking system.

On the basis of the above, Balassa (1996) is justified in arguing that neither on the question of consolidation nor on that of sale to foreign investors did Hungary's economic decision-makers have any real freedom of choice. Those countries which won time by passing on the 1992 financial reform measures are today finding themselves obliged to take similar steps, but at greater expense. In Hungary, the unhealthy symbiosis of state banks and state firms with stakes in each other was abolished. Different institutions restructured industrial companies, not those that had restructured the banks, and the two parties did not have to rely on each other's goodwill. In the light of the aforementioned foreign exchange statistics, there is little doubt that the marriage of banks and industrial firms in the Czech and Polish cases was less productive than what happened in Hungary, where, following Anglo-American logic, a clear divide between functions and players was made.

In the end, bank consolidation proved to be one-off: for a while it was feared that the authorities would make an institution out of intervention, but thankfully this fear proved unfounded. For while there were individual acts of intervention in the banking system even after 1995, but these were based on individual political deliberations, not universal, precedent-setting stabilization measures. Such case-by-case acts of intervention, however damaging, are of course not unheard of in Western countries either. The critical mass of foreign ownership makes it impossible for future governments to distort the macro-level distribution of resources to serve their own ideological purposes or the wishes of their patrons. In other words, these measures ensured a lasting and efficient distribution of resources, that is, the institutional guarantee required for sustainable growth. It is no less important that the

new owners are aware of the Westernstyle regulations devoted to bank safety, and do not regard them to be an impediment; thus there is no part of the banking system now threatened by an accumulation of bad debts.

With the banking system having undergone that inevitably controversial shakeup, and with the majority of owners now reliable, established Western banks, the widening range of services and improving technical conditions can—given the right regulatory system—lay the foundations for the country to become the financial centre of the region. It is not that Budapest aims to usurp the role of Zurich or Frankfurt, but that in the region's markets, which are fast-growing but burdened with uncertainties, both multinationals and investors who demand security and easy access regard the use of Hungary's services as an advantage. This represents not a squeeze on the old, but a market niche in the world's fastest-growing economic region.

Economic performance

Almost as a matter of course, the overall performance of the economy is regarded as weak and unsatisfactory both in terms of international comparison and in relation to society's expectations. Yet this view is only tenable if economic performance is based on certain indicators in common use—such as industrial production or calorie intake per head—even if these are regarded as irrelevant both by economic theory and international institutions.

In fact, Hungary is one of the small group of countries which, following the example of Eastern Asia or, in the nineties, of Latin America, simply lifted themselves out of debt without experimenting with risky "unconventional techniques" such as simply defaulting. In 1989 the national

debt was \$18bn, in 1992 \$22bn, in 1994 \$28bn, and at its height in 1995 it was \$33bn, subsequently reduced to \$27.6bn in 1996, and in 1997 to \$22bn. Of this, Hungary's external debt-the component that has to be faced by the taxpayerdropped from \$16bn in 1995 to \$5bn in 1997; hence half of the foreign debt is now private. As these loans are taken on for investment purposes, there is a greater probability ab ovo that they will generate the means of repayment, while the same cannot be expected of loans taken on to cover state budget deficits. The debt service ratio, the amount expended on debt repayments and on interest as a proportion of the value of exports, also peaked at 49.3 per cent in 1995 and was down to 18 per cent by 1997. The export level of around \$6bn, typical in the Eighties, had more than tripled by 1997 to \$19.7bn. Comparing imports of \$20.6bn to the Russian figure of \$38bn, it is clear that in terms of trade Hungary is by no means an insignificant market. As far as foreign direct investment is concerned, Hungary has attracted \$17.5bn, compared to Russia's \$9bn. Poland reached the \$20bn level in 1997, but the Polish figures include as yet unrealized investment promises; and Poland has four times the population of Hungary. Thus, in terms of investment per head they still lag far behind us.

The growth of imports by an annual 20 per cent in 1995–96 and by 30 per cent in 1997 has engendered fundamental changes to the nature of economic growth. Today export-led growth is not just a slogan, it is reality. This means that even if the record performance of 1997—a current account deficit of less than \$1bn—proves to be transitory, it still marks the first time in four decades that the current account deficit has not been an obstacle to economic growth. Economic policy has escaped from the vicious stop-go circle

and an opportunity has arisen for long-term economic growth, accompanied by reduced inflation and exchange rate stabilization. At the end of 1989, the current account deficit of \$3bn threatened to bankrupt the state: if such a deficit happened to appear today, it would be covered by inward capital flow and by operative and ministerial investment—the value of the later was \$2.5bn in 1997. The debt trap and related problems have lost their footing.

Despite claims to the contrary that are as common today as ever, Hungary is no longer an agricultural economy. If we consider that ever since the world depression of 1873 there has been a worldwide glut in agricultural products, a structural glut which in the last four decades—despite academic and international predictions that there would be a price revolution and food shortage in this period—has even increased, this is perhaps no bad thing. Those who have no choice but to compete in this market—as is the case of the majority of the poorest countries—see a systematic deterioration in their terms of trade, which is further intensified by subsidized competition from Western European countries.

In 1997, little more than 5 per cent of Hungary's GDP was agriculture. True, 30 per cent of the population lives in villages, but the proportion of these people solely or primarily engaged in agriculture is just 10 per cent (Kolosi–Sági, 1996). This means that Hungary—unlike Poland or Romania—has successfully undergone the process of tertialization, the lack of which is often referred to by EU states afraid of Eastern expansion.

It is also worth noting that by 1997 only 13 per cent of Hungarian exports were of agricultural products and thus there is no good reason for EU accession and Hungary's negotiating position in the World Trade Organization to be based on the considerations of this sector, simply because

its voice is louder and its negotiating position stronger than those of other groups.

Unlike in the Kádár era, Hungary is no longer an industrial society. In 1997 only 30 per cent of GDP and little more than a quarter (27 per cent) of jobs depended on industry. One consequence of this is that it is less and less possible to infer wider social and economic conclusions from industrial indicators; for example, the rapid increase in efficiency experienced in industry is hardly representative of other sectors. Another is that overall economic progress is less and less dependent on questions of industrial policy. Indeed the latter is beginning to lose its importance, with non-sectoral regional development, employment policy and training and social integration schemes taking its place.

The significance of industrial relations, that is collective interest representation and wage-bargaining, is strongly and irreversibly declining. Of around 3.5 million employees, fewer than half a million are members of the biggest unions—the unions' own figures—while no more than a further hundred thousand are members of the various independent unions. This represents an American level of collective "organization", a level which is maintained by the prevalence of personal computers, growth of part-time and seasonal employment, and the continuing significance of the second economy.

These structural changes have further repercussions. For one thing, the role of centralized wage-bargaining is increasingly insignificant outside the public sector, that is for the major part of the economy. Hence the agreements made by the Interest Arbitration Council are of little value even for purposes of information; nor is it surprising that in 1998, as in previous years, quantitative targets have not been realized. This means that there is no chance of an Austrian-Swedish-style corporatism emerg-

ing. Thus one of Hungary's advantages as a location for business will be its labour market flexibility. In social terms this means that even a small increase in economic activity will be felt on the labour market. Unemployment, which only became a mass phenomenon here in 1991–2, peaked at 13.4 per cent in November 1992, and has steadily declined ever since, reaching 8.1 per cent, measured by international statistical standards, in August 1998 (the EU average is 11 per cent). From this it seems probable that economic growth creates jobs, a fact supported by the on the average less than 5 per cent unemployment rate in Budapest.

Hungary is not a new democracy. I am not just thinking of its many centuries old parliament, but of the fact that changes of government have been achieved systematically and on schedule. Unlike in neighbouring countries, there was no need to take the first steps in establishing parliamentary democracy, to set up interim governments, or to make the state of revolution permanent. This does admit-tedly relegate those who believe in direct popular intervention to local government, but it also undoubtedly increases institutional stability, on the basis of the non-proportional nature of the much-criticized "pact politics" and the electoral system. It does not of course follow from the above that the rights to national identity and free self-determination, and constitutionalism in general, are automatically realized without anything in the way of problems or struggle. What does follow is that the claim that the system of institutions has not yet been established is nota valid argument against Hungary's Euro-Atlantic accession.

The European context

Hungary's long-term prospects are essentially determined by when the country will enter the European Union. Just

about all analysts-if not all political groups-agree that membership of the Union, with the necessary institutional and orientational help and the security provided by the regulatory authorities, will in due course be the conclusion to the second phase of systemic transformation. The later we reach this fixed point that is so decisive for the whole process, the greater will be the uncertainty, the political mistakes and playing for time, and the greater the dangers due to experimenting with goodness knows what alternatives. The longer the "transitory" period lasts, and the larger the role of compensation for those incurring transitory losses, the more areas there will be where demands for "exceptional" treatment arise, and the more the importance of membership of the Union will decline. This is a dangerous path, because it could eventually lead to us failing to seize the second opportunity this century has given us to catch up.

I have recently discussed diverse questions raised by membership of the Union in several other articles. Here I will only refer to my basic argument, that the benefits of membership are not represented by the balance of net transfer payments. Although even the richest countries make such calculations on a regular basis, from a historical and strategic point of view this approach takes us down the wrong road, if we-as always-want to take on something that doesn't work as it is (as they say in Budapest, Albanian wages with a Swedish tax system). From the point of view of Hungary's development strategy, the benefit of membership would be that it maintains and strengthens the self-propelling processes that are currently emerging. This can be explained in terms of the following four cross-sections.

The acceptance of the Union's regulatory system makes Hungarian regulations credible, and thanks to the large integra-

tion area the danger of outside shocks diminishes. The foreign investor demands the risk premium associated with one of the world's best-known and strongest economic players, which is certainly smaller than the risk premium for a single nationstate. This results in a decrease in related transaction costs and time requirements. And this means that domestic savings will not directly obstruct the potential development framework. The increase in capital investment can be taken on by the Union's huge market, which from the point of view of the majority of Hungarian producers appears infinite. For the basic questions of development strategy are precisely how much of what exists can be saved, where the sources of investment for various requirements can be found, and what kind of institutions can guarantee their repayment. The direct and indirect answer to all three questions is "being in": the longer we negotiate, the later the dynamic benefits of integration will take effect.

99 per cent of world capital flow, and "only" 95 per cent of capital inflows to developing countries are from private sources. In 1992 the EU decided that member states should use no more than 1.27 per cent of the GDP to achieve collective objectives. There are already long queues of those waiting to spend this money. In contrast, even at the time the regime changed, Hungary was more attractive to private investors than the other transitional and developing states. So we are certainly not playing our cards right if our starting point is official transfers, and this causes us to ignore private capital, of far greater significance. PHARE monies represent less than one thousandth of all operative capital investments in Hungary, and the future will not see any radical changes here.

It is not money from Brussels that will strengthen the country's ability to attract capital but the very fact of being in the

Union; it would clearly not be prudent to lose the many dollars of private capital for the sake of a few cents from Brussels. Faster modernization requires capital. technology and leadership abilities and, of course, export markets. Both of these needs are essentially provided for by the market integration brought about by legal harmonization and the articles of partnership. It would in fact be worth joining even if we were not to receive a single Euro in subsidy, because, bearing the current level of attainment in mind, only full membership would generate a discernible surplus in our business and political life. On the political level this would be in the form of participation in the creation of collective regulations, and on the business level the cheaper and more easily accessible source of capital, as the cases of Spain, Ireland and Portugal show. As, by its own admission, Hungary's weak point in terms of economic policy is its battle against inflation, the set of criteria associated with the prospect of financial union would strengthen exactly those elements the Hungarian economy most needs to work on, but which on its own it would not be able to realize adequately or in time.

Accession to the EU would represent the institutionalization of the quasi-automatic process of catching up that has already begun, something that does not require either side to rediscover the philosophers' stone. The Hungarian economy's potential growth up till accession is around 5 per cent per year, double the EU average. The forint is the least devalued of the currencies of the countries nominated for accession, and convergence in price levels is well advanced. Following entry into the EU, the further pull factor of the advantages brought by dynamic integration should maintain this potential for growth (which is 1.5-2 per cent greater than the long-term trend of only 3-3.5 per cent

per year predicted by Hungary's current endowments), as they will have an investment, institutional and market synergy effect. In addition to this, there would be a number of benefits not represented in the GDP, such as relations becoming more civilized and dependable, a strengthening of the constitutional state, something that can easily be felt even in Greece (especially in comparison to its neighbours and traditional partners). True, in principle this can be achieved without the EU, but the Greek example displays how welcome EU membership can be.

Especially from the EU perspective it is important to consider that the number of losers from transformation can only be less in the next decade than it was in the previous decade. We do not have to expect a similar restructuring of the Hungarian economy and society, and inflation, that has done so much to help destroy the middle classes, cannot remain at the 1990–96 level of 25 per cent. The sustainability of non-inflationary growth will mean that the cake will grow, and the state's uncivilized, hidden methods of redistribution will shrink.

Weak points

Here I concentrate on four elements on which the majority of analysts are in agreement.

Inflation is too high: in technical terms, it has got stuck. The high, double-digit inflation of the Nineties means that economic agents— including households and the hundreds of thousands of enterprises—adjust their expectations accordingly, taking it for granted in their income expectations and their price-responsivity, and accommodate themselves to it. This is difficult to alter, especially when the whole economy—from the energy sector to the pension system—takes the past as its point of reference. The credibility of government

institutions is low, while a predictable, stable path of economic policy is not seen as a virtue even in theory, while day-to-day manoeuvering, the culture of pragmatism, is strong. All this only helps uncertainty and inflation can thus never be as low as econometric modelling suggests it could be. As we have seen, given current conditions in Hungary, a price-wage pact or lower taxes in return for higher tax morale would not lead anywhere. Corporative bargains of this type are in any case only viable in exceptional crisis scenarios. It is extremely dangerous for the state to demand restraint of its citizens while it allows budgets to be overstepped by tens of millions of forints year after year. Another source of danger is if the equilibrium between the various elements of economic policy is upset. In such instances fiscal policy tends to become the victim of day-to-day battles, or the desire for a sense of success motivates economic policy to steps that stimulate immediate breakthroughs. Increases to the tax burden, the spread of constitutionally debatable methods of collection, in fact any kind of interference with the general public itself has an upward effect on prices, and discourages medium to long-term investment.

Fiscal policy is not particularly severe. Between 1990 and 1994 the thinking behind this was that it protected those classes that had lost out. In the period after 1994, however, implicit spending became more of a danger. While expenditure was restrained, the activities of the privatization agency, the promises of the pension system and the proliferation of ad hoc obligations not covered by the budget resulted in a higher level of public expenditure than appears in the overall figures. Making the use of public funds more transparent and economical, demanded and still demands measures that will not appear in improvements either to the quarterly or to the annual balance sheet figures. There was certainly a need for reform of the pensions system, but the fiscal plan did not really take into account the predictable loss of income by the social security pension system. Accession to the EU and NATO also tends to be seen as a free lunch, apart from some PR and diplomatic expenditure, and this suggests a misunderstanding of what lies before us. If we are going to receive EU funds, the shadow financing these require must not be committed to specific objectives and spent in advance. All these critical areas point to a lack of long-term vision for balancing public spending, and may represent a landmine which may blow up in the faces of unsuspecting future decision-makers. The Bokros package did not see Hungary through the worst of it. The spending of savings made from lower interest payments on consumption is not a long-term and reasoned policy, and is a bad signal to economic agents.

The reform of healthcare is slow, where even the realization of a market socialist model based on equality between forms of ownership seems a distant ob-jective (cf. Kornai, 1998). The structure, financial requirements and legal scope of regional public administration are not in harmony. Numerous large institutions—the military, the railways, the judicial system—have not accommodated to market conditions. In these areas an institutional solution to the harmonization of needs and possibilities and a transparent and accountable division of administration and responsibility can at best be a pious wish.

The growth of the economy's potential to generate employment is inadequate. This characteristic of the economy becomes particularly obvious if we take into account regional, ethnic and qualification considerations (Köllô, 1998). There is a significant group whose living standards will

not be helped by future economic progress. Other studies (Timár, 1997) draw our attention to the fact that there are a number of obstacles to introducing the flexible employment solutions that developed countries used, (one such is the high level of social security taxes) which cannot be reduced at one stroke. Police intervention in the labour market, and action against the black economy, fact loosen in makeshift social safety-net that does something to protect the classes that are worst off.

The importance of environmental concerns has been recognized neither by the general public nor by political decision-makers. Thus they see the satisfaction of EU requirements as a question of honour. The ecosocial market economy is unknown, even as an item of terminology.

It is clear from this summary of results and weaknesses that Hungarian economic policy has a list of new pro-blems to be solved on the long road to EU membership and eventual currency union. This will require more than regarding the maintaining of a financial balance as more important than anything else. More, because harmonizing the measures required for inflation-free sustainable growth and faster catching-up will be no small feat.

Midterm outlook: On the road to the EU

The robustness of Hungarian economic development has become particularly evident in 1998. First, a change of government took place quite smoothly. While the centre-right parties adopted an election platform echoing the grievances of those not (yet) profiting from socio-economic restructuring, their actual policy decisions are, by and large, following the same path, with the correction of some trivial flaws of the outgoing government.

The elections of spring 1998 reflected the voters' rejection of the idea that there were no alternatives and a desire on their part to cut the intertwinings between politics and business. Accordingly, the new government formed on 8 July contains few professional full-time politicians as against technocrats, who have earned a name in their respective fields. Zsigmond Járai, the Minister of Finance, was one of the founding fathers of the Budapest Stock Exchange in 1989, Kálmán Katona, Minister of Transport, has spent all his working life in this sector, Zoltán Pokorni, Minister of Education, is a secondary school teacher and was active in the teachers' union before entering national politics, János Martonyi, Minister Foreign Affairs, worked as an investment consultant and private lawyer (he also served as Undersecretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before 1994). Numbers and decisions are also in this direction. The draft budget for 1998 corrects for a disproportionate increase in pensions so as to make room for a 6 per cent cut in social security contributions paid by employers. The targeted deficit of 4 per cent against 4.5 per cent in 1998 represents an element of continuity, leaving little room for a populist spending spree.

The government has acted resolutely to roll back politically overdetermined spending items. By dropping the building of the Danube Dam at Nagymaros, informally agreed by the Horn administration with the Slovaks, the government can save, by conservative estimates, between \$3.5 and \$4.5bn in investment costs. After initiating a government-led restructuring of the previously notoriously loss-making PostaBank (which was also involved in obscure financing deals of various sorts) more taxpayers' money is being saved. The new management comes from ABN-Amro, a Dutch bank, where this same team man-

aged one of the most successful bank restructuring operations in 1995–97.

A slowly decelerating rate of inflation can be forecast for 1999, with the 14–15 per cent rate of 1998 coming down by another 3 per cent. This is sizable, should the targeted 5–5.5 per cent growth in GDP materialize, and with the current account deficit, at most \$2bn, covered by capital inflow.

The evolution of a partially privatized pension scheme is likely to contribute to broadening the capital market. In fact, heavily hit by the Asian and Russian flu, the capital market has turned out to be one of the major headaches for Hungarian policymaking despite the sound fundamentals and the ongoing high rating of Hungarian blue chips on the London, New York and Frankfurt stock exchanges. BUX, the index of the Budapest Stock Exchange had dropped from its high of over 9000 points to below 5000 points in early September 1998. While the profitability of Hungarian blue chips even improved and exports grew by about 25 per cent in \$ terms (according to preliminary data for 1998), the drop was obviously due to external factors.

Paradoxically the Budapest capital market has paid a heavy price for its qualitative superiority, namely the fact that it is more liquid than its counterpart in Prague, and listing more foreign investors than its counterpart in Warsaw. Hit by the panic following the Russian collapse, major foreign players went into a selling craze motivated by the imminent cash needs of their small investors, as well as by CEO orders to minimize their exposure to the region. In theory, the recovery phase should soon become palpable even if some correction of the previously overpriced shares is also part and parcel of the rearrangement. With Russia taking only 5 per cent of Hungarian exports and supplying only 9 per cent of imports, trade dependency is not a relevant

issue. However, the already marked disillusionment of investors in emerging markets is likely to be felt for some time to come, and this implies higher-risk premiums, less availability of funds, worse prospects for more firms to issue further corporate bonds instead of relying on bank credits.

Meanwhile the strategy of having relied on direct rather than portfolio investments has been paying off. Direct investors do have a stake in continued business. Indeed, the slump on the BSE has made further acquisitions more lucrative, while harvesting profits is possible

only if profitable operations are found, often in foreign markets. This is a warranty for an ongoing export-led growth in Hungary as well as for the country's ongoing integration in the EU—at the microlevel. Since macro-policies have avoided the typical traps of populist politics in 1998, both in terms of an expansionary fiscal policy and in terms of introducing capital controls (to ward off the world financial crisis), there is good reason to expect an ongoing, sustainable growth trajectory and an increasing number of winners emerging in the years tocome.

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Béla Pomogáts

Literature and the New Democracy

Public life and literary life

The more than four decades of communist dictatorship are now behind us in the historical sense, but still very much alive in the mind and reflexes of Hungarians. The last decade of the regime was marked, among other things, by the struggles to liberate literature and the intellect. In the absence of public outlets for a democratic opposition, writers had to articulate the mood and endeavours of the country, providing regular warnings to the powers-that-be of the discrepancies between the interests of the overwhelming majority and of the small group that held the political reins.

Historically, the long-fought struggle of the tiny opposition to the regime was successful and, combined with the economic pressures and the developments in global politics, brought forth momentous political changes, which were then sanctioned by the United States and the Soviet Union or, more precisely, by Presidents Bush and Gorbachev in the Malta agreement. Literature and culture have regained their autonomy, and matters of creative work and literary life could henceforth be decided on without constraints.

This recapturing of autonomy at the same time has again brought up traditional questions or dilemmas in a powerful way. Does literature, under the new circumstances, still belong in part to the political sphere or is it solely art? Is there a passage, as it were, between the two spheres? Or, to put it in a different way, should writers undertake tasks in politics and political journalism, or should they restrict themselves to writing? The very posing of these questions creates a situation of uncertainty for many, as earlier, in the decades of dictatorship, literary life had quite naturally undertaken to represent and assert national and social interests political tasks par excellence.

This issue has been almost like a *leit-motif*, so it is by no means a new one. Literature in Hungary, just as elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe, has almost always been compelled to take sides and provide answers to the fundamental issues facing the nation. This it did in a way that extended beyond the competence of art, which creates moral and aesthetic values, to the political arena, where literature often acted as a spokesman of the common

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an essayist and literary historian, is currently President of the Hungarian Writers' Association will of society or of the nation, and also as a guide and a representative of the historical interests of Hungarians. Alongside public role-playing, however, the claim has also been articulated that instead of being tribunes of the people, seers or fighters on the barricades, writers should engage themselves in creating valid moral and aesthetic values, because, more than through any political stance or roles, such values can protect the morale of the nation and its spiritual identity with greater efficiency.

I have no intention to intensify the polemics and conflicts between "political" literature and "value-creating" literature. for I believe that no such conflicts exist in reality. I merely wish to point out that there are polemics and conflicts going on currently-at least this is what can be gathered from the clashes between various literary groupings. There are many who have happily withdrawn into creative work, and there are political forces, both on the socialist-liberal or just liberal and on the conservative-national side, who want to steer representatives of literature away from the political decision-making mechanisms and from the means by which public opinion is influenced. Controversy around the public role-taking of literature is in any case strongly affected by the fact that from the late 1980s onwards, political culture in Hungary, suppressed for long decades, started to develop at an unprecedented pace, thereby relieving literature of the burden of a direct political role.

Under the current circumstances, the political role-taking of the writer has become virtually redundant. After all, if Parliament operates according to the principles of the rule of law and political pluralism, even if at times imperfectly, there is no need any more for the general meetings or the board meetings of the Writers' Association to act as a quasi-Parliament and undertake to represent and articulate

the interests of society. Actors on the literary scene are themselves generally convinced that literature should withdraw into the well deserved silence of creative life and allow professional politicians to deal with public matters. A few writers did, however, undertake roles in Parliament, in Government or in the leadership of a party, and insisting on maintaining their earlier markedly political roles. They have turned politician, and in carrying their public functions they seem to have abandoned the tolerance and openness, as well as the considerate and complex style, that is expected from men of letters.

Liberty and poverty

The position of literature has changed: on the one hand, the sense of importance rooted in its responsibility for public and national issues, which Hungarian literature traditionally undertook, especially in crucial historical situations, e.g., before and during the 1956 Revolution or in the opposition movements in the 1980s, has been shattered. On the other hand, the social status of Hungarian literature has changed, and this has also entailed the impoverishment of literary institutions and a perceivable loss of the prestige accorded to writers and their creative work.

During the communist regime, literature was undoubtedly under the control of politics. Taboos had to be respected—not only ideological but also stylistic taboos. The appreciation and at times even the publication of a literary work depended on the judgment of "those up there", people sitting in the ante-chambers and secret nooks of cultural policy-making, in the central bodies of the party or, for many decades, on the maker of "cultural policy" György Aczél and his entourage.

At the same time, literature too had a degree of control over politics. According

to the ruling ideology, the arts, above all writing, had a primary role in the transformation of social awareness and, more indirectly, of society. Thus literature and literary life had at least as much strategic importance as was accorded to an industry of medium importance, such as technological innovation or tourism. A politician had to think twice before quarreling with an esteemed man of letters, like Gyula Illyés or László Németh, or with the Writers' Association. (One has to add that, while it had considerable social and political weight, the Hungarian Writers' Association played a role different from that of its counterpart organization in the Soviet Union. In Hungary, membership did not entail any privileges, nor was publication a necessary condition, and several Hungarian writers did not think it important to register.) This was true of the political consolidation that took place from the mid-60s on. In the repercussions following the 1956 Revolution, the Communist authorities locked up those writers who had voiced their commitment to the nation's fight for freedom-mostly communist "renegades"—without batting an eyelid, and simply banned the Writers' Association. In the last twenty years of the Kádár regime, however, no stand against literature could be taken unless for a momentous political reason or under a resolution brought by leading party organs. Literature was handled by agents in the political arena with a "double conscience" as it were: they distrusted its representatives on the one hand, and on the other, sometimes wooed them, recalling the events of 1956.

Thus a strange situation evolved, paradoxical and ludicrous, namely that the politically mighty did not cease to watch, control and denigrate the workings of literature as an intellectual and political institution; at the same time, they respected it, at times looking at it in awe, and politi-

cal potentates like György Aczél himself, tried to win the goodwill of leading literary lights with smaller or greater favours and services, such as a council flat lease, preferential car purchases, passports, scholarships, awards, publication of collected works, cancellations of police or court sanctions, etc. The "oral history" of the past decades has a wealth of amusing as well as thought-provoking examples of this.

Literature today is free from the constraints and pressures of censorship, and it has lost its special status. As is evident in any post-socialist country in Central and Eastern Europe, the advent of freedom of creation and publicity goes hand in hand with the financial instability of literature's institutional structures. The livelihood of writers, the publication of books, reviews and periodicals, all heavily supported by the state previously, and the maintenance of the social and professional institutions of literary life, were all threatened by a serious financial crisis. With the exception of established and best-selling authors, writers are often virtually or actually not paid at all by their publishersthey are given copies instead. Despite the launch by the dozens of new reviews and publishing firms, their continuity is inordinately difficult to maintain and at times seems a hopeless struggle. The end to censorship and the restitution of literary freedom on the one hand, and the crisis of the institutional system of literature on the other, contribute towards the inner uncertainties and disfunctioning of writers and literary life.

Today the state plays the role of a patron only sporadically, and civil society, the middle classes and the nouveaux riches are neither ready nor willing yet to support writers. Most new capitalists and the banks or companies they control do not as yet undertake any considerable financial responsibility in supporting institutions

that create cultural values, such as literary reviews or scientific and scholarly papers, publishers, theatres or orchestras; their preference lies in financing car races and sports clubs, though instances of cultural sponsorship seem to have increased lately. Behind a spectacular expansion of the institutional system of literature lie tensions and problems that will not be easy to resolve. Never before have as many literary reviews been published in Hungary as today (though in the late 1930s there were dozens of periodicals competing to win readers' favours), but with a few exceptions they are all tottering on the brink of demise and are in serious need of support.

The same applies to publishers. The number of books that appear is high, with a good many valuable works among them. The flood of trash and pornography following the demise of censorship has abated. Publication is usually focussed around three major events, the annual spring book festival, National Book Week in June. and the Christmas book fair. This means that books published to coincide with these occasions face strong competition. Publishers—of whom there are now several hundred—and the authors themselves are subject to the whims of committees and boards and that is something new to them. Few financial institutions or economic entities are willing to support book publishing. The state-financed National Cultural Fund, together with the Hungarian Book Foundation and a few private foundations, provide most of the support publishers can obtain, and this comes through a book-by-book application process on a preferential basis. The Soros Foundation, an ample source of aid, has been reducing its activities in this particular field to devote attention to other needs. The greatest problem facing literature, however, lies in the drained purchasing power of the staunchest consumers in the

cultural market, the intelligentsia and the middle-class in general. Valuable literature has more or less lost the market security it had enjoyed. Earlier, an average book of poetry appeared—as was so often mentioned throughout Europe with pride or envy-in an edition of three to four thousand copies, a novel in one of eight to ten thousand copies in this small country of ten million. Erzsébet Galgóczi's novel Vidravas, for instance, in which the terror of Stalinist dictatorship is exposed, sold 180,000 copies in two editions at the time. Today, a volume of poetry attracts four to five hundred buyers, a novel ten to fifteen hundred, and book prices are exorbitantand still too low, publishers complain.

It was clear, or was beginning to be clear in the last few years, that views proclaiming the radical refusal of the public role of literature, of culture in general, are a bit too premature. We may not as yet have reached the state when writers can confidently withdraw to their studies and concentrate solely on creative work. Hungarian public life in the last eight years has produced several events and features which writers could not overlook, urged as they are by centuries-old traditions of Hungarian literature. Animosity has infected politics; ideological and political extremism has showed its face; and there are political forces intent on manipulating public opinion—all these invite treatment, judgement, and, if necessary, challenge by the men of intellect. But public role-taking by the writer, naturally, is-as it has always been—a matter of individual choice.

Changes in the status of literature

It follows from the above that the social status and prestige of literature, its position in public life, has been impaired—the informal mandate literature has traditionally fulfilled in society has weakened. The

reasons are many. The new economic and political elites that have surfaced after 1989 do not accord literature, the arts, and in general cultural values, as much importance as their predecessors had earlier, which included incidentally not only party functionaries in the single-party state but also leading intellectuals. Some of the new political elite are irritated by literature, as it cannot be made to directly serve power purposes. The mind set and cultural interests of the (upper) middle classes that are emerging with great difficulty, seem to be taking shape not quite according to the model Max Weber outlined.

Meanwhile, a powerful shift of generation has taken place, accompanied by a change in attitudes. From the late 1920s onwards, the same system of paradigms enjoyed acceptance and was followed by three groups—the circle around the leading literary review Nyugat (1908-41), who were committed to liberalism and the ideals of literary modernity, the popular movement, which articulated agrarian democratic interests, both on the left and the right, and leftist radicalism. The rules in this system of paradigms were based on the conviction that literature should represent and assert values that were in actual fact independent of it. These values could originate in the representation and service of the nation, but also the commitment to a broader, European culture and cultural community or to the cause of social progress.

This literary paradigm prevailed and involved creative personalities who were as different as Lajos Kassák, Milán Füst, Gyula Illyés, László Németh, Lőrinc Szabó, Tibor Déry, Áron Tamási, István Vas, Sándor Weöres, János Pilinszky, Ágnes Nemes Nagy, István Örkény, Iván Mándy and László Nagy. With their departure, and the arrival of new generations, the full results being evident by 1980, the "personal"

make-up" of literature has changed to a considerable extent. The main body of the literary army is now constituted by Ottó Orbán, Dezső Tandori, Ádám Bodor, István Ágh, György Petri, György Spiró, Péter Esterházy, Péter Nádas, Sándor Tar, Mihály Kornis, and Zsuzsa Rakovszky. The mode of existence, the attitudes, one may say mentality, of literature has undergone a transformation—an important grouping of contemporary writers are thinking, in Esterházy's oft-quoted sacrastic metaphor, no longer in terms of "the nation and the people" but of "subject and predicate". In other words, the postmodern trend in Hungarian literature has started with the creative personality heeding no values outside literature and often replacing the traditional narrative with reflection, focussing mainly on language and modes of discourse.

Naturally, earlier forms of mentality survive, as do moral or even political motivations. This is evident not only among those who represent traditional realism or neo-classicism or commitment to social and national issues, such as István Csukás, Imre Oravecz, Pál Závada, Károly Szakonyi and András Fodor (who died recently), but also among individual writers who followed a Western and modern orientation, like György Somlyó, György Rába, Miklós Mészöly, György Konrád, and others. Today several lines of fracture are visible on the literary map of the country, running not only along the traditions undertaken or the creative modes selected. Politics, primarily party politics, has left its imprint on contemporary literary frays. Literary and public polemics at times flare up with an intensity that jeopardize the inner solidarity and the assertion of interest of the writers' community.

A more beneficial development is the slow restitution of an intellectual cohesion that was all too frequently disrupted and

constantly threatened by the enormous disasters of twentieth century Hungarian history—the peace treaties of 1920 and 1947, which tore one third of the nation and old Hungarian cultural centres out of the country, and the ethnocentric and ethnocratic political courses that have for long prevailed in neighbouring countries. Following the changes in Central Europe in 1989, literary contacts between writers within and outside the borders have grown stronger, just as the émigré Hungarian literature in the West has taken its due and natural place in the cultural life of the Hungarian community. Today the Hungarian literary institutions in Transylvania in Romania, the former Upper Hungary in southern Slovakia, Sub-Carpathia in Ukraine, the Vojvodina in Serbia and those in the West cooperate with the cultural institutions of the motherland. Writers such as András Sütő, Sándor Kányádi and Aladár Lászlóffy in Transylvania, Árpád Tőzsér and Lajos Grendel in Upper Hungary, Ottó Tolnai in the Vojvodina, Győző (Victor) Határ in Britain, Tibor Papp in France, József Bakucz in the US and András Domahidy in Australia are considered everywhere as important figures in Hungarian literature.

Reality and literature

As a treasured means for the self-awareness of the nation, Hungarian literature has traditionally been a mirror of its life and history. Apart from school textbooks, Hungarians learn about the varied and turbulent events of their history, e.g., life in medieval Hungary, the struggles against Turkish occupation in the 16th–17th centuries, Ferenc Rákóczi II's War of Independence, the 1848–49 Revolution and War of Independence, or the painful stories of the two world wars, mostly from literature. Fiction in Hungary

in this respect has always been a most efficient means of enriching the nation's knowledge and self-knowledge, much more so than historiography or journalism. Similarly, narrative literature has presented an authentic portrait of the make-up of society, its way of life, inner struggles and endeavours. József Eötvös, Mór Jókai, Zsigmond Kemény, Kálmán Mikszáth, Zsigmond Móricz, Gyula Krúdy, Dezső Kosztolányi, Józsi Jenő Tersánszky, Lajos Nagy, János Kodolányi, László Németh et al., have presented an immensely rich depiction of the life and relationships of Hungarian society. So too in recent decades have the works of Tibor Déry, István Örkény, Tibor Cseres, Iván Mándy, András Sütő, Erzsébet Galgóczi and Ferenc Sánta.

Compared to the above, Hungarian literature after 1989 has shown less intent to carry on this tradition of depicting social reality. Of the life of contemporary Hungarian society, of its inner conflicts and mental state one can only gain a fragmented picture through current writing. It is regrettable that as yet no large-format narrative of the 1956 Revolution has been written, as has been of the 1848-49 Revolution; the same is true of the Second World War. Prior to 1989, a full portrayal of the period was prevented by taboos and censorship; after 1989, however, it is more through the works of historians, primarily works written earlier by émigrés in the West, than literature that we can form a picture of 1956. Similarly, still missing are literary works on the events, its social, moral and psychological consequences, of the momentous political transformation that began in 1989.

Recent narrative literature in Hungarian reflects the post-modern endeavour to give an insight into the creative personality or creative process itself and neglects to some extent the exciting social changes

that are taking place before our eyes and on which the public rightly expects the writers' judgment. All these, however, cannot justify the animosity which can be felt on a daily basis so strongly between advocates of postmodern trends and representatives of the more traditional realist style.

The former tend to see a sort of obsolete didacticism in the kind of fiction that follows, among other things, the straight narrative traditions of the novel depicting social conditions. The latter easily label postmodernism as a cosmopolitan artifice with a limited audience. Both are wrong. The resources of traditional realism in fiction have not been drained yet (the 20th century has seen several renewals), and innovative postmodernism has wide-ranging possibilities to reflect the life of society. Examples to be cited in this respect are Péter Esterházy's Termelési regény (Production Novel), Péter Nádas's Emlékiratok könyve (Book of Memories), Péter Lengyel's Cseréptörés (Breaking Tiles) and Ferenc Temesi's Por. (Dust), or 1997's book sensation, Pál Závada's Jadviga párnája (Jadviga's Pillow), all regarded as postmodernist works.

Continuity and seeking roles

The position and sense of identity of Hungarian literature may have changed necessarily after the historic political changes in 1989–90, yet the traditional role literature plays in the shaping of intellectual and national strategies hopefully continues, if only in an altered form. The discussions and self-defensive struggles in intellectual life in recent years have led us to believe that literature continues to be a main force in shaping stands in public life and intellectual strategies of the intelligentsia.

One therefore needs to take greater caution before stating that literature, now that it has regained its autonomy, can contentedly settle down within the inner circles of creative work. The autonomy men of literature and culture have just regained calls for taking a public stand against all schemes that may jeopardize peace and development in the region, a further expansion of liberty, and a wide access to the values of Hungarian culture. This applies not only within the borders but also to threatening phenomena in the neighbouring countries, where violence and hate often surround the Hungarian ethnic communities.

