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Peter Unwin

Borders and Crossings

Notes by a Retired Diplomat

The main road from Vienna to Budapest crosses the frontier at Hegyeshalom. Today it is a motorway on both sides of the border, and the frontier control point is as busy as any you will find, one of the principal places where traffic from the east, in this case Hungary, the Balkans and Turkey, enters the European Union. It was very different when I first approached it in 1958. Then we drove out of Austria in a car that was overloaded with family, with babies' bits and pieces and with our own perturbation. We were going to a Hungary which two years earlier had been torn by revolution and war and in which, just a month ago, the revolutionary leader Imre Nagy had been executed. We were taking with us a girl of two and a boy of one, as well as our own hopes and fears about this unfamiliar business of diplomacy. There was a real feeling of tension, as much in the air at the Austrian checkpoint as in our car. So when the Austrian frontier policeman (his pistol, we noticed, wrapped against the elements in grease-proof paper) wished us *"Auf Wiedersehen"* we whispered *"Bald"* in unison in reply.

The arrangements on the Hungarian side of the frontier were of a different order of seriousness. As we drove down the empty road towards the border itself we saw watchtowers across the fields. The checkpoint lay at the end of an avenue of barbed wire and the guards there had sub-machine guns slung across their chests. The system processed us with agonizing slowness, if with the propriety due to even a brand-new diplomat. Then we drove away into Hungary down an unkempt main road that no repairer had touched since the 1930s.

The first serious place we came to was a straggle of a big village called Mosonmagyaróvár. The name had been one to conjure with two years earlier, when Western journalists driving to Budapest on the first day of the revolution

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Peter Unwin

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Of his four books to date, Imre Nagy – Voice in the Wilderness, *was reviewed in No. 128.*

encountered there the broken remains of a massacre by the security police. We drove into the place expectantly, even nervously, and found nothing but the long dusty straggle of houses you encounter in villages and small country towns all over Hungary. (Forty years later I found a busy, substantial town, all trace of my early memories submerged in concrete.) We needed something for the children to drink and went looking for bottled water in the only shop we could discover, quite fruitlessly. Half an hour later, in a more substantial town on the road to Budapest, we stopped at a traffic light. A modulated English voice asked whether we needed help; and the Military Attaché from the Legation, returning from a shopping trip to Vienna, shepherded us into the city. At a level-crossing somewhere just outside Budapest, children came begging, till a man bristling with respectable indignation sent them away.

You can find places and things all over the Burgenland and western Hungary to illustrate the history of the borderlands. A consequence of the Ottoman occupation of the heart of Hungary is that most of its relatively few medieval and Renaissance relics lie on its very edges. So if you visit Hungary looking for Romanesque country churches you must go to Ják, right on the border with Austria, or Velemér, which is almost in Slovenia. Sopron is a fine old Hungarian town, but it stands surrounded by Austrian territory. When the Burgenland was ceded to Austria, the people of Sopron voted to stay with Hungary. The Hungarians praise their loyalty—recorded on a tablet which calls Sopron the most loyal of cities. Others will tell you that a Hungarian soldier was billeted in every house to make sure the occupants voted for union with Hungary. And there must have been citizens who, throughout the years of the Cold War, cursed the way their grandparents chose to cast, or were made to cast, their votes. Now Sopron seems a happy place, its shopkeepers enriched by Austrians who come to buy their groceries here and its dentists happily serving all the tourists who come in search of crowns, fillings and extractions at half their cost within the European Union.

Kőszeg is another old town right on the Austrian border, and this is one of the places that withstood a long Turkish siege, with little assistance from the Habsburgs whose lands it was defending. Sárvár, twenty miles deeper into Hungary, has a Renaissance fortress, and a museum within it tells a story even better calculated to feed the Hungarians' self-pity, for in it they are more actively betrayed by the Habsburgs to the Turks. Péter Zrinyi, a Hungarian seventeenth-century general, younger brother of the poet Miklós Zrinyi, fought brilliant campaigns to keep the Turks at bay here on the border of Austria, only to see his victories negated in a craven treaty with the Turks. So he, and Count Ferenc Nádasdy, the lord of Sárvár, rose against the Habsburgs, and in the museum you can see them standing before their judges with the executioner in waiting. It is the sort of story that appeals to the Hungarian image of themselves as the eternal victims of history.

I drove down the border to remind myself of all these places, and encountered the importance in Central Europe of the feasts of All Saints and All Souls. In every village cemetery there were groups of mourners, flowers on every grave, and candles flickering between them in the dusk. In Velemér I found a solitary old man kneeling at his wife's grave, but in the bigger villages there was something approaching a party atmosphere, with the quick sharing of a drink together before happily turning to their duties to the dead. I was struck by the contrast with the protocol at Central European funerals, where every mourner is expected to show the agony of his grief, and where even a quick smile of recognition of a neighbour is taken as an offence to the memory of the dead.

In the same places I found more political commemorations that would have got their authors into gaol when I lived in Hungary. For the villages have sprouted modest monuments to the 1956 revolution, each resplendent in the national colours.

On the road that leads from Sopron deeper into Hungary lie two of Hungary's finest estates. One is the home of the richest of all Hungarian magnates, the Esterházys. Fertőd is a yellow and white palace of a place which attracts awed Hungarian schoolchildren and Austrian visitors in equal proportions. Though the palace has been restored, the job was botched and Fertőd again has an air of having seen better days. But though you can find grander Esterházy palaces in Austria, Fertőd has an importance of its own as a symbol of the wealth of the sort of Hungarian magnates who told a visiting Englishman that they had as many shepherds as he had sheep. Nagycenk is a more modest place, a big manor house rather than palace, but it tells a more moving story. For this was the home of Count István Széchenyi, who in the early nineteenth century set about modernizing his homeland, pretty well single-handed. Széchenyi bridged the Danube and opened it up to shipping. He preached modern agriculture and the value of railways and the importance of using credit constructively. Concern at the war with Austria in 1848-49 brought his mind to breaking point and in 1860 he shot himself. Like Zrinyi and Count Nádasdy of Sárvár, he was another Hungarian who found himself trapped between his homeland and the Habsburgs.

When we were leaving Hungary, an artist we had befriended wanted to give us a present. He offered us a choice of two bronze bas-reliefs. One depicted a pastoral scene, of man with horse and moon, the other, more moving by far, showed Jews being driven through a western Hungarian town in the winter of 1944, on their way to extinction. We swallowed hard and chose the less demanding gift. Now, when I went back rediscovering Hungary, I went looking for the prison at Sopronkőhida where some of these Jews, and some of Hungary's few anti-Nazi resistance fighters, died in the last desperate months of the war. It is a functioning prison still, with high blank walls and razor wire and guards with guns. There are plaques on the walls to the victims of fascism who died

here in 1944–45 and to the "several thousand" Hungarians who were imprisoned here by Soviet occupiers between 1945 and 1948. But there are advertisements on the walls too, in good free-market style. When I was there they were promoting life insurance and condoms to repel AIDS.

On that same journey I discovered some new aspects of western Hungary. Just inside the country from Austria is a gleaming new factory labelled "Opel of Hungary". Further up the road I passed what was left of an agricultural estate. There, at the end of an avenue of trees, was the old manor house, dilapidated and ruinous now, and there were the farm labourers' barracks, which in the bad old days of the estates offered human beings less comfort than carriage horses found in the stables. Now I could see curtains at the windows and three satellite dishes along the eaves. At last the people were living better than the horses.

I went looking for a mechanic to fix the damage done to my car in Budejovice. By the roadside I found a workshop which, on the face of it, had all the glitz of a Western business. They went to work on my car and I wandered off in search of a toilet. Behind the scenes I found myself in living quarters more squalid than anything I have seen in the Third World, an abomination of bachelor desolation.

A few miles further on I stopped for petrol and saw that they were selling toys for doting fathers to take home to Laci. The biggest attraction on the shelves was an American army truck in IFOR Bosnia lettering, with the name of the NATO base in Hungary, Kaposvár, blazoned on its side. When I left in 1986, I reminded myself, Hungary was a member of the Warsaw Pact in good standing, a country that even smelt of Eastern Europe, with that mixture of dust and diesel exhaust and doubtful drains. Now it is a pillar of NATO and as capitalist as they come, selling replicas of NATO trucks for little Hungarians to play with. The Iron Curtain is gone, and with it so many of the presumptions that made Hungary Eastern European. But as I paid for my petrol and bought a bar of chocolate and went back to the car, I caught another whiff of that smell I remembered so clearly.

We stayed in Budapest for three years on our first diplomatic posting, years at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s which showed just how harsh life behind the Iron Curtain could be. There were Russian garrisons all over the country. The Communist regime pumped out a stream of propaganda about popular contentment that nobody believed; for the place then was dirt-poor, the people shit-scared. Rumours ran around Budapest: so-and-so had been arrested for his part in the Revolution, tried, imprisoned or executed. It was rumoured then, and has been established as fact now, that the regime was executing young men on their eighteenth birthday, when they reached the age of legal responsibility. A campaign began to drive the peasants back into co-operative farms which they had abandoned as soon as they got the chance two years earlier. Every so often we drove to Vienna to stock up with supplies and breathe free air, and each time we crossed the border we saw more of the complexity with which the Hungarian side

was defended. We came to take the watchtowers, the wire and the border controls for granted; but to encounter, twenty kilometres inside Hungary, a pair of frontier guards manning a machine gun in the ditch beside the road was a reminder of just how lethal this border could be for those who, unlike us, had no right to be there. And even we were not allowed to travel freely near the border if we were not on our way to Austria. The contrast between the tension and terror in Hungary and the casual ways of neutral Austria in those years was a stark instruction on the differences which the Iron Curtain had driven through the heart of Europe.

For us there were lighter moments along that border, even in the late 1950s. Once we went out of Hungary, not on the road to Vienna, but at the other end of its border with Austria, at a place called Rábafüzes. The frontier station there was even simpler than at Hegyeshalom, but the same sense of siege brooded over it: watchtower, barbed wire, ploughed strip, bored young men with guns. While we waited for our passports we saw that the guards had penned a young faun in a handkerchief of a field behind the frontier post. It was shut in by barbed wire but it was looking for greener grass in pastures new, poking its head under the barbed wire. Just beyond the wire was one of the little pennants in the national red and white with which the Austrians staked out their sovereignty. It would have made a splendid propaganda photograph if we had had the nerve to take it. Instead we contented ourselves with composing a sentence in broken Hungarian: "That animal is as free as the Hungarian people;" but we had the sense not to use it when the guard wordlessly gave us back our passports. (I rediscovered that crossing point recently. It was as unrecognizable as Hegyeshalom, with a smart new customs post manned only by a young girl idly glancing at passports. She had an enormous pistol strapped to her broad backside, but as I handed her my passport I saw that she had a child's jigsaw puzzle of Donald Duck on the shelf in front of her. Two or three pieces seemed to have defeated her, and I stretched over and slipped one into place. *"Köszönöm szépen"* she said, without looking up: "thank you very much", with all the commitment of a child trained to say thank you before she gets down to play.)

Whenever we crossed the frontier, we did so as privileged foreigners. Things were different for Hungarians. An old Hungarian said to me recently: "To talk about taking a trip to the moon today is more realistic—I mean it, literally more realistic—than the thought of our taking a trip to Vienna in the early 1950s." Once I went shopping for something or other in the Bond Street of Budapest. I turned down the only thing the shopkeeper had to offer me, saying "I'll get it in Vienna next time I go." To this day I remember with shame the expression my carelessness painted on his face.