All this does not mean that literary life has to become again a noisy public forum, or that writers should necessarily become fighters in the public arena. Literature has a role and weight in public life even if the writers themselves keep away from political strife and do not join political parties and movements or even the self-defending fights of the intellect. Literature has its own indirect public role and it makes it a defender of national or universal values, the advocate and upholder of a virtual moral code. The public moral role-taking of literature is indispensable in at last putting moral and intellectual values to an efficient historical use in wide circles in the conflict-ridden political life of todayvalues that had been injured or broken under the pressure of dictatorial regimes. Even if confined strictly within professional and artistic limits, literature serves the birth of a new political culture. However, at times it seems desirable that it cross these limits and, with determination and courage, undertake the struggle in the interest of culture and in defence of both itself and the general values of the nation.

György Somlyó

Poems

Translated by Jascha Kessler

Creation

If others, then why not
me too a god must
have made me too
though these bones
that will be here long after we've gone
aren't us
we're just that mortal immortality
we make of ourselves

A Homeric Simile

concerning the cat the night the other room and other things too

Just as the cat

vanishes behind one of the armchairs when evening enters its critical phase round about midnight or under the bed or into some other mysterious space cloaking himself in that inscrutable silence only he knows how to weave though he's well aware that... that's something I know too and moreover he knows it's childish and that's that pussycat there's no where there and no escaping its

György Somlyó

is the author of twenty volumes of poems, three novels, a dozen collections of essays, and an "introduction to modern poetry" entitled The Wound of Phyloctetes.

He has translated Ancient and Modern Greek, Spanish, French, English, German and Portuguese poetry.

wherever for all he may tense every muscle trying to squirm out of his visibility sooner and/or later he's dead certain to be found just like yesterday orthe day before without even as much chance as a lucky molecule of H2O in the pot of boiling water has to elude till the last instant being boiled off if that—still maybe he goes on cocooning himself wherever he may be making believe he's not that silken soft silence softer and silkier than his own fur because he imagines that from your perspective up there it's hard to see behind the armchair and under the bed since you're too lazy and obstinately confident in the unbreakable laws of nature that sooner and/or later will simply assert themselves that you much prefer waiting until he tires of his hopeless hopefulness which he most assuredly will not encourage therefore goes on waiting till abruptly he bursts from his excruciating tension streaking like the wind across the room still invisibly silent merely sending out a shockwave like a lightning ball and yet suddenly giving in conscious time's up as silkily and softly as his fur and as silently lets you grip that softness and silence and lift it from its mysterious hiding-place again that anyway wasn't really a secret lets you slip your hand under his snowy belly and carefully lift him once more with a choking guiltiness nonetheless tenderly as you can find it in yourself to be removing him to the other room and ruthlessly banging the door on him for the night alone in the dark

like the cat

hiding too all day bent over the notepad drowned in your book or carried on the delusory waves of your grudging attentiveness as though this or that were your job pretending you had no idea you're not doing what you'd prefer to every minute aware there's absolutely no choice whatever you do you do in vain hiding in and/or knitting that silence about yourself or else purling words the way your mother's needles once purled her stitches knowing only this one thing that round about midnight and/or some other time of day you'll find yourself brusquely in the other room the door banged on you left to stay alone in the dark

just like the cat

Buying Slippers

from here on out you don't have to replace anything you buy these slippers will take you into the hospital along with those pajamas long since laid aside for the occasion and whatever may catch your eye now and then reminds you that you have quite enough even more than enough anything extra doesn't matter anymore and you don't know what's not although you might try out that sharp little laptop anyway it might show you something you've been altogether unable to upload you might buy another ream of that paper you always liked to see so neatly stacked on the desk after all who knows when that centonical play you've postponed forever might not be jump-started by some stray phrase you've picked up but then it occurs to you this handy old pen of yours should suffice when you come to be stuck in your last line of verse

A Fragment From a Play

Strophe

He always had to be a "Jew" here
Now an accepted Jew
And then a Jew tolerated
A Jew generously allowed in now and then
If not a Jew banned
A Jew spared
Or a good-for-the-shitheap Jew
Still a Jew loved despite everything
Or a Jew it's embarrassing-to-like
A Jew liked enviously
A Jew liked condescendingly

A Jew liked guiltily
A Jew liked with sincere condolence
But a Jew liked by yours sincerely
Sometimes a Jew granted the favour
Of appreciation qua Jew
On occasion even honored as much befits a Jew
(And so forth and so on)
(Pass it along)

Epode

Except by the weaker sex
Usually stronger than the stronger
And naturally those relations (when they occur)
Develop from the first on another stage
Under the trap door out of sight of Good Society
Out of body-to-body soul-to-soul
In that Eden
From which we were so stormily driven
No sooner than it had bloomed on Earth
Though given some luck between lightning and thunder
And thunder and lightning
Managing to find our way back
(Only to be driven forth again and again)
Yet those rare moments...
beneath those Trees as yet untouched...

Antistrophe

And elsewhere?

Elsewhere?... One or another kind of vocalization—someone
A sort of Jederman or Nemo Nobody
Each in some way—or another—or another—whatever suits
S'il vous plait or M'sieur or Salut Georges
One among Many—and here and there what's more even
among the Many the One
Even better than he thought himself to be sometimes
Maybe even what he actually was sometimes — actually is
By definition—which is however truly rare
We know—Elsewhere too.

Envoi

(Prince, I'm not complaining)
(Not really complaining)
(I just want to say—in case I've never said it)
One way or another, or another as long as it lasts
No matter where you're born
Life usually passes

Wherever He May Be

he puts off starting whatever because then he might have to finish it and making changes in the situation isn't something he cares to do

mornings it's hard for him to turn on the tap and just as hard turning it off again

he'd as soon not get out of the tub letting the water go cold on him the way the world's slowly turning cold too

wherever he may be he's miserable still he could feel great anywhere though what's best for him is where he's not

A Little Old Night Poetry

as though the words all dropped out of the very language and nothing was left looming in the air but the lacy twigs of syntax

as though the ideas all dripped out of the very brain and nothing was left dangling in the mind but the wires of torn nerves in just a day the foreseen yet unavoidable little catastrophe of autumn assaulted the trees and swept all the leaves away

slick sodden corpses litter the earth but soon enough the sharp wintry wind will sweep it all away

Two Texts—To One Score

Bach: Suite in D-Major for cello solo (Casals)

Any time now

I might leave myself

and never notice it

I might pass myself

in the Advent fog

in the glimmering Arrival

like someone who having never come

therefore cannot leave

I might pass myself

and never notice it

the way I used to pass by

this music

which is no music at all and never

in all those years flashed by me

or else was beside me all that time

though I wasn't near it

or maybe it just approached me

because I'd never looked for it

never even knew it was there

this fingering at one string

as though it were too scary to touch

an ordeal by fire

this minimalist baroque art

this endless one-stringed chorusing

in which silence is suddenly hearable

in the silence

I might desert myself

and never notice it

might pass myself by
like any stranger
in the November fog
in the commotion of Advent
I could leave
at the Arrival
like the one who'd never come
who was never here
for so many long years
I never went near it
nor did it ever come near me
this endless rustling

this enthralling boredom
eternity's boredom
this one-stringed droning
(I dare not say, whose)
could I hear it I wonder once more
this so-hearable
silence through the silence

"That's Me!"

Márta Papp in Conversation with Bruno Monsaingeon

In 1977 Buno Monsaingeon made a film about two brilliant Hungarian pianists, Zoltán Kocsis and Dezső Ránki, both very young at the time. Now, following his film on David Oistrakh, MTV 1 has shown a film on Svyatoslav Richter, which lasts for more than two and a half hours. Its French title is Richter, l'insoumis; the English title is something of a compromise: Richter, the Enigma. The film's structure is dictated by the remembrances of Richter between the ages of eighty and eighty-two, which were partly recorded on audio tape, partly using a video camera. These are counterpointed by concert recordings from various periods, and rarities found in private collections. The film is the first place where we find Richter willing to talk in any depth about himself and his relationship with the outside world. He also talks about his life in the Soviet Union, how he managed to live under a dictatorship, to which he was no more willing to subordinate himself than he was to Western ways and free market thinking.

Márta Papp: Would you tell us something of the genesis of your Richter film?

Bruno Monsaigneon: It's a very long story, I can't tell it briefly. I'm actually writing a book about the whole thing. It spans an enormous amount of time, you see, because I've known Richter for many many years, since about 1974, when he attended the Tours festival in France.

The occasion was really with Zoltán Kocsis. Richter had first invited Zoltán to play as a substitute in case Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli might not play, and Zoltán did in fact replace Michelangeli.

Márta Papp

heads a section of the Music Department of Magyar Rádió and is the author of a book on Moussorgsky. The above interview took place in Paris, February 17, 1998. The next year, in 1975, Richter and Zoltán played a four-handed piece together. They came to rehearse in my apartment in Paris, so we had a lot of contact with each other. Actually that rehearsal at my home was very special, because I left them when they started playing. It was a

beautiful June day, and the window was open. They started rehearsing, and when I came back, Richter had left. It turned out he'd begun to break things in my flat—somebody had come to complain about the noise. So that was a very special occasion.* Strangely enough, when I first started seeing Richter on the subject of this film, the first thing he said was "Do you remember when I came to your place?" And I replied, "Do you remember?" I was really astounded.

In the film, Richter spoke about his life, and sometimes he was reading from a text.

Oh yes, he read his notes. He had written a kind of diary. And he was ready to give me that diary. So that I could work on it, rewrite it and publish it. And he was ready to do that.

Wasn't Richter famously inaccessible to the public, to the media?

Yes, absolutely. In the last years I kept trying, trying. I knew I had producers to finance the film, but there was no way he would even consider the question. I saw his assistant, Milena Borromeo, a wonderful woman, who said that there was no hope, there was no way to make a film about him. He was simply not interested, it was so far away from his own inner world. So I was completely discouraged.

Was Richter in Paris for an extended stay?

When I saw Milena Borromeo, he was in Paris, that was in March 1995. But he still managed to give two more concerts in Lübeck, Germany—the last one was at the end of March 1995. At that time I didn't see him, I just saw Milena, who told me not to waste my time, there was no way.

So I said to the potential producers that probably there would never be a film. We could do something with documents but without the participation of Richter it would be an insignificant movie. This was around April, May 1995. I was absolutely exhausted because in the previous four years I had finished a series of films on Fischer-Dieskau, on Menuhin, on Oistrack, and on this young French violinist, Gilles Apap. I felt exhausted by the tension of making these films, and I needed to recharge my batteries. I decided to cancel everything for a few months, just to live on my own and try to think about what I wanted to do. And so for a few months I took it easy. One thing which was difficult to cancel was a concert tour which I was meant to do in South America, but I cancelled that too—it was supposed to take place in early September. And afterwards I thought, my God, it's amazingly fortuitous that I should have cancelled that

^{*} See Zoltán Kocsis's recollection on pp. 70-71 of this issue.

tour, because it was at that time, in early September 1995, that Richter called me. Or, rather, Milena called me and said that the Maestro wished to see me as he wanted me to do his biography. I said, what do you mean, do his biography? And she said, "I don't know, but he keeps repeating that many things are being written about him which are totally false, and that he'd like Bruno to do his biography." I said, "But what do you mean?" She couldn't tell me. I said, "Look, first of all, I am not a biographer. I'm not going to write, or to write a film, if indeed there is going to be a film." She said, "No no no, do his biography". I asked whether I could see him. She said no, that he doesn't want to see anybody. I said, "Milena, what am I supposed to do? We have to define things a little more clearly." And then it occurred to me that maybe I should write a few pages, in which I would set out some kind of framework.

Anyway, on the day I met Milena at the hotel, I asked whether I should write some kind of framework with various questions that could interest Richter. And she said yes, by all means, I should do that. So I worked all night and wrote about 10–12 pages. And then I wanted to find a conclusion to my little text. A few years earlier I had found in Moscow the whole of *A la recherche du temps perdu*, in Russian. Which I bought, because I am devoted to Proust.

Then your Russian must be very good.

My Russian is good, yes.

It must have been difficult nonetheless.

Well, I was very interested in reading Proust in Russian, as I had read him in French, English and Italian but not in Russian. It had come out for the first time, because of perestroika. I wanted to use it as an end to my little text that I wanted to send to him. There is a sentence in that very strange and wonderful episode about La Berma, that great actress, modelled on Sarah Bernhardt. Proust says that from a masterpiece in which she acted she created another masterpiece, the masterpiece of her own performance. In other words, it was the whole question of what interpretation is about. Can the act of performing be an act of genius? And I just wrote it down from the Russian edition and asked whether Richter might agree with that idea.

The next morning I sent my text by fax. Within a few hours, I got a call from Milena saying that the Maestro wants to see me. Now. He wants to see me immediately. And that's the way the whole thing started. I went to see him and we spent the whole of that autumn together, whenever I was free. I cancelled everything: I made myself free, I was available. I saw him nearly every day, and we started recording conversations together. Not in front of a camera, nothing, we hadn't defined a thing, we didn't know whether it was going to be a book, no

one knew. And that first meeting was quite extraordinary. The first word he said to me—he was very depressed and very ill—was "privet", which means "salut", "hi", as if we had had dinner the previous night, when in fact we had not seen each other for twelve years. It was very natural and spontaneous, an almost bizarre kind of familiarity. He started talking to me about his life, and by the end I recorded about 1500 pages of conversation. But there was no way of telling him that I wanted to make a film, everybody told me he's not going to be interested. Even the microphone was a difficulty for him—I hid it behind the flowers. It was very difficult for me, because at the same time I could see that he was on the upbeat. He was in better shape, he was happier, whereas previously he had always been terribly depressed and sad, saying that he had lost all interest in life, and that all the activity should be on my side. At the start, he only said a few words here and there; I had to ask questions all the time. Then finally he began to get out some extraordinary confessions. And even things that were incredibly personal.

During that whole time I wanted at some point to say to him, "What about trying to make a film?" An occasion arose about two months later, towards the end of October. That day he had been wonderful. We had had a very special session together. The day before, he'd been told by his doctors that he was all right, that his leg was all right—he had had a leg operation. And he went out for about three hours as he would have done many years before, he used to walk a lot. He came back very happy and seemed pleased to see me and talk. And at the end of that session, which was really tremendous, he asked me whether I would come again tomorrow. "Of course, Maestro," I replied. "What I am saying to you is not very interesting," he said; his face was sad. I said, "Come on, come on!" And all of a sudden it came to me like lightning. I told him it would be even more interesting with a camera. Finally, after two months of not being able to express my wishes! When I had informed Nina, Richter's wife, she had said, "Bruno, this is indispensable, you must make a film, but you've got to do it in such a way that he will not know about it." "A camera is not a microphone," I told her. "It's not just a camera, it's lights and so on. We can't do that with a hidden camera, I mean, you could do a sequence like that perhaps, but not a whole film." She said she didn't see how it would be possible. So there was a kind of complicity between her and me. And on the day I told him it would be even more interesting with a camera, his reaction was absolutely fantastic. Rather than just saying no, he said "We shall see". And at that very moment Nina came into the room. She had heard what we'd been talking about and she said to him insistently, "Slava, you won't see a thing, it's going to be very easy, Bruno will come with just somebody and a little aparatura, nothing special". And he exploded. He was absolutely furious. "No, no, ne hatchu", he cried, and almost began to break things. She was terrified. I left, and he said to me, "See you tomorrow". The next morning there was a call from Milena, saying that he'd been very angry all night,

not with me but that he'd been impossible, was feeling terribly tired and wouldn't see me today.

I was accustomed to that kind of thing—our meetings were never fixed. I never knew whether I would see him the next day, and very often he would call and say that he had been too emotional the previous night and that he couldn't see me that day. So it was always haphazard. But this time I thought, my God, I am never going to see him again. That was the feeling I had. The next day there was another call from Milena saying that he couldn't see me. And then silence. A week later, a whole week later, suddenly there was a call saying, "Maestro wants to see you now". But the call came just as I was leaving my flat, I had already opened the door. I was going to London, for the only engagement during the whole of the autumn that I couldn't cancel. It was the première of my Menuhin film in London. Not only that, the première was being held at Buckingham Palace with the Queen, there was a dinner party with the Queen afterwards. So I said to Milena, "I'm sorry, but I'm off to London, I have to see the Queen, I must go, I told you two months ago that this was the only time when I wouldn't be available". She said to call as soon as I came back. Three days later I returned to find lots of messages saying come, come, I want to see you, and so on.

So I went, and he was absolutely fantastic. He started reading some of his notebooks to me, some of the diaries he had just written. The first thing he read was a critique he had written about my film on Fischer-Dieskau. It was a beautiful piece, a very sensitive and perceptive review. It displayed a very refined sense of what cinema is about. It was lovely. The next day he also started by reading something he had written about my film on David Oistrack, which was fantastic. At the end he was saying that we must be grateful to Bruno Monsaingeon for having made such a wonderful film. And I had to read between the lines. What did that mean? To me it meant, "Yes, I agree". Why would he have bothered to watch my films, to write about them and to read to me what he had written, if he wasn't trying to convey the idea that he would agree to us making a film? In any case, a few days later he left for Japan. This was a tour that he had wanted to cancel, but he had started to play the piano again after an interlude of six months; finally he left for Japan, feeling better physically but not very sure he would play. And indeed a month later he was back in Europe without having played a single note. That was in December 1995. Over the next year, I met him in Italy, in Germany, and then he returned to Paris. He did not know what to do, he was very depressed, he was very ill, he had heart problems.

So I found him, or them, in a house near Paris—it was a lovely place. I saw them many times. It was near the Van Gogh house in Auvers-sur-Oise. They spent about two or three months there, then in late May they left for Germany, because he knew a doctor at a hospital there. He was receiving treatment in Paris but the German doctor knew him very well and invited him to go there. And he spent a miserable summer with terrible problems with his heart. And fi-

nally, in September, I found him in Vienna. It was extraordinary: till the very end, Richter was a Wanderer. He needed to see other places, needed to travel, to go elsewhere. He wouldn't normally stay in the same place for more than four or five days, and having been in Paris for six months, he needed to go, go, further and further. But there was no objective, no playing, nothing. He was not in a state to play at all. When I met them in Vienna I could hardly recognize him. He was lying on a sofa, and when he saw me, he tried to smile, but he couldn't talk. It was very sad. Nina said they didn't know where to go. They didn't know what to do. He did not want to go to Moscow. He wanted to go back to Paris, but it would be better to go to the South. He wanted to go to Italy or Spain, but there were no doctors there, so he would have to go to the south of France. But they didn't know where or how. In the end I arranged for my father, who was a rather old man, to put him up in a flat he had in Antibes, near Nice. My father agreed to the idea and in October 1996 Richter travelled there by car from Vienna. And naturally I had the idea that maybe we could make the film there, because I knew the flat, there were three rooms, there was a lovely living room and a beautiful terrace. It was not a particularly luxurious place, but Richter did not mind about luxury anyway. He was totally indifferent to that kind of thing.

Was there a piano there?

A piano was taken by Yamaha to wherever he went, that was no problem. So we put him up in Antibes. And I thought that maybe there, since he would have his own separate room, not like a hotel, I could try and set up some kind of a shooting schedule. And that is what we did. I went to see him and he was feeling much better now that he was in the South, what with the beautiful sun. His condition would vary from day to day, of course: one day he would be fine and the next day he would be totally depressed.

In January 1997 I went to Singapore and Australia, and saw the new digital cameras. They were very, very small, absolutely tiny. Not quite broadcast quality, but digital nonetheless. And I bought one, thinking, who knows, it's so small, maybe we could link it to some professional system and do something. When I came back to France, I went to see them in Antibes right away. He seemed to be happy to see me. It was like a new phase, we went to restaurants, but he was still very weak. I went to see the production company I worked with on many of my films, and I said, let's try something. So I brought my cameraman, Raphael O'Byrne, to Antibes and introduced him as my assistant as he would have to remain hidden. And Richter liked him quite a bit, there was no problem, and he spent a few days there. We were looking at possible set-ups, to work out exactly where the camera should be placed. I wanted it to look absolutely neutral. There were, of course, many requirements in terms of light, but there was no way to bring in any kind of artificial light, anything at all. So we would have to shoot in

the afternoons, relying on the natural light of the sun coming through the bay window. We started testing it in February. I got a few sentences out of him, and he didn't seem to notice anything at all. Then we planned a longer period of shooting where, having many days to play with, we could decide on a day-today basis whether he was in good enough shape for us to shoot, whether his mood and disposition were right or not. We decided to come in March, which is usually the time when my father comes to the flat, so my brothers and I sent him to Venice for a few days with his wife so that the Richters could stay. And we did that shooting period with my cameraman hidden in the kitchen. We had cabled the little camera via the balcony and the terrace to the kitchen. And there was no way to have an operator behind the camera, which was very problematic, because we had to frame, and I wanted to have close-ups as well as just wide-shots. So we actually bought two little cameras, one for close-ups and one for wideshots. Whenever Richter made a move to the right or to the left, he would be out of frame. So I sat just in front of him, and whenever he leant to one side or the other, I would try to bring him back, it was a kind of unspoken mise-en-scène.

Also, since I felt he was not really able or keen to talk, I thought maybe I'll just ask him to read some of his notes which I selected very carefully from the archival research which we had started two years before. So that they would be able to fit with some of the documents that we had found. I also thought that if I were to ask him to read specific things, this might raise some questions which he might answer more naturally than if there were the effort of unbroken conversation. This is how we worked for a period of ten days. He made me know that he knew that I was filming in a very funny way. But he wanted me to know that he knew. It was wonderfully touching. One day his assistant wanted to take his pullover to the cleaners. He said, "No, no, it's much prettier for Bruno like this". We did some shooting that day, and after the shooting, in his car, which he was driving, he asked me, "Did you manage to shoot today? Did you manage to film today?" I said, "Yes, Maestro." "And with this?", he pointed to his pullover. I said, "Yes, Maestro, it was very pretty". That was all. He wanted me to know. On the last day, I got a call from one of my brothers saying that my father had come back from Venice and had just suffered a stroke. I came back to Paris and saw my father, who looked terrible, and the first thing he said to me was "How is Richter?". My father died three weeks later, on the day Richter left Antibes to go to the States. In the meanwhile I had begun to edit the film, because the whole idea was to try and create the illusion that the whole narration was continuous. As I had done everything in Paris with just a microphone, I had to edit word by word, constructing them into sentences and using pictures of him in different positions—you probably noticed that the rhythm slackens. I could edit it in such a way that there would be a certain feeling of fluidity and continuity. We had begun editing in February. First pure sound, no picture whatsoever, just to try and elaborate the structure of the narration. Over the next few

months we carried on day and night. It was an enormous amount of work. But it progressed so well that by the end of June I had already established a possible complete narration, with some pictures, though very few. And I went to see him in Aix-en-Provence but then he came back to Paris. I was staying in a hotel, which was the house where Proust actually died, and he stayed there too, as he was very moved by the thought that Proust had been there, in the same house.

Then he went to the Tours festival, not to play, of course; he hadn't played for many months. I went to see him one night and we went to a concert together. He made the effort to stand up and leave his bed—he was in bed all the time. And to go to the concert. A week later he came back to Paris. As usual, he prefered to drive on small roads, so instead of two or three hours, it took them eight hours to drive back from Tours. But he was feeling happy. He stepped out of the car and asked for the *klavinova*, his little electronic piano, which Yamaha always had carried around with him. He had hardly touched it: in Antibes he played for perhaps twenty minutes and that was all. They said to him, "Maestro, the *klavinova* will be here tomorrow". So he walked directly to Yamaha's office, which was close to the hotel, and started practising.

In late June I asked him whether he would like me to show him the results of what we had already done. In terms of editing it was not ready at all but it could give him an idea. We had a viewing at Madame Shostakovich's flat in Paris the day before he left for Moscow. There was almost no picture, mostly narration, it was very long, something like three hours and twenty minutes, but he watched intensely, with that wonderful sense of attention. At the end of the film he said the most extraordinary, laconic thing to me. He said: "Eto ya": "That's me". And I can tell you that this "Eto ya", these two words, kept me alive for the next six months that it would take to finish editing. Then he took me to a cabaret and we came back to his hotel and I stayed there until three o'clock in the morning. We had arranged to go to Moscow to finish the shooting: after the first editing session you know very clearly what is missing. I spoke openly with him. And he said that by now he was very involved in the whole idea of the film, he was really personally involved. "Yes, yes," he said, "you must come, come to Moscow as soon as possible". "But Maestro," I replied, "I'm going to have a crew, I'm going to direct you and to force you to do this and that. I will write a few sentences that I will need, I will want you to open yourself completely, and say things that you haven't said or that you have only said with much reluctance." But he just said yes, yes. He told me to come to Moscow as soon as possible. I said I could gather a crew and get visas and be in Moscow the following week. "Well," he said, "perhaps not next week, because I have to go there by plane, I hate planes, it's the first time in three years that I'm taking a plane, and I will need some rest." And I said yes, of course, and that it would be easier for me not to come the following week anyway. What about the end of August? "Pozno", he replied, which means late. His health was still awful. But he added with a smile: "Potomushto

mozhet bit koncert"—"maybe there will be a concert". So when he had said that it would be too late, he was only thinking of when he would play again. There was no premonition of death. I said, "What about the first week of August? I could come on the second of August." "That's perfect," he replied. "On the second of August we will start working together. And it will be at my dacha, and we will work, we've still got a lot of things to do."

In the meantime, I'd been to his flat in Moscow many times. He'd even given me the keys, so I could look through photographs and documents. He was very open about it—I'd spent many weeks in his flat carrying out my research. Then he said, "In my apartment there are places which only I know. And I want to show you these things. My things... we've got a lot of work to do still. A lot of work to do." He always spoke with that extraordinary frankness, modesty, innocence. So he was very enthusiastic. We gathered all the necessary things, the crew, the equipment, everything we needed to go to Moscow on the second of August. I would call the Richters every other day. Nina told me that he was practising for three hours every day, that he seemed to be happy, and that he was looking forward to me coming. Then two days before I was supposed to go to Moscow, I called again, and she said that he hadn't played on the previous day. He felt tired, she said, but was very much looking forward to my arrival.

The next day I got a call to say that the Maestro had been taken to the hospital that night. That I shouldn't come. They said he would call, maybe next week he would be better. Of course, I thought, my God, it's so complicated to rearrange the shoot. When he cancelled in Paris, that was all right, but in this case we had arranged all the visas and had engaged people, all these things. It's a complicated thing arranging a week's shooting. So the next day I called again, to ask how he was, whether everything was under control at the hospital. And they told me he had died one minute earlier. Those were the extraordinary episodes of his last few days.

Then I went to Moscow of course, and saw him in his flat, where I'd been so many times without him. He was in his open coffin, as is the custom with Russians, he looked marvellous, his magnificent figure was extraordinary. He was gone, and we decided that it was all the more enticing to try and to put all the necessary energy and warmth and whatever we had into making a film that would be some kind of testament to what he had been and what he had represented. So we carried on with the editing procedure, and I went again in September to do some shooting in various places in Russia, which I now conceived as part of the general staging of the film. We literally finished the editing a few weeks ago, and now I think the main thing is that this film exists at all. Because there is very little one can otherwise see about Richter, whether as a person, musician, or great figure.

There are unique, newly released video recordings of his early years.

Yes. Though many things are actually rather amateurish.

Did it come from Richter's own archive?

He had bought a little camera which he was using, I found it at his place. He had told me about it. I found eight hours of material which was hardly usable. We restored it. It was very amateurishly filmed, yet we used quite a lot of it. And I think it really works. I wanted this film to have a very strong structure. I wanted it to hold together beautifully, but at the same time, there had to be that extraordinary unspoken emotion, that unsentimental emotion which is so typical of Richter. Because the emotion is there, that extraordinarily expressive face, expressive even when it was not trying to be expressive.

Sometimes it was quite shocking to see the old Richter.

Yes. In the last sequence, for instance, the Schubert Sonata in B flat, op. post., which I wanted to use to link the beginning and the end of the film. I inserted into that sequence two shots that we'd done in Antibes when he was looking absolutely desperate, as though he was listening inside himself. I thought this was a premonition of death. With cinema one can do a lot to bring out something which is latent, which might be there, but which might equally go unnoticed or be dismissed. So this is what we've been working on, putting together a document on one of the great figures in piano history, who was at the same time one of the extraordinarily original personalities of our century. I am sure about that. I'm not saving that the film examines these questions directly, but it does show how he managed to remain untouched. Completely untouched by the Soviet regime and of course untouched by Western culture; untouched by time, untouched by fashion. This shows the extraordinary strength of the man, a strength that is not a violent strength, more a kind of passive resistance. Not wanting to know. He was out of the world. He couldn't stand newspapers. He couldn't stand anything which was day-to-day, anything that was specific to a certain age. I think he saw things in his own very simple terms. He had a much deeper view on the universe than a lot of people who are a product of the age in which they live. So in a sense he did not belong to our time, he belonged to all times. This was our perspective when we made the film.

I think that's quite characteristic of great Russians.

Yes. And of course that wonderful sense of humour. Yes. A spontaneous and natural kind of humour. He could be very sour and acidic, too. I couldn't use everything, naturally, though in the book which I'm writing, there is much more. Sometimes I was a little hesitant. And finally I said to myself, do it. I thought it

should come out, that it should be quite obvious that while he was critical of many people, he was first of all immensely critical of himself. This should be borne in mind when he delivers those extraordinary attacks against Rostropovich or Karajan, or Shostakovich, a genius but a madman. When he says that Shostakovich was mad, and he was also mad, and then adds, oh sorry, why do I say also, because I am not mad at all, I'm so normal. He considered himself to be a normal person. Which is ridiculous of course, because he was obviously so different from everybody else that one can call it craziness. With all those ideas about concerts, about where he should play. He just wanted to play wherever he felt like and didn't comply with the requirements of concert life. I remember one very special day we had in Auvers-sur-Oise, when he was in bed, feeling terrible. He was in a kind of delirium, saying, "You know, Bruno, I know what should happen. I just want to play free concerts. Concerts should be free. Because then you're not just going to have those people at the top of society, you're going to have concerts for people who love music." I said, "That's a lovely idea, Maestro." He said with a smile on his face, "But you know, it's very strange, but I think organisers don't like that. They won't like the idea... but we could put a big hat on the stage, if people want to give a little money, no?" He was convinced that this was the solution. At the same time there were people, impresarios, agents in America, whoever, who were ready to pay gigantic fees to have him. And he would not even consider such offers.

In that sense, I think, he is, with Glenn Gould, one of the most uncorrupted artists who ever lived. Nothing could tempt them away from the path they had decided for themselves. Not money, not glory, nothing. There was no temptation for him in this regard. In that sense he was totally pure. So the fact that there are a few artists like Richter, Gould and such people with no ambition of that kind is very purifying. I'm not talking about the pianist, who I think he remained until the very end, and maintained his standards. When I discovered those recitals in Mantua given in 1986 or those in London in 1989, and many other concerts, I realized his technique was absolutely intact. The power was intact, the involvement, the same kind of purity—but then his crazy ideal that there was no interpretation was completely illusory. That all one had to do was read the score properly—and have the necessary technique to express it. He would not bring in anything of his own, it was all notes. Nothing more, nothing less. This is of course totally illusory. You can immediately tell that it is Richter, there is no doubt about that. His enormous communicative personality comes into the picture very clearly. On occasion he had some very simplistic ideas, with which you may or may not agree, but everything was always geared towards that search, that quest for purity, which is so characteristic of him. It is all wonderful, incredibly intense. And he was such a very loveable person.

János Pilinszky

Musical Postcard Tours, September 14th, 1975

he 22nd Tours Festival got underway on 26th June, 1975. The person who started this unique musical event is Svyatoslav Richter. The venue, too, was his choice: a medieval barn, though in fact its beauty and architecture are more reminiscent of a Roman temple. For the past few days-unexpectedly, and by great good fortune-I have been living almost literally possessed by the spirit of music. Zoltán Kocsis arrived in Paris on the 23rd at Richter's invitation, and the two of us have spent some real "musical nights" together among friends; these were not "private recitals", but rather "conversations". Two things captured my attention above all about his playing: the way he submits entirely and impersonally to the music and yet at the same time his personality comes across with extraordinary force, and the youthful vigour and homogeneity of his

[...]

like that!

Festival was given by Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli. With him you can never be sure that he will actually give the recital. I heard later that even here he had found something to complain about; this time it was the piano stool. He turned up at the last minute on a flight from Hamburg-on

playing. Shelley and Petőfi must have been

The opening performance of the Tours

the only plane he had found acceptable, and because he was rehearsing up to the last minute, the audience was kept waiting outside for an hour.

June 28th in the Meslay Barn was Svyatoslav Richter's Beethoven-night. It was much anticipated since after the break he was to play the "Hammerklavier" Sonata, Beethoven's incomparably beautiful and difficult late masterpiece, for the first time before an audience.

He appeared on stage looking ashengrey, tense and agitated; he seemed to seek refuge in the piano, to draw strength from the keyboard; he seemed almost to put forth roots into the instrument, into the notes he played, roots as strong as arms; thirsty roots tenuous as hairs. He played with titanic force, but as if he might not win the struggle for redemption.

The "musical miracle" did happen, however, in the second half-and right

János Pilinszky (1921–1981)

poet and essayist. Selected Poems was published in Ted Hughes' translation by Carcanet in 1976; Crater, Poems 1974-75, translated by Peter Jay, came out from Anvil in 1978, and The Desert of Love, an extended edition of the 1976 selection, also from Anvil, 1989.

from the opening moments. Now every note and every passage truly rang out with the power of perfection. As a great philosopher once said, there are no easy solutions, because the only true path is fraught with difficulties. It is clear which path Richter had chosen: the only path possible, the steepest, most difficult one; and it is clear from the outset that he was right in doing so, because it is the one which promises the certainty of reaching the summit. This is why the drama of Beethoven and Richter is suffused with Elysian beauty and clarity through this interpretation. As Zoltán Kocsis remarked, "Richter managed to play this whole piece not so much like an actor interpreting a part as like a poet reading his own work".

I did not find out till the following day that Richter was insisting that Kocsis should give a performance too, and would not take no for an answer. At first this was supposed to take place on July 4th in the afternoon, but then Pollini cancelled and it was rescheduled for 9 p.m. on the 3rd. I must confess that I was looking forward to that evening with bated breath. To be asked to give the third performance, to follow Benedetti and Richter, is the kind of honour which was accorded to the young Mozart or Chopin in their day.

At 7 p.m. it was still pouring with rain in Meslay. Rain and wind were beating down on the barn, but then it suddenly cleared and they were able to light the lanterns outside in the open air. Zoltán Kocsis dedicated his first piece to Pollini who, it turned out, had been seriously injured in a motoring accident. His performance included pieces by Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Bartók. The two Mozart

pieces in particular were outstanding, but when he took his bow, you could see from the childlike, utterly desolate look in his eyes that it was a huge effort for him to shake off stage fright.

His two Beethoven interpretations after the interval were more relaxed and inspired. He played with creative power and purity, and yet at the same time his playing was imbued with a haunting sense of both mortality and of childhood. His encore surpassed everything else, however. It was a Chopin piece, and he dedicated it to Richter. Richter stood up and blew a kiss in his direction, and from that moment the atmosphere took on that rare quality where any resistance or distance between perfomer and audience ceases to exist.

Next day, in the church in Meslay, Richter again performed for a small circle of friends. As good fortune would have it, I had an opportunity to chat with him at length in the nearby tavern about Kocsis's concert the previous night. "Zoltán is a great musician", he said—these were his very words—"and I love and admire him. Benedetti Michelangeli is perhaps the best pianist of our time, but Kocsis is already a greater artist".

In the village church Richter played Bach by candlelight. Nothing could disturb the atmosphere of reverence. When latecomers knocked, he waited patiently for them to be seated, but not even the intermittent noise of people coming and going could have interrupted his playing. Two altar-boys, sitting sideways, were swinging their legs. Bach himself must have played the organ in similar surroundings, and with similarly down-to-earth sublimity.

Zoltán Kocsis

An Escapade

Of the many memories I have concerning Richter, the one I would like to mention relates to something which happened in Paris towards the end of 1977. At the time, we were in the flat of my friend Bruno Monsaingeon (the well-known TV and film director) rehearsing—every day, usually after lunch—for our forthcoming recital for four hands. Although the programme was Schubert, somehow tacitly we had both opted for a more dramatic interpretation and so we were giving the poor piano a right good hammering.

Suddenly the doorbell rang. An elderly and rather agitated woman stood in the doorway. Dispensing almost entirely with the niceties of polite conversation, she made it clear that there was to be no more rattling of the ivories, because she wanted

to have her afternoon nap in peace. I managed to calm her down, not without difficulty, and she duly left. When I went back in to where Richter was, he asked immediately: "Sto? Sto?" (We communicated in the curious mixture of Russian and German he seemed to find most comfortable). "Nvevazmozhno igraty", I answered. What then took place seems unbelievable even now. Richter began swearing loudly and flung his spectacles onto the floor (my mother, who was also there, still has a piece of the frame), where of course they smashed to smithereens (Bruno kept finding bits of glass for months afterwards). Then he ran out. By the time we had recovered from the shock of this, he had disappeared.

Which was all very well, but we had to rehearse; we were not yet ready for our performance. I thought I would find him in his hotel that evening—he always stayed at the George V, the best hotel in Paris-but evening came and he was still nowhere to be found. By then, of course, it was not only me who was looking for him; his agent, his doctor and a considerable crowd of admirers were all concerned as to his whereabouts. At the reception they said he hadn't been seen since the night before. We were at a loss. What could we possibly do? Added to that, the Metro had shut down and there were no longer any buses running, so it was about 3 a.m. before I managed to get

Zoltán Kocsis.

pianist, conductor and composer, is
Music Director of the Hungarian National
Philharmonic Orchestra. His 1987
recording of Bartók's Complete Works for
Piano with the Budapest Festival
Orchestra, conducted by Iván Fischer, won
the Edison Award. A 1990 selection of
Debussy's piano pieces won Gramophone's
award for the best instrumental record of
the year.

home. The following day, about midday, the telephone rang. It was the Maestro in person. He said we really must rehearse that afternoon; and that I really must go and see the show at the Moulin Rouge if I possibly could. He hadn't had such a good time in ages. That was also typical of Richter; in the face of such enthusiasm, it did not even occur to me then or later to

ask him why he hadn't at least contacted the hotel to let them know his whereabouts. So you see, this was another aspect of the man who was one of the greatest performing artists of all time.

Meanwhile, I realized that this escapade was not yet over; Richter, you see, had no spare spectacles. But that's another story...





Richter with Zoltán Kocsis and Annie Fischer at the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music in Budapest.

stván Harmath

Performances and Recordings

Perső Ránki: We all grew up on Richter. Fortunately, he often came to Hungary. If my memory serves me right, it was on the radio that I first heard him. I must have been about seven or eight at the time. He played Schubert's posthumous Sonata in C minor, various other Schubert pieces and lots of Liszt—the Valses oubliées, Funérailles, Venice and Naples...

Márta Papp: Yes, Richter's rendering of Venice and Naples was played a great deal on the radio in the late '50s and early '60s, although it was not in fact from a recording of a recital in Budapest; the tape was a gift from Moscow Radio. Did you hear that he played Liszt's Sonata in B minor in Miskolc but never in Budapest? Many people think that that recital in Miskolc was his first performance in Hungary, but research has shown that it was in 1954 that he first played here.

I heard the story of that performance from local people, reliable witnesses. Apparently, when Richer reached the first fortissimo

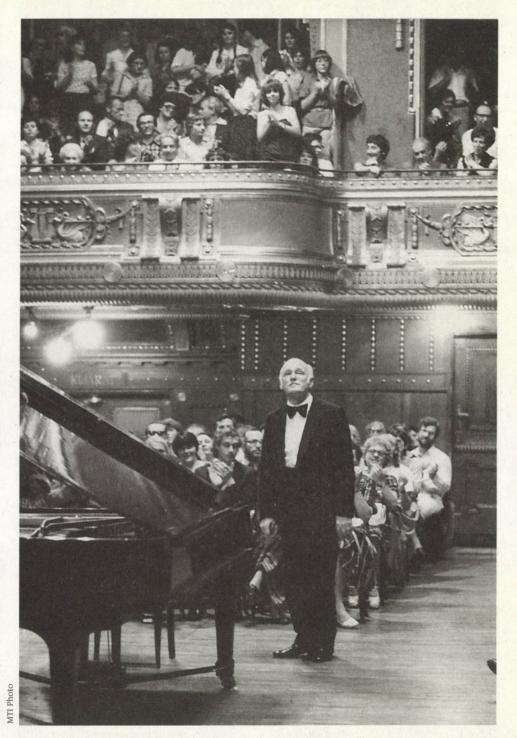
Dezső Ránki

is an international concert pianist. An interview with Márta Papp, of Magyar Rádió.

he made a huge leap in his seat. The chair collapsed under him and he fell to the floor. In stunned silence he picked up the chair and disappeared behind the curtain. Then the audience heard a tremendous crash, which allegedly was Richter smashing the chair against the wall in a rage. Finally it seems another chair was produced from somewhere and after a short interval he played the B-minor Sonata. This is probably quite close to the truth. Richter always sat very high up at the piano; he was quite a well-built man and his fortissimos were powerful, often accompanied by a flurry of motion. Knowing the state of the average concert piano in the provinces, it's probably no wonder he leapt up like that.

When did you first hear Richter in person?

It was in Budapest in the Erkel Theatre; he played two Schubert sonatas, the posthumous C minor and the Bb-flat major. Even now I can remember some passages as clearly as if I were sitting there. In the years which followed I heard him in concert many times. Unfortunately, there was one recital I missed, because I was abroad at the time; this was the one in which he played the *Fantasiestücke*. I have only heard a recording of that one. I listen to every recording he made that I can get hold of.



Richter at the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music, Budapest, 12 June, 1980

Do you collect his recordings?

Yes, systematically, and I try to get hold of any available discographies too. There are 8 or 10 live concert recordings of some pieces, and you have to listen to all of them; there is something different in every one. He had a huge repertoire, something like 180 hours of music, an incredible amount. What is also interesting and—I think—sets an example, is that he never recorded "collected works". He never played, say, all the sonatas of so-and-so, or the all this, that or the other by anybody. He formed his own special relationship with each and every piece, and if he didn't feel drawn to a particular piece of music, he didn't play it. As a result, there are some masterpieces even. which were not part of his repertoire.

He didn't play Beethoven's "Moonlight" Sonata, the "Waldstein" or the "Les Adieux" Sonatas. On the other hand, his programme often included the Op.10 in D; he played that one in Budapest three times. As regards the piano concertos, he only ever played the C and the C minor. Of Bartók's piano concertos, he only learnt the 2nd, and even then he only played it at a particular time—in the late '50s in Budapest and Moscow.

There is also a concert recording from Moscow, in 1968, and in 1969 he made a studio recording of it with Lorin Maazel.

He only kept Liszt's B-minor Sonata in his repertoire for a limited period too. We know from his memoirs that he learnt it and played it several times in Neuhaus's classes after he went to live in Moscow at the end of the 30s, but he did not play it in concert until the '60s. Unfortunately, his performance of the B-minor Sonata at Miskolc was not recorded.

There is an American recording of the B-minor Sonata, from his New York recital in

1965, and another one, made at the Aldeburgh Festival in 1966, which has appeared on quite a few records. You can distinguish between the New York and the Aldeburgh versions by the false notes; in the American one it is at the beginning of the piece in a particularly distinctive place; in the English version, it is in the fugato passage.

Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier and the English and French Suites were high points of his career. He played them in Moscow and elsewhere in the Soviet Union in 1948, and then in the '50s, '60s and '70s on his European tours, and in the 90s too.

But there was a big gap. Between 1973 and 1991 he hardly ever played Bach at all.

I wonder why?

Who knows. I think he was interested in a lot of other things and maybe he lost interest a little. However, I do know for certain why he only very rarely performed with an orchestra in the later stages of his career. Richter would always have wanted to rehearse a great deal, but in the modern, fastmoving and expensive world, orchestras simply couldn't take that on. He worked with chamber orchestras, including the Liszt Ferenc Chamber Orchestra, but preparing for several concerts in advance, and rehearsing the programme in great detail.

There are some composers, however, whose work was present throughout his whole career, for example Schubert, Chopin, Debussy, Schumann.

Yes, especially Schumann. The way he played Schuman was quite unique. It wasn't the straightforward, jolly, catchy style, which is the usual way people play Schumann. It was intense, with wild contradictions. His interpretation conveyed a great tranquility, which some people think

doesn't suit Schumann; but the way he played it was a tremendous thrill, and he made it credible.

He didn't play Schubert in the conventional way either, did he?

No, I suppose the same could be said about everything he played, but with Schubert there's a lot of scope. Schubert's musical world is as wide and open as the sea, you can become completely immersed in it, and whatever you do in it, you're not squeezing anybody else out; there's room for everybody in it.

What about Chopin?

He didn't play as much Chopin as Schumann or Schubert: the Four Scherzos, the Four Ballads and a few of the Preludes. It was also typical of him that he didn't play all the 24 Preludes, but rather a selection of the ones that he liked best, I suppose. That meant he didn't follow the usual order, either. The same goes for his approach to performing the Etudes.

It was the opposite with Debussy's second volume of Preludes, which he played in its entirety in Budapest, and in places such as Moscow, Aldeburgh, Spoleto, Florence, Prague.

That is perhaps the only set of works—apart from the two books of The Well-Tempered Clavier—which he ever performed in concert in their entirety. In the case of other serial works he only played a selection, chosen according to his own idiosyncratic criteria.

In Budapest in 1973 he played Book II of The Well-Tempered Clavier at two concerts. I was there when he came out and immediately set about giving the radio producer a list of which preludes and fugues he was allowed to broadcast and those he wasn't, and which piece was to be replaced by one of the encores. This meant that the

radio was only able to broadcast a selection of the two recitals. This was something quite new to Hungarian Radio, which until then had had free rein to record, broadcast and generally do whatever it liked, whenever it liked, with its recordings of Richter's performances in Hungary since 1954. All of a sudden Richter was withholding permission for live broadcasts—not for any material gain, of course, but setting his terms as an artist and refusing to allow some of the pieces to be broadcast to a wider audience. In 1982 he played Szymanowski's 2nd Sonata at the Pesti Vigadó, and forbade any broadcast of that too. However, a pirate recording of that performance has since been released in the West. Now that Richter has died, do you think all recordings made of his performances could or should be released, or only those he himself approved of?

This is the same kind of problem as whether it is acceptable to publish a writer's private papers.

Maybe not quite the same.

I think it's similar. When the writer wrote his letters he was not concerned about whether they might be published later. Richter played pieces of music, and he decided which could be released on record, and which he didn't want released. Thus to release the latter is to go against his wishes. There are important recordings, however, such as his debut concerts in New York, which he always considered very bad, but which were incredible concerts. Now that, unfortunately, he is no longer around to protest, it is highly likely that sooner or later these will be released too. The New York recordings were in fact released at the time, shortly after the concerts took place, but in a very limited edition, and have never been re-released since. These are regarded as rarities by collectors, and they fetch large sums of money when they change hands. I myself have a New

Zealand edition of one of these concerts on record. Richter himself always asserted that he had an awful time in New York, that he was dreadfully agitated and played abominably; but if you know the recordings, you know what a great thing it would be if they were re-released in a decent edition.

Future generations will only know Richter from records.

I think the fact that new Richter recordings are appearing in succession and even the fifth or sixth concert recording of the same piece is selling, shows that Richter's charisma carries even on record. He is one of the very few—maybe four or five—personalities who are instantly recognizable on record, and whom you can listen to over and over again and find something new every time. Besides Richter, I mean people like Furtwängler, Callas, Celibidache.

There are vast differences between performances by Richter of the same piece at different times. It's strange, one's first impression is that there are great differences in tempo. In 1973 he played Schubert's Sonata in C minor at a seemingly much much slower tempo than he had played it fifteen years previously. But if you measure the length of the two versions on the radio recordings, they turn out to be almost the same. The same applies to his recordings of Bach in Moscow in 1948 and in Bonn in 1991; the tempo is virtually the same in both, and yet the two performances are completely different.

I don't think it was simply a question of changes in character or attitude, which had taken place in the long interval which elapsed between the two performances. Richter was always profoundly influenced by the hall he was playing in and the instrument he was playing on. He would strike the notes differently, or mould the whole tone of the piece differently, depending on the piano he was playing

on, or if he was performing in a small room as opposed to a vast stadium. Once, in Japan, he played in a concert hall with walls of glass, and the effect was as if he were playing in the middle of a forest, surrounded by beautiful trees and birds. I am sure that this affected him deeply; he loved it there, and felt he played "naturally"...

What is the situation concerning the authorized recordings? There are quite a few records bearing his signature, or which state that the record was released with the artist's approval.

That's a difficult question. He thought that these recordings truly represented what he felt the piece should sound like, and that his playing was as it should have been. Nevertheless-even though it may appear conceited to base an example on myself here-when a musician listens to one of his own recordings, the mistakes that bother him are different from those another listener might find annoying-indeed, he might not notice them at all, let alone pay any attention to them. On the other hand, things that move another listener may not be things the musician finds important. In other words, the musician may not be the best or most honest judge of his own recordings. Of course, in Richter's case it is different; he was always very honest indeed. Nevertheless, I think that what I have just said still applies; his attitude to his own recordings was very different from that of the audience who had heard him play.

If the records were not released, the listening public would be deprived of so many wonderful experiences.

Absolutely. If you think about it, who is bothered if he plays a wrong chord in the third bar and another one in the fifth bar, if the five minutes which follow are the most wonderful musical experience of a lifetime? But he would say "Dreadful! That is not to be released"... *

János Rolla

The Orchestral Rehearsals

ános Rolla: We tried for a long time to I make contact with Richter and persuade him to play as a soloist with the Liszt Ferenc Chamber Orchestra, but there didn't seem to be any way. Or possibly just one: when he went on tour, he usually travelled via Hungary—he never travelled by plane—and would give concerts en route, so we hoped that sometime, eventually, he would perform with us. Then suddenly in 1991 the call came, via the Philharmonic Concert Bureau: Richter was on his way; he wanted to play Bach's piano concertos with us; we would be rehearsing here in Budapest and give a performance here, then go on to perform the same thing together at the Tours Festival. Luckily, the orchestra was at home and had no bookings yet for that period. There was huge excitement and we launched full steam ahead into the preparatory work. It was not the first time that the orchestra had worked with a world famous soloist. but Richter was somehow very special for us. There was also some trepidation, be-

manding Richter was. I will never forget how he walked in to the first rehearsal, the orchestra was standing to attention, and in a matter of moments he had completely shattered the aura that had been the source of our anxiety. I had the feeling it was deliberate. When he walked in he came face to face with the poster for his concert, which had his name in bold print, and the name of the orchestra in smaller letters. He got extremely angry. This was not his concert, he said, but the orchestra's concert, at which he was soloist, and that something should be done so that the name of the orchestra and that of the soloist should at least be in the same size lettering.

cause we knew how exceptionally de-

Márta Papp: What language did you speak?

German. That wasn't a problem. German was his "father-tongue", and the members of the orchestra speak German. But in fact there was nothing to talk about, that was the interesting thing. We did not make any agreement about anything in advance, not even about tempo. He just sat down at the piano as if we had been playing together for years, as if he knew everybody. He quite simply got down to work, and the result was miraculous. The concert itself was something, but the rehearsals were spe-

János Rolla,

a violinist, is Music Director and Leader of the Liszt Ferenc Chamber Orchestra. He was interviewed by Márta Papp.



most feeling his way around the keys. Then we played it a second time and a third time and umpteen times, because of course each time there was something he was unhappy about. We hardly spoke at all. Sometimes he would ask how we thought such-and-such should be played. He did not instruct and he did not direct the orchestra in any way, but his presence demanded tremendous concentration, discipline, order and unflagging attention from all of us. There was quite simply nothing to talk about. We just played and played and the orchestra somehow fused with him. We have never experienced anything even remotely comparable since.

pecially at the slow passages, he was al-

To what extent was Richter's way of playing Bach in harmony with the way the orchestra played Bach?

He was completely open to suggestions, even as regards tempi. There were no rehearsed, pre-arranged ritenutos or

cial. We would begin to play, everybody concentrating fiercely of course, and after a few minutes it was as if those pieces were just being written at that moment. He would open the music...

At that time was he already playing from the score?

Yes. We had a conversation once about why he, in those years, played from the score. He used to have absolute pitch, but as he got older he heard everything one tone higher. It used to trouble him enormously that he would play a note on the piano and hear something different. This was what made him play from the score in the end; he needed it as a reference. In any case, we began to rehearse, and felt-especially the first time round—that he was writing the piece as we went along, as if he was being programmed like a computer, as if his hands and head were being programmed. The first time we played it through he was searching in the score, es-



stván Harm

changes in tempo, there was no affectation whatever in his way of playing, and therefore there was nothing we could use as a point of reference. The score was sacred to him, as was having everything about him in an orderly state. Every note was profoundly important to him; not a single one could be missed. If you watched his hands you could tell that he paused over every note, no matter how fast he was playing. It was fantastic how he was able to combine technical perfection with feeling. The most important thing was what the composer had written, and the tremendous effect of Richter's contribution lay in the fact that his own musical personality was not thrust into the foreground; he was quite unassuming. It was Bach that one could hear, not Richter. He was a formidable pianist, but the Bach piano concertos do not demand great skill on the part of the pianist, so for him, in terms of keyboard skills, these must have been quite easy, and yet he played them as if his life depended on it. It was almost as if he weighed up each note. It was a very educational, enlightening experience. Of course, for the orchestra it is always an educational experience to work with a soloist; for us, since we operate without a conductor, working with great soloists, with the likes of Isaac Stern, Murray Perahia, Maurice André, or with the conductor Helmut Rilling, gives us a "blood transfusion". Playing with Richter had a lasting effect, not only on the way we play Bach, I think, but on our playing in general.

All I know about the Tours Festival is that Richter chose this small place in France, Grange de Meslay, near Tours, and every summer he would invite his friends and other musicians he respected to come and play music and give performances there. Why he chose this picturesque little village and made an annual pilgrimage there is due to Richter's personality. He liked places which were off the beaten track, and he liked to be close to nature. Not that he was a recluse, but somehow performing for him was not about reaching an audience, it was about making music, and these places were more suited to that than the great concert halls of the world. The "concert hall" at the Tours Festival was in the middle of a field: it used to be some kind of farm building, a barn, perhaps. The acoustics we just had to put up with. Richter welcomed us to Tours, or rather to Grange de Meslay, as if we had been old friends; he was friendly and open. Of course we rehearsed a lot there too.

What was the audience like?

Richter's name drew huge crowds. My impression is that the Grange de Meslay barn was full of people who came back year after year. A really elegant lot they were too, you had to laugh the way they stumbled about over the grassy tussocks to make sure they got into the concert. But the concert made it worth the trouble they had in getting there.

Did the orchestra meet Richter again?

We toyed with the idea of him coming to the Zemplén Festival in the North of Hungary. It wouldn't have taken him out of his way on his return journey. We talked about it. I wouldn't go as far as to say he agreed to it, but he was very open to the idea. Unfortunately, health problems prevented him from coming that summer, after that he became ill more and more often and we never got to play with him again.

Svyatoslav Richter's Appearances in Hungary

1954, March 4, Budapest, Academy of Music. Budapest Symphony Orchestra [BSO]—Vilmos Komor. Tchaikovsky: Piano Concerto in B flat minor, (encore) Rakhmaninov: Two Preludes, op.23/2,5

1954, March 8, Budapest, Academy of Music. Hungarian State Orchestra [HSO]—János Ferencsik. Schumann: Piano Concerto in A minor, (encore) Brahms: Intermezzi in A minor and E flat minor, op.118/1,6

1954, March 10, Budapest, Academy of Music. Bach: The Well-tempered Clavier I. Preludes and Fugues in C major and minor, F major and minor, A major and minor, Bach: French Suite in C minor, BWV 813, Mozart: Sonata in F, K.533, Beethoven: Sonata in F minor "Appassionata", op.57, (encore) three Chopin pieces

1954, March 15, Budapest, Opera House. Philharmonic Orchestra—János Ferencsik. Bach: Piano Concerto in D minor

1954, March 24, Budapest, Erkel Theatre. HSO—János Ferencsik, Liszt: Piano Concerto in E flat

1954, March 26, Budapest, Academy of Music. Prokofiev: Sonata no.8, Ravel: Pavane pour une infante défunte, Gaspar de la nuit no.2, Valses nobles et sentimentales, (encore) Jeux d'eau, Alborada del gracioso

1954, March 27, Budapest, Academy of Music (youth concert). Mozart sonatas, Beethoven: Sonatas in D, op. 10 and in F minor "Appassionata", op.57

1954, April 3, Budapest, Opera House (gala performance on the anniversary of the liberation of Hungary), with the Moiseyev Ensemble and several Hungarian folk ensembles also participating

1958, February 9, Budapest, Academy of Music. Schubert: Sonata in C minor, op.post., Schumann: Toccata in C, Mussorgsky: Pictures of an Exhibition, (encore) Rakhmaninov: Prelude in G sharp minor, Debussy: Les collines d'Anacapri (Preludes I/5), Cloches à travers les feuilles (Images II/1)

1958, February 11, Budapest, Academy of Music. Schubert: Sonata in A, op.120, Moment musical in C, op.94/1, Three Impromptus op.90/2,3,4 (E flat, G, A flat), Liszt: Funérailles, Dance of the Imps, Love Dreams (E, A flat), Valses oubliées nos.1,2,3, Mephisto Waltz (encore) Liszt: 123rd Petrarca Sonnet, Feux follets

1958, February 12, Budapest, Bartók Hall—Nina Dorliac (soprano). Mozart: Das Veilchen, Die Alte, Komm, liebe Zither, Sehnsucht nach dem Frühling, Das Lied von der Trennung, Schumann: Intermezzo, Mit Myrthen und Rosen, In der Fremde, Liszt: Vergiftet sind meine Lieder, Oh, quand je dors, Mussorgsky: The Nursery,

Debussy: C'est d'extase langoureuse (Ariettes oubliées no.1), Chevaux de bois, Green (Ariettes oubliées no.5)

1958, February 13, Budapest, Academy of Music—Tátrai Quartet. Brahms: Piano Quintet in F minor

1958, February 15, Budapest, Bartók Hall—Nina Dorliac (soprano). Schubert: Gute Nacht, Liebesbotschaft, Die Post, Die Krähe, Du bist die Ruh', Am Meer, Die Taubenpost, Sei mir gegrüsst, Wolf: Agnes, Der Gartner, Der Knabe und das Immlein, Der Genesene an die Hoffnung, Nixe Binsefuss

1958, February 17, Budapest, Erkel Theatre. HSO—András Kórodi. Mozart: Piano Concerto in D minor, K.466, Brahms: Piano Concerto in B flat

1958, October 3, Budapest, Erkel Theatre. HSO—János Ferencsik. Bartók: Piano Concerto no.2

1961, September 27, Budapest, Erkel Theatre—HSO, János Ferencsik. Liszt: Piano Concerto in A, (encore) Hungarian Fantasy

1963, April 27, Budapest, Academy of Music. Beethoven: Sonata in B flat, op.22, Schubert: Three Piano Pieces, op. post., "Wanderer" fantasy in C, (encore) Schubert: Allegretto in C minor, Chopin: Mazurka in C, op.24/2, Etude in A flat, op.10/10, Nocturne in F, op.15

1963, April 29, Budapest, Erkel Theatre. Händel: Suite in E, Shostakovich: Six Preludes and Fugues, op. 87/4,12,23,14, 17, 15, Prokofiev: Sonata no.6, (encore) Prokofiev: Visions fugitives op.22/6,11,14

1963, April 30, Debrecen. Beethoven: Sonata in B flat, op. 22, Schubert: Three Piano Pieces, op.post., Prokofiev: Sonata no.6, (encore) Prokofiev: Two pieces from Visions fugitives, Chopin: Etude in C minor, op.10/12

1965, July 16, Szombathely, House of Culture and Sports. Mozart: Sonata in F, K.280, Beethoven: Sonata in E flat,

op.31/3, Chopin: Four Scherzos, (encore) Chopin: Etudes op.10 – C sharp minor, F, C, C minor

1965, July 17, Budapest, Erkel Theatre. Mozart: Sonata in F, K.280, Beethoven: Sonata in A, op.101, Chopin: Four Scherzos, (encore) Chopin: Nocturne in F, op.15/1

1965, around July 20, Miskolc, National Theatre. Schubert: Sonata in B, D.575, Brahms: op.119/1,2,3,4, Liszt: Sonata in B minor, (encore) three Chopin etudes

1967, August 27, Budapest, Erkel Theatre. Haydn: Sonata in C, no.48. Hob. XVI:35, Chopin: Rondo à la mazur, Ballade in G minor, Debussy: Twelve Preludes, Vol. II (encore) Debussy: La sérénade interrompue, (Preludes I/9)

1967, September 18, Budapest, Erkel Theatre. HSO—János Ferencsik. Britten: Piano Concerto

1969, November 15 or 16, Sopron. Schubert: Hüttenbrenner Variations, Schumann: Fantasiestücke, op.12/1,2,3,5,7,8, Rakhmaninov: Preludes op.23/1, op.32/9, 10,12, op.23/8, op.32,3,2,6,7, op.23/2,4,5, (encore) Rakhmaninov

1969, November 16 or 17, Veszprém, Petőfi Theatre. Schubert: Hüttenbrenner Variations, Schumann: Fantasiestücke, op.12/1,2,3,5,7,8, Rakhmaninov: Preludes op.23/1, op.32/9,10,12, op.23/8, op.32,3,2,6,7, op.23/2,4,5 (encore) Rakhmaninov

1969, November 18, Budapest, Academy of Music. Schubert: Hüttenbrenner Variations, Schumann: Fantasiestücke, op.12/1,2,3,5,7,8, Prokofiev: Sonata no.8 (encore) Prokofiev: Paysage op.59/2, War and Peace – Waltz, Debussy: Cloches à travers les feuilles (Images II/1)

1972, February 16, Szeged, Schubert: Sonata in C minor, op.post., Mendelssohn: Lieder ohne Worte, op.19/1,2,3,5,6, Chopin: Nocturne in B flat minor op.9/1, Debussy: Images I/1,2,3 (encore) Debussy: Hommâge à Haydn, L'isle joyeuse

1972, March 16, Budapest, Academy of Music. Bach: The Well-Tempered Clavier II, Preludes and Fugues in C, C minor, C sharp, C sharp minor, D, D minor, E flat, D sharp minor, E, E minor, F, F minor (encore) Vol.II. Prelude and Fugue in A flat

1973, March 18, Budapest, Academy of Music. Bach: The Well-Tempered Clavier II, Preludes and Fugues in F sharp, F sharp minor, G, G minor, A flat, G sharp minor, A, A minor, B flat, B flat minor, B, B minor, (encore) Vol.II Prelude in B, Preludes and Fugues in D, B minor

1973, March 22, Budapest, Erkel Theatre. Schubert: Sonata in C minor, op.post., Sonata in B flat, op.post., (encore) Schubert: Three Impromptus op.90/2,3,4

1973, October 6, Budapest, Erkel Theatre—Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau (baritone). Wolf: Mörike Lieder—Der Genesene an die Hoffnung, In der Frühe, Fussreise, Neue Liebe, Der Feuerreiter, An den Schlaf, Zur Warnung, Jägerlied, Storchenbotschaft, Im Frühling, Auf einer Wanderung, An die Geliebte, Peregrina I, Peregrina II, Lebewohl, Begegnung, Der Jäger, Bei einer Trauung, Abschied, (encore) Wolf: Mörike Lieder—Verborgenheit, Selbstgeständnis, Nimmersatte Liebe, Auf ein altes Bild, Der Tambour, Gesang Weylas

1974, December 6, Pécs, Liszt Ferenc Hall. Beethoven: Sonatas in C, op.2/3, in E flat op.7, in C minor, op.111 (encore) Bagatelles in G, op.126/1, B minor, op.126/4, E flat, op.126/6

1974, December 7, Pécs, Liszt Ferenc Hall. Miaskovsky: Sonata in C minor, op.19, Shostakovich: Four Preludes and Fugues, op.87/22,21,23,20, Prokofiev: Sonata no.8 (encore) Beethoven: Bagatelle in B flat, op.119

1975, April 16, Győr, Kisfaludy Theatre. Beethoven: Sonata in C, op.2/3, in E flat, op.7, in C minor, op.111 (encore) Beethoven: Bagatelles in G, op.126/1, in B minor, op. 126/4, in E flat, op.126/6, Wagner: Albumblatt

1976, December 9, Budapest, Academy of Music. Beethoven: Sonata in F minor, op.2/1, in D, op.10/3, in E, op.14/1, in A flat, op.26, (encore) Bagatelle in B minor, op.126, Wagner: Albumblatt

1976. December 10. Budapest. Academy of Music. Beethoven: Sonata in D. op.10/3. Schumann: Carnival in Vienna. op.26. Chopin: Polonaise-Fantasy in F flat. Two Waltzes, F op.34 and D flat op.70. Four Mazurkas, C sharp minor op.63/3, C op.67/3, F op.68/3, A minor op.post... Chopin: Etude in C sharp minor op.25/7. Scherzo in E op.54. (encore) Chopin: Etude in C sharp minor. op.10/4. Debussy: Wind in the Plain (Preludes I/3). Ondine (Preludes II/8). Wagner: Albumblatt

1977, April 9, Debrecen, Bartók Hall. Beethoven: Andante favori in F, Schumann: Carnival in Vienna, op.26, Chopin: Scherzo in B minor, op.20, Scherzo in B flat minor, op.31, Scherzo in C sharp minor op.39, Chopin: Barcarole, op.60 (encore) Chopin: Three Etudes op.10 (E flat minor, A flat, C sharp minor)

1978, August 10, Budapest, Academy of Music. Schubert: Sonata in A, op.120, Schumann: Fantasiestücke, op.12/1,2,3,5 7,8, Debussy: Suite bergamasque, Debussy: Estampes, (encore) Debussy: Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses (Preludes II/4), Chopin: Prelude in B flat, op.28/21

1980, June 11, Miskolc, National Theatre. Beethoven: Sonatas in F, op.10/2, D minor, op.31/2, Schumann: Fantasia in C (encore) Chopin: Prelude in B flat, op.28/21, Etude in E, op.10/3, Rakhmaninov: Prelude in G sharp minor, op.32/12

1980, June 12, Budapest, Academy of Music. Beethoven: Sonatas in F, op.10/2, in D minor, op.31/2, Schumann: Fantasia in C (encore) Schumann: Aufschwung (Fantasiestücke no.2), Chopin: Prelude in B flat, op.28/21, Debussy: La danse de Puck (Preludes I/11)

1982, October 11 and 15, Budapest, Vigadó. Liszt: Pensée des morts (Harmonies poétiques et religieuses no.4), Andante lagrimoso (Harmonies poétiques et religieuses no.9), Ave Maria in E major, Franck: Prelude, Choral and Fugue, Szymanowski: Sonata no.2 (encore on 11th) Szymanowski: Mazurkas op.50/1,17,18,3

1983, August 3, Budapest, Academy of Music. Tchaikovsky: The seasons, op.37b/5,7,11,1, Nocturne in F, op.10/1, Valse Scherzo in A, op.7, Humoresque op.10/2, Capriccioso op.19/5, Valse in A flat op.40/8, Romance op.51/5, Rakhmaninov: Etudes-Tableaux, op.33/9,5,6 op.39/1,2,3,4,9

1985, January 14, Budapest, Opera House—Yury Bashmet (viola). Haydn: Sonata in D no.39, Hob.XVI:24, Hindemith: Sonata for viola and piano op.11/4, Debussy: Preludes I, nos.1-7 and 9-11 (encore) Debussy: L'isle joyeuse, Reflets dans l'eau (Images I/1)

1985, January 15, Budapest, Vigadó—Yury Bashmet (viola). Hindemith: Sonata for viola and piano op.11/4, Britten: Lachrymae for viola and piano, op.48, Shostakovich: Sonata for viola and piano op.147

1985, June 7, Budapest, Academy of Music, small auditorium (private). Hindemith: Sonata no.2, Ludus Tonalis

1986, June 7, Győr, Town Hall. Beethoven: Two Rondos, in C, op.51/1, G,

op.51/2, Sonata in A, op.101, Diabelli Variations, op.120

1986, June 11, Győr, Town Hall. Schumann: Four fugues, op.72, G minor March, op.76/2, Three Etudes on a Paganini theme, op.10/4,5,6, Toccata in C, op.7, Novellette in F, op.21, Blumenstück D flat, op.19, Nachtstücke, op.23/1,2,3,4 (encore) Wagner: Albumblatt

1991, June 6, Budapest, Academy of Music, "In Memory of Oleg Kagan". Bach: French Suite in C minor, BWV 813, French Suite in E flat, BWV 815, French Suite in E, BWV 817, Mozart: Fantasia in C minor, K.475, Sonata in C minor, K.457

1991, June 9, Budapest, Academy of Music—Liszt Ferenc Chamber Orchestra. Bach: Piano Concertos in D, BWV 1054, and G minor, BWV 1058

1993, November 9, Budapest, Congress Centre. Grieg: Lyrical Pieces, op.12, Arietta, Waltz, Song of the Nightwatch, Fairy Dance, op.38, Norwegian Dance, Canon, op.43, Butterfly, To Spring, op.47, Valseimpromptu, op.54, Norwegian Village March, Scherzo, Peal of Bell, op.57, Secret, She is Dancing, Homesickness, op.62, Dream Face, op.65, Wedding in Troldhaugen, op.68, Evening in the Mountains, op.71, Elf, The Peace of the Mountains, It's Over, Memories.

Compiled by Márta Papp

.hu: Hungary on the Net

Not long ago, a brilliant future was predicted for the later. dicted for the Internet in Hungary. It had just started with a promisingly big bang. However, a "White Book", published last spring (with black covers), observes in a mournful tone that the spectacular progress of the Internet in Hungary was halted two years ago. It blames high telephone rates and the similarly high providers' charges. The pamphlet, Internet in the Homes. Hungary Falling Behind. The Situation and Suggestions (http://www.internetto. hu/friss/ feherkonyv) points out that the costs of Internet use in Hungary are high not only by American, but even by European standards. The report, compiled by the editorsin-chief of Hungary's most visited website, the webzine Internetto and the online version of the country's leading economic and political weekly, HVG Online, begins with the shocking news that while "in Western Europe, 4 per cent of all households are connected to the Net, the same figure in Hungary is no higher than 0.7 per cent."

As evidence that the cause of this dramatic difference is really the high tele-

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economic weekly.

phone rates, the authors mention that in February, when-in fact at the urging of the authors of this very report—a latenight reduction was introduced by the national telephone service, especially aimed at Internet users, traffic not only doubled in the Hungarian corner of the Net but, as the correspondent of the leading Hungarian daily, Népszabadság wrote, "nighttime traffic jams were created on the Infobahn". Still, cheap late-night Websurfing, the same correspondent wrote, "can only be a temporary solution in the absence of something better, especially for children: if you surf at night, you are likely to fall asleep in class next morning."

Of course, in Hungary the Internet is being accessed by users in school, university or the workplace rather than homes. The total number of "wired Hungarians" can only be guessed at. One publicly known figure, for instance, is that the number of host computers covered by the first government-sponsored Internet project, the National Project for Information Infrastructure Development (NIIF) was 60,000. According to the managers of NIIF, the average number of users per host is three, so this national project involves some 180,000 Internet users, mainly from the academic sphere, which means universities and research institutions. The government has connected at least another

2,500 users to the Internet (higher ranking ministerial or administrative staff, or at least their secretaries, are now obliged to be present on the Net through at least one e-mail address).

What is going on now with regard to the country's secondary schools in the framework of another government-sponsored project is something similar to what was prescribed by Al Gore in America for primary schools and kindergardens: they are now being connected to the Internet. By the beginning of the Autumn term on September 1, 1998, in principle every secondary school (1,200 in number) was supposed to be "wired", meaning that—taking 5 to 7 computers per school as a basis with 5 to 8 users each—the number of users must have risen to somewhere between 100,000 and 180,000.

In addition, there are those who can actually be counted on the Net: subscribers registered with the commercial Their number, together with CompuServe's two thousand Hungarian subscribers, was 36,000 in January 1998. This figure must be considerably higher by now. All this means that the total number of Internet users in Hungary is likely to be well above a quarter of a million. If we were to add to that figure the number of home PCs unconnected today (because of the lack of a modem and/or the inability to raise the money for modem, phone bill and Internet charges), we would be talking about another 250,000 computers and even more potential Internet users.

It follows from the above that in Hungary today, some three hundred thousand people have access to the Internet, a number which could easily double if computers used in homes for many purposes, but only offline, could also join the Web. On the other hand, whether that figure is a quarter or a half of a million makes little difference when compared to the fact that

in the USA or Iceland, at least 45 per cent of the population has access to the Internet. (in Hungary that ratio is a meagre 2 per cent.) It looks very much like a vicious circle: the number of Internet users probably fails to grow at a fast enough rate because the Net is rarely used by investors for advertising. On the other hand, advertisers stay away from the Net because the Hungarian web is too small, it has not yet reached the critical mass where it becomes an effective medium. As the economic daily Világgazdaság wrote, "Web magazines made a poor start. Enormous resources and energy were put into experimentation-at least with some publicationsbut, because of the relatively small number of "hits", they folded pretty fast. They cannot be expected to turn profitable within the next 3 to 5 years."

No crystal ball tells you exactly where the Hungarian Internet will be in three to five years' time, but it can be safely predicted that it will be something totally different from what it is today. The number of users by then will be well past the above mentioned critical mass. Investors will have seen their first investments break even or bring profits. Telephone and Internet access rates will begin their downward climb-because by then there will be genuine competition in the fieldand, in general, all that is present in an incipient form today, and much more than that, will have ripened to fruition. Because the Hungarian web is a place where everything can already be found.

There are Hungarian search engines, digital libraries, intelligent cities and even villages, virtual university and long-distance work—whereas we do not even have an answer to the question as to what "Hungarian web" means. It may be regarded as the equivalent to all e-mail and web addresses ending in "hu". That, on the other hand, would mean omitting the

Hungary's Leading Software Companies

Company	sales in 1997 in million forin	ownership ts (per cent)
Datorg Team Ltd	245	10 Hungarian, 90 German
Ericson Hungary Ltd	1180	100 Swedish
FreeSoft Ltd.	289	100 Hungarian
Graphisoft Co.	4464	84.5 Hungarian, 15.5 Japanese
Idom Ltd.	3500	32.4 Hungarian, 67.5 Swiss
Interson Ltd.	600*	100 Hungarian
IQSoft Ltd.	640	76.2 Hungarian, 15 Swedish, 8.8 German
KFKI Computer Systems Co	5023	98.5 Hungarian, 1.5 British
*1966 figure		

URLs ending in "com", i.e., the commercial ones. Moreover, "Hungarian web" cannot be regarded as equivalent to Internet in the Hungarian language since most web pages all over the country (or more exactly, all over "hu") have English versions as well, and it is often the English version that is first found by browsers too. Up to the start of the last election campaign, the home page of the liberal party, the League of Free Democrats, which had provided the telecommunications minister of the last government, first welcomed those clicking their way there in English, and only from there offered a link to those who would rather choose to browse on in their native language. According to observers, that attitude may have contributed to the party's humiliating defeat in the elections. It may be added that neither do websites in the Hungarian language necessarily mean websites physically located in Hungary, i.e. they may be actually registered anywhere from the USA to Romania, Slovakia or the Cayman Islands.