We saw the difference between diplomats and Hungarians one day when we drove a Hungarian friend to Vienna and into emigration. Mária worked as a translator in the British Legation. For a variety of reasons—wrong class back-

ground, sons who had fled in 1956, refusal to report on the Legation's doings—she got across the secret policeman to whom she had to report for a regular interrogation. He could have clapped her in gaol. But she was sick and getting sicker, and working as she did in a Western legation she had at least a modicum of protection. The interrogator and his masters decided they would be better off without her. They told her she could leave the country, and they would drive her into an asylum if she stayed; so, innumerable documents and rubber-stamps later, she drove away with us down the road to Vienna. At the frontier the passport people and the customs people turned out her pockets and her handbag and all that was left of her possessions in a crumbling suitcase.

Mária too was privileged in her own way. Those who tried to get out of Hungary illegally were not. For most of the Cold War it was a potentially fatal business to try to flee the country. The Hungarian frontier guards did not keep their guns wrapped in grease-proof paper. Even in the early 1980s, when I was back in Hungary as ambassador, by which time Hungary was supposed to have become an easygoing place, the BBC reported that an Austrian couple out boating on the Neusiedlersee, the lake that straddles the border, had drifted into Hungarian waters and been shot dead by the frontier guards. I asked our cook about it, for in an earlier incarnation he had done his national service with the frontier troops. Oh, yes, he told me, there were regular shootings on the border. But he had escaped patrolling when he volunteered for the cook house. There he learned the finer points of *gulyás* and *pörkölt* and now he found himself in our kitchen, cooking them for Princess Margaret and Margaret Thatcher.

There were, nevertheless, two great illegal migrations across the border into Austria: in the late 1940s, as the Communists tightened their grip in Hungary, and in the autumn of 1956, when the revolution went down to defeat and 200,000 people took the chance to get away to freedom. Pál Nagy went with the first wave, Tom and Kati Zombory with the second.

Nagy started his journey from Budapest in style, on the Arlberg express. His cover story was that he had family business to settle in western Hungary. So far, so good. He changed trains safely, then went into hiding with friends. That night he boarded a third train that would take him close to the border. He found himself in the suspicious company of frontier guards going back to duty, and matters were made worse when two friends joined him, dressed in their best shooting clothes and all too obviously prepared for a yuppy romp to freedom. But Nagy had paid a guide, who was keeping an eye on him from the next compartment. They made a dash for it, jumped from the slow-moving train and escaped into the darkness. Four hours hard walking followed; fear at the frontier; a dash past heaps of barbed wire not yet put in place; and safety in Austria.

The Zomborys fled in 1956, after the defeat of the Hungarian revolution, when half the young people of Budapest were on their way to the West. They also took a train, intending to cross the frontier near a place called Levél, which in

Hungarian means "letter" and also "leaf". A cousin had gone before them and she sent them a message on Radio Free Europe from Vienna: *Levél megy*—which to the world meant "letter on its way" but to them meant the Levél route to freedom was still open. But the railways were erratic in those tumultuous days, and their train dumped them miles away further south, ten miles from the border. In the station yard men were waiting: "Can I help you?" They could have been villains, or agents of the secret police, or honest men who for a price could show them the way to freedom. Tom and Kati gambled, successfully. Their guide took them on a six-hour route march across frozen ploughland and sent them on their way across a canal that forms the border with Austria. In the darkness a flapping flag told them they were safe and they struggled on for five more miles towards a single light in the darkness. Behind them they saw flares and heard shots. In a sleeping village they found a sign in Hungarian: "refugees this way". It led them to an empty schoolroom strewn with hay. There they slept. The following morning a clerk registered their arrival and a local farmer gave them the fare to Vienna.

From then on, the Zomborys' story reads like a fairy tale. Vienna was packed with refugees. Austrians gave them money, took them in, gave them clothes. The Zomborys went to the British Embassy, where the British Council representative gave them tea, sausage rolls, cake and sympathy. Within a week of their arrival they married—the first refugee couple to do so, with the man from the British Council giving Kati away. Within two weeks they were in Britain. When, as they told me their story, I carelessly remarked that nowadays they would be rejected as economic emigrants, they were understandably offended; but the fact remains that we do not manage today to give refugees the welcome which poor post-war Britain extended so unquestioningly forty-four years ago.

Nearly fifty years after Pál Nagy, more than forty after the Zomborys, I went looking for traces of the two exoduses. I looked in western Hungary and, more particularly, in the quiet corner of Austria in which most of the refugees arrived. It is the Seewinkel, the flat stretch of fields and marshes that juts into Hungary on the eastern side of the Neusiedlersee, infinitely remote from Vienna only forty miles away. I went to Andau, where hundreds of refugees inched across a broken bridge across the canal that follows the border. It is a nondescript little town which has forgotten that once upon a time people wrote books about what happened there. But a back road which leads the six miles to the bridge has been christened "Freedom's Way". Artists from all over Europe have punctuated it at regular intervals with bits of modern sculpture made from trees and boulders and choses trouvées, which are worthy if unconvincing tributes to freedom and human rights for all. At the end of it, I found the bridge—or rather a reconstruction of the bridge, in brand-new timber. Beside it was a viewing tower, for those who wanted to peer into Hungary. In front of it was a little no-

tice marking the border five yards short of the bridge, and threatening criminal prosecution for those who crossed it.

That autumn Western Europe was full of the dangers of East European Gypsies fleeing into the European Union from persecution at home. On the previous day I had seen those Austrian troops watching the Danube near the Slovak frontier, and everywhere I had been along the frontier there had been patrols —men on foot, in jeeps, in frail bivouac tents—out to stem the flow. Two men in uniform were moving away along the canal as I arrived at the bridge at Andau. I studied their backs; the minatory notice; and the satisfaction to be had from setting foot on the famous bridge. It was getting dark, they were lost already in the darkness, it would be absolutely safe to go over into Hungary. Timidity held me back, a timidity which even in safe little England blushes when it sees a policeman. And as timidity defeated temptation I saw, ten yards away in a ditch, two other Austrian gendarmes, who must have been watching me in the November dusk. It was nothing more respectable than craven fear that saved me from exposure as the ex-ambassador who was arrested for illegally crossing from Austria into Hungary over the bridge at Andau.

Objective Hungarians—and they do not grow on trees—will tell you that they are a brilliant, bumptious and unique people. Outsiders, who in their turn find it difficult to be objective about the Hungarians, tend to agree with them. They love them or loathe them, and those of us who know them well sometimes entertain both sentiments at the same time. Hungary and the Hungarian Diaspora have produced far more than their share of brilliant individuals. Go to a party in Budapest and you will find that Hungarians, particularly male Hungarians, more often than not are bumptiously aware of their own merits. "With a Hungarian for a friend you don't need an enemy" caricatures but encapsulates an aggressive lack of love of fellow-Hungarians and the nation's neighbours. And listen to spoken Hungarian or glance at a Hungarian newspaper to be convinced that these are a unique people with a unique language, their only remote European linguistic relatives the distant Estonians and Finns.

You could as easily make a different list of Hungarian characteristics. Hungarians strike me as extraordinarily personable, flexible and quick off the mark. There is charm about them, and striking physical and moral beauty. Their loneliness in Europe makes them exceptionally self-aware, which makes them yet more personable; but self-awareness makes them selfish. Hungary's policy in the late nineteenth century provoked a usually mild-mannered observer, Edward Crankshaw, to write "... it is hard to discover in the history of modern Europe any nation which has exhibited such sustained and unmitigated egocentricity as the Hungarian nation, any nation which at no time in a century of rapid change ever showed the faintest, the most embryonic, flicker of interest in anything at all but its own immediately selfish interests."

The dying East German regime in 1989 would have said amen to that, as it watched the Hungarian government open its frontier to Austria and release that flood of East Germans to the West which brought down Communism in Europe. Yet the comparison brings us to the inescapable point that the Hungarians did the right thing in 1989, for Europe and their own interests. If, yet again, the Hungarians were last into the revolving door and first out of it, they opened the way for others to follow them.

Criticism such as Crankshaw's easily provokes the Hungarians to self-pity. They think they are unusually badly done by. Geography exposed them to the ravages of Mongols, Tartars, Turks, Habsburgs and Russians. When the Turks were gone they were left as junior partners of the Habsburgs, and they could never persuade Vienna to take their preoccupations as seriously as they took them themselves. Geography surrounded them with people whom on the whole they despise, with historical grudges against them. And these despised Romanians, Slovaks and South Slavs came out on top in 1920, when the Treaty of Trianon gave them so much of historic Hungary, leaving Hungarian minorities languishing under alien rule and a truncated Hungary bewailing its misfortune. Resentment of Trianon led the Hungarians into Hitler's arms, which was followed by Soviet occupation and then by failed revolution.

But after the tragedy of 1956, the Hungarians' famed agility once again stood them in good stead. They found their way relatively quickly out of the worst excesses of Communism. They escaped from it altogether in 1989, back into the Western company in which they believe they naturally belong but from which malign fate has too often separated them. Now they are members of NATO and on their way to membership of the European Union. No lasting grounds for self-pity here (though the day they joined NATO it went to war with the Serbs in their very backyard).

The Hungarian revolution of 1956 calls for reflection. For thirty years after it, no-one told the exact truth about it, at least in public. The Communist regime wanted the Hungarian people to forget about their moment of glory when they tackled Soviet tanks; for them, as for Moscow, Budapest in 1956 was a neuralgic memory. But Hungarians in the West had an interest in painting a highly-coloured picture of what had happened in their homeland that autumn. Memoirs were slanted while the archives remained closed.

Yet the revolution itself needs no embroidery and deserves to be remembered. It was the greatest event in Hungary's twentieth-century history, and the country rightly takes 23 October, the date on which it began, as its national day. In 1956 the Hungarians abandoned their usual caution and went for broke. For once, they used to say, they behaved like the gallant and impractical Poles. In this Hungarian version, the Poles that year behaved like Czechs and the Czechs, as usual, behaved like pigs. For a fortnight, Hungarian freedom fighters fought gallantly against

Soviet tanks. The Hungarian people succoured them, fed them and nursed them. A few Communist apparatchiks and secret policemen apart, no Hungarians went over to the enemy. Between the Second World War and the wars in Yugoslavia, this was the only European war between sovereign states in half a century.

Once the revolution was defeated, all concerned breathed "never again". The Hungarian people wanted no more bloodshed; the regime no challenge to its authority; Moscow no more damaging images of its tanks in action in city streets. The Hungarians had had their moment of glory; now they reverted to their more traditional caution. That caution played its part in bringing them by careful degrees to where they stand today, eighty per cent reintegrated into the European body politic, a Central European country latching itself onto the West, distancing itself as best it can from Balkan neighbours. Still Hungarians see themselves as unique in Europe, as the victims of history and as the worthy objects of their own self-pity. And to the rest of the world they remain the agile, intelligent, personable and often impossible people their history has made them.

My next-door neighbour in England is back from four happy years in Hungary. I told her that I was trying to describe my time there for a book about the Iron Curtain. "I never knew the Iron Curtain", she said, and for a moment she took my breath away; for me life in Hungary and life behind the Iron Curtain had always been synonymous. But even nostalgic old men must keep up with the times. In today's Hungary the Iron Curtain is history.

As we talked, I realized that there were many other ways, too, in which Nina and I saw Hungary differently. Mine was the macro view, based on history, politics, society and diplomacy, leading me to broad and questionably-founded generalization. Her preoccupations had been very different: children in Hungarian schools, giving tea to Hungarian school friends, taking children to Hungarian music-teachers—a micro view. I asked her to put down her impressions, give me a view of Hungary from the school gates. This is the essence of what she wrote.