Illustrative of this situation is the fact that before Autumn 1995, the foundation date of *Internetto*, the already mentioned online magazine, the only segment of the

Net which could genuinely claim to be the "Hungarian corner of the Internet" was being run at Harvard by a Hungarian living in America, József Hollósi, called "Hollosi Information Exchange" or HIX. Up to this very day, HIX is the home of numerous forums, releases web pages, and even has a searchable database. Still, today HIX is already history in a way, partly because since then there has been an explosion in content provision on the Hungarian weband especially under the top-level domain name "hu"—and partly because HIX itself now looks upon its own former activity as history. When Internetto recently published its "own" variant of the Hungarianlanguage version of Microsoft Internet Explorer on a CD-ROM, it contained, beside the programme and music by the alternative rock group "Yugoslav Scholars", a selection from three Hungarian Internet archives, HIX, Internetto and the "Hungarian Gutenberg JR. Project", i.e. the Hungarian Electronic Library (MEK).

"There are many projects in the world aimed at collecting and publishing electronic texts," István Moldován, one of MEK's founders says, "but I know of none which has accomplished this on a similar

The Cell Phone Explosion

Few words are used more often in Hungarian public and political life today than "joining". The topics constantly being discussed include joining NATO, the EU and Europe in general (though Hungarians prefer to use "return" in the last case rather than "joining"). Another catchphrase is "connection". More often than not, though, even when these words are being used in a technical sense, people tend to think of the mobile or cellular phones rather than the Internet.

Hungary—just like so many other countries from the United States to Denmark and from Israel to the Czech Republic—is constantly on the phone. Mobile phones are no longer carried by businessmen only but also by students and housewives, and their ringing is heard not only in black Mercedeses but ever more frequently on buses and trams. My mother's cleaning lady bought one recently, and now arranges her schedule with customers on the mobile. Children are beginning to ask for mobile phones for Christmas, and at test-writing times, when the teacher leaves the room or keeps an eye closed, they are getting the right answers from outside on the mobile. The number of subscribers of the two big mobile phone companies, now in a cut-throat compétition with each other, is over 880,000 already. The two companies predict a million mobile phones in use by the end of the year, and two million by the year 2000. (The approximate number of cable phones is roughly the same today.) The mobile phones currently in use operate in the 450 and the majority in the 900 Megahertz frequency range, but the next tender for the 1800 Megahertz band is already being prepared (the two "big ones" dominating the Hungarian market, Westel 900 Co., and Pannon GSM Co., will be among the more than twenty contestants). By the year 2000, according to the predictions of the two companies, 14 per cent of the mobile phone users are expected to use the 1800 Megahertz frequency which can ensure a 20 times faster data transfer than the 900 Megahertz band, and is therefore well suited not only to Internet access in general, but also to the transfer of multimedia applications over the Internet.

Although intensifying competition is likely to bring further price drops, the rates of the mobile phone companies are still a great deal higher than those for the cable phones. However, since, due to a government concession, MATÁV, the national telecommunications company, in which the government holds a majority of shares, will be in a monopoly position until the year 2002, while the mobile companies are in intensive competition and are now past their most costly investments, the situation may be reached where MATÁV keeps raising its prices from time to time, while the mobile companies lower theirs. If that tendency keeps continuing, they will meet each other on the way.

F.G.

nation-wide plane as we do." Moldován claims that this ensures the national character of the Hungarian digital library which keeps growing day by day. For the time being, the stock is collected on a voluntary basis partly from material originally published in print—like the majority of classical literary texts-and partly from works produced originally by a digital process. It follows from this that MEK collects mainly works for which no royalty is likely to be asked, although the managers of the library champion the principle of what is called "fair use". The texts uploaded by them on the web bear a headline which proclaims that the material may be freely copied for educational, journalistic or cultural purposes but their multiplication for commercial use is prohibited. In Hungary the old adage that "a nation lives in its language" is still considered valid, and the tradition that the number of poets per population is one of the highest in the world is also very much alive. The number of the "nation's great poets" in Hungary is not three or four as in other countries but rather thirty or forty. They are now also present on the web (in MEK, too).

The previous Socialist-Liberal coalition government, voted out of office in May 1998, stirred up quite a storm, not very long before the elections, when it selected (mainly from among the bearers of the highest state award, the Kossuth Prize, but also including some others) a group of writers and poets called "the digital immortals". These authors were offered a steady income by the government and asked to authorize the release of their works on the Internet in return. This probably resulted in a number of wounded egos. Looked at from the outside, though, the outcome is positive: even more authors are now present on the Net then ever before.

The browser hitting upon the Hungarian web is no longer lost if he or she

wants a Yahoo-type nation-wide directory. Such a directory, HUDIR, is now available at http://www.net.hu/hudir/ (or its American mirror site, http://www.hungary. com/hudir). For those preferring word searches, there is the Hungarian version of the search engine AltaVista, launched a few months ago under the name "Altavizsla", at http://www.altavizsla.matav.hu/. which has since become the most popular Hungarian website. (The name, by the way, is a pun. A vizsla is a dog, a Hungarian retriever.) The site, in contrast to the searches narrowed down to Hungarian of the original Altavista of Digital, performs searches through the pages under "hu" in generalincluding those in English—rather than covering web pages "in the Hungarian language". The last Academy survey of any use, according to which a mere 11.2 per cent of Hungarians above 18 are capable of making themselves understood in speech and in writing in any foreign language, and only 6.1 per cent speak English, is long out of date. English is spoken—or, more exactly, used-by a lot more people today. It may not be Shakespeare's or Joyce's English, but rather the kind of global or even "virtual" English now being learned by the whole world, a language devoid of local features, the learning of which is therefore much simpler than that of British or American English.

Since it propagates over the Internet, it seems logical that the Internet should also be the place where it is being taught, along with other subjects. At least that is the view held by Kristóf Nyiri, the President of the Society of Hungarian Philosophers, an Internet enthusiast. "My dream," the philosopher says, "is the Hungarian-speaking youth living in a small village without any knowledge of English, who acquires knowledge, language skills and an American graduate degree within a few

A Success Story

Graphisoft, with a capital of 100 million forints, owned almost entirely by its employees with the Japanese CSK or the Nippon Investment Fund holding a 16 per cent stake, had an income of \$22 million gross last year, mainly from the sale of the architectural design programme ArchiCad. Beside financial success, Graphisoft, founded in 1982 by the present Managing Director, Gábor Bojár and Research Director István Gábor Tari as a two-man business, the company has also won prestigious prizes such as the Software Oscar, awarded by the jury of *MacUser*, a magazine for professional users. Another Oscar was won last year in the group users' category. In the Spring of 1998, when their firm, registered in Holland under the name "Graphisoft NV", went on the stock market in Frankfurt, one million shares issued at 40 DM were taken up in the days after the introduction, and the stock was oversubscribed 35 times. On top of it all, during the 16 years of its existence, the company has never borrowed a penny, and has reached its position as third in the world architectural software market by relying entirely on its own resources.

The success story began in the 1980s, when the nuclear power plant at Paks was being built. The builders realized that the construction would require a three-dimensional modelling of the tubing system. Bojár and Tari started to work; on leased computers and, strangely enough, due to the reform-mindedness of the Minister of Industry at the time, they actually won the contract for the job, and the work itself was done with the help of the software they had designed. Encouraged by early successes, they went to Munich on their own money to take part in a computer display, and their 3D program created at the dawn of the PC age turned into an unexpected success. The firm, whose profits are derived, 20 per cent each, from markets in Japan, Germany and the USA, finally got the right to trade abroad in 1990, after the dismantling of the Iron Curtain and the disintegration of the Eastern block. The remainder of their sales, up to ten per cent, are in East Europe and in 40 other countries in the Far East and in Western Europe.

Graphisoft employs nearly 200 people and has a design team whose average age is 35. The philosophy underlying their achievements is that one must try to think with the mind of the architect using the software, and that the huge program based on complex algorithms running beneath the "user-friendly" surface must remain unnoticed. In other words, the user's time is for the work, not for learning the program. The company has managed to achieve this, according to Gábor Bojár, by spending 10 to 12 per cent of its gross income on R&D. Production costs take up 15 to 20 per cent, marketing and promotion 30, while business administration costs are running around 15 per cent. Which means that the company's profits amount to some 25 to 30 per cent of sales. No wonder that Graphisoft's developers earn salaries well above even the average in the West, sometimes 20,000 dollars per month.

Tamás Vajna

years, then finds employment easily, perhaps even abroad, without ever having left the area where he lives." The conditions whereby the dream may come true are gradually coming about. Uniworld University is already organizing classes but, more importantly, teaching English over the Internet for the remote regions of Hungary has already begun. Within the framework of a course organized by the remote teaching university Uniworld, teachers of the English and American Institute of Budapest University are giving English classes to inhabitants of a small village which is barely on the map: there is a single road leading there, and no railway.

This village of 360 souls, Alsómocsolád, in Southwest Hungary, came into the picture—and joined the Internet as well as a member of the "Telehouse" movement launched a few years ago. The village is the site of one of Hungary's "Telehouses" (there are now between 30 and 40 of them, all wired together into a league). The acronym means both a "telecommunications house" and a "full house" in Hungarian, and covers a kind of village communal house with computers, xerox machines, scanners, fax machines and, of course, Internet access to connect the locals to the outside word and, increasingly, also to each other. The "telehouses", built or, more often, equipped from funds obtained from various foundations, became centres of the communal life of the villages involved, even though the communal institutions (cultural centres, schools, mayor's offices) of the same villages are being systematically shut down, falling victim to concentration and "regionalization", says Mátyás Gáspár, manager of the telehouse of the village of Csákberény, the home of 1,250 people, and the founding president of the Hungarian Telehouse Federation.

These computerized, community-building "telehouses" display a kind of similarity with the "people's colleges" associated with the movement of Populist or, rather, rural writers and village researchers in Hungary before and directly after the Second World War. The idea that there should be an institution providing education to rural people, especially in wintertime, the slack period for those who live on the the land, comes from Scandinavia, just like the idea of the telehouse. The movement also demonstrates that financing concrete projects is far more effective than investments funded in an equalizing manner from central coffers.

Apart from this, Hungarian Internet developers are increasingly watching Scandinavia these days. The good English spoken by virtually everyone there is as widely appreciated as is their (Scandinavian) cultural autonomy, precisely in relation to the English-speaking Web. It is, in any case, remarkable that according to statistics, the number of computers connected to the Internet is higher in Iceland, Finland, Norway and Denmark than in English-speaking Britain, the United States or Australia.

No matter how the knowledge of English of Hungarians may develop (there are few complaints about the English of web designers or developers), the Hungarian web, like any other corner of the Internet, is practically bilingual. Both sides are looking forward to a great future, the English because English is the world language today, and Hungarians because that is the one being read and understood—and in which content is being provided—by Hungarians cut off from Hungary proper by the borders imposed by the Trianon Treaty, as well as by Hungarians who migrated all over the world.

Szilárd Béla Jávorszky

Budapest Music Centre Online

There is a place in Budapest which, happily, more and more people are coming to know. The Budapest Music Centre (website: www.bmc.hu) was founded mainly on enthusiasm more than two years ago, on a non-profit basis. It is a place where Hungarian composers and artists are treated seriously.

László Göőz, who heads the BMC, has been teaching ear training, trombone improvization and music history at the Academy of Music for twenty years. For ten years he was a member of one of the most influential Hungarian modern music ensembles, Group 180. He has contributed to some one hundred recordings and founded several orchestras. He has always been deeply involved in Hungarian music life. He saw how little opportunity they had to develop an international career, how hopeless and contradictory the artistic environment was. He witnessed it all, but had little influence on events until a few years ago when he saw a chance to improve this unhealthy situation a little.

Szilárd Béla Jávorszky is on the staff of Népszabadság, a national daily.

Together with a number of fellow musicians, he established a music-oriented online information centre in Lónyai utca in the Ninth District of Budapest and, with it, he began developing a highly professional database. He would have needed twenty or twenty-five million forints to realize the idea, which was an impossibly large sum to raise at the time. There was not much hope of this, so Göőz developed his music centre slowly and gradually. First he got hold of the place, which was the site where, between 1990 and 1995, one of the best-known avant-garde art exhibition centres in Eastern Central Europe had operated. Leaving the inner space, created by the architect Gábor Bachmann, untouched, he further shaped the interior along guidelines suggested by Bachmann, so that the Centre would be able to fill the role he and his colleagues had undertaken. Next, he began to develop and to build a network using funds donated by sponsors and on his own money. First they had a single computer, then two, and now they have nine.

BMC was formally inaugurated on May 24, 1996. Its founders have emphasized from the start that the centre is meant to cover the activity of composers, artists, theoretical and practical specialists and educators working in all areas of Hungarian music life. Their objective is to

create an up-to-date database which, beside transmitting information, will also be able to receive information through cooperation with international networks.

BMC, however, is not only an information office but—like other major music centres in the world—also intends to be a driving force in Hungarian music by arranging music festivals, lectures, concerts, exhibitions and workshops. It sells a wide variety of musical publications, CDs and other media, music scores and videos, with launches of these sometimes combined with live performances. It also collects and transmits information on various firms involved in music as well as on publications, musical instruments and their prices.

Most important of all, László Göőz and his colleagues have set out to develop a database of contemporary Hungarian composers and performing artists. In recognition for their work, they were awarded the Best of Europe Prize of Europe Online in the spring of 1998. They are indebted for this mainly to Zoltán Kocsis, who gave them the discography he himself had systematized, including detailed data on more than five hundred recordings, which they then uploaded to the Internet along with a special search engine. Thus, in future, anyone interested can check, for instance, which pieces by Ferenc Liszt were recorded by Zoltán Kocsis, the length of those works, the company which produced the record, and the other musicians who worked on the release.

Creating the database, which is still far from complete, takes a great deal more time than Göőz imagined when he began. First of all, he was not really aware of the sheer volume of data and the work it would take to computerize it all. Nor did he foresee the kind of personal relationships and the diplomacy which were required if a really complete view of Hun-

gary's music life was to be provided. They needed access to the oeuvre of Emil Petrovics, the grand old man in Hungarian music life, and the teacher of most Hungarian musicians active today as well as access to that of Béla Faragó, of the middle generation or access to the young composer Ádám Kondor.

Although BMC concentrates almost exclusively on the work of classical music and jazz composers and performers, its database nevertheless also includes documents of certain musical "border" areas like folk jazz, jazz rock or underground music. It is crucial that BMC expresses no official opinion on the composers and performers. It does not qualify or rank them but attempts to provide the widest and most complete view of their work.

Fast access is paramount for an online information centre, especially where relatively large numbers of music excerpts are being put on a website. BMC has recently joined TvNet, achieving a tenfold increase in data transfer, and its rapidly growing traffic reflects this.

The initiative is being increasingly accepted by composers and performers. The news spread fast that no one was being asked any money for inclusion on the database. Anybody can be on the Internet in the same place, entirely free of charge. It is small wonder that in the last year the database too has grown enormously. Interest has also been continuous from the other side, those making inquiries. Suffice it to take a look at their e-mails: the site is being used by everyone from foreign music impresarios to Italian students, professors and concert organizers. Thus if somebody wants data on the Amadinda percussion group, which plays contemporary "serious" music and jazz with equal adeptness, he or she can download images, a discography, an introduction in

Hungarian and English as well as sound. BMC has managed to create the kind of booklet every newly founded orchestra yearns to has in print. The difference is that everything is changing here, and is continuously updated. The updating is free.

The main thing is that this is a place which can provide any kind of information on anyone, and is able to establish contact for anybody with anybody, since BMC's people are in daily direct contact with the entire elite of Hungary's musicians. One of the major partners is the Music Board. The Centre is in close connection with the information office of the latter. They use and process each other's data and it is through the Board that BMC is connected to the information centre (IAMIC) covering all the music centres on earth. That is where BMC's endeavours come full circle: it has now joined the music information core of the world.

Of course the financial background of Budapest Music Centre has to be secured somehow. Releasing the soundtrack of the movie hit Csinibaba brought the financial success it was expected to bring, and the profits have gone into the expansion of the centre. But Göőz is an optimist, and therefore a believer in long-term effort. He says he will never demand money from musicians for his services. Their circle is so small and their audiences so narrow, yet it is highly important to preserve something from this age and from this spiritual community. One of their steady backers is the municipal cultural committee of Budapest, but its annual contribution covers only a fraction of BMC's budget. They apply for funds wherever they can, from foundations, companies, offices -and not always unsuccessfully.

Göőz is convinced that in the past fifty years Budapest has been the real musical centre of Europe, if not the whole world. The most important composers, in his view, are György Kurtág, György Ligeti and Péter Eötvös, with Boulez, Schnittke and Xenakis taking second place. Of course, all three of those Hungarian composers live abroad. One left the country at the age of sixty, the others when they were young. It is true, though, that Hungary is the home of outstanding composers and musicians and there are many of whom precious little is known abroad.

The Internet reaches a relatively narrow audience, and the database and the music centre remain basically facilities for the musical profession, and will not make Hungarian composers and performers better known to audiences at large. The BMC has therefore made a bold move. Their latest project, under which they plan to release a series of twenty to twenty-five records of contemporary Hungarian music for the 1999 Frankfurt International Book Fair, is supported by ten million forints they received from the National Cultural Fund and 1.5 million forints from the Soros Foundation. (Hungary is going to be the focus country at the 1999 Frankfurt Book Fair.) The series is to consist of rereleases of BMC's earlier recordings as well as new contemporary music recordings. Among the earlier BMC discs, Bach's Art of the Fugue, Richard Strauss's Metamorphosis and Arthur Honegger's Second Symphony will be released, all three performed by the Cluj Symphony Orchestra under the baton of an outstanding conductor, Erich Bergel, who died recently. The series devoted to new contemporary music will include pieces written in the past five to ten years but never recorded. Of course subjective elements also play a part in the selection. Göőz and his friends do have certain ideas and specific tastes, which they are not ashamed to admit to. They would like audiences to learn

more about what they believe to be really worth knowing. The list of names included in their plans are Gyula Csapó, Barnabás Dukay, Béla Faragó, Zoltán Jenei, Ádám Kondor, György Orbán, Emil Petrovics, József Sári, László Sáry, Zsolt Serey, Endre Szervánszky, András Szőlőssy, László Tihanyi, János Vajda, László Vidovszky and Leó Weiner.

They are guided by similar principles in their selection of performers. The series will probably include ComponEnsemble, headed by Zsolt Serei, the New Hungarian Music Society established by Peter Eötvös, the Weiner-Szász Chamber Orchestra, the inimitable Amadinda and, as the odd one out, the first record ever of the National Philharmonic Orchestra (formerly the Hungarian State Orchestra) with orchestral works by Ferenc Liszt and conducted by Zsolt Hamar.

The series will probably come out in three rounds, with the first seven discs to be released in November. This "package" includes the above mentioned two re-releases, Péter Eötvös's Atlantis, an eclectic but highly enjoyable album by Gyula Csapó, who lives in Canada, László Vidovszky's Etudes for Player Piano, a trombone quartet (jazz!) and László Sáry's "Locomotive" Symphony. The latter is a curious musical collage written Hungarian steam engines. Each steam engine's sound has a specific pitch which, composed in a system, has the effect of a symphonic piece. The second package of the series is expected to be released next spring, and the third immediately before the Frankfurt Fair, in September 1999.

Göőz has repeatedly stressed that these records are being produced mainly for the international market. Today, beside Hungaroton Classic, no other company exports recordings by contemporary Hungarian composers, performers or groups. Certain artists, such as Zoltán Kocsis, András Schiff and the Budapest Festival Orchestra, have contracts with foreign companies, and Hungarian musicians are frequently employed by Naxos as supporting players.

The market for contemporary music is narrow all over the world, but Göőz keeps the success of ECM in his sights. It is no accident that nearly the whole range of records on sale in the BMC record shop on the first floor is made up of ECM releases. That company has been playing its part in jazz and classical music (although in the latter case, only for the past six years). They have been approached by several Hungarian composers and performers but without success. Still, they have so far sold a total of eighty-thousand (!) copies of the three records of György Kurtág (regarded as impossible to listen to by many), the same number as that for the European sales of the rock group Yes. Göőz believes that some of his own recordings will also achieve high sales figures. His real aim, however, is not commercial success. It is much more important to leave to posterity a musical imprint of Hungary as it was at the end of the century we are just about to leave behind.

The Impact of the United States on Hungary's Age of Reform

The 150th anniversary of the launching of the 1848 Revolution in Hungary is an appropriate time to examine the ties between Hungary and the United States during the period stretching from the late 18th century through the momentous events of 1848–1849. These ties had a great deal to do with fostering developments in Hungary, which in turn set the stage for the glorious days of March, 1848 and the subsequent War of Independence.

When I say developments, I do not so much mean political actions, legislation, legal maneuverings, commercial or industrial activities—important as they were—but the exhilarating and excruciating turmoil inside people's heads and hearts. Without such a turmoil, no revolution can ever occur.

Hungary before 1848 was still backward, feudal, nearly medieval in certain aspects, controlled on the local level by privileged noblemen, who were lording it over the vast majority of the population, that is, over serfs in bondage. Towns were generally small, populated less by entrepreneurs than by old-fashioned traditional townspeople, most of whom were Germans. Although Hungary enjoyed a degree of autonomy, the important levers of power were in the hands of bureaucrats appointed by the Habsburg Emperor. True, he was also crowned King of Hungary, but his power base, his roots were firmly lodged in Vienna.

In 1830, Count István Széchenyi, the greatest Hungarian reformer, wrote about Hungary as a potentially rich country where many people nevertheless went hungry. Five years later, he spoke pessimistically about the decay of Hungarian society and the lack of public spirit in his country. Around the same time, he embarked on writing a pamphlet entitled "Dirt and Mud in Pest."

Yet, Széchenyi could also be hopeful. After all, he was simultaneously engaged in organizing several projects, some of them quite successful. And there were, all over the country, thousands of "little Széchenyis", doing their bits in the individual and collective effort to transform Hungary into a more liveable and modern country.²

Gábor Vermes

left Hungary in 1956. He teaches history at Rutgers University, and is the author of the biography István Tisza: The Liberal Vision and Conservative Statecraft of a Magyar Nationalist, Columbia University Press, 1985, translated into Hungarian in 1994. Their scale of comparison was the West, especially England, France, and the more advanced parts of Germany. Books, pamphlets, and newspaper articles about the West were meant to shake up complacent Hungarians and to shame them into action. "Everywhere," wrote Bertalan Szemere in the introduction to his book, Travels Abroad, published in 1840, "Everywhere we have to seek out the best." There was a sense of urgency, because it was widely believed that either Hungary would catch up with the West or it would perish.

To reform-minded Hungarians, the United States was also significant as a model, inhibiting and attractive at the same time. Both of these attributes had something to do with the forbidding geographical distance at the time. America was so far away, so strange to most Europeans.

At the same time, its very remoteness, coupled with its remarkable achievements, challenged the imagination of progressive Europeans and fired up their hopes and expectations. America was like a giant canvas, the perfect place on which to project European dreams and desires. In Árpád Kadarkay's words, "Europeans wanted to see how this new republic translated the utopian idealism of the European Enlightenment into political reality." Political reality was only part of this appeal, as America was also elevated onto a transcendental plane as the best possible place on earth for spiritual fulfilment.

This excitement about America was not universally shared. Conservative defenders of the feudal *status quo*, or even proponents of modest reforms recoiled from what appeared to them as a coarse egalitarian society with no visible hierarchy and no sense of refinement and manners. Strong feelings about the United States existed everywhere, but they acquired a special edge in backward Hungary, where the

success or failure in applying Western examples was linked to assumptions about the nation's ability to survive.

This was not yet the issue in the late 18th century, when brief attempts at reforming the country were limited first to the unpopular Joseph II and to a very small circle of patriots. Furthermore, as far as interest in America was concerned, the thunder was soon stolen by France and the French Revolution.

Nevertheless, the American Revolution did not pass unnoticed in Hungary. Mihály Kováts, a Hungarian army officer, volunteered to serve with Washington's army. Attached to the Pulaski Legion, Colonel Kováts died a hero's death in the battle of Charleston in 1779. An article in the September 30, 1780 issue of Magyar Hírmondó expressed astonishment over his ability to pursue scholarship in the midst of a war. Another article, published in the May 27, 1789 issue of Magyar Kurir, stated that "Since America threw off the English yoke and became a free republic, all nations yearn after such a golden freedom."5

Later, as the French Revolution turned into a bloody dictatorship, even progressive Hungarian noblemen became frightened, wondering whether even relatively innocuous reform activities would end up in terror and bloodshed. This fear, coupled with Emperor Francis I's dread of any change, put a damper on curiosity about the outside world and on the desire to find suitable Western models to imitate. Consequently, only a relatively few references to America succeeded in breaking through the thick layers of inward-turning indifference and the crushing weight of censorship.

The writer and economist Gergely Berzeviczy was one of the few bright lights in an otherwise bleak intellectual environment. "Improvements move from East to

West," wrote Berzeviczy in 1819, "and, as they are growing old and weak in Europe, they are moving to America to be purified there of abuses and shame." András Thaisz, editor of Tudományos Gyűjtemény, published an article, also in 1819, which expressed similar sentiments. "While in old Europe," Thaisz wrote, "blood was flowing in streams, a revolution was progressing with giant strides on the other side of the Atlantic."6

Count István Széchenyi was fascinated by the United States. His diaries from 1818 on contain many references to America, which he called "The Land of the Future." During the 1820s, he spent a great deal of time in Vienna, in the salons of aristocratic ladies to whom he must have talked so much about the United States that they nicknamed him "Der Amerikaner," the American.⁷

Széchenyi admired George Washington and, even more, Benjamin Franklin. He praised Franklin for combining civic morality and practicality-precisely the character traits which eventually enabled Széchenyi himself to become a national leader. When Széchenyi was travelling a great deal in Western Europe during the 1820s, his friend and travelling companion, Baron Miklós Wesselényi, was equally enthusiastic about the United "Liberty's glorious home," States. Wesselényi wrote in his diary, "uncontaminated by servitude, filled us with enthusiasm."8

In fact, Széchenyi repeatedly requested permission to travel to the United States—"to the fountain from which the essence of justice springs," to use his own words. But Austrian Chancellor and Foreign Minister Prince Klemens von Metternich rejected Széchenyi's •requests, finding them "bizarre" and "impossible to put into practice." As the principal defender of the status quo not only in the Austrian

Empire but also in Europe, Metternich hated the United States and all that it stood for.9

The breakthrough in enhancing the impact that the United States made on Hungary came with the publication of Sándor Bölöni Farkas's book, *Travel in North America*, in 1834, with another edition the following year. This book recounted the personal impressions of Bölöni Farkas, who had travelled more than 2,500 miles in the United States in 1830–1831. Born in 1795 in Háromszék County in Transylvania, Bölöni Farkas was the scion of a Hungarian–Székely noble family of modest means. He eked out a meager living as a clerk in the Transylvanian Chancery, a government office.

His real love was literature. For a long time, he was in contact with Ferenc Kazinczy, one of the most prominent Hungarian men of letters at the time. The relationship between them eventually cooled, because Bölöni Farkas's poetry failed to measure up to Kazinczy's high standards. Unfortunately for Bölöni Farkas, the 1820s marked the beginning of a golden age for Hungarian poetry, and his talents lay elsewhere. In fact, he was a brilliant writer of prose, but this became apparent only when he published his book about America.

His literary disappointments notwith-standing, Bölöni Farkas was one of those "little Széchenyis" who, imbued with a deep sense of patriotism, were doing good deeds for their respective communities. Despite his modest means, he built up a library of nearly 500 volumes, including Tom Paine's *Rights of Man*, and he lent them out to friends or even acquaintances. He was instrumental in founding a savings bank in Kolozsvár, hoped to establish a museum, and supported the budding Hungarian theatre. Bölöni Farkas was also a

founding member of the Hungarian Casino in Kolozsvár, a club whose purpose was to foster national consciousness and to disseminate knowledge about the West.

Still, he was a man filled with grievances, living a marginal existence. His chances for promotion in the royal bureaucracy were nil. After all, he was poor, he was a Hungarian, and, last but not least, he was a Unitarian, a denomination barely tolerated in official circles. Bölöni Farkas was frustrated not only in his literary ambitions, but also in his role as a Hungarian patriot, who felt crushed by the pettiness and meanness of his surroundings. He once wrote to Kazinczy that he wished to have been born two thousand years ago in ancient Greece, so that he could have enjoyed freedom, something for which he longed throughout his entire life.

Ironically, his lack of fame made it possible for him and his travelling companion, Count Ferenc Béldi, to receive permission to travel to the United States. After weeks of arduous travel on a British ship, Bölöni Farkas caught sight of New York harbour on September 3, 1830.

He felt overwhelmed by joy. "It has been sixty years," he wrote "that the eyes of mankind have been cast on America. Can this people be the masters of their destiny? Will I be able to find liberty here and the asylum for oppressed peoples, no matter where they come from?" He was amazed that nobody asked for his passport or hassled him at customs, something unheard of in his own European experience.

In New York City, he studied the school system and was very impressed by the fact that even children of the poor had a chance to study. "When I remembered the schools in my country," he poignantly remarked, "I could not help sighing. A Hungarian traveller has to sigh a lot, since he carries everywhere with him the memory of his homeland." Bölöni Farkas loved the

visible absence of sharp social distinctions. Everybody—whether a priest, an officer, a judge, a scholar, or banker—was simply a citizen. Wherever Bölöni Farkas looked, he was delightfully amazed. He commented on the freedom of the press and noted that, while Transylvania and New York State had roughly equal populations, Transylvania had only one newspaper, while 237 newspapers were being published in New York State.

He eventually encountered luxury in Albany and Boston. Realizing that opulence contradicted his earlier praise of republican simplicity, he rationalized luxury in America by claiming that wealth there was the result of hard work and diligence and was therefore justified.

It was in Boston that he kept returning to what to him was a magnificent achievement, freedom of religion, which meant that religion was a private matter, that a state religion was non-existent, and that there was no institutionalized political role for the clergy. "What a miracle," he exclaimed, adding that "In Europe, two denominations (which co-exist in one place) are enough to poison each other's lives."

Bölöni Farkas saw that total lack of state support or control over religion in fact magnified, rather than diminished, the religious fervour of Americans. He visited a Shaker settlement and a Methodist camp meeting, and, although he found the latter strange, he came away from it with respect for the diversity of religious expression in the United States.

Bölöni Farkas concluded that this tolerance was the foundation of America's existence. "People come here from everywhere," he wrote, "and for all these people to live together in unity appears impossible. Yet, the opposite is true. America is blossoming, because people have equal rights here and laws protect them all in a uniform fashion."

He translated and included in his book the full texts of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of New Hampshire. "This document," as referred to the Declaration of Independence, "carries as much magic now as it did when it was proclaimed for the first time." When he and Count Béldi visited Washington, they just walked into the White House to meet with President Andrew Jackson, who happened to be busy. So the Hungarian guests were invited to return the next day. They did so and had a pleasant conversation with the President. "His simplicity and kindness," wrote Bölöni Farkas, "made me forget that we were speaking to the first official of 13 million people, who was elected not because of his lineage, wealth, or good luck, but because of his own merits." Bölöni Farkas was convinced that, when a public office was vacant, American citizens would elect the best candidate to fill that slot.

He was also impressed by America's canal system, industrial organization, and prison reforms. When visiting a jail in Charlestown, Massachusetts, he encountered another European visitor, Alexis de Tocqueville.

Bölöni Farkas did not like everything he saw. He was critical of the treatment of native Americans and felt revulsion over slavery. But his tremendous faith in the democratic potential of the United States made him believe that,"In a short time, slavery will disappear."¹⁰

It would be easy to laugh about Bölöni Farkas's naivety. Indeed, his book lacks the sophistication and critical insights of de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. The difference can be partially explained by their disparate upbringings—a French aristocrat with an excellent education as compared with a largely self-taught, poor government clerk.

But what counts more, in my opinion, is the fact that Bölöni Farkas came from a

backward province of a feudal country. To him, almost everything American must have appeared as the miraculous mirror image of all the miseries, injustices, and indignities that he had experienced first-hand in his homeland. In the words of Theodore and Helene Schoenmann, "Travel in America was a hymn to American democracy, and it was destined to become a political timebomb."

And a timebomb it was. László Kőváry was a contemporary of Bölöni Farkas, who described in extravagant terms—perhaps with some romantic hyperbole—the impact of the publication of Bölöni Farkas' book. "It was like lightning and thunder, shaking peoples' bones to their marrow. Men and women, old and young, anybody who could read was burning with a desire to read it." Széchenyi was most enthusiastic. "Thank God," he said, "that this book appeared in print; its value for the nation is inestimable."

Bölöni Farkas's friend and fellow Transylvanian, Baron Miklós Wesselényi, was even more effusive. "Fate was really kind to you," he told the author, "because you were able to see the young giant of human rights and liberty. You brought fresh air back to us, and this pure fresh air will contribute to the cause of freedom and to making everybody born in this country a citizen imbued with inalienable rights." Travel in North America came to inspire and teach a whole generation of young Hungarians.

How did a book with such an inflammatory text get by the censor? Luckily, as in all authoritarian regimes, the wheels of bureaucracy turned slowly and clumsily in Hungary. The book had gone through two editions before the authorities woke up to its menace. The censor was suddenly fired, and the book banned. It was too late, and Bölöni Farkas rejoiced. "My book is banned. What an honour!," he wrote in his diary on September 23, 1835. 13

To rub salt into official wounds, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences elected Bölöni Farkas an associate member and awarded his book 200 gold forints. Embarrassed by his election, Bölöni Farkas returned the money, saying that "We have not progressed very far when in one year my work is acclaimed the best. I would be ashamed to tell an Englishman or an American that no better book than mine has appeared here during the entire year." 14

Bölöni Farkas was all too modest, and perhaps a psychologist would say that he was incapable of living with success. His last few years in Kolozsvár were sad, and he died in 1842, at the age of 47.

After the publication of *Travel in North America*, the interest of Hungarians in the United States skyrocketed. This was true in Pozsony, where the National Diet was in session between 1832 and 1836. According to the historian Mihály Horváth, the popular delegate János Balogh taught his seven-year-old son the following political catechism:

Question: Who was the first person?

Answer: Washington.

Question: What is the best form of government?

Answer: A republic.

Question: Who are you?

Answer: I am a Democrat. 15

After many years of only infrequent references to the Unite States in Hungary, a plethora of books, pamphlets, and articles about the new country, most of them quite laudatory, began to appear in the wake of Bölöni Farkas' book. At times, these publications made ridiculous claims. For example, the literary critic Ferenc Toldy claimed in an article that in America, "where there are three houses, there is a school." Other publications were closer to the mark. Lajos Kuthy hailed the lack of feudal

bonds and titles, for example, while István Bocsor spoke of a young America possessing enormous latent strength.¹⁶

Ágoston Haraszthy, a rich landowner, visited the United States in 1840, and published a book four years later about his experiences. His work concerned American society less than economics, with an emphasis on farming. "The American is always on the go," he wrote, "making full use of every minute. There are no idle people in America, as there are in Hungary." 17

While emphasizing the impact of Bölöni Farkas's book on the Hungarian reading public, I should also mention De Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. It was serialized in the late 1830s and published in Hungarian translation in 1841.

The joint impact of these two books was probably strongest in the area of prison reform. Hungarian reformers sensed that, of all the manifestations of modernity which Bölöni Farkas and De Tocqueville observed in the United States, the one which they had some chance of achieving was the reform of the prison system.

"Back home," Bölöni Farkas had stated in his book, "prisons are the garbage dumps of rotten morality." To change this was a question of human rights, one of the central aims that Hungarian reformers were promoting. At the same time, this was a humanitarian issue which could appeal to conservatives as well.

Hungarian reformers based their observations about the American system primarily on the Massachusetts penal code and Edward Livingstone's Louisiana Codex. According to these reformers, the underlying principles of these codes were a rejection of corporal punishment and the death penalty, as well as an emphasis on prevention and rehabilitation, rather than revenge. The noblest and best educated reformers—including Ferenc Deák, József

Eötvös, Móricz Lukács, Ferenc Pulszky, László Szalay, and Bertalan Szemere—worked on modernizing the Hungarian penal code. Concrete examples from the United States, culled in large measure from the books by Bölöni Farkas and De Tocqueville, played a critical role in their deliberations.

Conservative aversion toward America was expressed less frequently, perhaps because conservatives realized the futility of minimizing an obvious success story. At the 1832–1836 National Diet, Count Károly De La Motte, a conservative delegate, contemptuously remarked that "America is still too young, and, therefore, it cannot serve as an example to us." Not all the conservative criticism lacked foundation. József Orosz, poking holes in the muchtouted picture of American equality, asked whether anyone had asked poor American workers about it.¹⁹

During the 1840s, conservative papers like *Világ* made fun of American manners. To be more accurate, these papers claimed that American manners did not exist, because Americans were crude hicks, chewing tobacco, spitting in public, fighting almost everywhere with their fists, and putting their feet on the table. Ferenc Kállay, in his articles on America in the ultraconservative *Nemzeti Újság*, listed the principal character traits of Americans as greed, vanity, jealousy, and an emphasis on quantity over quality.²⁰

There were even short stories and plays written about life in America. A short story by Imre Burián was published in Életképek in 1845, using a theme which was to become familiar not only in Hungary but also in every country that has furnished immigrants to the United States. In Burián's story, a good-for-nothing young playboy gets himself into debt, because he is counting on deliverance by his rich American uncle—that is, an older Hun-

garian gentleman who had immigrated earlier to the United Sates. All American uncles, by definition, have been rich, but by no means all, and certainly not the one in Burián's story, have come to the rescue of their all-too-eager European nephews and nieces.²¹

In the ultraconservative István Eliássy's play, *Hungarians in North America*, published in 1845, the United States was portrayed in the most unfavourable light as a country of crooks and fools. This play failed miserably, and one reviewer called it a joke.²²

In fact, the repudiation of the United States by Hungarian conservatives was a minority phenomenon. By the 1840s, the leaders of the conservatives were trying to become more flexible and politically more astute, and so they mostly recoiled from criticizing America.