The school population—teachers, children, parents—was a far cry from the westernized Hungarians whom most foreign diplomats and businessmen naturally meet. Few of them spoke English; few of them wanted to learn it; all rejected Russian; for them Hungarian was good enough and always would be. They took pride in their language, as an academic discipline, a gloriously ingenious linguistic jigsaw puzzle and an essential part of national identity. At school meetings the teachers begged the parents to insist on its correct and punctilious use and on resisting foreign influences. This kind of concern, together with the formality of the Hungarian language (which was resisting democratic slovenliness as effectively as it had resisted Communist levelling), meant that Hungary, Nina thought, was making a better fist than its Western neighbours at holding unwelcome outside cultural and social influences at bay.

Most of the time, Nina found that she was the only parent in the gathering at the school gates waiting for Laci and his little sister Eva. Hungarians in their thirties and forties were too busy holding down multiple jobs to make ends meet. Grandparents came instead, when they could; and when they couldn't, eight-year-old Laci took five-year-old Eva home himself, right across Budapest with three changes of bus if necessary. Mum's Volvo-run was not an option in middle- and working-class Hungary.

All this meant that children were self-reliant to a degree no longer imaginable in the West. By and large they were serious, too, about their work. By Christmas the first grade were reading fluently and writing in a neat cursive hand, by the end of the year they knew their tables up to 10. By Western standards the curriculum was narrow but rigorous, and teachers put their back into their work, for pitifully small financial reward. As a result, by the end of elementary school everyone had mastered basic literacy and numeracy.

Nina found all this impressive - as one might have found English education two generations ago. She was impressed too by the efforts the school made to help a rare Gypsy child. She was gifted, but her father was a caricature of everything that underpins eastern European prejudice against the Roma. He seemed determined to frustrate the school's attempts to help Ilona keep up, as if education would threaten her Gypsy identity. Finally Ilona went elsewhere, and her teachers grieved for her.

But musical education was something else. Music gives Hungary's Gypsies a rare opportunity to break out of the mean framework of their lives, and Gypsy families put everything into supporting musically gifted children. Nina found her own violinist children competing with Gypsy children for approval and applause, and the Gypsy parents treated her and her children almost as if they were competitors for their family business.

Nina's memories reminded me of a different group of Hungarians who took their language seriously. In both the periods in which we lived in Hungary, the poets, writers and translators occupied positions in society more central by far than their confrères in the West. In Central Europe, the literati mattered.

In some ways, they always have. The nations of Central Europe have faced hard struggles to survive or to emerge from under alien rule. Their languages have played an essential role in that struggle. The writers and poets who used them had a political as well as a cultural importance. Mickiewicz in Poland, Petőfi in Hungary are figures of literary and political, and hence of heroic, stature. Their words gave expression to nationality, and so helped build nations.

Each of them wrote in languages with little resonance outside their own countries. They needed translators to convey their message to the world. At the same time, the intellectuals of Central and Eastern Europe wanted to bathe in Western culture as well. They cried out for translations of the works of

Shakespeare, Dante, Voltaire and the rest. So Hungarians, and no doubt Poles and Romanians as well, will tell you that Shakespeare reads even better in their language than in English.

Translators in Central Europe share in some of the veneration accorded to poets and prose writers alike. Many writers use translations to supplement what they earn from their own writing. In the hard years of the 1950s and 1960s others, such as Hungary's first democratic president after 1989, Árpád Göncz, turned to translation when their political sins brought a ban on the publication of their original work. Then and now they form an integral part of the literary world.

When we first lived in Hungary, it was this literary world which stood out most distinctly for Hungarian values, in mute protest at the Socialist internationalism which the country's rulers wished upon their people. Some of its members lived dangerous lives, and they made the danger worse by their appetite for things Western. So even in the worst of times they took risks to keep in touch with Western diplomats, accept invitations, lay their hands on Western books.

Faced with the literary giants among them, the authorities shared something of the nation's awe and admiration. So poets like Gyula Illyés and novelists like Géza Ottlik created limited freedoms for themselves, and used those freedoms to pick away, almost imperceptibly, at the bonds that had been fastened on Hungary. Boldly daring, they used to come to our house, and talk about Hungarian literature and art; wrapped up in the parcel with the poems, novels and short stories were fragments of Hungarian politics too. And when the British Council invited them, they sought, and sometimes won, permission to go to Britain and see its cultural world.

By the time we went back to Hungary in the 1980s, everything there was easier. The cultural figures went back and forth more or less at their pleasure, doing a term at an American university here, attending a literary conference in Italy there. By now, politics was beginning to express itself without the old literary camouflage; dissenters were speaking almost openly of their political aspirations.

Some of the political zing had vanished from literary and cultural gatherings. What had once been whispered among friends now appeared, suitably modulated, in the literary magazines. Still, the writers wrote, the poets sang their songs, the translators filled the bookshops with the work of Western writers. Still the state subsidized this cultural world, accepting that in some ways it reflected the aspirations of ordinary Hungarians who did not open books from one year's end to the next. We saw the way things worked through the lives of many of our friends: materially cramped, living in two-roomed flats on the scrapings of a literary income, but free of the whole world's ideas, and confident that they spoke for the true Hungary.

1989 brought them real freedom to replace the limited, cloistered freedom their reputations had won them under the Communists. It also brought them a

sudden bruising acquaintance with the costs of capitalist freedoms. Now ordinary readers were free to back their preferences, and more often than not they chose the easily accessible, the meretricious. The people we had known winced at the changes that came over the Budapest bookshops. At the same time their state subsidies vanished and they were thrown back on what they could earn. The value of their state pensions diminished with inflation. Beside the new rich their status, once unchallenged, dwindled. They worked harder to scrape a living.

They continued to read widely, and their judgement and taste, as much for foreign as for Hungarian work, remained sound. To talk to Hungarian writers was to be reminded of how much valuable new work in English was passing one by, and of how much time one was giving to things that were less than first-rate. I gave one of Patrick O'Brian's novels to one of them, suggesting he consider translating it, telling myself that the language of topgallant staysails in a force nine gale would take some rendering into Hungarian. A week later he returned it, saying thanks but no thanks; and he explained himself not with the problem of interesting Hungarian readers in Nelson's navy but with a wonderfully shrewd analysis of O'Brian's deficiencies in such particulars as plotting, literary pace and character development.

As long as Hungarians worship their language, Hungary's writers will be people of national importance. I see no sign of them ceasing to be men and women of taste, judgement and literary ability, bravura performers in their own right as well as mainstays of their country. But in a free Hungary their role is going to be less central, less political, in the end less zestful than it was under Communism. By and large, the writers of Central Europe enjoyed the curse of living in interesting times. Now they have to come to terms with the curse of living in easier ones. ❧

Orsolya Karafiáth

Poems

Translated by David Hill

Dark Colours

Sötét színek

I'm coming face-to-face with the gloomy truth:
Good sir, you have discarded me. All for nothing,
then, were the tight skirt, pert decolletage—
your mind's eye no longer strolls my hills and dales.

What use listing everything you're losing—
the sensuous nibbling sessions which you shall no longer
partake in, the intellectual companion,
the kitchen sprite, in hard times the good mother?!

My children's father, my support in old age,
it is now certain, will be another man.
For us two there's no happy, secure future.

I'd urge you to look the sad fact in the face:
a desert of drained-empty days awaits you;
a warmthless, messed-up bachelor apartment ...

Orsolya Karafiáth
was born in 1976. These poems are from her first and so far only volume, Lotte Lenya titkos éneke *(The Secret Song of Lotte Lenya), Noran, 1999.*

Who Plays the Other Role?

Ki adja a másikat?

So this is what a woman's soul needs: I must know
where my place is, who's master of the household.
My dear one holds a power demonstration.
The Lord protect the china dinner service.

"Please don't," I'd like to whisper to him gently,
but feel it's better now to just listen.
My greatest virtue is speedy adaptation:
I easily become the ideal suffering subject.

Lo, here I stand. No drama, no poetics.
My dear one tells me I'm a frigid bitch:
my solid scale of values seems to topple.

("Sweet little pillar of salt," I think of myself,
while staring at the slammed shut door. Lo, here
I stand. And lean my head against the wall.)

fission

oldás

i cannot choose your touching any more
the touchings we have left are without truth
moments off-guard—what are we touching for
you gave me up and now i give up too
instead i rather choose your distantness
while still your distantness will seek me out
as an exchange please take my distantness
you've yielded me i too am yielding now
i opt for your regard whatever cold
forgiving aspects your regard may show
you too want my regard for after all
you've let me go and now i too let go
there's no lovelier split no easier one
give up while i too still am giving up

Potted History

Cserepek

The gossip spread around like wildfire:
tongues wagged about back-of-the-shop-based screwing;
people mentioned a child, a sobbing wife abandoned.
They cursed the vandal who had torn asunder
these strong and holy bonds. (That's me.) A good day
would see me classed as stinking whore, but there was worse.
From telephone calls late at night I learned
just what a wicked bitch I was.

That's the last time I ever go out with a florist.
For such a pairing there's no fertile soil.
No one will coo to me that I'm a rose, a dahlia:
my love will sprout in someone else's heart henceforth.

Why was I taken in by flowery words?!
My good name, such as it was, has gone to pot.

our rooms in november

szobáink novemberben

where could you withdraw to when
there's no meaning even in
shadows any longer
these rooms here just novembery
lacking heating system
are no warmer than nothingness
radiator noises and long-since-
tired-of music fills them up
widening the narrow space
of the summers of your memory

i know these minutes are hard
to give up the re-evokings
like the last cigarettes you smoked

again and again keep returning
it turns into a scent which
you can recognize anywhere then
it will remain inside us like stale air
in a closed room at start of day

early-winter collage: everywhere
november just as if the whole
coldness had been cut up with scissors pasted
into one frozen picture
which perhaps seems a bit monotonous
if you don't look with due attention
at its beautiful settled hues

the poems we know are also now
returning to life gradually comes
the time to relearn the winter trees
amongst the grove's denuded bushes
while their colours might just mingle
it'll be a fine enough spectacle
when our room's window totally transforms
into glassy chilly november
we'll spend a long time looking at the crows
happy the person who has a home

Nándor Gion

Pig's Blood and Anita Dugóhidi

(Short story)

For some reason it has always given me great pleasure to reconcile my quarrelling friends. Even in my early years. But I would sooner not enlarge upon that period, it bears little relation to immediate events. The main thing is that not long ago I successfully reconciled even Selim Ferhatovich and Leonid, though the conflict between them was not a simple case of intellectual dissent as it usually is for most of my friends, it was real antagonism which could have ended in death, and it was perhaps partly thanks to my intervention that it was resolved without serious mishap. It is precisely the gravity of the situation that makes me think I should explain myself. The people in question are not really my friends. Well, perhaps I would call Selim Ferhatovich a friend. We served together in the ill-famed punishment battalion in the former Yugoslav People's Army, and I used to write love letters to his fiancée in his name because he was illiterate; he still has not learned to read and write, but is a very enterprising person all the same, he runs between Bosnia and Western Europe with a huge covered lorry, and in the course of his travels tracked me down in Budapest and, as opposed to the general South Slav view, he likes Hungarians, we have grand talks about the bad old times, though to see his lorry parked beneath my window for days sends shivers down my spine. This is because I am convinced that Selim Ferhatovich carries firearms, mines, possibly other kinds of explosive devices; I cannot state this with complete certainty, it is simply a conjecture of mine, a foreboding if you will. What is certain is that Selim Ferhatovich is a professing Bosnian Muslim, a hardheaded, courageous man who likes Hungarians, therefore I am on friendly terms with him even though I have certain doubts concerning his trade.

Nándor Gion

is a Hungarian writer from Vojvodina now living in Budapest.
He has published twenty volumes of fiction, some of which have been translated into Serb, Croat, Polish and Slovak.