Among many points which fostered America's popularity during the Hungarian Age of Reform, two things should be highlighted. One was the frequent reference to the youth of the United States. As we have seen, the debit side of youth—that is, immaturity—was picked up by the conservatives. However, this was a losing argument in Hungary, where enthusiastic young reformers constituted the source and vital center for positive changes.

Secondly, the vast panorama of the American scene allowed each reformer to choose what he liked and to frame it in his vocabulary according to his own preferences. For instance, Széchenyi, the moderate reformer and believer in a constitutional monarchy, ignored "republican theories," as he called them, and pictured the American approach to progress as sober and rational, rather than emotional. Széchenyi also emphasized the importance of linguistic, religious, and cultural tolerance in the United States. On the other hand, the radical liberal Lajos Kossuth

liked the fact that English was the dominant language in the United States. Citing this example, he mistakenly found support in it for his determination to make Hungarian the dominant language in multiethnic Hungary.²³

When Hungary embarked on its revolution on March 15, 1848, American interest in Hungary was virtually non-existent. This changed when, against all odds, Hungarian soldiers kept defeating the much better equipped Austrian armies in the spring of 1849 and when, on April 14, the Hungarian National Assembly dethroned the Habsburg dynasty and declared Hungary's independence.

Suddenly, American interest perked up. Americans like an underdog. Of all European nations which had experienced revolutions in 1848, only the Hungarians and the Italians in Rome and Venice were still engaged in wars of liberation by the spring of 1849.

In addition, the parallels between the American colonies fighting for independence and the Hungarians doing the same were too close to ignore. The Hungarian Declaration of Independence was so similar to its American counterpart that Kossuth was later charged with plagiarism by his opponents.

Kossuth, as Head of State, sent a copy to President Zachary Taylor, clearly hoping for moral support. Indeed, the American President sent an envoy to Hungary, but, by the time the American diplomat Ambrose Dudley Mann left Paris, the Hungarians had surrendered at Világos to the Russian army, which had come to the rescue of the Austrians. Sending Dudley Mann had been futile, but it was a gesture—more than either England and France had done, which was nothing.

As Aladár Urbán pointed out, President Taylor's attitude, aided by an outburst of public sympathy for Hungary, paved the way toward Kossuth's triumphal tour of the United States during the early 1850s, a tour comparable only to that of the Marquis de Lafayette several decades earlier.²⁴

No two historical periods, separated from each other by 150–200 years, are truly alike. However, if we were to discuss current Hungarian–American relations, analogies related to the past abound. First of all, Hungary has only recently emerged from decades of foreign domination. These decades were also marked by authoritarian rule, which, in all of its forms, whether it was a hard or a softer dictatorship, represented the antithesis to Hungary's best liberal traditions and to the dominant ethos of the 1840s

I still remember the darkest days of oppression during the Rákos era of the early 1950s. The official propaganda barrage portrayed the United States as the archvillain, as a power-hungry, greedy, imperialist super-power, a mean and cruel tyranny. I do not remember any person in my large circle of friends and acquaintances who believed one single word of this rubbish.

In our 1956 Revolution, just as in 1848, Hungarians wanted freedom and democracy in ways we knew that Americans had them. Although Radio Free Europe had irresponsibly raised false hopes of American support with ambiguous statements, it turned out that no concrete steps were taken to aid the Revolution. After the Revolution was crushed by Soviet tanks, close to two hundred thousand Hungarians arrived in Austria as refugees.

Almost all of them wanted to come to the United States, whatever their disappointment in American inaction. To those who made it, the generosity of the United States will never be forgotten. I did not have a penny in my pocket, spoke no English, and had no relatives anywhere in America. But a U.S. military transport

plane brought me across the Atlantic Ocean, and the U.S. Government accepted responsibility for my room and board until other suitable arrangements could be found. During my first week in this country, I obtained a Social Security number and the 1957 equivalent of a green card, which not only allowed me to work, but also was a prelude to citizenship five years later.

When the Soviet Bloc collapsed, American sympathy for a reborn Eastern Europe was overwhelming. Many expected another Marshall Plan and were disappointed that none was forthcoming. I found an interesting take on this issue in a booklet entitled *Investors in Hungary Summit*, a collection of speeches made in Budapest in June, 1997, when government officials and major investors gathered together.

One of the speakers at this meeting was Donald Blinken, the then current American Ambassador to Hungary. "With the 50th anniversary of the Marshall Plan this month," he said, "it is interesting to compare the results Western Europe enjoyed from the Marshall Plan in the 1940s

and '50s with Hungary's experience in the 1990s. Does Hungary need a Marshall Plan? The answer clearly is that it has had a Marshall Plan and that Marshall Plan has been called private investment. Hungary has enjoyed an enormous inflow of private capital, which has made a tremendous difference for the country. Hungary would not have been ready for the invitation to NATO this July in Madrid had it not got its economic house in order, and this would not have been possible without private foreign investment."25

And, indeed, U.S. investment in Hungary to date amounts to approximately six billion dollars, the second largest investment after that of Germany. These and other investments are critical for Hungary to become an economically strong country and, in time, a full-fledged member of both NATO and the European Union.

The geographical distance between Hungary and the United States will never diminish, but their mutuality of interest is already shortening this distance in many other ways. Sándor Bölöni Farkas would be delighted over this state of affairs.

NOTES

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- 2 Lajos Hatvany: *Egy székely nemes, aki felfedezte a demokráciát* (A Székely Nobleman Who Discovered Democracy), Budapest, Káldor, 1934, p. 61.
- 3 Bertalan Szemere: *Utazás külföldön* (Travel Abroad). Budapest, Helikon, n.d.), p. 9.
- 4 Árpád Kadarkay in his introduction to Sándor Bölöni. Farkas's *Journey in North America*, 1831, translated and edited by Árpád Kadarkay. Santa Barbara, ABC-Clio, Inc., 1978, p. 71.

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- 6 Ibid., pp. 95, 85.
- 7 George Barany: Stephen Széchenyi and the Awakening of Hungarian Nationalism, 1791–1841. Princeton University Press, 1968, p. 86.
- 8 István Gál: "Széchenyi's Picture of America", *The New Hungarian Quarterly* Vol.16, No. 60 (1975), p. 151.
- 9 Barany, op. cit., pp. 176, 106.
- 10 Sándor Bölöni Farkas, *Utazás Észak-Amerikában* (Travel in North America). Kolozs-

- vár, Ifjabb Tilsch János, 1835, pp. 28, 31, 39, 42, 48. 59–60, 215–218, 70–78, 63, 92–98, 275–278, 223, 258.
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- 12 Quoted in Hatvany, op. cit., p. 31; quoted in Kadarkay, op. cit., p. 43; quoted in Závodszky, op. cit., p. 147.
- 13 Quoted in Samu Benkő, ed., Sándor Bölöni Farkas, *Utazás Észak-Amerikában* (Travel in North America). Bucharest, Irodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1966, p. 40.
- 14 Quoted in Kadarkay, op. cit., p. 43.
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- 16 Ferenc Toldy: "A Szellemi és erkölcsi polgárosodás állapota az Észak-amerikai Egyesült Országokban," (The Condition of Intellectual and Moral Development in the United States of America), *Tudománytár* 3 (1834), p. 137; Aladár Urbán, "Attempts at Reform and the Lessons of History. Constitutional Models and the Beginnings of Political Journalism in Feudal Hungary, 1841–1842," Etudes Historiques Hongroises

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- 20 Iván Zoltán Dénes: Közüggyé emelt kiváltságérzés. A magyar konzervatívok szerepe és értékvilága az 1840-es években (The Preservation of Privileges Elevated into a Public Affair. The Role and Value System of Hungarian Conservatives in the 1840s). Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989, p. 92.
- 21 Závodszky, op. cit., p. 243.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid., pp. 149, 193; Urbán, op. cit., p. 485.
- 24 Aladár Urbán: "A Lesson from the Old Continent. The Image of America in the Hungarian Revolution of 1848/1849", *The New Hungarian Quarterly* Vol.17, No. 63 (1976), p. 96.
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János Tischler

Kádár and the Polish Crisis 1980–1981

The first news of the Polish crisis of 1980-81 reached Hungary just as the Kádár regime had gone past its prime and started on a steady decline, which was to last nearly ten years and end in its collapse. In the summer of 1979, the Hungarian government was forced into a second major price hike after the one that had been imposed in 1974-75 —to be followed by several others; the result was a rise in food prices of nearly 20 per cent, as against a 9 per cent growth in annual wages. Although the price increases did not provoke strikes or any other protests, they nevertheless shocked the public, signalling that the rise in standards of living had come to an end, and that the best that could be hoped for was to maintain the current level. The latest international oil price explosion forced the government to take measures to limit oil imports and to

borrow more abroad; the result was that the country's gross foreign debt, standing at \$11.5 million in 1980, grew to an alarming \$19.5 million by 1985.

János Kádár, who had come to power by the grace of Moscow as a result of the brutal suppression of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, had, since 1960, somewhat changed his spots. He showed respect for private life, allowing greater personal freedom within the confines of the system and, most importantly, he guaranteed a continuous and steady rise in living standards. After 1979, the Kádár-leadership gave overriding priority to the latter. With accumulation at a minimum, foreign credits were used to keep consumer prices artificially low and to subsidize inefficient large factories; this strategy, at the price of generating a deficit, was able to secure full employment. Nevertheless, a growing share of public expenditure had to be used to service earlier loans.

In conjunction with the failure of extensive growth, an opposition which rejected the system outright began to emerge. In October 1979, members of this opposition sent a letter to János Kádár, First Secretary of the HSWP's Central Committee, and to Pál Losonczi, the Chairman of the country's Presidium, signed by 254 persons. This letter protested against the prosecution of Charta 77's leaders (includ-

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a historian, is on the staff of the Institute for the Research of the 1956 Revolution. He has specialized in Polish-Hungarian relations, publishing a book on the Polish documents of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution in both Warsaw (1995) and Budapest (1996). ing Vaclav Hável) and requested—naturally, to no avail—that the Hungarian leaders raise the issue with their comrades in Czechoslovakia. In December of the same year, SZETA was founded more or less openly. This organization, operating on only a modest scale, was set up to support the poor in Hungary. This irritated the party leadership beyond belief, contradicting as it did the dogma that there can be no misery under socialism.

All the same, Kádár was firmly in power, challenged by practically no one and, indeed, enjoying a rather broadly-based popular support. The 12th Congress of the HSWP was held in March 1980, with the re-elected ageing leadership however only promising a continuation of existing policies. For Kádár and his associates were only capable of making adjustments, not fundamental political changes, albeit, by the early 1980s, the system was in such a deep crisis that only determined action and genuine reforms could have helped. The guidelines of the 6th Five-Year Plan were so inappropriate that, within eight months, essential modifications had to be introduced. At that time the party leadership was mostly made up of unimaginative apparatchiks, who dreaded change and kept deferring positive action. When they finally decided to take the plunge, they invariably acted in panic.

János Kádár publicly maintained all along that the HSWP (Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party) must show solidarity with the Polish Communists, promising them his full support both economically and politically, but he believed from the start that it was the Polish United Workers' Party's (PUWP) job to deal with the Polish crisis, preferably by finding a political solution, "in the socialist manner". By that he meant that Poland would continue to be a Socialist country and a member of the Soviet

bloc, the Warsaw Pact and Comecon. Kádár considered the use of "administrative methods" (i.e. military force) to be admissible only when the last hope for a peaceful solution had gone, or if Communist rule itself was challenged. Such a challenge would have been addressed to the entire Socialist bloc, putting his own power at home in jeopardy. Were that the case, however, the solution of the crisis should be by domestic forces only: the state security, the army and police. He envisaged the possibility of Soviet intervention only as a last resort, but even then "consolidation"—in other words, the "solution of all the political and social problems"-should be left to the Polish Communists, in much the same way as he and his comrades had carried it out after 1956.1 Kádár knew from experience how difficult-or how much more difficultthis was for someone who had been installed in power by Soviet tanks, against the will of his own people.

The HSWP, unlike other Socialist-bloc countries which relentlessly attacked the PUWP and its leaders for their "opportunism", passivity and continuous retreat, tried to support their Polish comrades by refraining from criticizing the Polish leadership, either in public or through "party channels".2 (The only exception to this rule was a letter sent to the PUWP's Central Committee by the HSWP's Central Committee with János Kádár's signature; this was, however, made necessary by a concrete event, a congress of the trade union Solidarity.) When Leonid Brezhnev phoned the Hungarian party leader at the beginning of the Polish crisis, Kádár explained to him that the best way to handle the situation, in the HSWP's view, was to refrain from "interfering from the outside". Kádár argued that in a rapidly changing scenario such as in Poland, where "various people emerge from within the Polish party leadership as well as from outside the party," it would be embarrassing for both sides if the Hungarian leadership condemned or supported somebody, while the Polish leadership formed an opposing view.³ When all was said and done, Kádár considered the Polish crisis a "family problem", which should only concern the Soviet-bloc countries, and he consistently represented this view whenever he talked to anyone from the West.⁴

Kádár saw the causes of the Polish crisis above all in the leadership's failure to re-organize agriculture on the Socialist pattern; in the over-ambitious rate of economic development; and in other grave mistakes committed by the leadership of the PUWP.5 Like other party leaders, Kádár, too, refused to admit (and of course could not afford to admit) that all these were in fact evidence of a general crisis in the system, inherent in its nature. Applying the 1956 pattern in his analysis of the situation, he divided Polish developments into stages. He thought that although the strikes had been sparked off by the justified grievances of the workers, forces hostile to Socialism, agitators from home and abroad, had hijacked events. These were the forces that persuaded the workers to establish the Solidarity movement, under whose guise they in fact strove to eliminate the Communist system, manipulating the honest but misguided masses. By this reasoning the absurdity of the need to protect "working-class power" from the workers themselves could be explained.

In analyzing the Polish example, the First Secretary was also able to draw some new conclusions, including the lesson that the internal and external enemies of the Socialist order had seemed to have learned more from the events of 1956 in Hungary, and of 1968 in Czechoslovakia, than had the ruling Communist parties. As obvious proof he observed that the opposition to

the establishment in Poland agreed "not to touch the fundamentals of Socialism, not to challenge the leading role of the party, and not to question their country's membership in its system of alliances, the Warsaw Pact." His final conclusion was that the enemies of Socialism could still count on considerable reserves, and that it would prove increasingly difficult to fight them.6

On the domestic front, Polish developments made life both easier and more difficult for the Hungarian leadership. They could boast how much better life was in Hungary than in Poland, with all the unrest and shortages of food, services and goods there. They could take pride in the political wisdom of Kádár, which the HSWP's leaders invariably did in their declarations, as did the media. In addition to the impending 25th anniversary of the 1956 "counter-revolution", it was the Polish issue that offered Kádár a good opportunity to draw a positive balance of the HSWP's quarter-of-a-century track record. He could point out that all those mistakes that the Polish leaders had repeatedly committed over the years, he and his comrades had been able to avoid. Indeed, after 1956, the Hungarian leadership was sensible enough to realize that those nonessential privileges and pressures—special shops for party functionaries and the daily obligatory praise of the leaders; the blatant exploitation of power and the hurrah-optimism wholly unfounded and plainly out of keeping with the realities of the economy-irritated people far more than did long-term geopolitical realities (the Soviet army's presence in Hungary or Warsaw Pact membership, for example). Having learned from the mistakes committed immediately before the 1956 Revolution, the leadership established the appropriate organizations—trade unions, Communist Youth Organization, Patriotic People's Front—to mediate between the masses

and the party leadership, and this came to be known as socialist democracy. The HSWP's leadership never tried to set themselves up on Olympian heights, nor was there any attempt to build up a personality cult around Kádár. Some kind of a rapport did exist between the single ruling party and society—though a far cry from "trust", the word mentioned in such affectionate tones in party circles. And when it came to the internal affairs of the HSWP itself, the leadership was able to avoid those pitfalls that eventually came to almost completely paralyse the PUWP during and after the strikes of June and August, 1980. In Hungary the policy whereby the resolutions adopted by the Party's top organizations should be presented as unanimous to the outside world. was consistently carried through, rather than merely preached. Similarly, the Party made sure that the idea of "democratic centralism", in other words the incontrovertible execution at the lower levels of the policies formulated at the top, be strictly observed. All this required, however, the absolute authority of János Kádár, who was able to make himself accepted both at home and abroad.

On the debit side, the Polish developments caused great anxiety, within the HSWP's leadership, for they demonstrated a functional disorder within the Socialist camp, which might challenge the domestic politics of the other countries within the bloc. Despite all this, in his address to Parliament in September 1980, repeated in a speech to the Central Committee on October 16, János Kádár declared that the HSWP would not toughen its policies on account of the Polish events: "We have a good deal of valuable experience, which has enabled us to change the practice in almost every area of social life. It is worth bringing up this experience, in its proper course, manner and measure, because it

has gained a new timeliness. We set great store on these political achievements. And they even lend a new timeliness to these practices. These achievements, objectives and results, which we have attained in politics and in the life of society, have to be maintained."7 Nevertheless, the Hungarian party leaders were extremely concerned because of the Polish crisis, even though they professed the contrary.8 The Political Committee of the HSWP was of the opinion that the reason why the Polish example had no appeal to people in Hungary was that Hungarians had attained a respectable level of prosperity, which they wanted to protect, and therefore they had something to lose, should any unrest on the Polish scale develop here. Nevertheless, the party leaders were aware that "there are people in [Hungarian] society not too many-who sympathize with Solidarity, and who would like to see the Polish example spread to Hungary."9 For this reason they thought it necessary to warn the public; in early spring 1981, Kádár repeatedly declared—this time at the Congress of the Patriotic People's Front—that they would defend the achievements of socialism in Hungary against everything and everybody. 10 On a different occasion he told the public that "in this tense situation we should treasure and defend our achievements all the more; and as to those who want to agitate and stir up trouble, we must make clear to them that these are the achievements of the people, and that we will allow no one to touch them."11 In connection with the price rises, which became increasingly frequent in Hungary at the time, great care was taken not to provoke reactions similar to those in Poland. In early 1981, shortly after the acrimonious confrontation that had developed between the Polish authorities and Solidarity over the issue of Saturdays off, the five-day working week was introduced in Hungary

too, and it was generally believed was done in order as to prevent people from demanding it.

A forceful campaign took place in Hungary against both Solidarity and the strikes led by it, claiming that the very existence of a free, self-governed and independent trade union made working-class power a contradiction in itself, while strikes were actually jeopardizing the standard of living and the achievements of socialism. After the summer of 1981, this propaganda grew into a general anti-Polish campaign, suggesting that Poles in general were good-for-nothing freeloaders, who hated to work. The Hungarian media successfully exploited the fact that, after a period of stagnation, Hungarian living standards were slowly beginning to drop and, as news of strikes in Poland kept coming in all the time, this was to lead some people-in fact a minority-to believe that there was some connection between the two. Things were said, such as "What is the Polish situation going to cost us, Hungarians?";12 "The Poles expect to live off the other Socialist countries!";13 "It is hard work, not strikes, that will improve living and working conditions";14 "It is absurd to stop working and to expect greater handouts, or to keep going on strikes while people in the other Socialist countries work". 15

In expressing views like this, the Hungarian media played a major part by consistently misinforming the Hungarian public about the true causes of the Polish crisis. The media suggested that it was not the catastrophic policies of the previous years that brought on the strikes in the Summer of 1980, but the reverse: Solidarity was to blame for the shortages, because the trade union, guided by its own selfish motives and "following the orders of the subversive forces of Imperialism", organized strikes in quick succession. What the mass media suggested to the Hungarian

public was that they should be content with what they had, as their desire for freedom would only lead to chaos and to a drastic deterioration of their living standards. Party propaganda was quick to seize every opportunity to blacken the Poles by disseminating false and malicious stereotypes about them.

In September 1980 the Hungarian party leadership was faced with the dilemma of how to present the Polish events in the Hungarian media. At its September 2 session, the Political Committee of the HSWP adopted the view that "agitation and propaganda, the newspapers, radio and television should cover Polish developments as they have done before". 16 This meant continuing the practice whereby the Hungarian news media mostly published articles received from the Polish news agencies, after the necessary censoring and-in accordance with the instructions of the party leadership—refrained from commenting on the events. (In general, it was the customary practice between socialist countries that until the official news agency of the socialist country concerned released information on a domestic event, that news did not exist). Later on this guideline was modified to the extent that the Hungarian media could cover Polish events "in a balanced and calm tone, objectively, and expressing solidarity with the Polish leadership rather than making their situation more difficult", while the HSWP exploited "the opportunities to make public statements, using the newspapers, radio and television as platforms to support the positive forces" in Poland. 17 They even gave instructions to the Hungarian media on the manner of presentation: "the coverage of the Polish developments must not suggest a campaign; the events should be discussed among the general issues of domestic and foreign politics."18 Finally, the Political Committee resolution of September 2, 1980, emphasized that "the events should be used to focus the public's attention even more on our domestic tasks, the improvement of our work, the correction of our mistakes, and the carrying out of the resolutions of the 12th Congress." They also thought it necessary to give detailed information to party members, and "to improve relations with the universities; leading comrades should visit as many [universities] as possible!" The de-politicization and the passivity of Hungarians, which was one of the pillars of the Kádár regime, worked perfectly in this case, too.

Despite her own growing problems, Hungary rushed to the aid of Poland, which was in deep economic trouble. The Polish government explicitly asked for assistance in writing, first in early Autumn, 1980, and again after December 13, 1981, when General Jaruzelski made a further appeal. In late 1980, Hungary sent special aid to Warsaw to the value of 13.5 million roubles (the official rate of exchange at the time was \$1 to 1.8 roubles); in addition, the Hungarian government re-scheduled the repayment of Poland's debts, which reached 58.5 million roubles at the end of the year. Following the introduction of martial law, Hungary once again rapidly supplied economic aid to Poland, providing markets with food and basic materials (pork, cooking fat, sunflower oil, etc.) to the value of \$35 million, as well as sending in an extra delivery worth 25 million roubles above its contracted obligations.20

In the course of 1980 and 1981, three topranking Polish politicians visited Budapest to report on the Polish situation and to listen to the advice of the Hungarian comrades. The first was Emil Wojtaszek, alternate member of the Political Committee and Secretary of the Central Committee, who arrived in September 1980; he was followed in November by another Central Committee Secretary, Tadeusz Grabski; last to arrive was Stanislaw Kania, First Secretary of the PUWP's Central Committee, who came in March 1981. After August 1980, the Polish leadership looked upon Hungary as the blueprint they wanted to copy. Kania and his colleagues, who would have liked to adapt elements of Kádár's policy to Polish conditions-naturally without any hope of success, as they had neither the time nor the patience to stick to a course of effective actions—listened to the views of the First Secretary of the HSWP's Central Committee very attentively. Kádár was genuinely respected in Poland, and the PUWP tried to exploit the political asset of his name-which, however, was just then beginning to lose its value, slowly at first and then more rapidly. Both Kania and, immediately after December 13, 1981, Jaruzelski, asked for, and were given, a detailed account of the HSWP's "consolidation" programme in Hungary after November 4, 1956. The Polish leadership also tried to turn to good account the memories of the Soviet military intervention of 1956 in Hungary, still vividly remembered in Poland. In October 1981 they decided to screen a Hungarian documentary film on the "1956 counter-revolution" under the title "This Is How It Happened", with the aim of intimidat-ing the Poles by recalling the "Hungarian scenario".

While the PUWP wanted some general advice, the Hungarians always emphasized—bearing in mind the lessons of the 1950s, when a perfect copy of the Soviet system had been introduced in Hungary—that mere copying of a model was useless, specific local features had to be taken into account at all times and for this reason they declined the invitation to give advice, and only offered to share their experience.²¹ On every occasion, the Hungarian leaders emphasized to their Polish guests

the importance of drawing up a concise and clearly-worded programme, one that the PUWP's members could rally to and the broad masses desirous of "order and peace"-the ordinary sympathizers of socialism-could support. At the same time, unity within the party leadership must be achieved, and that would eventually filter through to the party itself. "The state of society mirrors the state of the party. Once there is unity in the party, it can also be achieved in society. In our own experience, a resolution is not possible without a committed and united leadership. A large party membership is no guarantee of quality. Cutting back on quantity might produce a force many times more effective," Károly Németh, a member of the HSWP Political Committee told Grabski in November 1980.22 Non-party members must not be allowed to interfere in the PUWP's internal affairs; of similar importance was the need for the Polish party to carry out an accurate and thorough analysis of the events. This was up to the Polish Communists, and the business of drawing the right conclusions was theirs, too; "it is very difficult to give intelligent advice from the sidelines".23 Kádár also told Wojtaszek that "it is not enough to promise workers beautiful things in the future; they have to get something today. They must feel that socialism is not only for the future, but that it already works for them today."24

A consultation of top party and government officials of the Warsaw Pact countries was held in Moscow on December 5, 1980—following the Budapest visits of the two Polish Central Committee secretaries, but preceding Kania's. The discussion of the Polish situation was the single item on the agenda. The Hungarian delegation was led by János Kádár, whose speech was markedly different from those of the hard-liners, Honecker, Zhivkov and Husak. These three strongly advocated the estab-

lishment of order by force, as opposed to Kádár who repeatedly argued for a political solution. He reiterated that the Polish Communists themselves had to resolve the crisis in a socialist way. The condition for this was that the party hold onto its leading position, that the socialist constitutional establishment be preserved, and that the people's democracy be maintained, in which the control of the mass media, as an integral part of political power, played an important role. He warned the Polish comrades to distance themselves from their earlier mistakes, without focusing, however, too much attention on a search for scapegoats. In connection with this he pointed out that "it was only in 1962 that we established the responsibility" of Mátyás Rákosi and his associates, i.e. when they were expelled from the HSWP. He also emphasized that the platform from which the PUWP should launch its campaign must be chosen so as to project its resolve. Therefore, the Polish party should make it clear that it would "continue its efforts to avoid bloodshed, but there were certain things which it was prepared to defend to the last." He strongly believed that "at least half of the population would rally to the support of a clear and straightforward political line," not only the Communists but also "all the progressive and patriotic forces, even including many of the church-goers." Finally, Kádár recalled the words of encouragement of the Soviet comrades during November 1956 (at a time when he could rely only on Soviet military forces and the law enforcement agencies of the Rákosi regime), "who said to the Hungarian Communists that they were stronger than they think" and "the same applies to the Polish Communists now" 25

By the time of Stanislaw Kania's visit to Budapest in March 1981, the confrontation between the authorities and Solidarity had

intensified in Poland. Correspondingly, though Kádár dutifully reiterated the earlier opinion of the HSWP and maintaining that in communicating with the masses he still believed in frank dialogue based on mutual trust, he had the following to add: "When the class enemies launch a general attack, there can be no clemency. In the fight against the class enemies the laws of humanitarianism are suspended. Mass hysteria must be checked."26 Kádár summed up the lessons of the 1956 "counterrevolution" and of the three months that followed; in comparing the developments in Hungary and in Poland and in analyzing the dissimilarities, he concluded that in Hungary "the events developed at least three stages further in 1956, and the purification was also deeper and more general, than in Poland." Finally, he advised the Polish comrades to "fight to the finish, preferably using political means but, if necessary, using any other means available to authority; the basic requirement is that Poland remain a socialist country."27

When Kádár recalled the events of twenty-five years earlier, he unconsciously drew a parallel between the Hungarian situation of 1956 and the Polish developments of 1980-81. Weighing the similarities and the dissimilarities, he tried to find analogies suggesting that the Polish leadership could rightly expect popular support, once it had made up its mind "to restore order". In this vein, he declared at the March 26, 1981 session of the Central Committee that, although the situation was bad enough both in Poland and within the PUWP, he was still confident that everything would turn out well in the end, for he continued to believe that the socialist cause had many supporters in Poland. To justify his optimism, he recalled the Budapest May Day parade of 1957 (only six months after the crushing of the Revolution), at which nearly half a million people turned up, "pledging support to both the socialist idea and our leadership and expressing their readiness to take part in the fight for social consolidation". 28 "No slogans or organization could have mobilized or gathered up a huge mass such as that which [on that day] responded to the call of our reorganized party. I am deeply convinced that in today's Poland, too, the supporters of socialism are in the majority." 29

After September 1981, Kádár adopted a much tougher and much more rigid position in relation to Polish developments. That was when Solidarity held its first congress, carrying by acclamation the motion to issue a document entitled "Message", addressed to the workers of Eastern Europe. In this they pledged support to those "who have resolved on fighting for the free trade union movement" in the hope that "our representatives would soon be able to meet in order to share their trade-union experience". "Message" threw the leadership of every single socialist country into a fit of rage. A huge, Orwellian media campaign was launched to rebuke "Solidarity's blatant attempts to interfere". Hungary was no exception. Of course, the authorities were careful not to publish the actual text of "Message"; what they did was to demand that the workers' collectives reject it unanimously, denouncing the radical and anti-Communist ringleaders of Solidarity.

It was this "Message" that prompted the HSWP's Central Committee to write the letter mentioned above, which was signed by János Kádár and was addressed to the Central Committee of the PUWP, and personally to its First Secretary. Patterned on another letter addressed to the PUWP, one that had been written in June of the same year by the Central Committee of the Soviet party and therefore establishing a rather unusual deviation from accustomed practice, this document expressed the con-

cern that the HSWP leadership felt in the wake of the Solidarity congress. The Hungarian party's main motive behind writing the letter was the determination "to direct attention to the dangers threatening both the Polish people and the entire community of socialist countries", at the same time urging the PUWP leadership to take a firmer course of action.30 After concluding that lately in Poland "it was the enemies of socialism, not its supporters, who were on the offensive, and they were bent on a head-on collision course in their attempt to seize power," the Hungarian leaders voiced their fears concerning the effects on Hungarians: "For us, too, it is now becoming increasingly difficult to answer the questions of our people, showing genuine concern as well as growing impatience, all boiling down to the question of where Poland is heading and how long the dangerous escalation of attempts and actions aiming to overturn the socialist order can continue,..." This was followed by a discussion of the concrete event that prompted the letter: "We have been especially disturbed by the atmosphere at the congress of the trade union Solidarity by the anti-Communist and anti-Soviet agitation taking place there, and by the unbridled demagogy of the ringleaders trying to mislead and to beguile the working class, who want a correction of mistakes, not the elimination of socialism. It is obvious that determined measures must be taken to counter the attack, which scorns and jeopardizes the results that the people of Poland have achieved in sweat and blood, and which raises the flag of destruction and anarchy in Poland's difficult situation, instead of striving for social reconciliation and constructive programmes. [...] In effect, Solidarity's provocative "message" addressed to the workers of the socialist countries is nothing but an attempt to transfer the same unreasonable and irresponsible demagogy to the international scene—obviously suggested by the international reaction in order to turn the peoples of socialist countries against one another." Finally, the HSWP's leadership drew the following conclusions: "Strongly upholding our earlier views, we believe that it has now become more urgent than ever that, by uniting, mobilizing and activating the Polish Communists, the Polish patriots and all the forces ready to work for a socialist resolution of the problems, the road to counter-revolution be blocked."³¹

When General Jaruzelski became First Secretary of the PUWP's Central Committee in October 1981—retaining his earlier positions as Prime Minister and Minister of Defence—Kádár welcomed this development with relief. At the session of the HSWP's Central Committee, held a few days later, he expressed his views as follows: in Poland "polarization has increased, strengthening our long-established view and position, whereby the launching of a firm, upright and calculated offensive enlisting the support of all honest men against the counter-revolution would rapidly gain momentum." 32

In any case, by autumn 1981 the Hungarian party, too, was in favour of urgent action; and when Wojciech Jaruzelski imposed martial law in Poland on December 13, 1981 (translated as a "state of emergency" in Hungarian reports), this was indeed greeted with relief and whole-hearted approval by the Hungarian leadership. The Secretariat of the HSWP was convened on the very same day, and in a two-day-long session it passed a motion to respond to General Jaruzelski's appeal by sending economic aid rapidly. The Secretariat approved of "János Kádár's telegramme, in which he had assured Comrade W. Jaruzelski of our support"; they also agreed on releasing an announcement of similar, content through the Hungarian Press Agency, the precise wording of which was to be approved by the Secretariat. They explicitly demanded that "our instruction to allow Poles working in our country to take 5 kilogrammes of meat in their luggage on their return home must be mentioned, along with our permission to spend a part of their earnings in Hungary." In addition, the Secretariat ordered that "in informing the public, the Hungarian media should rely primarily on material received from the Polish press agency."³³

On the whole, Hungarians felt a kind of relief on hearing the news that martial law had been imposed in Poland. The majority of people—or rather of those who held an opinion—thought that if law and order was established along the Vistula, life would become easier back home, too. Naturally, there were some people (mostly among the intelligentsia and university students, and also within the emerging Hungarian opposition), who, in one form or another, protested against Jaruzelski's move; there was even a relief campaign in support of the Poles and a distribution of some leaflets at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. However, the general opinion was best summed up in a "public morale report," compiled for the HSWP's Central Committee: "The public understood the need to impose martial law in Poland. Many people thought that the move was unavoidable; it was provoked by the forces of anti-socialism; the operation was carried out efficiently and at the last minute. In most people's view this should have been done months ago. Among the intelligentsia the prevailing opinion is that the action had to be delayed until the forces of the counter-revolution exposed themselves thoroughly: the timing was right from the viewpoint of foreign politics and Polish domestic politics alike. [...] In connection with the suspension of the right to assembly,

some people resented the fact that it did not apply to religious assemblies. Many of them were afraid that this would enable the counter-revolutionary elements to use religious events for their own purposes. [...] Many thought that the socialist countries, too, had to send aid to alleviate shortages in Poland: the earlier reservations surrounding the issue eased off and anti-Polish demonstrations lost ground."³⁴

On top of economic aid from Hungary, General Jaruzelski also requested that the "Hungarian comrades" supply him with information on their struggle with "the forces of counter-revolution" twenty-five years before, as well as sharing with him their experience "in the process of socialist consolidation and in the building of socialism."35 In response to this invitation, the HSWP sent a three-man delegation, headed by György Aczél, member of the Political Committee, on a three-day visit to Warsaw between December 27 and 29. 1981. Jaruzelski carefully listened to the Hungarians, who on their return mentioned in their report that "everywhere there was a tremendous and broad interest in the Hungarian experience." They also added to this, however, that "people quite often assume our hard-fought achievements as the basis, and are less keen on learning about the initial, struggle-ridden period of consolidation. They frequently announce difficult measures with reference to, but without detailed knowledge of, this experience."36 Regardless of all this, the interest in the above mentioned experiences never abated and, in view of this interest, the Political Committee of the HSWP passed a resolution on its February 16, 1982 meeting, in which they declared that "we should lend a sympathetic ear to, and comply with, the requests of those Polish press agencies and political publishers who want to make use of our documents relating to the socialist consolidation and reconstruction [of our society]." In addition, they decided that in the future the Hungarian Embassy in Warsaw "should publish public information material more frequently as well as in a larger circulation. For this purpose, the [Embassy's] public relations budget should be raised by HUF 500,000."³⁷

The attention which Jaruzelski and his I team gave to the achievements of Kádár's policies did not slacken in subsequent years. However, those official communications in which Hungary was invited to receive either some "Polish peasants and individual farmers who want to study the results and the state of Hungarian agriculture", or "a high-level Polish delegation who would like to study economic management" or the appeal by those Hungarian bishops who "should try to exert some influence on the Polish Primate Józef Glemp"38 during his visit to Hungary, became more and more anachronistic. In a personal meeting with Jaruzelski in Poland in October 1983, Kádár still gave a detailed

account of "the experience we gained from the counter-revolution of 1956 and from the subsequent political consolidation, from the socialist reconstruction of the country and from the party's international activities"; he also praised the Polish leaders "for their ability to end the counter-revolution and the anarchy on their own", thus "rendering a great service not only to Poland, but also to the entire socialist community." 39

Notwithstanding the fraternal comparing of notes, just as in Hungary in 1956, military force was required to save Communist rule in Poland in 1981; the point whether this was done by "external or internal forces" mattered very little in the end. The Kádár regime survived for thirty-three years; Jaruzelski's rule—admittedly in an entirely different international situation—lingered on for eight years. As to the oft-mentioned "Hungarian experience", this failed to save the Communist system from its final collapse in either country.

NOTES

- 1 Magyar Országos Levéltár (Hungarian National Archives) hereafter MOL, Department of MDP and MSZMP documents (MOL), 288. f. 11/4397.
- 2 As rapporteur of the issue at the December 2, 1980 session of the HSWP Central Committee, András Gyenes, Secretary of the Central Committee, used the following words to express the same policy: "In our statements we do not criticize the measures and methods thought necessary by the Polish leadership, and we use every opportunity to confirm our solidarity with them in their difficult struggle." (MOL, 288. f. 4/177.)
- 3 MOL, 2888. f. 4/174.
- 4 János Kádár expressed this view at the October 16, 1980 meeting of the HSWP's Central Committee: "The imperialists are right: they will never get Poland back, as long as the Earth is round and it is spinning around its axis; never again will there be capitalism in that country. This is a Polish problem, they must deal with it; we should use every opportunity to help them, and sometimes this

is done most intelligently by not interfering in their disputes. We must do everything in our power to avoid any outside interference with Polish problems. And we shall continue to represent this view in the future." (MOL, 288, f. 4/174.)