As for Leonid, I have no doubts about him at all. I know perfectly well that he is a Ukranian hitman. He told me so himself, and besides, I followed a couple of his operations at a distance, a great distance, and they all ended with someone's death. But I would never be able to prove anything in his case either. Leonid and I got acquainted quite by accident, I have never commissioned him to do anything for me and have no intention of ever doing so. He, however, cultivates our chance acquaintanceship, though he only looks me up when he has well-founded operational reasons to do so, but for me even this occasional connection is onerous. I try to put on a brave face when he turns up unexpectedly, but I would like to make it perfectly clear that he is no friend of mine, far from it, he is at best merely an acquaintance.

These were the antecedents. The sequel was beginning to look perilous, for Leonid lives a pretty mobile life in Central Europe, has been active in Sarajevo among other places, and in consequence of his activities there certain people commissioned Selim Ferhatovich to flatten the Ukranian assassin on one of his official trips, by accident as it were. And he came very near succeeding, Leonid jumped aside at the very last moment, and afterwards sent an extremely menacing message through me to Selim Ferhatovich. I hate getting mixed up in any dirty business of this kind, especially as I've nothing to do with it all, but in the end I managed to separate my two rancorous... let us say, acquaintances, and to keep them apart. I advised Selim Ferhatovich to leave the country, Leonid was able to return to his lucrative work, and both of them left me alone for some months, which pleased me greatly. I fiddled around quietly at my desk, and from time to time badgered Dominica, the university student who lived in the flat below mine.

There's no need to draw inferences, there was nothing improper in my interest, it was mostly Dominica's soul, her peace of mind that I was concerned with. She is not a full-time university student, her original occupation was walking the streets of the Józsefváros district at night, but since the police have begun to enforce the law, she has been cooped up in her flat, and in her loneliness and misery got out her biology text-books, enrolled in a course at the university, and passed almost all her examinations with credit.

But even this could not alleviate her feeling of confinement, she would often come up and complain plaintively, I would try to comfort her, emphasizing the importance of intellectual achievement, but did not succeed in convincing Dominica, who would just smile sadly at my reasoning. Incidentally, she has a lovely smile.

Then one fine day Dr Katalin Baltás paid me a visit, who in my opinion is the best doctor in the world; she comes to take my blood pressure about once every five years, shakes her head disapprovingly, but never tries to scare me, doesn't try to make me give up anything, so I really like her. But this time she did not come alone, but came in dragging a Hungarian pointer, a vizsla, behind her, and introduced us at once. The dog was pure-bred, pedigree, its registered name was Anita Dugóhidi but, quite illogically, was called Dorka among friends. The dog

barked at me when I gave my doctor a friendly hug, then ran around the flat, stopped in front of the hallway mirror, and yelping loudly attacked her own reflection, bashing her nose a couple of times, this calmed her down a bit, and she lay down in one of the armchairs. Then Dr Katalin Baltás explained the reason for her visit. She has been invited to go on a one-month study-tour in Scandinavia, her plane is leaving tomorrow, she is very happy to be going, her only problem is that she has no one to leave Dorka with. Seeing as she'd been straightforward with me, I gave her a straight answer. I explained that, my boundless sympathy and compassion notwithstanding, I had no notion of looking after this stupid, though smart, but jealous beast because I had a thousand more important things to do. Dr Katalin Baltás sprang to her dog's defence, protesting that it was indeed somewhat spoiled, but was basically a lovable, clever and faithful animal. We argued for a while, but could not settle the matter. In the end the doctor snapped at me to roll up my shirtsleeve, and took my blood pressure. This time she became really stern with me. She listed the things I should not eat and drink in the future. I pounded on the floor three times, in other words signalled for Dominica, who was whiling away the time in the flat below me, to come up.

She came up at once. I introduced her to my doctor and the dog sprawling in my armchair, and put the case to her, using all my powers of persuasion to induce her to take care of this sleek-coated, gentle, friendly and pure-bred animal for a month. She would of course be remembered for her services by the owner.

Dominica was not averse to the suggestion, in fact her face lit up as she heard me out, I think she really suffered a lot from her intellectual solitude, she was the kind of person who needs physical activity. Dr Katalin Baltás explained that Dorka was to be taken for a walk every morning and evening, that she had to be fed every evening with choice dogfood, she then advanced a few ten thousand forint notes for expenses and efforts. We parted contented, Dr Katalin Baltás flew to Malmö or to Oslo, I could eat and drink what I wished just as before, and Dominica conscientiously walked the Hungarian pointer called Dorka; and I can safely say that she did not pursue any other activities while she was walking the dog, as other girls do in the eighth or other districts of ill repute. She was only concerned with the dog.

During the first couple of nights Dorka would give a sorrowful howl from time to time, but later she resigned herself to her changed circumstances, grew fond of Dominica, and once again I was surrounded by blessed silence.

And it was at this point that Leonid suddenly reappeared. He first called me on the phone in his accustomed, polite manner, then appeared in person, dressed up to the nines as usual. As a present he brought me a bottle of vodka of a brand previously unknown to me; it was labelled "Pearl of the Carpathians" in Cyrillic, and Leonid explained at length that the crystal-clear beverage was distilled in a well-established Ruthenian distillery using some ancient, sound technology. The quality was guaranteed, only the fortunate few could come by it. The

vodka was actually very good, but I listened to his expert account warily, Leonid is not given to idle chatter, I knew he did not come to expound on distilleries. Sure enough, some time later he came to the point, though in a roundabout way.

"You do drive, I presume?" he asked.

"Of course I can drive," I replied, but cautiously added at once, "I drive very well, but I hate driving. I hate motor vehicles in general. My favourite transportation has always been, and always will be, the horse-drawn carriage."

"But you do travel in motor vehicles on occasion, for convenience's sake."

"Naturally. I travel with pleasure in cars, buses, trains, even in planes as long as I don't have to drive them."

"Do you ever take taxis?" asked Leonid incidentally, or so it seemed, but I knew at once that it was not said in passing.

"I rarely take taxis these days," I replied, trying to guess what he wanted of me, so I launched into protracted explanations." Partly for financial reasons, you know, literature of quality is still not valued as it should be; in other words I never have enough money, and besides I've been overcharged twice. I stayed out late, you see, which I am not in the habit of doing, I lead a very settled, sedate life as you know, anyway, I had to get home somehow, and was made to pay an exorbitant charge both times. I don't like to be taken for a fool."

"I expect they were owner-driver cabs."

"Of course they were. It's mostly owner-drivers who work the city at night."

"You may have to use them again some time."

"Out of the question. I'd rather walk. In shoes or barefoot if I have to."

"I'd reimburse you for your expenses."

I was rather surprised at his suggestion, but turned it down quickly.

"I'd still say no. I am firmly resolved not to support those hyenas."

Leonid pondered over this for a while, his placid blue eyes resting on me in a friendly way, poured a shot from the Pearl of the Carpathians, and still did not give up.

"The Pigsticker is in Budapest again," he said meaningfully.

"I have not had the pleasure of his acquaintance."

"I know. The Pigsticker is a despicable, brutal killer, he does not belong among your circle of acquaintances..."

"As for that, my circle of acquaintances does include..." I began with thinly veiled sarcasm, but Leonid continued with his explanation.

"...He started out as pig-slaughterer and a butcher, spilling animal blood somewhere in the ugly Karstland beyond the Adriatic sea, but later he advanced to killing people. He has been active in several countries, Hungary included, but operates mostly in Western Europe, where his line of work is well paid. During the Yugoslav civil wars he went back to his homeland and got rich. He has chosen Budapest as a temporary retreat, he is familiar with the circumstances, he can work safely here."

"Healthy... or is it cutthroat competition?" I said, in an attempt at subtle irony.

"He works with a knife. Most times he gets rid of the bodies by burning them. One way of putting it is that he's a blot on the profession. And he's in the bad books of quite a few influential men."

"In other words he ought to be put out of action?"

"What I like best about you is your careful and precise choice of words. It's not going to be easy. So far all I've managed to find out is that he drives a taxi as a cover for his other activities, that he works mostly at night, and takes calls while he drives. That is why we have to get into contact with these owner-drivers, maybe we could get a line on him.

"Better start looking then," I suggested maliciously.

"The Pigsticker knows me."

"And I don't want to get to know him. Anyway, what I mostly do at night is read, with great pleasure, I must add, or else I write, which gives me less pleasure, but I do that for financial reasons, since I'm no good at anything else."

Leonid was still looking at me with hopeful, innocent eyes.

"I only need a little help. All it would involve is a little joyriding."

I was getting tired of the conversation, which I felt was unworthy of me, and of the conflict it might bring about. I wanted to be rid of Leonid, so on a sudden impulse I said:

"Dominica might help."

Leonid looked disappointed.

"That silly slut?"

"Dominica has been living a blameless life for some time now. She has scored top marks in all her examinations at university, which shows how intelligent she is, she walks a dog every morning and night, and last but not least, she is much more familiar with the night-life of the city than I am."

Leonid deliberated over my brainwave, then said, a bit dubiously:

"Let's try her. Girls of her kind sometimes serve noble causes. I'll give you an advance of a hundred thousand forints for expenses, but I can pay in hard currency if you think it would be better."

I told him that forints would do just fine. Leonid counted out the money and left at last. I called over Dominica, told her I had been commissioned to write a report, maybe a study on self-employed taxi-drivers, for which I would be generously paid, but having no time to do the survey myself, would like to ask her to use taxis at night, and give an account of her experiences; and would she please note down the drivers' names and registration numbers. She can go where she likes. I would give her ten thousand forints every night for her fares and other expenses, I know it isn't a lot of money but it is money after all.

Dominica was practically jumping for joy as she agreed to help me, her only stipulation was that I take charge of Dorka while she was out collecting data, so she would not howl out of loneliness. I thought it was the least I could do.

A spoiled Hungarian vizsla could not cause much trouble during my night hours. I was wrong.

We set to work that evening. Dominica fed the dog, took her for a walk, then dragged her up to my flat and left to hunt for taxis. Dorka made herself comfortable in the armchair she had picked out for herself the first time we met, and fell peacefully asleep. I sat down at my desk with the intention of writing something memorable. I put paper and pens before me, lit a cigarette, and was thinking over the first impressive sentence, keeping very quiet, but even so the spoiled brute must have smelled a rat; at first she just stared at me reproachfully from the armchair, then she came over to me and began to bark at my papers. I patted her head. I actually did not mind her making a fuss; I wasn't really in the mood for working. I took a book, a classic English novel, dipped into it, but Dorka barked angrily at the book too. This I did find irritating, I tried to get her to go back into her armchair, but she did not obey me. I slammed the book down, got up from my desk, went to sit on the couch, switched on the television, there was an American action film on, full of blood and gore. The dog looked at me with grateful doggy eyes, lay down in the armchair and fell asleep immediately, even snored. I switched off the television, sneaked back to my desk, but the dog jumped up at once and began to bark. I surrendered and sat back down before the television.

And that's how it went every evening, it was very tiring, I was seriously considering throwing out, or perhaps selling my television, when Dr Katalin Baltás came home.

As for Dominica, she definitely enjoyed her night-time pursuits. She generally came home about midnight, beaming, and gave a detailed account of her experiences with the taxi drivers; she met several interesting people, for example a retired football player who had been on the national team as a substitute three or four times, she had also met a pop singer who had lost his voice, even a heart specialist who was obliged to drive taxis at night because of his undeservedly low salary. I listened to her tales increasingly discouraged , the only thing I had to look forward to was that she took the dog away after she had given her report, so I could read a bit before falling asleep.

But one night Dominica arrived home white-faced.

"I've never had anything like this happen to me," she said with lips that almost trembled. "I've never met a man like this one."

"An Olympic fencer or a brain surgeon?" I said listlessly, making a listless effort to be witty.

"A butcher, presumably. He talked about blood. He said he had shed a great deal of blood, and for him there was no difference between human blood and pig's blood. And he was smiling all the while, I suppose he wanted to impress me, because he kept caressing my thighs as he talked. I've never experienced courting like that."

All at once I became wide awake.

"Did you take down his name and registration number?"

Dominica handed over a piece of paper.

"He didn't tell me his name. But here's the registration number of his car, and he gave me the number for his mobile phone. He asked me to call him, said he wanted to meet me again, I could ride in his car any time for free. He has a big comfortable car, but I'm not going within a mile of that man ever again."

I tried to assume a composed and soothing manner.

"Calm down," I told her. "Get this snoring beast away from here, take her for a walk, then go to bed. We'll suspend our survey of taxi drivers for the time being."

Dominica left with the pointer, giving me a long, uncomprehending look. I called Leonid and all I said into the receiver was:

"I think we found him."

He answered me reservedly and politely as always, as if he had been waiting for my call in the dark night, after midnight.

"I'll call round tomorrow. At what time can I come?"

"I work in the mornings and read the paper," I replied, also very reservedly. "After lunch I take a nap from two to five."

"Will six o'clock do?"

"Yes."

At six o'clock exactly he rang my bell, I told him Dominica's story, and gave him the slip of paper with her notes.

Leonid nodded as he glanced over the piece of paper, then excused himself and called someone on the phone, gave them the registration number of the taxi and the mobile phone number. Then we sat silently for about a quarter of an hour, twenty minutes, then the person rang back. Leonid nodded again, put the phone down, and said admiringly:

"It's him. You are an artist endowed with an excellent analytical sense. Thank you very much."

He could not finish his tribute because, as usually happens in life, and as unbelievable as it may sound spoken out loud or written down, there was a sudden, new development. With a loud rumble a lorry stopped before our house. I rushed over to the window, and saw Selim Ferhatovich clambering out of the driving compartment. Understandably, I became rather nervous.

"I think you'd better get out of here quick," I told Leonid. "Your direst enemy has just popped up out of the blue and I do not want the tranquility of my peaceful home disrupted because of your old disputes."

Leonid came over to the window, looked at the lorry and Selim Ferhatovich, and did not seem at all nervous.

"Oh, it's your boorish Bosnian friend," he said in a voice that sounded almost happy. "He's bound to know the Pigsticker. I'll wait for him to come up and talk to him."

He sat down in an armchair, in what was actually Dorka's place, and I opened the door to Selim Ferhatovich. He was holding a huge carton, making excuses as soon as he walked through the door.

"I only dropped in for a minute. I can't stay long. I'm off tonight... I brought you some Belgian beer. Did you know that Belgium was actually the birthplace of beer?"

"Yes I did," I said. "I've heard that on television commercials."

Selim Ferhatovich walked into the living room carrying the carton of bottles of beer, and stopped short. He stared fixedly at Leonid, then turned slowly towards me, his neck seeming to grate as he turned, and his voice:

"Where did this scumbag spring from?"

"He's looking for an old acquaintance," I said. "He wants to kill him."

"He isn't going to get the chance, because I'm going to snap his neck in thirty seconds," said Selim Ferhatovich. "Do you know what he did in Sarajevo?"

"Take it easy, put that carton on the floor," I tried to pacify him. "He's got a gun and he knows how to use it."

"I'm not afraid of his gun, you know me..."

"Of course I know you. But the old acquaintance our friend is looking for is called the Pigsticker."

Selim Ferhatovich put down the carton of beer and sat down on the floor.

"Is that the Pigsticker...?"

"That's the one."

"He killed Muslims by the dozen. He tore earrings out of women's ears, he cut men's fingers off for their signet rings."

"He is here in our fine city right now."

Then Leonid began to speak, and from then on the conversation slowed down considerably. Leonid speaks Hungarian quite well, but Selim Ferhatovich only speaks the Bosnian-Muslim version of Serbo-Croat, so I had to interpret for him. Leonid said in Hungarian:

"I know a treacherous sharp curve in the Buda hills, a blind corner where it's very dark at night. If a lorry were to break down in that curve and its lights were to fail as well, another car coming along that same stretch of road would smash right into it. The driver could well lose his life, and no one could be blamed for the fatal accident."

"What is this damn crook talking about?" asked Selim Ferhatovich, still in a hostile voice.

I translated.

"If you were to stop your lorry in a dark street with your lights off, the Pigsticker might crash into you with his fine big car and dash his brains out."

Selim Ferhatovich tore open the carton with his gnarled fingers, and took out three bottles of beer while I brought the bottle opener. We drank the beer out of bottles, Leonid gave me back Dominica's notes and wrote an address on the slip

of paper. My two acquaintances, sworn enemies till a short while ago, left my flat in amity as darkness fell, a turn of events I still find extremely gratifying.

After supper Dominica walked Dorka, then they both came up to see me. She bared its teeth at me when she saw me caress the university student's hand, so I restrained myself and the dog quitened down. And after some gentle persuasion and a couple of Belgian beers, Dominica called a taxi to a certain address beyond a dark corner.

Leonid phoned me the next day around noon, and spoke in an unaccustomedly ebullient voice.

"Pig's blood was shed last night! A taxi got totalled. Its driver too. And Selim and I have sworn undying friendship."

"Without an interpreter?"

"People whose mother tongue is Slavic always understand each other."

"I'm really very glad to hear it," I said. "About your being friends, I mean."

"I am extremely grateful to you," continued Leonid, still exuberant. "I expect the hundred thousand did not cover the costs of your inquiry."

"Well... Dominica did run into expenses."

"What about you?"

"Well, this period did occasion a marked loss of income: I was unable to write because of the barking of the dog. My readers and various editors are clamouring for my work."

"I'll make it up to you. I'll pay you more than all your various editors together. I'll bring you the money today."

"Send it by post."

Leonid was silent for some minutes, then in a more composed, almost reverent voice said:

"Perhaps you're right. It's a pleasure to work with you."

"Don't put your own name as sender," I continued, ever prudent. "Let the sender be... let's say... Dr Katalin Baltás."

"Why Dr Katalin Baltás?"

"She's my doctor. She flew back from Sweden today, took my blood pressure, and finally took Dorka away."

"Who's Dorka?"

"A sleek-coated, extremely intelligent Hungarian pointer. She hates paper, pens, any printed matter. Her registered name is Anita Dugóhidi."

Leonid fell silent again, then once again said admiringly:

"A beautiful name. If you have no objections, I shall send you the money in her name."

I had no objections. ❧

Translated by Eszter Molnár

John Ridland

On Translating Petőfi's János Vitéz

Forgive me, Petőfi, my fibrillations
Against the steady ground bass of your pulse.
All of us undertaking true translations
Will find them turning into something else:
At best alert, agile approximations,
Eclectic beepers miming the sound of bells,
Bow Bells tied up in knots, clear intimations
Blurred in a muddy fog no sun dispels.

The sun your nap still blazes, searing hot
At noontime
when I nod and fall asleep
You wake me up
I hear my straying sheep's
Bells clatter distantly.
I kept your plot?
I did my best?
My best is good enough?
I pray you'll know the impure from pure guff.

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George Klein

Mother

(Memoir)

I was seventeen when I first read *Peer Gynt,* in a Hungarian translation by Lajos Áprily. It is a piece of writing that has stayed with me throughout my life ever since. By now I have seen countless performances, yet I still manage to find something new in it each time. When I began to learn Swedish, mainly teaching myself whilst doing my hospital rounds, *Peer Gynt*—in the original Norwegian—was the first book in a Scandinavian language that I bought. I was unwilling to wait until I knew enough Swedish to understand a Swedish text but rather pitched straight into the work that, out of all the literatures of the northern lands, meant the most to me.

Above all, I wanted to read the original for the sake of that mysterious and, to my as yet part-conscious intuition, peculiarly important scene in Act 2 in which Peer comes up against the Great Boyg. I was none the wiser for having read it in Norwegian, which is why I have repeatedly put the questions to any men of letters or of the theatre who have crossed my path over the ensuing half-century: Who is the Great Boyg? What was Ibsen trying to say with this mysterious scene?

No one could give me a satisfactory answer. A few had a go at interpreting the scene, but they were all uncertain and gave woolly explanations; not one could even tell me the meaning of the word itself, the great "Boyg", which Áprily translated as the *Görbe*—Twisted, Bent, Crooked—though that still tells me not.

The first explanation that I was instantly able to accept at an intuitive level was the wordless interpretation supplied by Ingmar Bergman in his '90s production at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm. In this the Boyg was Peer Gynt

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himself in half a dozen or more alter egos. These constantly dance around him, blocking his path. He himself is the obstacle.

To summarise the scene briefly: it is pitch dark. Peer Gynt is hacking about himself with a big tree branch, and the following dialogue is heard:

PEER GYNT: Who are you? Answer!
A VOICE IN THE DARK: My Self!
PEER GYNT: Make way, then!
THE VOICE: Go round about, Peer—there's room on the mountain.
PEER GYNT *(pulled up short as he tries to pass another way):* Who are you?
THE VOICE: My Self. Can *you* say as much?
PEER GYNT: I can say what I like, and my sword can strike home, look out for yourself!

Peer brags about his valour, slashing out around himself all the time. He puts the question "Who are you?" several times over, but each time he gets the answer: "My Self". To the question "What are you?", however, the answer is: "The Great Boyg".

Peer carries on flailing, thinking that the Great Boyg will be felled. But he is mistaken; the Great Boyg is still there. Whichever way Peer turns, he stumbles into him. The voice says it is the one and only Boyg:

The Boyg who was wounded—the Boyg who is whole;
the Boyg who was slain—and the Boyg who's alive!

Trust as he might in his fist and his sinews, Peer Gynt just cannot move forward. He seethes with impotent rage:

Backwards or forwards it's just as far,
out or in, it's just as narrow.
He's here, he's there, he's all about me!
When I'm sure that I'm out, then I'm back in the middle.
What's your name? Let me see you! What sort of thing are you?
VOICE: The Boyg.
PEER GYNT *(groping about):* Neither dead nor alive....mist....and slime.
Shapeless, too... it's like running into a nest
of sleepy growling bears.

(From Peter Watts' translation, Penguin, 1970.)

He calls on the Boyg to strike back at him but gets the answer: "Not the Boyg." He tries in vain to persuade the Boyg to fight with him. "The Great Boyg conquers without a blow" is the ominous response.

Peer becomes desperate. He wants to fight with somebody, be that a gnome, troll or some other supernatural being, as long as it is somebody. But there is no opponent who wishes to engage in a struggle with him. "The Great Boyg conquers by gentleness." Peer bites his own arm and hand just to get a taste of his own blood.

A sound of beating wings is heard, then huge birds speak to the Curve: "Is he coming, Boyg?" "Yes, step by step." The birds call their sisters to join them. They

see that Peer is growing weaker and before long they will be able to swoop down on him. Peer gives up the fight; he no longer struggles for his life and collapses. Life no longer has any value for him: "Life is too costly, if I must pay with an hour of this torment such as this!"

The birds cry out to the Boyg that Peer is falling and so can be seized. At this juncture, however, the tolling of church bells and chanting of psalms are heard in the distance. The Boyg, speaking with a gasp as he shrinks to nothing: "He was too strong. There were women behind him".

He did indeed have women behind him—above all, old mother Åse and Solveig. Åse had an unshakeable belief in her son, even when Peer lied and tricked her; in her eyes, Peer was the finest, strongest and cleverest of all men. Solveig waited all her life for Peer. Could it be that without the self-confidence that is received from the women who shape his identity a man does not get past the obstacles that stand before him?