Actually, Kádár himself used the expression "family problem", on various occasions, including the March 26, 1981 session of the HSWP's Central Committee. (MOL, 288. f. 12/217.)

- 5 MOL, 288. f. 5/815.
- 6 MOL, 288. f. 4/174.
- 7 MOL, 288. f. 4/174.
- 8 Sándor Gáspár, a member of the Political Committee and the President of the National Council of Trade Unions, said at the Central Committee's meeting of October 16, 1980: "On account of the Polish events we have reason neither to panic nor to do anything. We have no need for this. We have to be resolved on continuing the same policies that we started 20 years ago, in this regard, too."

To this Kádár added: "The imperialists try to convince the world that all the socialist countries are nervous, they are in trouble, they are forced into action. In our own reactions, and even in our internal affairs, as well as in the public, we must demonstrate somehow that we are on a set course. That is what we have to protect: we are on a set course and we want to develop this." (MOL, 288. f. 4/174.)

The same was expressed, again by Kádár, at the meeting of the Warsaw Pact countries on December 5, 1980: "The Imperialists claim that the other socialist countries are afraid of the Polish epidemic. On the domestic front the events give us little concern; we must approach the issue more as a shared international problem." (MOL, 288. F. 5/815.)

- 9 MOL, 288. f. 12/217.
- ·10 MOL, 288. f. 12/217.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12■ MOL, 288. f. 12/217.
- 13 MOL, 288. f. 11/4471.
- 14 MOL, 288. f. 11/4389.
- 15 MOL, 288. f. 12/216.

At the October 16, 1980 session of the HSWP's Central Committee, just two months after the strikes, János Kádár summed up the Hungarian reactions to the Polish strikes as follows: "The Communists, hundreds of thousands of responsible people in the Hungarian People's Republic, are naturally anxious and worried about the future of socialism in Poland. This fact alone is of great concern to the people. And I think it is a good reaction that the Polish situation concerns us. But we must say, Comrades, that it also concerns the public at large. This state of affairs—all information points to this effect—is healthy and good. The general attitude is responsible and calm in Hungary; the population is worried about the Poles, about the future of socialism. Naturally, the politically less mature once again say things like 'I pray to God, nothing like this will

ever happen to us!', 'Now we shall have to pay for this, again! They are on strike and we shall have to bail them out!' Broadly speaking, this was the reaction. I think, this is how one can sum things up." (MOL. 288. f. 4/174.)

- 16 MOL, 288. f. 5/808.
- 17 MOL, 288. f. 4/178 and 288. f. 58/10.
- 18 MOL, 288. f. 5/808.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 MOL, 288. f. 11/4402.
- 21 At the October 16, 1980 session of the HSWP's Central Committee, Kádár explained why the HSWP was reluctant to give advice and only offered to share its experience: "It was Mao who educated me during a great debate, when he once said—and I think he was right on this occasion, as even he was right sometimes—that it was not the advisor who would be called to account, but the person who took the advice. I think this is a correct rule." (MOL, 288. f. 4/174.)
- 22 MOL, 288. f. 11/4391.
- 23 MOL, 288. f. 4/174.
- 24 MOL, 288. f. 5/809.
- 25 MOL, 288. f. 5/815.
- 26 MOL, 288. f. 11/4397.27 Ibid.
- 28 Kádár's entire analogy—with regard to 1956 is extreme over-simplification and mostly untrue.
- 29 MOL, 288. f. 12/217.
- 30 MOL, 288, f. 4/181.
- 31 MOL, 288, f. 11/4400.
- 32 MOL, 288. f. 4/181.
- 33 MOL, 288. f. 7/641.
- 34 MOL, 288. f. 11/4402. 35 ■ MOL, 288. f. 5/844.
- 36■ Ibid.
- 37■ MOL, 288. f. 5/847.
- 38 MOL, 288. f. 5/895.
- 39 Ibid.

Gabriel Ronay

The Shadow of the Vampire

Count Dracula has made it to Britain's Hall of Fame. His gruesome countenance, complete with pointed fangs and magnetic gaze, stares at you from millions of Royal Mail stamps, absolute proof of literary success in Britain. Ireland too has honoured Dracula with a festive series of commemorative stamps.

The stamps mark the centennial of the publication of Bram Stoker's eponymous Gothic bestseller. Details of the count's Transylvanian castle and a baleful moon above it are traced in ultra-violet ink in the British stamp, which glows in the dark. The Irish stamps show the Undead in the company of a wolf while sucking blood from the neck of a comely wench. The Victorian vampire has never been more popular.

Since its publication in April 1897, Stoker's bestseller has been translated

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author, broadcaster and journalist, left
Hungary in 1956 and was until recently on
the staff of The Times of London.
Among his books is The Lost King of
England—The East European Adventures
of Edward the Exile, published by Bowdell
& Brewer in Britain and the US in 1990.

into more than 50 languages and it has never been out of print. The Royal Mail's venture into the nether world of horror was probably the most restrained in the world-wide celebrations honouring this Irish writer and theatre critic. Fans across the world—from Dublin to New York—organized literary conferences, cultural symposiums and Dracula balls. Facts and fiction became conveniently blurred.

The book acquainted the entire English-speaking world with Count Dracula's attempt to conquer Britain and establish a vampire empire. Generations of readers the world over have accepted Stoker's vampire empire as gospel truth. Many more to come will, no doubt, read the story of the "Transylvanian vampire" and never question its historical accuracy.

Attracted by a baffling -a ending of the ghoul's name in the 1970s, I decided to dig deeper and ascertain whether the vampire Dracula tradition had any basis in fact or was a bogey sprung from the fertile mind of the last true writer of Gothic romances. The feminine -a ending proved to be a red herring, but a critical analysis of historical material has helped to identify the historical role-model of Dracula as Vlad Tepes, or Impaler, a 15th-century ruler of Walachia. He was guilty of incredible cruelties and horrendous deeds, but vampirism was not one of them.

As Mary Shelley said in the foreword of Frankenstein, "everything must have a beginning, to speak the Sanchean phrase, and that beginning must be linked to something that went before. Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of void but out of chaos."

Her perceptive words fit perfectly the genesis of the vampire Dracula myth. It was created out of half-digested facts and outlandish folklore traditions by Stoker. But, with an unerring eye for the Victorians' love of horror fiction, Stoker transformed the traditionally cruel Vlad the Fifth, the Impaler, into Dracula the vampire to suit popular tastes. He was helped in this by Vlad the Impaler's use of the family nickname of "dracul", a corruption of "dragon", a high decoration awarded to his father, Vlad III, by Sigismund, King of Hungary and Holy Roman Emperor. The genitive -a ending appended to his name merely denoted his being "the son of Dragon", or Dracula.

There are several extant documents which Vlad the Impaler signed as "Draguly", "Dragwlya" or "Draculia", depending on which of his scribes had penned them. In his letters to his Hungarian feudal lord and in his communications with other Western chancelleries, he always identified himself as Dracula (Dragon-a). As a result, the Hungarians and the Transylvanian Saxons knew him as Dracula, his own countrymen as Vlad the Impaler.

The fact that in Romanian "dracul" is the homonym of the Devil, and that in Romanian folklore the dracul, or devil stories and the vampire myths of the region were never combined together, did not deter Stoker from endowing his fictional hero with new characteristics.

Stoker got most of his historical and ethnographical information from the British Museum Library, but he had to find the right setting for his story of a vampire king rising from his grave. During a chance

meeting in London with Ármin Vámbéry, the noted Hungarian orientalist and traveller, Vámbéry drew his attention to Transylvania as a suitably remote and superstition-ridden region of Europe, which could serve as a backdrop for his horror story.

It was an admirable choice. Although Stoker was only vaguely aware of it, the memory of ancient legends and pagan religious practices still survived intact in the 19th century in communities huddled in the Carpathian valleys. Transylvania was a land where the miraculous was held to be as probable as the ordinary, and where the beliefs and superstitions of three peoples —Hungarians, Romanians and Saxons—intermingled.

Reflecting this mixture, Stoker's Count Dracula presents himself to his English lawyer as a noble boyar, a term applicable in the Balkans to the noblemen of old Walachia (now Romania). This would make him a Romanian. But he also claims the title of Count of Beszterce, which would make him a Magyar noble. Historically, this was one of the titles of János Hunyadi, a famous 15th-century Hungarian military commander, who was appointed Prince of Transylvania.

On other occasions the vampire count boasts of his Székely, to wit his Hungarian Transylvanian ancestry.

We Szekelys have a right to be proud, for in our veins flows the blood of many races. Here in the whirlpool of European races, the Ugric [Magyar] tribes... found the Huns whose warlike fury had swept the Earth like a living flame, till the dying peoples held that in their veins ran the blood of those old witches who, expelled from Scythia, had mated with the devils in the desert. Fools, fools! What devil or what witch was ever so great as Attila, whose blood is in these veins?

It was the Irish horror-writer's stroke of genius to trace the bloodline of his ogre

to the bubbling "Transylvanian whirlpool of races", for the benefit of readers in cold and rational Britain. But Stoker took such liberties with the facts that it required a lengthy exercise in historical and philological detective work to identify without a shadow of doubt the count's 15th-century role-model, the historical Vlad Dracula, the Impaler.

The terrifying cruelties of Vlad Dracula shocked and fascinated Renaissance Europe. Early chapbooks detailed his appalling deeds and he grew into a living legend in his own lifetime. In the last quarter of the 15th century, more Dracula incunabula were printed in Western and Central Europe than copies of the Bible.

Down the centuries, kings, tyrants, churches and ideologies exploited the Vlad Dracula tradition to political ends in societies of very different social and religious structure. In the 16th century, 22 versions of the Dracula story appeared in Russia as Orthodox monastic scribes used his actions to justify Ivan the Terrible's tyrannical rule. In the late 17th and the 18th centuries, the Catholic and Orthodox churches used the vampire myth in their struggle for the souls of the peoples of the Balkans being freed from Turkish rule.

Following the late flowering of the Dracula story in a technologically advanced country such as Britain, the vampire Dracula myth found a new class of afficionados in the 1920s and 30s, when the German practitioners of the horror genre mixed the count's blood lust with Teutonic blood rites. The Übermensch theory and the new Nazi order were based on blood myths and the mystical "life force" of human blood. The convergence of horror fiction and political literature in Nazi Germany lent the Dracula story unexpected political dimensions.

It was the magic of Hollywood that made the greatest contribution to the

rapid spread of the Dracula myth. Film-makers astutely mixed blood lust with sex, greatly extending the commercial appeal of Dracula and his ilk. There was little attempt to endow the Dracula films marketed by Hollywood and, later, by Hammer Films of London, with any intellectual content. As they were taken at face value as escapist movies, there was no ideological movement in Britain or the United States to exploit the Dracula myth.

But the US Army's Psychological Warfare Division recognized the hate appeal of the Transylvanian Ogre. During the Second World War, Dracula was linked to the traditionally cruel image of the Hun. Posters urging Americans to fight the Nazi hordes showed a Hun soldier with Dracula fangs dripping with the blood of innocents. Gls fighting in the European theatre were presented by the US Army with free copies of Stoker's Count Dracula.

The triumphant march of the Undead Transylvanian Ogre through the pages of books, cinema screens and the stage on both sides of the Atlantic was not matched by a similar progression in the East after the Second World War. Nonetheless, his impact was keenly felt. In communist Romania, Vlad the Impaler lived on, much as during the ancient regime, as a "harsh but just ruler." Stoker's Count Dracula, however, was proscribed as a capitalist nonperson. Vlad Dracula's unspeakable cruelties, the forests of impaled corpses and his delight in the prolonged agony of his innocent victims, had apparently fallen through the sieve of national consciousness.

In the years of Ceausescu's Stalinist dictatorship, he was portrayed as a dispenser of rough justice and the bane of greedy aristocrats, the ruler who brought law and order to a country crying out for justice and order. Stoker's vampire Dracula remained a figment of the decadent West's imagination and the translation of the

book stayed proscribed. But as the communist dictatorship reduced Romanians to serfs, dissidents began to draw parallels between Vlad Dracula and Nicolae Ceausescu. The thought police saw to it that such "bourgeois elements" got the just punishment they deserved for offending both Romania's 15th-century hero of the Turkish wars and its great 20th century socialist saviour, or "Conducator" (leader) as Ceausescu styled himself, aping Marshal Antonescu, his fascist predecessor.

With the toppling of Ceausescu's odious dictatorship in 1989, the heirs of the communists—and the re-emerged fascist nationalists-restored Vlad Dracula to his pedestal in Romania's Hall of Fame, Ancient horrors, dressed up as nationalist myths, filled the void left by messianic Marxism. Some Bucharest historians lost no time in taking up the cudgel, shaped appropriately in the form of a stake, in the defence of the country's national hero crudely misrepresented in the West. Four years after the formal disbanding of Ceausescu's communist thought police, Mihai Ungheanu, a Dracula apologist, devoted an entire book, tellingly entitled The Falsification of Dracula, to put me in the dock. The corpus delicti was my book, The Dracula Myth.

Somewhat flatteringly, perhaps, I was accused of being "the brains" behind a world-wide conspiracy to destroy the good name and fine reputation of Vlad Dracula. Among all the "falsifiers of Vlad Dracula", I was singled out as the most dangerous because I had pointed out in my book that "Vlad the Impaler was the prototype of the Romanian head of state." As it happens, Ceausescu was Romania's head of state when the book was published in Britain and the United States.

In mitigation of the *lèse-majesté* shown in my book to Dracula, it must be pointed out that, actually, I exonerated him of the vile charge of vampirism levelled against

him by Bram Stoker. For that the blame must be placed on Elizabeth Báthory, a late 16th-century scion of a famed Hungarian grandee family with castles in the Carpathians.

The pretty chatelaine of Csejthe Castle, the only reliably recorded vampire in the annals of Europe, used the blood of virgin girls as an elixir of youth. The vampire stories were more than simple horror tales in the neighbourhood of the Báthory estates. where the tortured bodies of many maidens were found drained of their lifeblood in the first decade of the 17th century. The roots of ancient blood healing lores were clearly present in Elizabeth Báthory's demented actions, as in those of her spiritual kinswoman, Lucrezia Borgia. But hers manifestly go back to the medieval usage of "miraculous virgin's blood", still not forgotten in the distant, isolated valleys of the Carpathians in her time.

The trails—and eventual official investigations—led to the Countess Báthory. Charges of sadistic serial murder and vampirism, however, were difficult to press against the widow of General Ferenc Nádasdy, hero of the Turkish wars and kinswoman of Gábor Báthori, Prince of Transylvania, and István Báthori, King of Poland. Nevertheless, she was arrested on 29 December, 1610, by Count György Thurzó, the Lord Palatine himself. "This blood-thirsty, blood-sucking godless woman was caught in the act at Csejthe Castle," he reported to King Matthias II and the Hungarian Diet.

Because of her exalted rank, she was not sentenced to death like her accomplices, but confined to her castle on the Lord palatine's orders. She died, defiant and unrepentant, on August 21st, 1614.

The vampire scandal shook Hungary. On royal orders, no mention was made of her crimes and the voluminous evidence of these heinous crimes remained hidden for over a century. But the "Countess Dracula", as she was posthumously nicknamed, is once again haunting Central Europe.

After the healing passage of 382 years, Irma Szádeczky-Kardos, a Hungarian judge, claims nothing less than that the "Tigress of Csejthe" was a victim of a male conspiracy and a Habsburg political frame-up. Highly empathetic with a wronged fellow woman, she has devoted her book, *The Truth of Elizabeth Báthory*, to proving her innocence.

As befits a graduate of the conspiracy theory school of history, the judge claims to espy male political and religious interest behind the tribulations of the much-maligned Elizabeth Báthory. She attacks with withering fire on a broad front. The investigation, she asserts, was hopelessly inadequate, the investigating magistrates and the judges were corrupt and both the King and the Lord Palatine had ulterior financial and political motives.

To lend weight to her sweeping claims, she applies the legal norms and investigating standards of our times to the first decade of the 17th century in war-torn Hungary. She diligently uses the tools of jurisprudence, ethnography, criminal medicine, epidemiology and psycho-graphology, to name but a few disciplines, but sadly fails to get to the heart of the case. Instead, she contends herself with the statement that "the hounding of Elizabeth Báthory was based on a scenario that was fabricated from start to finish."

The main plank of her twin-track crusade, for a crusade it is, is that the ignorant and biased law officers of the 17th century grievously misunderstood Countess Elizabeth's actions. She concedes that her serving girls were regularly punished, harshly even, "like in other aristocratic households, but that was not torture. Far from wanting to hurt those poor sick girls, Elizabeth Báthory and her staff were merely trying to heal peasant girls who had fallen ill in some epidemic." An early Florence Nightingale, forsooth. Unfortunately for the judge, the burnt, slashed and drained bodies of the countess's victims did not quite reflect contemporary medical practices.

The reports of villagers and the parents of hundreds of missing girls, as well as the confessions of her accomplices and procurers, tell a different story. The testimony of 224 witnesses¹ from all walks of life cannot simply be ignored. The court rightly heeded it.

Since the voluntary confessions of János Ficzkó, Dorottya Szentes, Ilona Jó and Kata Beniczky, as well as those under torture, together with the evidence provided by witnesses under oath, patently proved their guilt, a guilt suprassing all evil and cruelty, namely murder, wholesale butcherings and most horrendous and assorted tortures, these grave crimes must be punished with the harshest penalty provided for by the law.²

Indeed, no amount of PC reinterpretation can alter the horrendous fate of the innocent victims of the Tigress of Csejthe. When Ficzkó, her manservant, made his confession³ under oath on the way the virgins were murdered, he knew that nothing could save his life but, by telling the truth, he may save his soul.

They were murdered in the following manner: Anna Darvulia, of Sárvár, bound their arms behind their backs with rope, until

¹ National Archives, Budapest, vide Thurzó, f. 28. 2. 19

^{2 ■} Ibid: The Diet hearing of Gáspár Bajáky, castellan of Bicse, representing the complaints of 40 villagers who had testified under oath, December 1610; as well as the trial report dated January 2, 1611.

³ His confession was taken by Castellan Bajáky and Gáspár Kardos, a public notary, and recorded by the scribe Dániel Eördögh, vol. cit. National Archieves, Budapest.

their hands turned a deathly hue. The girls would then be beaten for so long that the soles of their feet and the skin on their hands hung in shreds. They were beaten without interruption until each one had taken 500 blows from the Mistress's women. They had learnt the art from Darvulia.

It happened that the noses and lips of girls were burned with an iron by her ladyship. The countess also stuck her own fingers into the mouths of the girls and ripped their mouths and tortured them in this way. If the girls had not finished their sewing by 10 pm, they were immediately tortured. In one day, they were taken away like lambs for torturing even 10 times.

This was not exactly "regular punishment like in other aristocratic households", as claimed by the author. Nor would have been the use of the "iron maiden," the mechanical torture instrument, found in her dungeons.

The countess's torture and murder sessions became more frequent and the bathing in virgins' blood began after the death of her husband. As her servant, Ficzkó, testified, "already during the lifetime of the lord, she began to torture this way, but she did not finish them off because his lordship would have taken her to task for that. But after Darvulia came to the house, the serial killing of girls began." The trial depositions and the mass of shatteringly convincing statements of a wide variety of witnesses reveal the names of the procurers of virgins and the horrendous, ritual way they were murdered. Any objective, unbiased reading of the damning material will give the lie to Szádeczky-Kardos's "discovery" of trumped up, political charges.

Even her own absurdly justified tally of Elizabeth's victims, a total of 12 girls between 1592 and 1610, would have resulted in a guilty verdict in any court of law worth its name. But the facts cannot be wished away. The lists provided by her accomplices speak for themselves.

Nevertheless, it is wroth quoting Ficzkó on the problems posed by the ever increasing number of murder victims.

Beside the ones referred to in Pozsony already, five bodies were later tossed into a pit, two into the water canal in the Csejthe garden, one of which was dragged out by the dogs, two were brought at night to Lesticze and buried in the church; these had been brought down from the castle where they had been murdered. The old women hid and buried the dead girls. Here at Csejthe, I myself helped to bury four, two at Lesticze, one at Keresztúr and one at Sárvár. The others at other places were buried with chant.

The Reverend Ponikenusz of Csejthe, who was the first to alert the country to the evil goings on in the castle, refused to bury the ever increasing number of dead girls and denounced the countess's wicked deeds from the pulpit. Following his predecessor's advice, he also investigated the ancient crypt, with the tomb of Count Kristóf Országh, under the castle church. He found nine deal boxes stuffed full with the remains of murdered girls. "The stench from the putrefying bodies is unbearable," he remarked in his report to his ecclesiastic superior, the Very Reverend Élias Lányi.

Szádeczky-Kardos's final claim that "the arrest of Elizabeth in flagrante delicto in her torture chamber at Csejthe was contrived and her guilt remains unproven" is nothing but whimsy. Her whitewash does not wash. The blood of innocent girls spilt by the crazed chatelaine of Csejthe is showing through. Undaunted by the overwhelming evidence of Elizabeth's guilt, she persists with her attempts to clear the good name of the "wronged countess", condemned, in her view, to eternal damnation by a male conspiracy. "Elizabeth Báthory was innocent," she avers. "She was neither wicked, nor a sadist and she was certainly not guilty. She was a victim, the victim of a show trial motivated by political interest as well as personal gain."

A letter written by the countess's sonin-law, Count Miklós Zrínyi, the legendary hero of the Turkish war, to the Lord Palatine proves conclusively that there is not a grain of truth in this.

After thanking Count Thurzó for his "kinsman-like goodwill", Zrínyi wrote

I have received and understood your Highness's letter, as well as the copies of His Majesty's letter to your Highness and reply to it. And although I am suffering with a heavy heart the bitter condition in which my mother [in-law] finds herself at present, nevertheless I wish, if comparing her terrible, hairraising and frightful acts to the present punishment meted out by your Highness, to choose the lesser of two evils. That is that your Highness did decree the saving of our honour and the elimination of the disgrace facing us, rather than letting come to pass what His Majesty outlined in his letter. For if that were to pass it would be better for all of us to die and, together with her kith and kin and their children, crumble to dust. We would rather choose that than hear the punishment passed [in court] for her terrible and ugly crimes.

When she is next due for day-release from Hell, the Countess Dracula will find, I suppose, the apologia of Szádeczky-Kardos amusing, especially the bit about her having been the victim of a male political conspiracy.

The rulers who once used Dracula's deeds to justify their absolutism have long since gone, together with their once mighty empires. The Russian despots and Nazi Übermenschen, who made the myth an important strand in the cultural weave of their societies, have been obliterated. The crusading Churches which found the scare engendered by the vampire myth useful in their dogmatic sparring, are now at peace. Only Dracula the Undead lives on, secure in the knowledge that he and his ilk will go on thrilling many more generations to come. Bram Stoker must bear a fair share of responsibility for Dracula's triumph.

Miklós Györffy

Here and Now?

László Darvasi: *Szerelmem, Dumumba elvtársnő* (Comrade Dumumba, My Love). Jelenkor, Pécs, 1998. 212 pp. • Sándor Tar: *Lassú teher* (Slow Freight). Magvető, Budapest, 1998. 223 pp. • Gergely Péterfy: *A B oldal* (Side B). Palatinus, Budapest, 1998. 175 pp.

In the past twenty years, the short story has been squeezed out, mostly by what postmodernists call "text", whatever that may mean. "Text" may indeed benefit from a loose interpretation, such as anything that consists of a succession of written words. In such, what remains to recall the short story, may be more than length. László Darvasi's shorter pieces are such texts; however unlike the works of a number of his contemporaries, these have short story-like elements. Darvasi has often taken narration itself as his subject, telling stories about story-telling, and these pieces, in some of their details and formal features, certainly resemble the short-story.

His new book, Comrade Dumumba, My Love, contains, according to its subtitle, "Hungarian short stories", and there are some "genuine", tight, finely wrought short stories in it. Indeed, some of these show Darvasi as one of the best contemporary writers in the classical tradition of the Hungarian short story. His talent in the genre was evident in his earlier, stylized chronicles and legends. I do not think more highly of his "short story-like" short

stories, simply because of their mode, than I do of his earlier, removed and hermetical texts, some of which have found their way into this collection too. However, I find that among the uneven, mixed and by no means only "Hungarian" pieces in the book, the "genuine" Hungarian short stories are outstanding.

In "Cornelia Vlad", Gruber, a factory worker, receives a telegram at work informing him of his wife's death in a hospital in a neighbouring country. Gruber borrows a car and brings the body home. Although not explicitly stated, the neighbouring country is clearly Romania, and the circumstances Gruber finds himself in over the border, in a hospital and in a village, are characteristically Romanian. Gruber goes to the village, because in the hospital mortuary he realizes that his wife had been wrongly identified and was buried in the village graveyard under the name of Cornelia Vlad. He makes no great fuss over all this because he knows how hopeless it is to prove his case and, perhaps, because he does not consider it too important that the body he is taking home has to be that of his wife. What is important is life, the mechanics of customs which help the individual to survive the meaningless and the unbearable. As it is, he has quite a few ridiculous and absurd difficulties to overcome. Back in Hungary,

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is our regular reviewer of new fiction.

he runs over a dog that belongs to a Gipsy colony. He barely escapes lynching and the Gypsies want the engagement ring off his wife's finger in exchange for the dog.

"Mr Stammer in Sao Paolo", (which appeared in No. 139 of The HQ) is about an elderly couple who are kept awake night after night by the crying of their new neighbours' baby. The crying stops after a time. When they greet the baby's father in the staircase, he responds that the baby has died. On seeing the old people's consternation he hastens to add he is just joking. Under the shock of this the old man starts behaving strangely. In sharp contrast to routine, he wants his wife to bring him brandy and to serve his coffee in their exquisite Zsolnay porcelain set. He unexpectedly dials a number in Sao Paolo and requests in Portuguese to speak to a Mr Stammer. A Brazilian woman, annoved at being awakened during her siesta, knows of no Mr Stammer and cannot grasp what this strange Hungarian wants from her. Eventually, when his wife goads him as they play two-handed patience, he says that they are not joking, not them. Much more is unsaid, emblematic and floating in this story than in the previous one, and the reader is confronted with the suggestive contrast between the young man's flippancy and the worn-out, sophisticated old couple's vague serious-mindedness. We never learn who Mr Stammer is-or whether he exists at all-yet we sense that the belated flare-up of playfulness is an omen of the seriousness of death.

Darvasi is a master of the "short Hungarian story", the minute piece of no more than a page or two, compact and dramatic, providing insight into tragic incidents in Hungarian life. The "Hungarian" before Darvasi's short stories, clearly a reference to Miklós Mészöly's "Magyar Novella" (Hungarian Short Story) has a complex meaning and can be stripped

down to its ethnic, political, social or cultural meaning only with difficulty. It signifies, perhaps, that in these short story-like situations and relationships, in their terse and reduced presentation by Darvasi, there is much of the absurd indifference and resignation that characterizes contemporary Hungarian life.

Darvasi has been interested for some time in the direct historical antecedents of his stories as well—the dictatorship and the revolution in the 50s. The two farcical stories which open and end the volume shower vulgar humour onto the Rákosi era. In "The Brazilians' Ball", football is depicted, through the party's cult of football in the era of the great Hungarian team of the early fifties, as a glorious heroic saga of the communist state ("After the communist takeover there was a secret ball factory at work in the country, which only produced disposable balls for Mátyás Rákosi and one or two other trusted comrades... In all these years, Comrade Rákosi would juggle balls a few thousand times, kicking one to the palely departing Moon and another, putting his boot in it, into the disc of the rising Sun..."). On the other hand, football is also the target of espionage on the part of the Brazilians, who will do anything to win the World Cup. ("A classified report is about the Brazilians' illegal entry into the country a couple of weeks before; they have played a number of practice matches at a place called Goalborough with prominent representatives of the local reactionary elements, kulaks and sons of kulaks, as well as Catholic priests capable of anything base.")

The title story with which the volume closes,"Comrade Dumumba, My Love", is, in a similarly absurd style, about a member of the communist children's organisation whose ideal is Comrade Rákosi and who is determined to grow up a true communist. He falls in love with Comrade

Dumumba (an obvious reference to Patrice Lumumba), a lady delegate of the Congolese people engaged in their heroic fight for freedom. "El Quahira" is totally different on account of its mixture of the grotesque and the lyric and the emotional, so rare in Darvasi. It is about the '56 uprising in Budapest as seen through the eyes of a Russian soldier who, along with his fellow squaddies, has been misled by his superiors and believes that they are in Cairo, defending the Arabs against the German Nazis and the British, French and Jewish imperialists. The point of the short story is the Hungarian capital and its revolution appearing as the image of a Cairo and Egypt that the Russian soldier happens to know from his secondary school days. The elaborate telescoping of the two settings, however, turns out to be artificial and phoney for that very reason, because not even grotesque exaggeration can make one believe, that someone who knows about the Nile, the pyramids, the mummies and even the mosques of Cairo, should mistake one city for the other.

I did not like "El Quahira", nor the longest piece in the volume, "The Erwin van Maal Scenario". This is more of an "American" short story, rather than "Hungarian", a mild parody of David Lynch's and Quentin Tarantino's films. As such it falls among those stories of Darvasi's that reflect variations of story-telling. Darvasi undoubtedly is, or would be, capable of producing crime thillers, dripping with ribaldry and coarseness; his efforts along these lines are, however, much less interesting than those employed in writing his "Hungarian stories".

Sándor Tar's short stories are no less genuinely Hungarian; his various collections have made him a major figure in contemporary Hungarian fiction. Selftaught, a former factory worker, he first wrote sociologically accurate stories about the hardships of the life of working people. He presented accounts of the barren, disconsolate life of people whom the official ideology proclaimed to be the celebrated winners and beneficiaries of the socialist state. Documentary in character, these stories did not gloss over the helplessness and misery of a working class described as socialist. Understandably he did not particularly endear himself with the leading lights of the party's cultural policy.

In his new short stories and especially in this latest collection, Slow Freight, the once verbose, occasionally rough, documentary presentation is replaced by a refined, terse, understated narrative style. Earlier Tar told stories about well definable groups of rural wage-earners turned city proles, and the declining peasantry, in itself limiting the validity of the stories. In Slow Freight he presents similar figures in a manner such that their fate reflects a comprehensive, valid vision. They exude the bitter, resigned experiences of the average Hungarian or even East European. Life as experienced by the protagonist of the story "Not to Die" is summed up: "We are waiting for the old people to die and the kids are waiting for us to die. What is in between is called life." Life is an unceasing, demoralising distribution of the little we have and a waiting for something that can only be gained through the death of others. This benefit, however, slowly diminishes during the waiting or, by the time it is obtained, the recipient is as good as dead. "You should fear moments of clarity for that's the end; what you've got to see before you is your wife, your kid and yourself, and the house you've got to build, it's a dream but you've got to. In any case it's best not to think, for thinking is death itself, and you should not die. Die, never. Not now. Later though, when

it comes to that, you should die without thinking and staight away."

In another story, the protagonist is an intelligent hard-working technician who gradually loses everything—wife, job, home and hope. He then moves to a farmstead on the Hungarian plain for the rest of his life, and "has no other intent except living as long as he could forget everything." The most you can attain in life is to forget about your life before your death, forget all the efforts you made to gain a foothold for a life fit for man.

Sándor Tar writes on helplessness, degradation and resignation. His typical figures are the unemployed, the homeless and the drunk, the vegetating old and the mercilessly pushy young, who believe there is something in life for them, and push their parents out of their way. The title story "Slow Freight" (See pp. 15-28 in this issue) is about a father and son who busk on the local trains. The boy wants to believe that his father is a strong man, who can defend him against his bullying school mates. The father is a cripple, who chooses smoky slow trains crowded with people much like himself, to whom he plays the accordeon. One day a noisy drunken group, all "strong and humorous men", humiliates them on one of the trains and literally throws them off. They scramble back to their feet and try to clamber onto a slow freight that is passing by. The boy, how-ever, kicks his father off the steps. He has no use for a worthless shabby man for a father.

Through such figures Tar expresses a Central European Zeitgeist, and apart from the refinement in his technique, history has much to do with it. In the ten years after the political changes, most people have directly experienced the losses that befall them if they are "just" average, hard-working people and find themselves outside the confines of a more or less hospitable mi-

crocosm. "The greatest trouble was perhaps that we had our places marked out for us, and for the average man this was more or less a job in industry where he was daily humiliated and exploited, yet in return for the coercion, aggression and retribution he was due his tiny everyday successes—a forced marriage, forced children, a flat on the housing estate, with inbuilt cupboards, two yards of books, oriental comfort."

The jobless, homeless drunk has become a representative hero of our times, and no one writes about him with greater authenticity and perception than Sándor Tar. From the opening words of a story by him we sense the absolute certainty and precision of treatment and tone. He knows everything there is to be known about his figures; he knows their environment and situations, and his texts use only such elements of this information as are relevant and telling. Once we are well into the story, the "climax", a misnomer since it is not shown as such in the story, is dismissed with a couple of characteristic turns of phrase. The discourse of the narrator or the protagonist, as the case may be, is part and parcel of the world of the story. It is made up of fully original textual finds, and in its carelessness, resignation, finely balanced ambiguities and reserved grotesquery, it mirrors the disillusionment in which nothing can cause a surprise—"a point from which you can see everything clear and bare, where there is no beating about the bush."

Through this balance of personal involvement and disillusioned clarity, Tar's new stories hold up what is typical in contemporary Hungarian life; in them the sociologically charged subject matter is distilled to a common experience of our times and as such is accessible also to a non-Hungarian reader. In several stories in *Slow Freight* the motifs are not directly tied to

the political changes, they are almost without time or space, yet in their concreteness, show up human misery in urban housing estates or in villages. Old people, often still in their fifties and worn out well before time, are in the way here too, they are the useless, burdensome, ballast for the young. The latter, quite a few of them stunted, either physically or mentally, still embody some kind of life force and make their way towards some pathetic fulfilment as formless creatures of instinct. On reading Slow Freight, the Hungarian readers may feel that here and now only such outlets of expression have a raison d'étre; anything else would only miss the point.

Other authors naturally do not heed this and, naturally enough, go on writing in their own way. Gergely Péterfy (b. 1966), for instance, in his autobiographical *Side B* gives an account of the school years and youth of his own angry generation as though nobody else existed except the "young gentleman" of Budapest, a middleclass arts student and would-be writer, with his narcissistic self-development and indulgent oats sowing.

Gergely Péterfy boasts some major figures in the Hungarian arts and literature in his family, a point that has to be made since they appear in this autobiographical novel, even though not under their own names. His father is an acclaimed sculptor from Transylvania; his maternal grandmother was a well-known actress: his mother's father and grandfather count as classics in twentieth-century Hungarian poetry. One of many topics in the novel, is Péterfy's ambivalent relationship to the family heritage, although it is certainly not his primary concern. The relevant sections are themselves ambivalent, insofar as Péterfy broaches the subject as though indifferent to him, that it is demeaning for him to clarify what they mean to him. He

does not say anything negative about anyone, referring to his parents and grandparents in a good-natured ironical way at worst, nor does he express pride in his forebears. As a child he knew his grandfather, an exceptional, original personality both as a poet and a man, yet all he learnt from him was how to fish.

One could say that Péterfy should take pride in his family heritage. The Hungarian Transylvanian Protestant culture was a burgher's tradition equally open to Western and national culture. If it means anything to him or not, we may infer much from the section in which he reminisces about family holidays in Transylvania. Well-written though summary, this section presents Transylvania as a foreign country which sends secrets to his father only. To him, "it means travelling abroad and back in time, backwards to steam railway engines, horse-drawn carts and water buffaloes, outmoded haircuts, old-fashioned colours and clothes, linguistic flourishes, poisonous waters, unconquerable mountains, unbridled rivers, incredible stories about acts of amazing heroism and base villages, straw hats and folk costumes. feverish and unproductive activities, fantastic schemes and stone-age sloth, halfnaked Gypsies, Saxon peasants murmuring in incomprehensible German and overbearing Romanian policemen who keep scratching their balls, secret agents with brilliantined hair in long raincoats and pumps, sycophantic party secretaries, helldark nights covering the towns..."-these are all things to which "it was very difficult, even impossible, to adjust the idyllic picture which appeared in my grandfather's stories about Transylvania."

Perhaps Péterfy keeps the family past and remembrance at a distance because this is largely how he handles memories of his own near-past. This is the main theme of the *gimnázium* and university years in

the eighties in the eyes of the memoir writer, in which the details of place weld into a comprehensive picture. Péterfy wants to employ the chronological and spatial articulation of the book as a means of distancing and structuring. In time, it progresses from morning to night, first evoking memories of various mornings, then, from chapter to chapter, it progresses through the day towards the nights of youth. Each chapter switches between three settings two apartments in Buda and a weekend home on the Danube serving as recurring points of departure in space, each chapter ending in a section subtitled (appendix), to close off this relatively rigid and not always employed framework. No chronological order is followed: certain topics, plot lines are discontinued and picked up again where they fit in, yet fail eventually to come together into coherent stories. Dialogue is rare, in indirect speech if at all. Péterfy describes and analyses his subjects in the associative style reminiscent of Marcel Proust, the great ancestor of such autobiographical and self-analysing prose.

Despite the somewhat contrived structure and the typical literature student's textual attitude, the familiar motifs and requisites of angry young men crop up in many lively and concrete sections—friendships and love, travel, boisterous parties and binges, fads and impudent helplessness. We see a picture of a generation, or

perhaps a subculture of a generation, Budapest students in the 70s and 80s, who do not disclose any greater originality and independence in youthful flourish than their predecessors or successors. The minor characters are rather pale, in part because of the distancing, descriptive and analytical style; the two great friends of the school and university years, König and Sculptor, the usual geniuses in ferment. fade into one another. The narrator is in focus throughout, and it is irrelevant to what degree this is an authentic self-portrait of the author. The point is that he is a young man who puts on airs as a misfit, self-complacently out of place, hence his compulsive drinking, whether alone or in company. He also makes love to a fellow student several times a day, in parks, the school, at home, anywhere; this aspect is entirely missing from the depiction of his university years. Péterfy describes himself, or his literary ego, with the same method he uses to describe the environment: immersing with relish in the juicy, rewarding sections, yet with a distancing, unsympathetic analysis. His tone is rarely warmed by feeling. The reader closes the book somewhat puzzled: why has Péterfy written Side B? If he did so only in order to record, with a perceivably trained writing skill, his own personally relevant youth, then the maximum interest he can evoke is directed to the models of his figures.

Ágnes Heller

The Chronicler of the Holocaust

Randolph L. Braham: *A népirtás politikája: A Holocaust Magyarországon* (The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary). Budapest, Belvárosi Könyvkiadó, Vols. 1–2, 1474 pp.

first read Braham in English ten years ago. I felt at the time that he had said all there was to be said about the subject. Reading this new edition (corrected and with additions) in a two-volume Hungarian translation confirmed this feeling. Perhaps the impossible is possible after all and one can provide a mirror image of a whole world. This outsize narrative appears to contain everything that happened in that ill-fated year 1944, to my family and to me, to friends and acquaintances, and to all those whose stories I have heard since. Every event is there, every square and street, every death march, the ghetto, every internationally protected house. Braham has written a chronicle, the chronicle of Hungarian Jewry. His tale starts in the Golden Age before the Great War, and as it goes forward in time so the feeling of a fall, of destruction strengthens apace. It culminates in a hell we know: as the chronicler's preface anticipates, the losses of Hungarian Jewry in the Second World War were greater by a third than those of the United States Armed Forces in all theatres of the Second World War combined. The narrative turns this statistic into a tale of horror.

From the time of the Hasburgs to the first Jewish Act the narrative pace is brisk. This is not the history of Hungary, nor of Hungarian Jewry, not even of Hungarian anti-Semitism but of all these combined and separately, only inasmuch as they had a role in a future that was still in shadow and therefore non-existent. 1944 is the vantage point, everything else is prehistory, and the Hungarian Holocaust casts its shadow on it all, both on the splendours of what is called the Golden Age and on the ominous years after the First World War.

The narrative pace slows with the first Jewish Act in 1938. The details grow in importance. The location is Hungary within her frontiers at any given time. Braham is not the chronicler of the Holocaust but of the Hungarian Holocaust. At decisive moments in the narrative, the Northern Uplands, Northern Transylvania and Újvidék (Novi Sad) are re-annexed by Hungary. That is when the country chains herself to the policies of the Axis. Újvidék was the scene of the first mass killing of Jews organized by Hungarians, indeed the only one up to the German occupation. In March 1944 the first trains to Auschwitz departed

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from Ciscarpathia and Northern Transylvania. Just about everybody abandoned the Jewry of the re-annexed territories to their fate. The Second World War events that are given importance are those that had a role in the Hungarian Holocaust, such as German dissatisfaction with Hungarian Judenpolitik, especially after the Wannsee Conference, which decided the destruction of European Jewry, or the establishment and operation of the first death camps, or the fate of Jews in neighbouring countries. The war in the Soviet Union was also relevant as there the Iewish Labour Service shared the terrible fate of the Second Hungarian Army on the Don, but as an extra, just for them, Jewish Labour Service men were also exposed to the murderous pastimes of the sadistic Hungarian soldiers who guarded them.

The pace of the chronicle reduces even more for March 19th 1944. Braham charts the Hungarian Holocaust in all its details: the pace of the narrative slows and achieves an almost unbearable intensity. Day by day cattle trucks left for the gas chambers, every day, without exception, somewhere in Hungary, Jews were humiliated, wounded and murdered because they were Jews. Braham tells us when, how many, in what manner, and where. The gendarmes shepherded the village Jews into makeshift ghettos. There was a great shortage of food. The Jews were surrounded and shoved into cattle trucks, lined up, those fit for work were selected and all the others, with the children and the old, were marched to the gas chambers. The same story is repeated again and again. The first zone (1st Gendarme District), the second zone, and so on, to the fifth zone. Half a million human beings in seven weeks. Braham describes what happened, as it happened, obeying Ranke's rules for historians. What he asks is not why, but why this and not that, why here and not there.

Generally he answers that perhaps this was the reason, perhaps that. He does not claim to know the reason why.

This self-restraint in the explanation of the inexplicable is what, for me, places Braham's account above all others. It is the truest book on the Holocaust that I have ever read. When it comes to evil incarnate, Braham is unsparing in his condemnation. In general, however, he does not say that X or Y are guilty but that they were guilty of this or that, at this time yes, and at that time no. One cannot say that Braham judges sine ira et studio, how indeed could he do that in a book full of so much pain and anger? But he is aware and makes us aware how men are ensnared, how they lie to themselves, how they come to be disoriented in a world in which they grew up, and that is why their instincts go wrong. They bury their heads in the sand, they are weak and cowardly, sometimes they want to do good, but not all they want is good, and they neglect to act. He shows how men become the prisoners of their class interests, their ideologies and their conventions, and of the instinct to look after their own-those most like them-in the first place, and by the time they notice that they should have rid themselves of all this, it is too late. Braham is aware and makes us aware that Evil cannot perform evil deeds unabetted. Evil has need of the coward, the lazy and the selfish, just as Evil needs silence and oblivion. In Braham's chronicle Hannah Arendt's proposition on the banality of evil is reversed. Evil here is anything but banal, but banal sins help to make its road straight.

The structure of Braham's chronicle changes with its pace. Up to 1944 plans, ideologies, constraints and personal motives cross each other. By 1944 the situation is that a number of men have decided

to destroy Hungarian Jewry. They make their plans, establishing schedules. The mechanism is stated. Not everyone knows about the plan, or everything about the plan, but they carry it out. On the victims' side, there is total confusion. They ought to know about the plan, and many do, but they do not understand it. The basic instinct is to escape, to escape the net without really knowing where it was, never knowing whether they really escaped or actually got further caught up in it. They felt their way in the dark, surrendering to arbitrary action, to chance, to mercy. Those who help or wish to help (Christians too) almost always miss the train, in the liberal sense of the term too. The ball is always in their court. A rational mechanism operates on one side, and perfect irrationality on the other. In a way it makes sense to depict the Holocaust situation as the apocalyptical model of the modern world. Modernity is a condition of the Holocaust (one of its conditions) but it certainly does not mean that modernity explains or makes sense of it.

Braham never claims to possess the explanation; he asks all the questions which others claim to answer, but he never answers them unambiguously. There are two kinds of such questions: those which refer to the causes of the Hungarian Holocaust, and those which ask whether the Jews could have been saved. What sins of omission were committed? Who is to blame, and to what degree, for the fact that half a million Hungarian Jews perished. We cannot, basically, know what would have happened, if... But we know that there were choices, that certain decisions proved ineffective and others most effective. Braham points out that one could never tell in advance what the result of a rescue operation would be. Most of them, and most protests, had no results, but some were nevertheless effective. Everything that was not tried, all things never done or done too late, may well have been successful if they had happened.

Braham is the chronicler of the Hungarian and not of the German Holocaust. His question is therefore not how the Holocaust grew out of Hungarian history and Hungarian anti-Semitism since that is precisely what did not happen. If the Germans had not occupied Hungary in March 1944, Hungarian anti-Semitism would still be on record as responsible for anti-Semitic legislation unique in modern European history. Non-Hungarian Jewsthe stateless-were delivered up to their murderers, and the Újvidék pogrom was carried out by Hungarians. Jewish soldiers on labour service were ill treated on the eastern front. For this, Hungarian anti-Semitism was responsible. They were terrible crimes but they were not genocide. One of the results of native anti-Semitism was that the Hungarian governing parties nullified the achievements of 19th-century national liberalism, that is the emancipation of the Jews, replacing it by racial discrimination. This policy confronted the norms of modern civilization but it did not amount to genocide.

Genocide was exported to Hungary by the German *Wehrmacht*.

If the Hungarian Holocaust is rooted in any sort of historical logic, and I do not believe that it is, then that would have to be the logic of German history.

Why, then, is this book, which hardly touches on German genocide politics and its background, still entitled *The Politics of Genocide?* What Braham's chronicle suggests, however, is that although the Hungarian Holocaust was not the direct consequence of Hungarian anti-Semitism and systematic anti-Jewish agitation, it cannot be imagined that it could have happened as it did without such antecedents. German Nazi genocidal plans could be carried

out with such unprecedented speed because they could rely on twenty years of anti-Semitic propaganda and on expectations and a mentality created by anti-Jewish measures. Men and institutions in large numbers were willing participants. But this would not have sufficed. A twentyyear-long anti-Jewish campaign and the absence or rarity of protests made it natural for non-Jewish Hungarians to identify Jews not as Hungarians or fellow citizens but merely as Jews, that is as enemies or adversaries, at the very least as strangers, as aliens. That is how it came to be accepted as natural that Jews should be concentrated in ghettos, and that they should be deported from their country to places where, it was said, they would be put to work by the Germans. If that is natural, if that is acceptable, then anything may happen because anything goes. In Braham's narrative, Hungarian anti-Semitism is not the cause or the root of the Holocaust, but the catastrophe itself.

Braham looks on German genocidal politics as a *donné*, without searching for an explanation. True, he notes about some particularly cruel or anti-Semitic individuals that they were of Swabian origin, with Magyarized names, giving their original German names in brackets, but he does not describe a penchant for genocide as a racial characteristic. What he wishes to stress is that Swabians or those of Swabian origin felt a greater loyalty towards Germany than to Hungary. Jews, on the contrary, even in 1944—a most inopportune time—forcefully stressed their Hungarian loyalties.

Could the Hungarian Holocaust have been prevented, or at the very least, moderated? If yes, then how? Are such questions as lacking in a sense of reality as similar ones related to Polish Jewry? The Germans had little time left in 1944. Thus they were able to kill incomparably fewer Jews in the Arrow Cross leader, Ference

Szálasi's than in Horthy's time. Hungary was an ally, unlike Poland, an enemy. The majority of Jews in Romania survived the Holocaust, true, in a strategically more favourable position. All Hungary had to do was to play for time. The Hungarian government, and Admiral Horthy, the Regent, especially, could have had a try. The Sztójay government, however, with the exception of just one minister, brooked no delay. They preferred to wait on Eichmann and his fellows with alacricity. Horthy did not sign deportation orders but he did not protest until July 7th when, no longer passive, he stopped the deportation of Budapest Jews by ordering out an armoured brigade. Even that was merely playing for time as Horthy did promise the Germans that their turn would come later. but this did save half the Budapest Jews. Could Horthy have done that earlier? Did he want to do it? And if he had done it, would it have helped, and to what degree? All that Braham says is that he could have ordered that the deportations stopped earlier too, and that it is possible, albeit by no means certain, that this would have helped. But no more need be said.

As Braham too tells us, Horthy did not stop the deportations on his own initiative but because he was subjected to pressure by the Pope, President Roosevelt and the King of Sweden, his son, Miklós Horthy jr., acting as intermediary. What would have happened if all these had acted earlier? Why did they act then, and only then? Braham mentions several factors. Perhaps the most decisive were the Auschwitz minutes, discussed in the greatest detail in Chapter 23 (The Conspiracy of Silence). That too has its own history, with many ramifications. One concerns the role of Jewish organizations at the time of the Holocaust.

Hannah Arendt in Eichmann in Jerusalem is generally critical of the Judenrate who, according to her, were cowards and delivered up their fellow Jews to the wolves. Her criticism is biassed and unjust and, according to Braham, irrelevant to Hungary. Thank God, the Hungarian Jewish Councils were never in the tragic position of their Polish or Lithuanian brethren. It was not up to them to decide who was to die or survive. The Hungarian Jewish Councils and the Zionists were faced with other choices.

According to Braham, the first Jewish Council, headed by Samu Stern, did not betray Jewry but acted according to their instincts and conventions. As wealthy Hungarian Jews in cahoots with the ruling classes, they were convinced that Jewry could only be saved by the Hungarian ruling classes and Horthy. They neglected to consider the fact that this segment of the ruling classes was not in good standing with the Germans and had lost all their influence. Horthy, who could have helped, chose to be passive. The policy of the Jewish Council was ineffective when the Jews of the provinces were taken away, and to that extent its members were responsible for the fact that no one hindered that action. The same policy became effective in July when Horthy, after all, stopped the deportation of Budapest Jews. True, there had been changes in the membership of the Jewish Council, which went with political changes, but it would appear that these made no essential difference.

Rudolf Kasztner and Joel Brand, who headed the Zionist rescue operation, chose a different strategy. They argued that you had to deal directly with those in charge of genocide, with the SS, the Gestapo and the German authorities in general. In the fifties, in a Jerusalem court case, the presiding judge stated that Kasztner had sold his soul to the devil. Braham rejects this. According to the

Talmud, whoever saves one man's life saves the whole of humanity. In that sense Kasztner saved humanity many thousand times over and not only those whom he rescued from the Kolozsvár ghetto. True, he was from Kolozsvár himself, and members of his own family were amongst those rescued. Would it have been more just if he had let them perish, rescuing only strangers? Who will cast the first stone? Braham tells us that Kasztner was also instrumental in the redirection of a number of trains headed for Auschwitz to Austria, where almost everybody survived the war.

Kasztner and Joel Brand's plan was to barter trucks and other essential goods, to be sent by the Allies, for Hungarian Jewish lives. Was this feasible? We cannot tell. In any event, the Western Allies summarily rejected the idea, calling it a trap. Perhaps it was, perhaps it wasn't. The Allied argument was that it was in the Jews' interest too that the war be won as quickly as possible. What they have not explained to this day is why they never did bomb the railway lines leading to Auschwitz, although all Jewish organizations asked them to. Perhaps because they were of small strategic importance?

However little the Kasztner–Joel Brand strategy may have achieved, it certainly saved lives at a time when the Jewish Council proved totally impotent. On the other hand, the Jewish Council policy started to save lives when the Kasztner–Brand plans had come to a dead end.

Why didn't the Churches protest against the deportations? József Éliás, who headed the Lutheran Good Shepherd Mission, acted immediately, and so did a few others. Why not the church hierarchy? Why did they protect baptized Jews only? Or—some time later—why was the pastoral letter by Cardinal Jusztinián Serédi, the Prince Primate, not read out aloud in churches? The traditional anti-Semitism of the

Hungarian Catholic Church was at cross pruposes with the sensitivity required by Christian practice. This was also characteristic of the Vatican at the time, in addition to its customary political pragmatism. It is also true that the Churches too tended to look after their own and it took time to recognize that genocide did not discriminate in terms of religious faith. In the meanwhile, almost half a million people perished, amongst them true believers, members of Churches which had abandoned them.

According to Braham, there was no conspiracy of silence. But no one, primarily no Jewish organization, reacted as they should have. All of them, the Zionist leaders as well as the members of the Jewish Council, kept silent about Auschwitz. No one told their fellow Jews. Perhaps already in March, but certainly in April, before the deportations started, they all knew the whole truth about the death camps. They were in possession of the plans of Auschwitz, they knew where the gas chambers were and where the crematoria, they knew that the Hungarian Jews would be gassed, but they kept silent. All the Jews who lived in Hungary outside Budapest were sent to Auschwitz in cattle trucks, according to the official version, to work in Germany. Jewish leaders knew that the purpose was slaughter. They did not speak up. Whether people believed the official version or not, the fact is that the Jewish agencies made sure that those who wanted to believe it, could believe it. Of course, if your eyes are not opened you prefer to believe that you are taken somewhere to work, and not to be murdered.

Of course, there are explanations but, as Braham rightly argues, none of them will do. That they did not want people to panic (why not?), that they did not want to take away all hope from the last moments of the lives of the victims, that they would

have been killed anyway, even had they known, that they would have climbed into the cattle trucks anyway. That could not have been known then, as it cannot be known now. I, for my part, do not believe that even one single woman would have got on of her own will with her child if she had known that her child would end up in a gas chamber two days later. They shoot at those trying to escape, as they shoot at those who resist. Many die if a crowd is fired on. But not everybody, as in a gas chamber. Christian Hungarians did not see the gas chambers but the butchering of those trying to escape could not have been kept secret from them. If that had happened they could not have believed what suited them, that the Jews were being taken to work. Perhaps more of them would have helped. Perhaps the Churches would have made a move before they did. Braham tells us that the leaders of the Jews at long last, late in June, began to publicize the Auschwitz minutes. A copy was given to Miklós Horthy jr. who passed it on to his father. Quite obviously, Horthy was already aware of the facts, but his son only found out then and, in possession of the facts, he tried to persuade his father to put an end to the transports.

Much that we want is possible, and the impossible can also become possible. The world finally found out about the Auschwitz minutes, thanks to just one man, George (Mandel) Mantello, a Hungarian Jew, a businessman, employed by the San Salvador consulate in Geneva. He managed to get the minutes to President Roosevelt and the Vatican. That was when the Vatican, President Roosevelt and the King of Sweden put pressure on Horthy, asking him to put a stop to the transports. That is how half the Budapest Jews, who were condemned to die, managed to escape. It could well be that our lives depended on the determination of just one man.

What would have happened if the world had known about the Auschwitz minutes before the transports had begun to roll from the provinces? Would protests have been as strong earlier too? And if they had been, would Horthy have stopped the transports? And would the Germans have tolerated this six weeks earlier? Could the Jews outside Budapest have been taken away by the Germans and Hungarian Arrow-Cross alone, given passive resistance on the part of Hungarian Christians? Such questions cannot be answered, nor does Braham try to answer them. But he does insist that, in consequence of certain political and personal weaknesses, prejudices, hesitations and conflicts, options that were open were not nearly fully exploited. He suggests what should have been done long before the Germans occupied the country on March 19th. In spite of growing anti-Semitism and all the anti-Jewish legislation, that is in spite of everything that prepared the genocide, their elected leaders did not prepare Hungarian Jewry for the worst. They helped create the illusion that Hungarian Jews, unlike Jews elsewhere in Europe, would get away with it.

Once, in Cracow, my husband and I visited the new synagogue. At the time the old ghetto still looked exactly as it had

done when its inhabitants were driven out to die. Two old Jews were in the synagogue. Noone else. My husband first addressed them in German and they pretended not to understand, then he switched to Russian, and asked them about their lives. One, the older, then asked us-in German—where we had come from From Budapest, we answered. He waved an angry finger at us. "You there, in Budapest, ate salami and made merry when our mothers and children went up in smoke in the crematoria." It is not good manners to reproach survivors for being alive, nevertheless we felt that, essentially, he was right. Not because of the salami and our good cheer but because we did not every day and at every hour think of those who at that very moment were going up in smoke. Perhaps we did not know about them because we did not want to know. We did not even try to do what solidarity demanded-whatever the success or its absence of such actions. We are all responsible for that. Not primarily us, who were then ten or fifteen years old but those who sang us the amoral lullabies of survival, of being exempt, of getting away with it. Braham's book is free of any kind of preaching, but this is one message it contains which is sure to last.

Péter Gosztonyi

Fortress Budapest

Krisztián Ungváry: Budapest ostroma (The Siege of Budapest). Corvina, 1998. 330 pp. Portraits, photographs, maps, tables, drawings

The last scholarly book on the 1944–1945 siege of Budapest, Budapest felszabadítása 1944-1945 (The Liberation of Budapest 1944-1945), Zrínyi Kiadó, was published in 1975. Sándor Tóth was the author, a military historian of unswerving loyalty to the regime, on the staff of the Military History Institute of the People's Army. Although occasionally drawing on western sources, it by and large described a triumphant march on Budapest by the Red Army, along with the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts' engagements around the city, and was desperately eager to avoid any issue that could be called delicate. So much so that, by the omission of important details he mutilated his work.

In the same period hardly anything appeared on the history of the Budapest siege in the West. For Western students of the history of the Second World War, Hungary was but a tiny speck on the map. The bombing of Dresden between

both defenders and attackers—had to confront numerous problems, military, economic and social alike. Even in early December 1944 the people of Budapest still could not believe that

the city would be the scene of street fighting. An extraordinary mood, some sort of a faith in miracles, prevailed. Most hoped that one day the fighting would simply pass them by, with serious fighting taking place far from Budapest, somewhere in the vicinity of Hungary's western borders.

However, on Hitler's orders, the high command of the German Army Group South ordered, as early as November 23, 1944, that preparations for a house-tohouse defence of Budapest be made, disregarding civilian casualties and the public buildings of Budapest. Since the German high command was worried about possible

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February 11 and 14, 1945, which led to 80,000 dead and the destruction of "Florence on the Elbe" (the motives of which still puzzle historians), overshadowed the 51-day siege of Budapest.

Yet, the siege of Budapest was a chap-

ter on its own in the history of the Great

European War. Suffering was great and casualities were massive. There was consid-

erable bombardment, both aerial and ar-

tillery. Red Army men referred to the siege

as a "second Stalingrad", and with good

reason. During the fighting, the troops-

civilian unrest, SS Obergruppenführer Otto Winkelmann, who was experienced in policing and security matters, was entrusted with the defence of Budapest and came to be named as the commander of "Festung Budapest" on December 1, 1944. He had already arrived in Hungary in late March, 1944. Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler, whose "empire" included the unified police system in Germany, appointed him to head all SS and German police forces in the country.

(In the mid-1970s, in a small town near Hanover, I had the opportunity to talk to Winkelmann. He mentioned that, being aware of the *Lokalpatriotismus* of Budapest citizens and of the overall military situation, he had his doubts from the start about being able to ensure the defence of Budapest against the Soviet offensive besides controlling civilian unrest—with no more than four or five German divisions at his disposal.)

On December 5, however, Winkelmann was replaced, presumably because the high command discovered his lack of front-line experience. He was replaced by SS Obergruppenführer Karl Pfeffer von Wildenbruch who, although himself transferred to the Waffen SS from the police forces, had been an army corps commander on the eastern front ever since the second half of 1943. Pfeffer von Wildenbruch was first posted to Budapest in the middle of September 1944, where he had been entrusted with setting up a Waffen SS mounted corps.

On the Soviet side, huge efforts were made to secure the swift taking of Budapest by the Red Army. The first wave of attacks was launched from the south-east, from the vicinity of Kecskemét, on October 30, 1944. This offensive, however, was halted by a successful German counter-attack with heavy Soviet losses, before it reached the southern and south-eastern

suburbs of Budapest. Then followed a more cautious advance. In order to achieve this. the Headquarters of the Soviet Army moved the 3rd Ukrainian Front from Bulgaria to Transdanubia, also reinforcing Marshal Malinovsky's 2nd Ukrainian Front by rested divisions taken from the Russian-Finnish front. In the course of these multi-stage manoeuvers the Soviet troops reached, during November, 1944, the suburbs of Budapest from the southern and eastern directions. On December 9, the 7th Guards Army surged ahead in a bold move to take the city of Vác on the left bank of the Danube north of the capital, and thus allowed Malinovsky to flank Pest on the left bank, too. In a simultaneous move, Marshal Tolbukhin's 3rd Ukrainian Front reached the German-Hungarian fortified lines (the Margit Line), which stretched from Lake Balaton past Lake Velence to the Danube. All this had been achieved by December 1944.

These events were the preliminaries to the Siege of Budapest, a battle whose planning and operations were of a standard deserving of study in staff colleges. A complex series of manoeuvers were conducted by the Germans and the Soviet Army in and around Budapest. There was fighting in the air, on the ground and on the Danube. In the streets of Budapest these units of the Soviet Army learned—at the price of massive casualties-how to fight in a Central European metropolis, for up to then they had fought on Soviet territory, mostly in rural areas amongst wretched timber buildings. When they entered Europe in the second half of August 1944, Bucharest and Sophia were taken without fighting. Even the four days of the fighting to take Belgrade in October 1944 involved only one Soviet army corps, supporting Tito's forces.

There were added complications in the Siege of Budapest. Fighting took place in a

city inhabited by civilians, with a concurrent terror being waged by the Arrow-Cross militia and sporadic anti-Nazi resistance; 100,000–120,000 helpless Jews were mostly concentrated in two separate ghettos; (the ghetto proper, enclosed and guarded, in an area containing a number of synagogues, an area of poor Jews, and a congerie of "protected houses" in a middle-class district in Pest, across the Danube from Margaret Island) the remainder, hiding elsewhere, were subjected to search and destroy raids by Arrow Cross detachments.

For the biassed history writing of "communist" times, all this was, of course, irrelevant. Indeed, they would have preferred to hush up the presence of 40,000 Hungarian soldiers in Budapest, too. More than fifty years had to pass before a young Hungarian historian—Krisztián Ungváry told the story of these events, based on a wealth of sources and unique documentation, in a book which will no doubt become the authoritative text on the subject. Budapest ostroma was published by Corvina (in two printings in quick succession) in the first half of 1998, on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of the unification of Pest, Buda and Óbuda.

Ingváry has managed to avoid all the pitfalls associated with the subject, in spite of enjoying the support of men in his research who are known for their extreme political views. The history of the siege of Budapest poses a number of delicate problems. From March 19, 1944 Hungary was under German occupation, part of Hitler's "new order" in Europe. Although Admiral Horthy was allowed to stay on as the country's Regent, the man who was really in charge was a Nazi Party official, the Third Reich's Minister to Hungary, Dr Edmund Veesenmayer. The series of defeats Germany suffered in the Balkans and on

the Eastern Front during the summer of 1944 allowed Horthy-by deceiving Veesenmayer and also by obtaining his grudging consent-to introduce new men into the Hungarian government. On August 29, 1944, General Géza Lakatos, loyal to Horthy, was asked to form a government, putting control of the country, once again, in Horthy's hands. Just as he had done between 1942 and 1944, the Regent again made overtures to the Allies in a lastminute bid to extricate Hungary from the Hitler camp and to spare the country from becoming a theatre of war. In late September 1944 he even sounded out Stalin in the interests of the future of the nation.

By then the political and military situation, coupled with the Western Allies' indifference concerning the fate of the Danube Basin, condemned Horthy's plans to failure from the start. The Regent's attempt, in the hope of signing an armistice on October 15, 1944, proved unsuccessful for various reasons, one of them being treason within the gates. Horthy and Lakatos had to go, and the SS sent the government packing. Hungarian generals and staff officers did not do what was their duty in keeping with their oath of personal loyalty to Horthy as Supreme Commander. The majority feared for their personal safety in the event of a Soviet victory more than they cared for the country's future. They hesitated at the critical moment, sitting on the fence until the last minute or trying to swim with the tide. On October 16, 1944 the Hungarian National Socialists (Arrow-Cross) formed a government, with a retired major of the General Staff, Ference Szálasi at its head. The Hungarian Arrow-Cross Party (or Hungarist Movement) was Berlin's last political reserve. Even Veesenmayer himself described Szálasi's appointment to form a government as "an ill-fated move" (personal communication to the present reviewer in Darmstadt in

The siege of Budapest lasted from the 24th of December 1944 to the 13th of February 1945. In June 1944 Budapest had a population of 1,200,000 (not counting military personnel). Due to air raids, artillery bombardment, fighting, deportations, voluntary flight and enforced evacuations, this figure had shrunk to 830,000. Neither of these figures include the outer suburbs which were only incorporated later. 12,000-13,000 people died during the siege as a result of the hostilities. Around 25,000 did so for other reasons. Total civilian losses during the siege: 38,000 to 40,000. The number of Jews within the total of civilian dead: 15,000. Victims of Arrow-Cross terror: 7,000. Around 50,000 civilian inhabitants of Budapest were employed in the building of the Margit defence line before Budapest was surrounded. Around 50,000 non-military personnel were taken as PoWs to the Soviet Union. Total civilian losses, including Jews: around 70,000. German and Hungarian soldiers killed in fighting around Budapest and during the siege: 17,000. Soviet casualties (2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Front) from the middle of November 1944 to the middle of February 1945, in and around Budapest: 71,950 dead, 240,056 wounded, 32,000 missing. 18,000 houses were completely destroyed, just about every building was damaged in some way, all the Danube bridges were blown up. Most factories were stripped of their equipment by the Germans. Bank vaults were opened and ransacked by the Soviets. The loss in public and private property is inestimable.

1961), pointing out, however, that after Horthy's arrest there was no real alternative.

That was true. Szálasi and the other insignificant extreme-right-wing parties seized their chance, but no political party in its right mind would have assumed the responsibility of forming a government after October 15, 1944, with the Soviet Army poised to attack Budapest less than eighty kilometres away and the Hungarian Army's high command entirely subordinated to the OKH (the German Supreme Army Command). Szálasi was willing, he had been preparing to seize power since 1938.

The "Hungarist" government totally submitted to the Germans. Events were entirely under the control of Hitler and the Nazi German government, and the Germans were in charge of the defence of Budapest. Holding Budapest would have been part of their overall interest. By 1944

it was clear that Hitler had lost the war. Fighting in and around Budapest only served to prolong the existence of the Third Reich, needlessly sacrificing Hungarian lives and property. This must be stressed. Without doing so, it is impossible to make sense of the siege of Budapest or to understand its political history.

This line of thought appears here and there in the book, but such ideas are soon lost in the detailed information that contributes to the narrative of the drama.

The book includes numerous personal accounts, as well as quotations from memoirs which had appeared in magazines or as books over the years. Ungváry started to search the libraries and archives and to pick the memories of survivors back in the late 1980s, when still attending university. It was not easy. Just about everyone of military rank or political office—that is presuming they survived the



Budapest, Spring 1945

war-had died between 1980 and 1985. Only few left something in writing after them. For most such Germans the Budapest siege was no more than an episode in six years of constant fighting. There were some men who could have provided valuable information, such as Waffen SS Obergruppenführer Gille, who responded to my request to write an account of the history of the Panzer Corps under his command during the first three months of 1945 in Hungary. However, he died of a heart attack in 1961. The commander of Fortress Budapest, SS Obergruppenführer Pfeffer von Wildenbruch, who returned to West Germany from a Soviet PoW camp in 1955 and whose two sons had been killed in battle, was a tired old man lacking the energy needed to write memoires. However, when I visited him, his face brightened and he gave detailed answers to my questions.

Personal accounts included in the book, be they contemporary with the

events, or recorded in the 1990s, bring the siege closer to the reader. This is somewhat of an innovation in Hungary for which we must all be grateful to Ungváry.

The story can roughly be divided into four periods.

It all started with the October 1944 offensive, with Kecskemét as its starting point, by troops commanded by Malinovsky. In the following weeks the attack got properly on the way on several sections of the frontline and with various degrees of success, bringing the Soviet Army ultimately to the suburbs of Pest in the middle of December, 1944. The second stage of the drama began on December 20, 1944, culminating in the capture of the city of Esztergom, NW of Budapest, on the right bank of the Danube. The offensive in Transdanubia, commanded by Marshal Tolbukhin, resulted in the complete collapse of the undermanned Margit Line

held by German and Hungarian troops. The line was a hastily improvised defence system, constructed on the orders of General Friessner, who commanded the German forces there at one time in 1944. The successful defence by the German 6th Army of the central parts of Transdanubia ended in a crisis. Although half-expecting the result, the commanding general was surprised by the swiftness of the Soviets' success. He lacked either the manpower or the weapons to launch a counter-offensive. The situation was further complicated by the fact that the commander of the German forces in Transdanubia, General of Artillery Fretter-Pico, lost Hitler's favour. He had advocated giving up Budapest without resistance. At the height of the crisis, he was replaced by General Hermann Balck, who had been transferred from the western front and was badly lacking in local information. Had Soviet Army intelligence been aware of this, the fighting around Budapest could have assumed a different character. Then Tolbukhin's armies, instead of swerving north and east after breaking through the Margit Line, could have turned west and pushed the offensive into Western Hungary. Short of reserves, the German 6th Army would have been powerless to prevent the Soviet Army's penetration into the region.

However, neither Malinovsky nor Tolbukhin pushed for maximum success. All they wanted was to surround Budapest and, in this, they succeeded. By December 27, "Fortress Budapest" was a kind of frontier stronghold, a German-Hungarian island in the sea of the two Soviet armies. Unlike Ungváry, I am convinced that the encirclement took both Pfeffer von Wildenbruch and his subordinate, Lieutenant General Iván Hindy, the commander of the Hungarian troops in Buda, by surprise. They had not been prepared for it. Pfeffer von Wildenbruch's chief of staff, a Wehr-

macht officer named Usdau Lindenau, said as much in a taped interview made in Hamburg in the early 1970s: although "Fortress Budapest" was aware of the Soviets' military objectives, it had great faith in the strength and endurance of the Margit Line. Ungváry puts the combined strength of the German and Hungarian defensive forces trapped in Budapest at 79,000. Pfeffer von Wildenbruch himself gave me a similar figure. Admittedly, he estimated the strength of the Hungarian defensive force at 7,000 men. It seems certain that the quoted figure of 79,000 refers to the ration rolls of the German and Hungarian forces and that only a fraction took part in the siege as fighting units.

The second stage of the siege was between December 24, 1944 and February 13, 1945. The accounts of these trying days cover the defence of Pest, the activities of the Hungarian resistance movement (with negligible effect on the outcome of the fighting), the numerous outrages committed by Arrow-Cross detachments, the story of Budapest Jewry herded in two ghettos, the various stages of rescue efforts and, last but not least, the first encounters of Budapest citizens with Soviet soldiers storming the German-Hungarian bridge-head in Pest.

The third chapter tells the story of the German offensives in Transdanubia that were meant to provide relief for the besieged. In Ungváry's book, this stage receives rather curt treatment. The author did not know, and in fact could not have known, the background history of these offensives, undocumented both in memoirs and in the contemporary records.

During the 1960s, I had the chance to talk to or to exchange letters with a number of senior officers of the German 6th Army, including Generals Balck and Gaedcke. I was in a position to talk to Gille and Harteneck, the corps commanders in

the 1945 January German offensives. I also contacted a number of senior Hungarian officers who had served in Transdanubia. Most importantly from the point of view of the present subject, in the early 1970s I met General Walther Wenck, in 1945 deputy to Colonel-General Guderian, Chief of Staff of the OKH. (He was a personal friend of both Generals Balck and Grollman, the latter chief of staff of Army Group South). From conversations with these German commanders I was able to establish that the ultimate objective of the three German offensives in January 1945 was not to rescue the Fortress Budapest garrison. Hitler wanted to hold Budapest at all costs, as a forward bastion. The objective of the German offensives was to establish a corridor between the German forces in Transdanubia and Budapest. In other words, had the German counter-offensive been successful, Budapest would have remained a battlefield for further weeks, perhaps even months.

As we all know, this did not happen. "Konrad III", the German offensive, ground to a halt on January 26, west of the capital, near the villages of Baracska and Vál. A Soviet counter-attack forced General Balck to abandon the offensive, which had lost all its momentum at a distance of eighteen or twenty kilometres from the German fortified positions in Buda. Indeed, he had to withdraw his advanced units rapidly to their original positions in the days that followed, to avoid being trapped in a *Kessel*. With that, the fate of Fortress Budapest was sealed.

The fourth section of the book, about 32 pages, tells in great detail the attempted (and failed) breakout by the Budapest garrison, which took place between February 11 and 15, 1945. This is one of the book's best documented parts. It includes a wealth of episodes which very nearly burst the bounds of the book. In de-

scribing the attempted breakout from Buda Castle, the author deals with a subject previously completely ignored by Hungarian historians of the Second World War. He provides us with an almost cinematic experience in his account of the desperate attempt by poorly organized and even more poorly directed, betrayed and deserted forces. Their sole motive was that even death was preferable to capture by the Red Army. Ungváry reckons that, on the day of the attempted breakout, there were 43,900 German and Hungarian soldiers in Buda (including 11,600 wounded). According to Ungváry, twenty-eight per cent of the troops that took part in the breakout, in other words 19,250 soldiers, were killed.

In the concluding chapter, Ungváry describes how the Soviet soldateska behaved in Budapest. In his representation and in his commentary to eye-witness accounts, he avoids the black-and-white pictures favoured by Marxist historians. There is ample documentation of the outrages committed by Soviet soldiers, but he also tells of encounters long-suffering Budapest citizens had with Soviet fighting troops who were kind, helpful and humane.

Recently I came across a memoir published in Caracas, Venezuela, in 1985, in Hungarian by Dr József Sági, the last Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun County. In other words, something written by an official who was active in the Budapest region during the critical period of 1944-45. Arccal kelet felé (Facing East) is certainly not the work of a friend of the Soviet Union. The aged memorialist has much that is interesting to say about the 1944-45 years. He was certainly no Arrow-Cross man, on the contrary, he despised the Arrow-Cross scum. As a conscientious civil servant he wished to serve his county in difficult times too. Let me quote:

In those critical days obtaining provisions posed a severe problem. The enemy's greater numbers made their advance unstoppable and the civilian population of the occupied territories were left without food. However, the telephone lines to the villages and towns around Pest were still functioning. The officials in charge there reported that people were starving. They could not give their children milk or bread. The enemy's command did not make provisions for the people. I ordered officials to find the Russian military commander and tell him that the workers were starving. The County's central administration would send them food, if the commander gave written assurances that he was not going to confiscate it.

And so the incredible took place, whereby, holding Russian papers, the headmen of the villages of Pestszentimre, Vecsés, etc., arrived in Budapest, still unoccupied at the time, with Russian papers in their hands; then had the food issued by me loaded on carts and returned to the villages already taken by the enemy, distributing the food to the people there.

The Russian soldiers all respected the commander's pass and never touched the food. This practice sadly changed after the siege of Budapest was over.

These improvised measures were all in the interest of the civilian population. Right to the end I was in touch with my people, doing everything I could to help them.