What does the Boyg signify to me now, half a century later, having seen Ingmar Bergman's interpretation? The Boyg is Peer Gynt; that is to say—me myself. Copies of my own self stand in my way. I am unable to move. The poet Ottó Orbán's Raven has taken roost within me. My own roles beset me and block my way ahead. It is just the Boyg, also known as the Raven, who is me. Can I too say the same? Is there still a My Self?

What are the names of the Boyg's alter egos, the ones who wish to block the way ahead? The vanity that, in Ezra Pound's view, a person must strip from himself? The relativism of values inflated to absurdity, that shapeless monster with which I tussle vainly in the dark? Approaching death? Slowly receding life? The melancholy idea that everything is meaningless, which has threatened me ceaselessly since childhood?

Yet this is the means by which I pull through, I know. I have no need for bells and hymn-singing. Because I am telling you, Boyg, that I am My Self. There are women behind me, several of them, but two above all: they have been behind me from the very outset down to the present day. One of them is my paternal grandmother, who died in a gas chamber at Auschwitz. She was an Orthodox Jewess. Though for my part I have never had the faith that she held, she none the less fashioned for me a strong bridge across which I can reach back four thousand years into the past. She knew who she was. Never once did she have to tell me, yet it is through her that I know who I am.

The other woman is my mother.

Two dead women confront the Boyg. It is they who open up the way ahead of me into the fifth millennium.

May 17th, 1996. The freshly dug grave in the Jewish cemetery on the southern outskirts of Stockholm is amazingly deep. Are the graves that they dig nowadays so deep? The gravedigger in the last act of *Hamlet* is only up to his

waist in the grave-pit when he digs up Yorick's skull. The hasty extempore graves that were dug during the Second World War were likewise not especially deep. Since then I have not seen too many graves from close up.

The coffin, along with Mother's withered, 99-year-old body, vanishes from my sight like a pebble dropped in the sea.

A long route led from the village of Tákos, beside the treacherously eddying flow of the White Tisza, to the Jewish cemetery in Stockholm. My mother never had the wish to revisit the river that put muscle on the arms of my three uncles on her side of the family, whose swimming skills were such a source of wonder to me in my childhood. Mother arrived in Sweden when she was fifty-three and so lived here for forty-six years altogether. When she was asked once, back in the Seventies, whether she had ever felt homesickness, her reply was, "Yes, but only once. When I went to see my younger brother in Mexico and I spotted a Swedish ship in the harbour at Vera Cruz."

Four days ago the vital functions were still intact in that tough, old body, though her brain had been paralysed by a stroke a week before. She no longer recognized me then. When I lifted her onto the bed, she spoke in Swedish: *"Hjälp mig,"* she said, "Help me." I replied in Hungarian, whereupon she immediately switched languages. "I'm your son," I said. "My son?" she enquired in astonishment. She may not have understood what she was saying, but she changed to Hungarian without a glitch, correct in her grammar. The loosely connected system of the semi-independent federal republics of our brain is impressive even in decline.

The day before the funeral, the rabbi who was to conduct the service called me up. He asked me to tell him a bit about her. I told him that in 1944 mother had escaped from the death march in which women, children and the elderly were driven out of Budapest towards the Austrian border—a trek on which most lost their lives. Two months later, during the siege of Budapest, fragile and timid though she was, she had ventured out completely on her own, empty cooking-pot in hand and without knowing a word of Russian, from an overcrowded shelter to the field-kitchens of the Red Army. She came back with a full pot.

She was strong, but easily took offence. She saw most things with unusual lucidity, but she also had her irremediable blind-spots. She was usually kind and ready to help, but she could also be stubborn and inflexible once she had formed an idea about something. She often found it hard to make decisions, but once she was certain about a thing, nobody could shake her from her opinion.

Her own birth had been received with mixed feelings. The atmosphere that surrounded her was a warm and loving one, of that there can be no doubt. But grandmother announced straight off, and was never to tire of repeating it later on, that it was a tragedy for a first-born child to be a girl. Mother accepted the patriarchal Jewish tradition, of which grandmother's declaration was an expression, as natural: in her eyes, consequently, only sons were worth anything.

Females, herself included, were just bit players in the normal order of things; their paramount duty was to give birth to and raise menfolk, take care of them, and keep their homes tidy.

In summers many boys would swim in the fast-flowing, dangerous eddies of the Tisza. Grandfather was a mill owner, his house lying close to the riverbank. Little Ilona, my mother—a skinny but charming teenage girl on the yellowing photos—became surrogate mother to a whole gang of lively boys. Apart from her three younger brothers, who had arrived in quick succession after the first failure, innumerable cousins, the children of other relatives, and their friends as well, used to congregate there from all around—lured by the river and the tasty slices of bread and butter that Ilona would give them. Girls did not join them; that would have been seen as improper. Neither Mother nor any other women of her age group and background whom I got to know ever learned to swim.

In assimilated Hungarian Jewish circles, sons came under heavy pressure from family and friends, for they were expected to make a success of their lives. There are historical reasons for that. The liberalization that took place in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy during the nineteenth century opened up new opportunities for Jews to better themselves. A substantial portion of the Jewish population supported Hungarian attempts to break free of Austrian domination, and that in itself was part of the pronounced tide of assimilation. Many Jews elected to use Hungarian as their native tongue in place of the earlier German, and they Magyarized in many other respects too. Some converted to Christianity, whilst others retained their Jewish faith, albeit in an ever laxer form. They fought as loyal and often highly patriotic Hungarian soldiers both in the 1848 War of Independence and in the First World War. The distance separating them from fellow Jews who upheld the Orthodox customs yawned ever wider. Orthodox Jews frequently spoke Yiddish amongst themselves, even though they spoke Hungarian. They still dressed in the traditional way and lived sharply isolated in a kind of ghetto of their own contriving. Members of the two groups looked disapprovingly on one another: assimilated Jews thought of the Orthodox as uneducated and hidebound, whereas the latter thought of secularising Jews as little better than heathens who had betrayed the faith of their ancestors.

Paradoxically enough, assimilating Jews enjoyed some favour, albeit of a strictly limited sort, amongst both Hungarians and Austrians even as traditional anti-Semitism lived on, and indeed escalated, throughout the lands of the Monarchy. There were common interests, for around the middle of the nineteenth century nationality conflicts and freedom movements were on the rise in the Monarchy, as in the other large European empires. The 1848-49 War of Independence was a major ordeal for Hungarians as well as for Austrians. Austria only managed to beat down the revolution with Russian assistance. For a while Hungary was subjected to savage suppression, but in 1867 a Compromise was reached which, creaky though it may have been to begin with, was

to function well in later years. Within the multilingual empire, what was important from Hungary's viewpoint was that the proportion of native Hungarian speakers recorded by official censuses was pushed as high as possible. That strengthened their position vis à vis the other ethnic groups with which they were competing for economic and political power. The Austrians, for their part, did not regard Hungarians of Jewish descent as so rabidly nationalistic as their non-Jewish compatriots.[1]

A measure of the successes attained by assimilated Jews is deducible from their levels of representation in certain occupations in the greatly shrunken Hungary that came out of the First World War and the Treaty of Trianon. By Randolph Braham's reckoning, 5.1% of the country's population (20% in Budapest) in 1930 was of Jewish extraction. Jews made up 1.6% of those employed in public administration, 0.33% in agriculture, and even less in the army, but in other occupational groups they achieved much higher ratios: 55.2% of physicians, 49.2% of lawyers, 30.4% of engineers, 31.7% of scientists and writers, 14.7% of artists, 25% of musicians, 26.7% of actors. They were also highly represented amongst businessmen and journalists.

From earliest childhood, and many years thereafter, even before I could have had any idea of its historical antecedents, I and other children who were similarly placed socially were hugely influenced by the mentality of our milieu, which had certainly taken shape over a great many generations. It was held to be a self-evident and indisputable truth that a Jewish boy would have to work ten times harder than a non-Jewish boy if he wished to gain university entrance or prosper at all in life. Doing badly counted as parlous in the extreme. There was a generally accepted view that there were just two options: either one would grow up to be a serious, respectable person, such as a doctor, lawyer, engineer, scientist, musician or businessman, otherwise one would be an absolute failure. There were only those two extremes, nothing in between. The real world was not as starkly cruel as that, at least not yet, but Jewish parents and other members of the family were nevertheless fairly good at implanting that notion in the minds of most children. As to how and when, that is hard to pinpoint. To all appearances, children imbibed it along with their mother's milk.

The older two of my uncles on mother's side became a doctor and an engineer; they were both diligent, clever boys, the apples of my grandmother's eyes. The youngest, and at the same time most handsome and likeable, son could not stand the constant comparisons with his successful elder brothers. After a string of failed business enterprises and countless amorous flings, he emigrated to Argentina, where he made a precarious living from casual jobs until he was car-

1 ■ According to census statistics, the Kingdom of Hungary in 1910 had a population of 18,264,533 inhabitants, of whom 9,944,627 (or 54.4%) were native Hungarian speakers. This rather slim majority was itself only reached by including 911,227 native Hungarian speakers of Jewish descent. (Braham, R.L.: *The Politics of Genocide.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1981.)

ried off by a perforated appendix which the cheapskate hospital had not diagnosed. He was the first of the siblings to die. His elder brothers had on a few occasions lent a helping hand in order to set him back on his feet, but had otherwise not wanted to give him any financial support lest he become even more pampered than he already was. After he died they tried to salve their consciences by having a fine tombstone set up over his grave, a photograph of which they sent to all their relatives.

Yes, indeed, boys. I myself, Mother's only child, was undoubtedly one of the true gender, but joy was soon succeeded by sorrow because my father fell sick. He was diagnosed as suffering from rheumatic heart disease, an insidious heart-valve infection caused by the bacterium viridans, which in other body tissues is totally innocuous but if it manages to colonize the heart valves it gradually eats them away. In the modern era this form of endocarditis is readily treatable with penicillin, but in the pre-penicillin era it was invariably fatal after a drawn-out illness.

After repeated episodes of temporary recovery had awakened unfounded hopes, my father died when I was just a year and half old. I was left alone with my mother until she remarried when I was ten. My step-father was a gentle, kindly man, who strangely enough wasn't bothered by mother's unmistakable signals that I, my father and her brothers occupied a higher place in her affections than he did.

The inner desire to prove one's excellence, and the external pressures placed on eagerly awaited sons to become somebody quite exceptional—for assimilated Hungarian Jews those were both a blessing and curse, a guardian angel and unappeasable daemon. These are what feed my own at times redeeming, at times destructive drives. These are what I both admire and hate in others. I behold with astonishment what marvels they are capable of in the cases of individual artists and scientists, and register with horror the havoc they wreak in those who fail to measure up. I despise and loathe them if a person who is their carrier becomes indifferent towards other people; I feel sorry for those ageing hosts whose motor is still turning over but idling in neutral.

Through conscious effort, and out of sheer self-protective reflex, over many years I have learned how to keep my own daemon on a short leash and how to exploit it as a source of energy. After numerous early failures, I managed to tame the daemon to be reconciled to its fate, and it accepted its role as the driving force for my professional activities. When it functions well, it is a reliable energy-source, but I have never managed to uncouple it altogether, however hard I might try. The anxious warnings from those around me—"Take it easier" and "What's the rush? You'd do better enjoying life a bit more"—just rolled off my back. I would have had no use for that sort of thing anyway. The moment my motive force failed to find appropriate fuel, life became unbearable for me. And I have a very picky daemon: it is not immaterial what I feed it on.

Amongst those driven to other careers by demons moulded in that same diabolical school were some who reached the top of their profession. Anyone danc-

ing before the idol of success needs every drop of energy on which he can draw. It used to be a commonplace that Hungarian Jews featured amongst the world's best in four occupations: mathematicians, orchestral conductors, master pickpockets and crack safebreakers. Fortunately, I never had occasion to meet any representative of the latter two categories, and I have no way of knowing if there was any truth in the assertion or whether it was just trotted out by anti-Semites seeking to pin the laurels of the criminal class onto Jews, or, if it comes to that, by Jews seeking to disarm the anti-Semites. In any case, for the first two categories it very much did hold up. Yet individual ambition alone is not a sufficient condition for professional distinction in either of those careers. Examples can be found of every possible type: the washout as well as the success, the dimwit as well as the genius, the flashy poseur as well as the deadly serious.

We were able to play many different roles, learn many different languages, conform to just about any culture. Can one conceive of a more pukka Englishman than Leslie Howard? Yet he was originally called Steiner, he was born in Budapest, and he was Jewish.

At an international chess competition that was held in Saltsjöbaden, just outside Stockholm, during the 1950s, another Steiner, this one Australian, was pitted against the Argentinian Neudorf. During the match neither of the grandmasters spoke a word to the other, but at a post-match conference they freely swapped thoughts about alternative strategies. Chess fans were keen to listen to such discussions as they were often more enthralling than the matches themselves, but on this occasion the two players—an Argentinian and an Australian— were conversing in a language that was incomprehensible to them. Before the audience had a chance to ask any questions, the large Soviet delegation turned up at the conference. Their team comprised five grandmasters, who kept themselves completely to themselves; as it later turned out, during the Stalinist era, and especially during the final years of the dictator's rule, they would have been running a great risk in speaking to any foreigner. Nevertheless, a Hungarian friend of mine who was seated in the auditorium, quite close to the speakers, distinctly heard the Soviet grandmaster Lilienthal ask quietly, in passing, *"Ki nyert?"*—just that: "Who won?" in Hungarian. In addition to Szabó, the official Hungarian contestant, Steiner, Neudorf and Lilienthal were also Hungarian-born Jews. They may all have played under different flags, but under the cover of that multiplicity of badges and careers they were still bound together by a language that seemed exotic to any outsider. And by much more than just the language, of course.

On what source did boys—it was only ever boys—draw for the springs of their resourcefulness and strength? On their mother's love, first and foremost, and often on the boundless faith that their mothers had in them. Woe to any boy with a weak, faint-hearted or emotionally unstable mother! The only fate worse than that would have been to be set down amongst the icebergs of Greenland in nothing but one's underpants.

When the Nobel prize-winning physicist Isidor Rabin was once asked if the rabbinical *yeshiva* that he attended in Poland had played an important role in his intellectual development, his answer was that it had, but only indirectly; his mama had played a much more important role. During his teenage years he had always gone home for lunch, just like all the other boys. But whereas other mothers always anxiously quizzed their sons as to whether they had been able to give the right answers in class, young Isidor's mother would enquire, "Were you able to think up any good questions to ask in school today?"

My mother's faith in me assumed proportions that provoked a degree of mirth even amongst our relatives, let alone the girls with whom I was later to form relationships. Most tickled of all were those whom my mother disliked. One of them, who was actually very fond of me, took to call me Gross instead of Klein purely for that reason. I myself paid very little attention to it: I took Mother's faith in me for granted and did not call it into question, but I was not grateful for it. On the contrary, it often infuriated me that she believed I was able to deal with everything, and she underestimated the obstacles that lay in my way. Still, that was nothing compared to the irritation with which I reacted to her imputed or real expectations. Due to Father's early death, she was left alone with me. There was barely a chink in the tightly knit fence which she erected around her own inner world, but I did at least realize that she deeply loved Father. After his death, there was every indication that some of the feelings she had nurtured for him were transferred to his most authentic representative—to me, in other words. It took decades before I began, slowly, to understand. Up to that point, I was simply incapable of grasping the reason for the bewildering incongruity between, on the one hand, the total trust and devotion that she displayed towards me and, on the other, the angry outbursts that she would lash me with, which would be followed by at least a day of mutely smouldering resentment. I usually provoked these outbursts with some thoughtless remark that she considered heartless or overly carping.

Bit by bit I learned that I had to be careful what I said if I wanted to avoid these scenes. I suppose that my ability to express myself comes, in part, from the need to defend myself constantly against accusations of being wanting in filial affection. The other lasting consequence of that was that I have always been terrified of hurting women—and it applies only to women—through anything I might say. This instinctive and, at times, well-nigh crippling fear is something that I was able to master, to some extent, only after years of conscious effort, and then after I had turned forty I began to shift to the opposite extreme. Only in my sixties did I manage to find a balance of sorts.

If Mother was very angry with me, she paid no heed to anything else, even if it put the lives of the family at jeopardy. One particular incident is engraved deep in my memory. As I have already mentioned, Mother managed to slip away from one of the death marches in November 1944. A large column of Jews, most of

them elderly, women and children, were sent off on foot along the highway from Budapest towards Vienna. At that time, the Nazis had not yet been fully defeated but the railway lines to the concentration camps had been cut and they no longer had any trains on which to deport the remaining Jews, though if there had been any they would have sooner diverted them to that end than for evacuating their own troops.

I have already told the story of my mother and step-father's flight elsewhere, so I shall not repeat it here. But after they had made good their escape, they managed to get back to Budapest. By a stroke of luck, we were swiftly reunited, though by then I had been forced to go under cover. I was able to organize forged papers for them, but they had nowhere to stay.

I knew of the existence of two sisters, distant relatives of Mother's, who were living in a two-room apartment somewhere near Keleti Station. I succeeded in making contact with them by means of the bush telegraph, which, curiously enough, still functioned even in that bleakest of periods. I begged them to take in my mother and step-father. One could not call it a luxury apartment, but at least it boasted a decent bed, a bathroom and a small kitchen.

Now kitchens, in the world of my mundane demons, are the abodes of Supreme Evil. And so it proved in this case, too.

At first, all three of us were immeasurably grateful to the sisters for their generosity. With Mother, however, that lasted no more than a day, to be supplanted by her unshakeable self-belief as the perfect housewife. That is something I shall return to in a moment. My step-father was particularly grateful, even though the situation was more onerous for him than for us. The two ladies had decided that his nose was too obviously Jewish and, lest he thereby betray us all, he immediately had a curfew imposed on him and, moreover, was not even allowed to show himself in the window. As the apartment was very cold, my step-father, though in good health, was confined to bed.

Mother, however, was unhappy about the bed linen. I was given strict orders to obtain some good, warm eiderdowns. Since my forged documents meant I could move around relatively freely, that did not present too much of a problem.

By the third day I noticed that something was not right. Popping in for a visit, I could feel the tension in the air; the sisters were acting strangely. I found out from my step-father what was up. Neither the daring return from the jaws of death, nor her gratitude towards the sisters had got in Mother's way when it came to her taking command in the kitchen, almost by reflex, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. She was, after all, the eldest of the women, and so she supposed that meant the cooking and general housework became her responsibility. The sisters tried to restrain themselves for a while longer, but by the fifth day they ran out of patience.

On calling in to see them that afternoon, as on previous days, I sat down on the edge of my step-father's bed whilst Mother busied herself in the kitchen. All of a

sudden, the two sisters burst into the room, seemingly in total panic, and informed us that Arrow-Cross militiamen were conducting a spot-check on the house next door. "They could be here any moment! We have to get out this instant." My step-father was so alarmed that he was barely able to pull on his trousers.

Mother swiftly packed their things; she could be very decisive when necessary. For all my urging that we set off straight away, with as little luggage as possible, Mother insisted on our taking the warm eiderdowns with us. She tied them up with twine and carried them herself, whilst my step-father and I lugged the rest of the bags. We raced down the stairs and out onto the street, but there were no Arrow-Cross men to be seen. Nor did the sisters exactly hurry with their packing, and indeed we set off without them. It began to dawn on me what this was really about.

Before long we reached Thököly Avenue, where we turned to make our way towards the heavily guarded Keleti Station. The street was thronged with passers-by; armed SS soldiers, Arrow-Cross men and gendarmes could be seen wherever one looked. I was unable to choke back my exasperation: "You really might, just this once, have left the cooking pots behind!" I let fly. "What did you say?" Mother asked, growing red in the face. When I let her know, with a few more pithy, adrenaline-fed words, exactly what was on my mind, Mother dropped the eiderdowns on the pavement and began bawling her head off.

Anyone who had never seen this generally timid and quiet woman's blazes of temper would have been unable to imagine the transformation that swept over her. These outpourings were at their most incandescent when she felt that she had been treated callously by her one and only son. On this occasion she completely lost her usual composure; in a piercingly shrill tone, she proclaimed that she was the unhappiest creature alive, mother to a son of the blackest ingratitude that had ever existed. Why was she, of all people, afflicted by such a misfortune when she had given up everything for her son's sake? People were stopping to watch the scene—a state of affairs in which my step-father's Jewish nose, in my not entirely objective view, played no small part. Even two SS soldiers who were standing a little way off were casting looks in our direction, but fortunately they were unable to understand a word of what the row was about.

The valuable, warm eiderdowns were lying on the filthy ground. My step-father was starting to panic. I yielded at once, apologized, snatched up the eiderdowns, dusted them off, and calmed Mother down, seething with anger all the while.

It was probably lucky for us that during those difficult times everybody in Budapest was on edge; people bickered more often than usual, so family spats like this were routine sights. And if anybody noticed anything suspicious about my step-father's nose, they kept it to themselves.

That episode sticks in my mind as a milestone. It marked the culmination of tensions that had been building up between Mother and me since my early ado-

lescent years. She forcefully demanded of me proper filial devotion, or rather the external manifestations of love, and this awakened what was, at first, an involuntary but, as time passed, increasingly deliberate resistance on my part. I loved her above all, but my entire being protested against having to demonstrate that love and, to top it all, being expected to use the ritual phrases and gestures that I found alien to me.

It was the same maternal and housewifely perfectionism that had eroded our relationship in the first place. Middle-class Jewish manners had traditionally laid great emphasis on feeding and clothing the child properly. It was of the utmost importance that the child should eat well. That was the way it was put, 'the child' in the singular, since in many families, ours included, there was just one child. And it also had a somewhat impersonal resonance, like the German *das Kind.*

The child needed fresh air, so rooms had to be ventilated regularly, but at the same time one had to be wary of draughts and catching a cold. But the child had no idea that this caution, like the worrying over thinness, was fanned by bogeys of the previous century, when thinness could imply, or be taken as implying, that the child had tuberculosis.

Mother was often the only person I had to talk to, but my attempts to speak about interesting things generally foundered on the fact that the practical business and concerns of life were more important in her eyes. I reacted to this with all but furious antagonism. The things on which she centred her attention and solicitude seemed more and more trivial to me as I advanced into adolescence. Eating is a matter of complete indifference to me down to the present day, and whenever the conversation in a social gathering turns to cooking and food it takes all my self-control to disguise how little the topic matters to me. Buying clothes is the greatest torment of all. Just trying to prevail on me to change attire is enough for me to protest like a cornered animal—and that is nothing compared to the purchasing of garments. The moment I set my foot in a clothes shop, even now that I am in my seventies, I am assailed by the aversion of my teenage years and in a trice I am projected back to the elegant premises of the Beneschofsky children's clothing store in Budapest's inner city, where I would try on one set of garments after another for hours on end until Mother finally made up her mind on what was suitable.

The building that housed the store was destroyed during the Second World War, but to the present day I am unable to cross that square without being assailed by the old terror and nausea which once blighted my joy in living and robbed me of any sense of acting as an autonomous individual. The greater my efforts to be a good boy and not upset my mother, who was only acting with my interests at heart, the stronger the voice of protest grew inside me.