Did the Soviet Army liberate Budapest or did Stalin's soldiers occupy and conquer it? For more than four decades, Marxist historians had been trying to brainwash Hungarians into believing that Budapest was liberated by the Great Soviet Union, a claim conceived by Rákosi's propaganda and later readily repeated by Kádár. By way of contrast, at the end of the siege the Soviet Army commanders un-

equivocally described the fighting along the Danube—with its substantial losses in both time and men—in an order of the day issued in the Summer of 1945: Budapest was captured and conquered by the Soviet Army. The campaign medals—no fewer than 35,000—distributed to the Soviet soldiers taking part in the Budapest siege had inscriptions to the same effect. This would mean that during the whole period of the siege—in three and a half months of constant fighting—the Soviet Army had employed about 500,000 men in and around Budapest.

For serious historians things were always clear: the Soviet Army conquered Budapest and occupied it. The "liberation" lasted for a couple of hours, perhaps, while the Army coming from the East was purging Budapest of the Nazi forces, of Szálasi's followers and of the Arrow-Cross Party's terror. But the soldiers' conduct, as well as the events of the subsequent years, proved beyond doubt that Stalin's army conquered Budapest for the Soviet Empire.

Ungváry's book comes with the addition of several interesting—if not always entirely accurate-tables, photos and maps. The bibliography at the end of the book, along with the index of names and place-names is impressive. The production of the book is to the credit of the publishers. Ungváry has written a text which will provide guidance to future historians of the siege for many years to come. But most of the hard work is still ahead. Now that German and Hungarian libraries and archives have become accessible to historians, what we have to do next is to incorporate the material emerging from the archives of the former Soviet Union.

Mihály Laki

Squaring the Circle

Ákos Róna-Tas: *The Great Surprise of the Small Transformation; The Demise of Communism and the Rise of the Private Sector in Hungary.*Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997, 289 pp.

Once the communists consolidated their power in the satellite states of the Soviet empire, large-scale private enterprises and large private property were nationalized. Medium and small-scale private enterprises and private property, including peasant smallholdings, were nationalized shortly afterwards. The only exceptions to these massive urban and rural forced collectivizations were the Polish smallholdings, and a small percentage of the Hungarian, Polish and East-German industrial, commercial and service sectors.

Much research has already been done on the post-1945 history of small-scale private industry and commerce in Poland and East Germany and on the postwar history of Polish peasant smallholdings (see, e.g., Aslund, 1985, and Juhász—Magyar, 1984): The operation, at various periods, of specific branches of the legal private sector in Hungary—enterprises that were either spared nationalization, or were revived during the communist era—has also

been examined in a number of outstanding books and studies. (See: Csillag, 1988; R. Gábor—D. Horváth, 1987; Gervai, 1960, 1965; Laky, 1987; Rupp, 1973; Seleny, 1991; Tellér, 1973). The illegal (or black) economy as a whole was extensively studied in the 1970s and 1980s (see, e.g.: R. Gábor—Galasi, 1981; Kemény 1992; Kenedi, 1981; Héthy–Makó, 1984.)

Ákos Róna-Tas, Assistant Professor at the University of California, San Diego, is the first to present a comprehensive picture of the private economy in communist Hungary. He offers a great many carefully delineated new details, taking care to organize his material in chapters and sections, whose length reflect the relative weight of the events and turning-points that comprise his reconstruction of the story. He also offers a number of significant new theoretical interpretations of the workings and the collapse of the socialist order.

One nation, one factory

According to the author, the classics of Marxist-Leninist thought (the "future-engineers") envisioned the working of a socialist economy along the lines of a giant publicly-owned or state factory, where the production and distribution of products and services were governed by the directives of the central management (the plan-

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teaches Economics in the Department of Political Science of the Central European University. He has published widely on post-socialist enterprises. ners). What they did, in effect, was to take the large enterprise and service sector model (postal services, railways, etc.) that came into being in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and project this model onto the economy as a whole, and even onto the running of the state.

As the author rightly emphasizes, the idea of the factory management model and the corresponding expansion of the state sector appealed not only to the communists, but, for quite some time, to the social democrats as well. (Fascist dictatorships have also shown an affinity for factory-like management methods, as have a variety of Latin-American, African and Asian conservative—and revolutionary presidential systems.) The communists attached great importance to the gains in efficiency to be derived from the factory-like management of the economy. Obviously, they believed that it would prove a better tool than a decentralized system for carrying out the transformation of society, i.e., for acquiring absolute control over the population.

One of the first and perhaps most important steps in Hungary's Great Transformation was the establishment of universal state employment. The author cites a great many fascinating documents to describe how the regime went about nationalizing the big banks and large industrial and commercial enterprises, eliminating private retail business, and getting artisans to join cooperatives. He pays particular attention to the rules governing the obligation to work, and to the regulations and sanctions imposed by which the workless, idlers and those who frequently changed their jobs were taught "socialist work ethics". Róna-Tas argues that the induction of the active work force into the socialist sector was a continuous effort albeit at times subjected to stop-go practices that continued until about 1961-1962, at which time hundreds of thousands of peasants gave in to pressure, and joined the cooperatives.

Inside the factory

y the early 60s, the "laying of the foundation of the socialist order", i.e. the practically total liquidation of the private sector, was completed. This was the time when the "consolidation" which followed the post-1956 retribution was pronounced to have been achieved, and the communist leadership announced its new policy. "Anyone who is not against us is with us," was János Kádár's new slogan. The two developments—the liquidation of the private sector and the new policy of reconciliation-were closely related, Róna-Tas maintains. With the overwhelming majority of the population in employment—by then, in the socialist sector—the regime, which had always been keen to expand its social and political constituency, finally got its chance to strengthen its influence and win popular endorsement: on the one hand, by extending the range of the benefits it offered (health care and pensions), and on the other, by establishing and expanding the "basic cells of the socialist way of life" (the workers' militia, the socialist brigades, etc.).

Perhaps the most important and most effective way in which the government augmented its influence with the population was the steady and noticeable rise in the standard of living, more particularly, in private consumption. The general feeling of well-being and satisfaction that resulted from it was not the only reason for the communist leadership's encouragement of consumerism. The shortage of certain goods (housing, telephones, cars, etc.) was a fact of life which gave party and union officials as well as medium and top-level managers

(who formed the backbone of the party) an opportunity to take an active part, not only in increasing the amount of goods made available to companies and institutions for distribution among their workers, but also in deciding who had priority among clients on waiting lists.

This kind of political patronage, however, became less and less practicable when, in the mid-'60s, production declined in several of the socialist states, Hungary included. First came a few years of economic slowdown, and then, in 1965, Hungary's GDP did not grow at all as compared to the preceding year. Most embarrassing for the leadership was the fact that production in the newly organized agricultural cooperatives fell way below the expected levels, and a shortage of some basic commodities, such as meat, ensued. As a result of measures aimed at creating economic equilibrium, including closing the trade gap, the earlier rise in real wages was arrested. Fewer and fewer people could rely on the socialist sector to provide the surplus income that would ensure the necessary purchasing power to increase consumption.

Róna-Tas's analysis, too, makes clear that the Hungarian political leadership saw economic reform as the primary means of getting out of this predicament. He introduces a number of documents which demonstrate that the reform was first and foremost expected to improve production in the state and cooperative sectors. But, realizing that this would take time, as an interim solution the establishment started to tolerate, and to a certain degree even encourage, economic activity outside the socialist sector. The earlier regulations which restricted legal private industry and trade were relaxed, and health insurance and the old-age pension scheme were extended—though with certain qualifications—to self-employed artisans and tradesmen. Semi-private economic activity, which combined the state sector with private entrepreneurship, began to expand. The cultivation of household plots turned from a merely self-supporting activity into an income-producing proposition. Auxiliary operations, run within the framework of agricultural cooperatives, started to grow in number and significance. The individual contractor made an agreement with the profit-oriented cooperative management, which then undertook to legalize his activity (Rupp, 1973). Contracts with other firms or private individuals were made in the name of the cooperative, which ceived an agreed percentage of the profits.

The mushrooming of private and semiprivate economic activity notwithstanding, the majority of the work-force stayed with the state sector. Their prudence was justified. By the early '70s, the opponents of the reform within the party leadership succeeded in curtailing the independence of state-owned firms, and in neutralizing the effects that market competition had on the high-priority giant enterprises. The Stalinist opponents of reform also launched a campaign designed to curb "excessive" income inequalities that had resulted from the activities of private entrepreneurs.

The weak and the strong

The opponents of the reform, the author maintains, had little to lose, for in attacking the private sector, they were attacking "the economy of the weak". One of Róna-Tas's important insights reveals that private entrepreneurship first started spreading among those segments of society which did not have sufficient bargaining power with the political and economic authorities to secure an extra income for themselves. The political leadership habitually neglected them when it came to the

redistribution of profits, and tried to make up for this by supporting their private ventures, or at least tolerating them. At that time, "the strong"—those employed in areas essential to the central objectives, the workers and managers of priority, stateowned firms, party members, those in the workers' militia, and those employed in state administration and the judiciaryworked primarily in the "official" economy, and their interests lay in increasing the quantity of goods and services redistributed by the central authorities. As new measures to suppress private ventures were introduced, "the weak", who, at any rate, had only one foot in the private sector (they had taken out trade licenses to legalize their moonlighting, or worked their family plots while holding down fulltime jobs), retreated into the state/cooperative sector.

The centralization wave of the early '70s, an economic policy based on big companies and central development programmes that underestimated the effects of the oil price explosion and remained committed to accelerated economic growth, proved to be totally mistaken. At the end of the '70s, one of the most important of economic indices, foreign debt, took a sharp upward turn.

By the early 1980s, the worsening situation compelled the country's political leaders to initiate a new set of reforms. They did away with the taboos of 1968 (the notions that work—as opposed to capital—was the only legitimate source of income; that private activities had to be integrated into the socialist economy; and that socialist legality was the touchstone of all economic activity) and embarked in earnest on revamping property relations. While Róna-Tas touches on the revival of earlier known forms of private enterprise, such as household farming, what he focuses on is the new forms of semi-private economic activi-

ty that began to mushroom in industry and in the service sector at that time. He describes the activities of the small GMKs ("economic work partnerships") that began to burgeon within (and outside) the various enterprises, follows up with a detailed analysis of the regulatory climate based on statistical data and a variety of other sources, and arrives at the highly significant conclusion that the economic upswing of the 1980s saw "the strong", those who had previously eschewed participation in private economic activity, assume a key role-and a rapidly expanding one-in the new Hungarian private economy. Thus, at this juncture, party members formed a disproportionate percentage of those participating in the new economic forms. The development of a private economy dominated by "the strong"—the author contends had far-reaching effects on the future of the regime, for those whose fortunes used to depend solely on the state and the party now looked to market transactions as a likely source of income growth. They became less interested in the survival of the socialist sector (if at all), and this attitude. as it later turned out, improved the odds of a peaceful transformation upon the (unexpected) demise of the system.

Here the story of the private economy in socialist Hungary comes to an end; Róna-Tas's book, however, does not. Its most likely readership-historians, political scientists, sociologists and students of the transformation at American universities—will want up-to-date information, and the book provides it. Róna-Tas gives a clear and accurate account of the political transformation and of the establishment of the legal and institutional framework guaranteeing free scope for private property. He assiduously traces the development of the new economic elite (to 1993-1994), and points out that a substantial segment of the managers and owners

has been recruited from younger members of the old nomenklatura. The older ones are also doing well, receiving above-average pensions, while their family members are taking an active part in the redistribution of power and property.

Another interpretation

any of those who have undertaken to Manalyse the communist system have failed to properly distinguish between the pipedreams of the leaders—the plans they drew up based on what they thought was reality—and the actual processes, developments influenced, in part, by events and popular actions outside the purview of the official circles. (These are factors which, admittedly, are difficult to reconstruct in retrospect.) Their failure to differentiate the vision from reality goes a long way towards explaining why some of these analysts have adopted certain indices (economic growth, foreign indebtedness, etc.) that show the classical Stalinist system based on explicit plan directives to be more effective, and its hierarchy and decision-making processes to be more transparent, than those of the post-Stalinist systems, muddled as these were by reforms and pseudoreforms, and beset by slower economic growth and an ever-growing foreign debt burden. (There are suggestions to this effect even in János Kornai's The Socialist System, first published in 1992.)

The classical, plan-directed socialism of the Stalinist era, however, did not function the way the revolutionaries and propagandists envisioned it. Its marked features were not consistent logic and clarity of purpose, but economic disasters, periodic famines and other serious aberrations (e.g., shortages), along with widespread wastage and chaos. Effective planning and evaluation were made impossible by the

constant prevarications of the intimidated subordinates. The system turned to campaigns, aggressive propaganda and a variety of inventive techniques of terrorization to try to lessen the unexpected and harmful effects of unrealistic plans and regulations. More unfounded reports on "positive achievements", more falsified statistics, and more botched plans followed. The ever more exacting task of trying to coordinate the system both through administratively veiled pressure and blatant coercion left the leadership without the strength (and perhaps, after a time, without the will) to try to make the utopian dreams come true that had been so attractive to so many. Soon, all attempts to establish local and regional self-governments (Soviets), to introduce collective consumption, and to set up communes in the place of the traditional family structure were abandoned. Those in power had to concentrate on survival and on averting impending disasters. One can not help but wonder why, under these circumstances, the leadership was still bent on achieving the other key element of the tradition, universal state employment. (Or was it? And if it was, did it ever realize this ambition?)

The preoccupation with survival and crisis management was not restricted to those in power. Crisis management became the central concern of workers, of peasants and of the intelligentsia as well, deprived as they were of their human rights, and threatened in their very livelihood. People looked to the factory, the collectives, and the institutions of the welfare system as offering a range of opportunities to obtain (steal or illegally produce) goods of primary importance to their families and households. The workplace became the stage for brisk exchanges of information, goods and services, with regular bribes-and managers looking the other way-facilitating the undisturbed flow

of transactions. The chances of discovery were minimized by the fact that slacks in production—counterbalanced by periods of highly productive overtime in end-ofthe month/year rush work campaignsmade the otherwise effective system of incentives and accountability impossible to employ (Kemény, 1992; Haraszti, 1989). Like a family of mice ensconced in a large round of cheese, the private worlds of factories, cooperatives and even schools operated embedded in the institutional framework of state employment, the framework painstakingly described by Róna-Tas. These private worlds existed at the level of housing as well (where they tended to take the form of mutual assistance with family building projects), though housing had been identified as an ideal sphere for the exercise of total control. (The older generation still remembers: tenants' meetings, house wardens, block wardens. Cf. Sík-Kelen, 1988.)

All in all, it was a situation that definitely obstructed the efficiency of the official economic policy, and it was not just the central leadership that sought to find a way out: so did the managers of factories and cooperatives, and local party officials. One school of thought expected "results" from tighter control, from heavier penalties, and even from the extension of gaol practices to the economy as such, i.e., the economy's militarization (measures certainly tried in Hungary until the death of Stalin, and still in practice in North Korea today). The other group—cooperative bosses with common sense, party officials with a vein for innovation, etc.—advocated "integration": they tried to channel private economic activity into the official flow of the economy. At first, whenever they became aware of some private activity, they simply looked the other way, in the hope of securing (and indeed securing) the loyalty of the "offenders" when it came to

everyone pulling their weight at the crucial "campaign" times. (It was these people who suspended recruitment into cooperatives until after the position of the cooperative movement had consolidated.) Not much later, these champions of integration—primarily its resourceful Hungarian advocates—devised some extraordinary combinations of the state sector with private enterprise. Róna-Tas refers to most of these forms, although, in keeping with the chronology of his own research, he deals primarily with the operation of these alternative forms in the period subsequent to the time when universal state employment was already established.

The story, however, started much earlier. In Hungary, it was in 1953, when Prime Minister Imre Nagy first modified Mátyás Rákosi's economic policy pushing for forced economic growth and cooperative association. Many left the cooperatives and applied for trade licenses at that time. These were the years when a great many state-owned restaurants leased their premises to private entrepreneurs. Came 1955, and the hard-liners once again gained the upper hand, only to retreat in 1957 when, fearful of the consequences of unemployment caused by economic recession, the newly-formed Kádár government cancelled the plans for forced collectivization, and the number of small artisans and retailers (especially those engaging in these activities on a part-time, or supplementary basis) began to grow.

The integrationists and the suppressors continued to take turns exercising effective influence even after 1968. Róna-Tas, too, makes a point of this. When the forced centralization and misdirected investment policies of the '70s led to greater foreign indebtedness, there came the new reforms of the early '80s, which provided for the intensive integration of the private sector into the socialist economy.

While the reformers (who tolerated/supported private activity), and the traditionalists (who hoped to satisfy the big enterprises' labour requirements by suppressing private enterprise and strengthening central leadership) were taking turns suggesting ways to improve the productivity of the socialist sector (with very little success), the Hungarian households (families) who were engaged in private activities managed to work out and implement a highly effective strategy for survival. They showed great flexibility in switching from one form of enterprise to another. The accumulated assets of their households and the skills and qualifications of family members gave them a chance to withdraw, when times were bad, into the state sector or into the household itself, only to revert, at times when the reformers got their way, into the world of private enterprise (most of them keeping one foot in the state sector all the while).

A different conclusion

Oⁿ Róna-Tas's analysis, the socialist economic order had two spirals: an upward one and a downward one. During the former, the institution of universal state employment took root; during the

latter it disintegrated. As I see it, socialism was plagued by serious operational problems from the very beginning. The system crumbled as soon as the consumable reserves were depleted. The legal and illegal private sector, which was present throughout the period (though to various degrees), helped to alleviate the problems endemic to the system, and at times provided much-needed life support. We cannot (in the context of the communist era) speak of development as such. What we can talk about is an accumulation of survival skills and a refinement of techniques. This is what some people called reform.

But these are outdated issues, and there is no need for us to deal with them. On the other hand, whoever undertakes a comparative study of the period, or wishes to familiarize himself with Hungary's most recent history, must read this exceptionally well-structured book. Róna-Tas's work will not only provide an abundance of new information and a comprehensive picture of the history of this peculiar sector, but also confronts him with some original views that provide ample scope for debate. In this publish-or-perish world of pseudo-scholarship, what more can one expect from a real book?

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Tamás Koltai

Crime and Punishment

László Darvasi: Bolond Helga (Crazy Helga) • Denise Radó: A Fedák-ügy (The Fedák Case) • András Szigethy: Kegyelem (Clemency) • András Jeles: Szenvedéstörténet (A Passion Story)

From the very earliest times playwrights have been intrigued by crime. It has been part of classic mythology, as in the story of the Atreids or in Sophocles' *Oedipus*. In Shakespeare's history plays, the crimes committed in the pursuit of power are constituents of history's "Great Mechanism". Ibsen's heroes are burdened by sins committed before his plots unfold. Modern drama is concerned with the psychological or social motivation of criminal acts—suffice to mention works by Sartre, Peter Weiss, Hochhuth or Dürrenmatt, which greatly influenced the theatre of the 50s and 60s.

In recent times, the criminal play has mostly followed commercialised patterns. Courtroom proceedings offer an all to facile opportunity for narration. But to avoid cheap sensationalism, writers have to attain either a level of abstraction or political actuality. Some recent Hungarian plays provide examples of both.

László Darvasi is a young writer best known for his short stories. His *Crazy*

Helga is apparently a simple, straightforward crime story. The night before the plot opens, Koch the baker and his family are murdered. Suspicion falls on two young people. One is Helga, the Kochs' adopted daughter, generally considered to be mad; the other is a secretive, nameless, young stranger, the girl's casual lover with whom she had spent the night. The morning after the murder, Helga describes the youth, now in custody, as her fiancé. Later she insists she is expecting his child. The justice in charge of the case falls in love with the girl and wants to save her. His councillors, however, want to cast suspicion upon Helga, all of them fearing the child's birth, for they all had an affair with the girl. They are all under suspicion anyway for they all owe smaller or larger sums to the murdered baker. Once this is discovered by the justice—though it may well be a bluff—they offer to help the anonymous young man and his fiancée to escape. Eventually the stranger disappears just as mysteriously as he arrived-rumour has it that a certain prince's men have helped him get away. Helga is in labour, and seeks in vain for the young man in gaol. Still behind bars, she gives birth to a girl and dies. The baby is handed over to the judge whom Helga is said to have named as the father before she died.

The short story on which the play is based sets the plot in 17th-century

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Bavaria. In the theatrical version, however, no specific place and time are mentioned. Nor are events as unambiguous as they would seem from the above résumé, which is one possible interpretation of the story. Causality is unclear and succeeding events invite more than one solution. There are mystical elements too in the crime story. Helga calls the unknown young man Himmel ("heaven"); the child seems at one time to be the result of physical coupling; at another, reference is made to the Immaculate Conception. It may even be that the child, who was born on the eve of Easter, was fathered by the Devil himself. Though it abounds in surprises and tries to display the mystery of both miracle and dread, the plot remains undeveloped. Helga's conduct amounts to sacred simplicity, her pregnancy a sign of being one of the chosen people. Hers is a story of heavenly love in which the prize is martyrdom, and also a story of earthly lust which condemns one to a life of sin. It is, in fact, a story about the human condition, in which both are present simultaneously and remain an unsolvable secret.

Darvasi handles the plot in his play so as to shift the emphasis from the person of the culprit to the nature of crime and the examination of its specific character. The case eventually remains unsolved; the criminal act itself and its metaphysical nature continue to be blurred. This dual unsolvability proves far too heavy a test for audiences, just as it does for the cast, as this production of the Csokonai Theatre of Debrecen makes abundantly clear. Of all possible interpretations, director Gábor Czeizel builds his production on the superficial layers of the text. We see a dramatized pseudo crime story performed in costume, which does not offer even a hint of the ontological and philosophical problems broached by the play.

Amore profane and concrete legal case is The Subject of the play staged by the The Underpass, the studio theatre of the József Attila Theatre in Budapest. The Fedák Case is a documentary on the court proceedings conducted against the actress Sári Fedák after the Second World War. A "People's Court" called her to account for her far right actions during the war, under the German occupation, and gave her a prison sentence. Nearing seventy when released, she never again set foot on the stage.

Our century has had many an actor and actress who were politically committed and dedicated their art to the service of an ideology or a regime—in some cases to more than one. They did so out of conviction or because they wanted to perform at any cost. Perhaps the best known among them was Gustaf Gründgens, on whose life Klaus Mann's novel Mephisto was based and hence István Szabó's Oscar-winning film of the same title. Gründgens was never a believing Nazi; he even protected some who were persecuted. However, unlike some leading figures in the German arts who refused to appear in public or went into exile, he lent his name to the Third Reich. Since he had committed no crime, he carried on as a theatre manager in Düsseldorf, then in Hamburg. In the eyes of those, however, to whom conscience mattered, he had a "record", just like Furtwängler, who carried on working in the years of the Third Reich.

In terms of talent, Sári Fedák does not compare to Gründgens. She was a comedienne whose work was part of the entertainment industry. She was most famous in a breeches role in the musical *János vitéz* by Pongrác Kacsóh. Based on a narrative poem by the great 19th-century romantic poet, Sándor Petôfi, it is an undemanding evergreen, adapted to unsophis-

ticated tastes. Fedák also appeared in many operettas, and as a critic said of her, "she allowed herself to be drifted in this or that direction most probably under the influence of her particular mood or hormonal urges". She happened to be too visible during the 133 days of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919, so she went into exile for some time. Not that what she did was politically motivated, neither when she married the playwright Ferenc Molnár, of Jewish origin (divorce followed shortly), nor when she kept mouthing anti-Semitic slogans and became a favourite of the far rightist regime. It was probably unnecessary to prosecute her and thus turn her into a martyr and heroine.

The play is a documentary based on the trial, edited and directed by a young actress, Denise Radó. She does no more than highlight the most important parts of the record of court hearings, rounding off the evidence, and various memoirs, into dramatic scenes. Among the witnesses are individuals well known to the Hungarian public-writers, composers, actors, politicians, journalists, lawyers, members of high society. (The parts are played by five actors.) Sári Fedák is played by Erzsi Galambos, who has won acclaim in musicals and operettas. Her opportunities are somewhat limited, since the role is mostly that of a broken old woman sitting in the dock, reduced to passivity. She could have shown the shaded colours of a personality in flashbacks, had the text offered her the chance. However, this would have called for a more fictional vein which goes beyond the documents-in short, for a genuine writer's approach. However, the undertaking does not-or cannot-cross this borderline, and remains content with illustration, avoiding the taking of sides over an actress who behaved like a chameleon under the various political regimes she found herself.

Insofar as there is a moral judgment, it is to be found in the closing sentence. As though producing a famous quote, a mysterious male voice tells the audience that "An actor can be right only on stage", thus warning actors of the dangers of making personal statements outside their theatrical roles.

Almost, but not quite, a documentary play, Clemency was written by András Szigethy, a journalist. This too is about a case, a historical one at that, in which a partial judgement has already been passed; however, the final one can only be the result, if it is possible at all, of collating millions and millions of personal opinions. The accused is none other than János Kádár, the communist party leader who for more than thirty years was the leading figure in Hungary's "goulash communism" and "the merriest barracks in the Gulag".

Kádár was, of course, never actually brought to trial, as he died on the eve of the political changes. In Szigethy's play he passes judgment on himself; the intention is one of self-acquittal rather than condemnation. Although several figures appear, the play takes the dramatic form of a single soliloguy, based on his notorious last address to the Central Committee on 12 April 1988. The address is a mixture of self-justification and excuse. On account of its confusion and self-apology, the original is dramatic in itself—so much so that earlier another writer, Mihály Kornis, put it on stage with minimal editing. Szigethy has opted for a more traditional method. supplements excerpts from speech—in the narrator's conscience with the arguments of those present. He confronts the "comrades" with themselves; comrades, who in the past forty years were one another's fellow fighters, predecessors, successors, followers and, as the case might be, executioners.

Thus Kádár meets, virtually or in reality, László Rajk, sentenced to death in a show trial and executed in 1949, when Kádár was Minister of the Interior: Mátvás Rákosi, the Stalinist party leader between 1945 and 1956; Imre Mezô, the Budapest party secretary, who was killed during the 1956 Revolution when the party headquarters were besieged by the freedom-fighters; and Imre Nagy, the communist turned revolutionary in 1956, whom Kádár sent to the gallows. This last encounter beyond death is the most disturbing of all. Kádár refers to "that man", whose very name was banned in Hungary for twenty years, with a bad conscience. He carries on an argument with him to justify himself. A similar polemic takes place with Rajk, based in part on original records of the interrogation (according to the evidence of a secretly recorded tape, Kádár persuaded, even threatened, Rajk to confess to the absurd charges in the interests of the party), * with Rákosi, Mező, and the "Soviet connection", Major General Serov.

All this is rather drab, so the author imports various characters to provide historical perspectives and analogies. From the nostalgic times of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Francis Joseph appears, who from being the monarch who suppressed and retaliated for the 1848 Revolution, became the Francis "Joe" of the 1867 Compromise. The simple Working Woman even today remembers Kádár as a symbol of a secure and stable life and happy times. The Hero of Our Times is a member of the mass, a man who always adjusts himself to circumstances. And to avoid didacticism, László Vándorfi, who directs this production at the Petôfi Theatre in Veszprém, inserts marches of the working class movement, operetta tunes and video clips. The ghosts of Kádár's predecessors are seen

marching over Kádár's bed, and so is an exhibition of his personal belongings (very ascetic, as he himself was widely known to be, these were sold at auction after the change of the regime). For the sake of authenticity, torture is occasionally seen on the screen. An element of the grotesque is introduced through Serov, the KGB general, who is shown as a buffoon (a Chinese actor speaking comically broken Hungarian is cast in the role), and by Péter Blaskó's outstanding imitations of Kádár's characteristic accent, fit for a stand-up comedy act.

As the director said, producing the play was an act of courage, given a public opinion that is still sensitive to the events of the near past and far from being in agreement over how to interpret them. (This is testified to by the fact that the company received several threats. Nothing out of the order happened either at the first night or after, and the play continues to attract capacity audiences in the tiny theatre.) The director and the lead actor have been invited to participate in the Budapest production in the Pesti Theatre. Yet the secret of the success must be sought in the banality of thought and form. The audience, faced with an easily comprehended and simplified handling of problems, and the technique of the amateur theatre of the 60s, has no difficulty believing that the party secretary's humdrum moaning sheds light on the mechanism of communist dictatorship.

We learn all the more from a similar play, thematically at least. András Jeles's *A Passion Story*, took first prize in a contest organized by the Csiky Gergely Theatre of Kaposvár in memory of the 40th anniversary of the 1956 Revolution. (I discussed the runner-up, *Körvadászat* (The

^{*} See transcript published in No. 147 of HQ.

Battue), in No. 147 of *The HQ.*) A Passion Story was first staged at the Kamra, the small stage of the Katona József Theatre in Budapest. Oddly enough, it was not directed by the author, himself a film director with an international reputation, who often works for the theatre and for a time had his own alternative company. The director of the Budapest production was Gábor Máté, who is an actor member of the company.

The play opens with the actors' orchestra playing Beethoven's *Egmont* Overture, with a difference—in silence, not a single sound is heard. (On 24 October 1956, the day after the uprising began, Hungarian Radio discontinued its regular programmes, and in between the various announcements and statements, this piece, alternating with Liszt's Piano Concerto in E-flat major, was broadcast all day.) The actors, in evening dresses, go through the motions sound by sound, but the heroic music is stifled in the instruments; we only hear the bows squeak, the wind players breathe and the conductor moan.

Jeles has written a powerful play, which triggers the imagination through its language. This is a visionary piece, something rare among the many flat plays to be found in the history of Hungarian drama. His aim is to grasp the apocalypse of the Hungarian communist movement at work—the surreal, crazy, yet systemic logic of cadre elimination, working in concentric circles; the paroxysm of primitiveness, at once appalling and ludicrous; the cannibalism of re-ideologized and unreal nightmares come true. Jeles aspires to and attains much more than the basic level of dramatized pamphlets. He examines the mechanism of the vandalism of the communist and AVO (State Security) thugs at work as a movement and as a "conscience", conjoining this with focus on the breakdown of the system. He uses documents too-some excerpts from the Rajk

trial are in the text—but these are twice removed, abstracted as absurd cliches, rather than insipid documents.

The boldest removal is the profane association of the fate of the protagonist, Colonel Ámen of the ÁVO, with Christ's Passion. The officer first tries out on himself the physical atrocities of interrogation with a perverted curiosity of self-analysis; later he too finds himself accused, a victim of his own comrades, and eventually crucifies himself of his own free will. The process is less psychological than visionary, along the lines of the surrealism of a Breughel or a Bosch. The movement, which "carries its traitors in itself", is best encapsulated in the anecdote told by one character, of a hooked fish which is found to have other fish in its innards. The picture conjured up is reminiscent of the Flemish vision of the slit monumental fish. out of which fall out smaller fishes one on top of the other, which are hung on trees. Horror and the grotesque go hand in hand, setting the tone of the scenes—the primitive gaolers gobbling up their food; the aggression of the "nursing comrades"; the moronic henchmen; the electric torture; and the test of the AVO officer searching for the transcendence of martyrdom, painting his own pseudo-agony in chicken blood; the theatre of preparing the accused in trumped-up trials by making them learn their confessions by heart.

The play requires a large stage, to offer the necessary distancing from the actual situation and to ensure surrealism. That would lend a visionary character, an apocalyptic unreality to the everyday premises of ÁVO offices, the interrogation chamber, villa or apartment. On the tiny stage of the Kamra, closely surrounded by the audience, all these remain overly naturalistic, and secondary elements—torture, or eating an egg—acquire primary emphasis, to the detriment of the nightmarish elements.

Yet the director's interpretation of the play is impeccable and some scenes are directed brilliantly. (One such is the scene in which Comrade Amen, the interrogator, is sitting on the lavatory, in between stereotyped excerpts from the Rajk trial in an eerie light and to the soft background music of Massenet's Dream Aria; the actor, who plays an Alsatian dog, with a laryngeal microphone built into the muzzle, is a trouvaille. So too are the nocturnal apocalypse of the ÁVO villa, whose lighting occasionally breaks down and emits a buzzing sound when switched on, the prisoners learning their confessions by heart, the drunken henchmen, the AVO gang fantasizing confusedly, the textual montage made up of communist jargon, slogans, idiotic phrases and stunted articulation.) However, we miss here the enlarged, surreal vision of the background. The "passiveness" of Comrade Amen's voluntary crucifixion in full view, in this naturalistic,

psychoanalytical medium, is utterly incomprehensible: a distant, symbolic view would suffice. And of course, one misses the author's closing visions of the resurrection of the crucified ÁVO and the apocalypse of the slaughter of the innocents at Bethlehem.

The actors take no bow at the end of this production, as applause is too profane after such a gut-level confrontation with evil. However, the audience does not dare not to applaud. They dare not allow silence prevail—silence which Peter Brook describes as "another form of recognizing and appreciating a shared experience". Sadly, forced artificial applause was all too strongly indoctrinated, that moronic rhythmic clapping encoded in communist times. And strangely enough, new generations of Hungarian audiences have more conspicuously retained this than did our neighbours, who lived through much tougher dictatorships.

THE TRANSYLVANIAN QUESTION

just had the opportunity to see your web site on the Internet, and read the article regarding Transylvania, by Gusztáv Molnár. (HQ 149, Spring 1998). Having visited the area several times within the last four years, I concur with the conclusions made in the article, and believe that one day Transylvania can become an independent federation, with Transylvanian Hungarians and Romanians working together.

We have established a foundation (Czegei Wass Foundation, Inc.) whose current goals are to improve the economic and cultural conditions of the Hungarians living in Transylvania. Hardships are many, but the small villages have a better chance for survival under current conditions than the populations living in the larger cities, who are driven by hopes of job opportunities and a better life. However, the villagers are survivors, and can withstand almost any hardship, but are rapidly losing their young people to the cities.

In an attempt to save these unique villages, our foundation is attempting to create job markets and provide opportunities for the younger generation to remain in these villages. We are also attempting to stabilize the losses of Hungarian owned property to Romanians, by helping the local churches purchase the land and turn it over to the villagers for food and grain production, or other business ventures.

In this effort we are looking for groups. foundations, churches and individuals who can afford to assist financially. We can arrange to have groups or churches sponsor specific Hungarian villages or Hungarian churches, so the sponsors can observe the progress through annual reports and photographs. Donations to churches are currently helping to renovate the churches, clean up the cemeteries, and restore buildings regained from the Government. They are also helping families with home repairs and personal needs, to restore the community's cultural centres and schools, and to provide schools with Hungarian teaching materials. Other donations to the foundation are used for the purchasing and maintainance of community farming equipment, assisting in marketing products, maintaining the properties of the community, creating small familytype businesses, and providing professional training and scholarships to the universities

Our goal is to regain the economic strength the Hungarians once enjoyed, and possibly establish an infrastructure which will allow economic growth through tourism, agriculture, and small business ventures.

If there is any way you can provide us with assistance through your publication, it would be greatly appreciated.

Géza Wass de Czege Czegei Wass Foundation, Inc. Fort Myers, FL 33901 U.S.A.

HQ: AN OPEN WINDOW

I have had the good fortune to read *The Hungarian Quarterly* for many years.

I expect I am not your usual reader. I have known Hungary since 1945, when I went there at the close of World War II and the end of the Russian siege as a *Time* magazine reporter. I missed the Hungarian Revolution, but having spent

that summer in Budapest I was able to write a report of what Hungary was like on the eve of the Revolution that you thought important enough to print in the *Quarterly* in two instalments. (*HQ* 142, 143.)

My ties to many of Hungary's leading cultural figures were close. I visited Kodály at his home, the sculptor Kisfaludy Stróbl was a dear friend, and so was Lipót Herman, the painter. Back in the U.S., becoming aware of the disproportionate numbers of distinguished Hungarian Americans in science and the arts, I wrote a piece about what made them so, for Harper's magazine. There have been repeated visits to Hungary since, the last for a meeting of American Congress men and women on Russia, which provided the opportunity for us to meet.

I tell you all this to underline my debt to the Quarterly. It has given me indis-

pensable insights into the Hungarian cultural and political scene that no other publication could or would, and in English. I think it's commonly felt that the Hungarian language is a bar to a wider understanding of Hungary's cultural achievements. But the *Quarterly* provides an open window into Hungarian politics, writing, history, and the arts. The quality of the editing and writing is very high, the equal of the best quarterlies in this country—I think of the *Yale Review*, *The American Scholar*, and others.

I find that few of my colleagues here know the *Quarterly*, which makes me think it should be better known. I have a suggestion that would not involve great cost: a small box in the back pages of *The New York Review of Books, The Times Literary Supplement*, and *The London Review of Books*, as a starter, stating what the magazine is, and costs. I think it could yield results.

Simon Bourgin Washington, DC 20009 U.S.A.

A COOL HOMEPAGE

I was just surfing around on the net when I came up onto your cool homepage. You have done a very good job. I really enjoyed how you laid out your graphics and your use of colour. There are so many bad sites out on the Internet that it is a true joy to surf up to a really nice one like yours! I liked the links that you had chosen as well as the actual content of your own home-

page as well. Keep up the good work, it is appreciated!

I am the Webmaster of WD9GNG's German/American Homepage. I have been trying to get out and look at as many homepages as I can in order to see what other folks are doing. You have given me some good ideas on how a good site should be laid out!!

Ken Wigger Onkel Ken Webmeister WD9GNG's German/American Homepage http://www.angelfire.com/il/wd9gng

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I want very much to understand more closely this saintly adventurer and exemplary Swedish patriot, of whom, I have noticed, young Swedes know awfully little, for Count Folke Bernadotte occupies the dais reserved for the real man who saved the Jews.

History

A statue of Raoul Wallenberg is not far from my present home. My young children were afraid of the tall, sad gentleman, but I reassured them: he was a good man, he loved children.

Documents

On Klauzál Square, meanwhile, where the hecatomb of ghetto residents was to have risen, not long ago the playground was refurbished. The children like the new playthings; among them are the children from the nearby Jewish school, mingled together with the neighbourhood

Fiction

Gypsy kids and all the others.

Poetry

From: György Konrád: On Raoul Wallenberg, pp. 3–12.

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