The inevitable conflicts that arose from these, as I see it, ridiculous problems induced a nausea that manifested itself in a single, unbroken silent scream: if this is life, it is not worth living! It was only in my adolescence that I discovered

the antidote to this affliction in the form of books and music. Suddenly there opened up before me an inexhaustible well of thoughts, feelings and experiences that tapped the centuries of achievements of the world's greatest creative artists. I simply had to endure the wandering in the desert, even if that obliged me to contort my features into a fixed grin as I tried on clothes in Mr. Beneschofsky's emporium. Fortunately, the joy I derived from my hunger for books and interest in music loomed as large in Mother as the sense of duty which made the outfitting expeditions such a hell. I think she never suspected the connection between the two things.

No, Mother's sense of a cosmic order was rock-solid and imperturbable. She remained true to it under even the most absurd circumstances, visiting benison or damnation on her loved ones regardless of time or place. The life-threatening scene on Thököly Avenue, with its eiderdowns and strident row, was just one of many, albeit probably the most perilous. I well recall another episode, this one completely innocuous though, as far as I was concerned, excruciatingly embarrassing, that had played out several months earlier in the same year, when we were still living in one of the designated Jewish houses in Budapest. Around July 1944, in the shadow of the collective death sentence that hung over us, the yellow stars we had to sew onto our outer garments and the restrictions on our movements, I had embarked on my first big love affair. Even though several families shared our apartment, there were still odd occasions when my girlfriend and I were able to spend time by ourselves in the dental surgery that had been installed in my old room. The dentist, a distant relative of my step-father, had gone into hiding. His wife, who always claimed I was her favourite nephew, would suddenly discover that she had pressing business to attend to in the neighbourhood, whilst Mother and my step-father would discreetly retire. There was no question of locking the door, of course, but passion overcame any fears.

Watching Kjell Grede's marvellous film about Raoul Wallenberg, nearly half a century after the events, I found that its story about the young pair of lovers awakened strong associations within me. The characters were moving and authentic, but their constant fear of the high probability that death might arrive at any moment did not chime with my own recollections. Death was certainly an element of our lives, for by then we knew about the existence of Auschwitz and we were well aware that our chances of surviving were not high. And yet man is a stubborn beast, and Nature has its demands too. The questions of when we might meet and where we could be together without being disturbed pushed all else to the backs of our minds whenever our lives were not under immediate threat—and sometimes, in truth, even then, as when we were in the shelter during a bombing raid.

My girlfriend lived a long way from our place, so the times she was able to spend with me were always brief and subject to curfews. Nevertheless, on long walks through the war-torn streets of Budapest, displaying the shameful yellow

star on our breasts, we experienced the timelessness of love. We laughed and joked, just like young lovers always had done in the past and will continue to do in the future, and the visions in our eyes were not of executioners and their victims, but purely of one another.

As the summer of 1944 progressed the persecution of the Jews slowed in tempo somewhat, once Regent Horthy had ordered a halt to the deportations from Budapest. This came literally at the last moment, for by then the entire Jewish population of the provinces had been transported off to Auschwitz. Half a million of them were murdered in just three months. After Horthy's intervention in June, the day when matters once again took a sinister lurch was October 15th. Horthy made a radio broadcast that Hungary had lost the war and was willing to lay down its arms and sue for peace. The Regent was placed under arrest by the Germans and government of the country was transferred to the Arrow-Cross Party, whose militias lost no time in setting about their murderous intentions. But for the two of us that September was a relatively tranquil month, if one discounted the nightly bombing raids, which did not scare us in the least. We simply hoped that they would hasten the day when the war would be over and we could escape.

One afternoon my girlfriend announced that her mother, in order to spare her the hazards of the evening journey home, had given her permission to spend the night at our place. Joy unbounded! But how would we be able to arrange it?

There could be no question of her being allowed to sleep in my room, of course; immorality of that order could not be countenanced. We would improvise some sort of bed for her in the room used by the dentist's wife. We agreed that during the night—after I had returned from the spell of air-raid duty down by the entrance to the building that I, along with the other adult male residents in the house, was obliged to discharge—she would sneak over to my bed. It didn't work out that way, however. Mother was outraged at the very thought of the untidiness of an impromptu bed. Place a mattress on the floor, if you please! And a change of clean bed-linen as well! She made a huge fuss about the whole business, without the least regard for the presence of my horrified girlfriend. The night—the one and only night that we would be able to spend together before events and fate separated us from one another—was well and truly done for.

It is not that Mother showed any hostility to the girls whom I courted. I needed them, she had that much insight and accepted the fact, but in truth they—like women in general, for that matter—might as well not have existed as far as she was concerned. Her deference to men extended to an acceptance of their sexuality as part and parcel of their nature. That attitude probably crystallized in her whilst her beloved younger brothers were growing up; she regarded it as axiomatic that they had a need for female company. But of course such matters could not be allowed to interfere with the proprieties of running the house, the beds and bed-linen. That iron rule was not to be bent, even in the summer of 1944, by the fact that any night might have been our last.

The subject of sex never once came up between Mother and me in all the seventy-one years that we lived together—with one memorable exception. For it was she, surprisingly, who gave me my first sex education lesson. That happened when I was eight. We were spending the summer vacation at the resort of Balatonalmádi, on the northern shore of Lake Balaton. I may not have known exactly how babies are born, but I did know that the stories and accounts with which it was usual to stuff children's minds had little to do with the truth. All that I understood from the embarrassed smiles, shifty looks and awkward evasions that one got from adults was that they were trying to hide the truth from me.

My schoolmates were no more knowledgeable than I. Various old wives' tales circulated in our class but none of them struck me as convincing. The freshest bit of information that I had come by stemmed from the boy who sat next to me: he had heard from a reliable source that the woman became pregnant when the man peed in her mouth. "Ugh!, that's disgusting," I said, refusing to believe him.

I remember how confused that left me, and how difficult I found it to pluck up the courage to put the question to Mother, but I probably came to the conclusion that she was the only one on whom I could rely on not to lie. During an evening stroll on a fairly deserted esplanade by the shore of the lake, I asked her straight out, without any preliminaries, how children are made.

Mother looked at me. Without turning a hair or blushing, she replied, "A man and a woman join their sexual organs together."

That was the entire conversation. The matter was never discussed again, but at least I now had the answer. And Mother's odd blend of primness and rectitude filled me with a warmth towards her that I was never able to show her. She was looking for me to produce the conventional expressions of love, and that inhibited me from any manifestation at all of those sorts of feelings.

The episode is one that I had virtually forgotten all about, and it only bubbled up again in my memory when Mother was nearing death. She was still able to get around in the corridor of her ward without assistance, despite six months earlier having suffered a fracture of the femoral neck which had required operation. But she no longer recognized either me or other people, and she had all but lost the ability to speak. "Her integrity is amazing," the nurses would say. "She still takes great care to keep herself clean and tidy, she lies down to sleep and gets up by herself, and she even looks after her clothes."

That was indeed astonishing enough, but I knew she was just as true to type in other respects. Any chance of our having a meaningful discussion had passed a good ten years before. Her hearing was poor, and she had particular difficulty in understanding my speech, even though we spoke Hungarian with one another, because my voice is fairly soft and I often speak very fast. It didn't help if I tried to speak up more loudly and slowly; perhaps it was down to the timbre, because she found it much easier to understand female voices.

She could hear my voice much better on the telephone, and that had led me to try and persuade her to buy a hearing aid—one of those tiny devices that fits into spectacles's legs. Nothing doing! No power on earth would have talked her into that. "I don't need one," she would say every time the subject came up, even on her ninety-ninth birthday, "It's only you I have trouble hearing. Speak up a bit."

She had been willing to undergo an eye operation when she was ninety-eight; the only problem she had was with the idea of a hearing aid. Was that vanity? Self-image? Or the integrity that the nurses had praised, though it could drive her almost to the brink of nervous collapse if she was unable to find her dentures, her spectacles or her watch? And was that the same integrity by virtue of which she would not brook the idea, under any circumstances, of leaving her one-room apartment, which she kept tidy, with an exemplary punctiliousness, right up to her death? She would have nothing to do with protected housing, or any other sort of institution for the elderly.

Deep down, I know that I acquired many things through her: self-confidence, the courage to be myself, or at least occasionally dare to make a stand for what I am, even when that was uncomfortable. She also passed on to me a peculiar mixture of her anxieties—and at so early an age that I do not even recall when, though some of them were certainly present within me, like some species of perennial pot-plant, by the time I was three, only to come into full bloom during my adolescence. I have already mentioned a few of them, such as the anxiety about not achieving sufficiently well, no better than others, with the attendant fear of not getting on in life. Then there is the continual flight from anything and anyone that might upset my domains, and especially my concentration. And related to that are the lengths to which I will go in order to end, or at least fend off, disturbing phenomena that impinge on my immediate environs—above all those that reach one via the organ of hearing (which unfortunately cannot be shut off in the way one can close one's eyes). Then there is the fear of hurting other people, particularly women and, above all, the very embodiment of Womanhood: the perpetual guilt at not being as good a son as She expects me to be. Anxiety that she will take offence or become disenchanted, perhaps even mortally so. The constant dread that something awful might happen to her at any moment.

Perhaps I take most closely after Mother at the times I go crazy when I am unable to find my keys, my passport, or my diary. This obsession paralyses any thinking process, blots out any other thought. And the realization that it is wreaking havoc on the very thing that I wish to preserve only makes the situation worse, because then I become angry and disillusioned with myself and even less able to do anything to control my obsession.

All that, and much else besides, was taken over, passed on or learned from her, though fortunately not those features that, in all likelihood, are more commonly found in women: I personally would have objection to having a hearing aid or other prosthesis fitted, should I need it.

There is one other strange obsession that I inherited from Mother. She always had to have a watch on her wrist, or at least a clock close to hand. Even in her last months, when she had lost any sense of what week or day it was, she always wanted to keep an eye on the time. Half a year before the end, when we managed only with utmost difficulty to keep her in the hospital after a femoral fracture, she would constantly be checking the clock that she set right in front of her. Each time I visited her, she would ask, always in Hungarian and with ever greater impatience, "So what's next?" She always had to have some chore or task—in this case, getting out of hospital as rapidly as possible, for she felt imprisoned, despite having a private room of her own and being immaculately nursed. She had a pressing need to return to her chores, whatever they might be: shopping in the grocery store across the street, keeping the apartment tidy, or expertly watering the indoor potted plants that she was so keen on. There was always something to do, the clock was ticking, a solution to be found for every problem. Once she had passed her ninety-fifth year she was unable to reconcile herself to feeling too frail and weary for the majority of chores. She constantly reproached me that, being a doctor, I ought to be able to come up with a potion to banish her fatigue; it couldn't go on like this, surely there was a solution.

I often asked to think about her past and not just about the future. What had her childhood been like? What was Father like? All I ever got out of her was banal responses: "Your father was a very good man." "I had a hard childhood." "I didn't get on well with mother." And, time after time, "It's no good living in the past," or "I prefer not to recall that." They were conversations that never led anywhere; two monologues, one has already been swallowed up by silence. The other will follow soon.

Thinking back on this, now there is no longer any chance of conversing—or, I could just as well say, years after realizing that there never was any chance—one might also put the question the other way round. Instead of trying to ferret out what forms of behaviour were inherited or learned in early childhood, one might consider all the things that one did not adopt. As a basis for comparison in this, admittedly, hardly scientific investigation, one might take people of the same gender and age-group who grew up in similar social and cultural surroundings. Though one could not hope to tackle the issue with the same methodological rigour as one would a problem in physics or even, these days, biology, it is still a question that can legitimately be posed.

There are a great many behavioural traits that Jewish boys of my generation have taken over from their parents. The chances were great that I could have acquired them as well, but Mother did not transmit any of them to me. Let me try to approach this sensitive issue by means of a metaphor. Textbooks of veterinary medicine in the nineteenth century would often include a diagram of a horse that displayed the principal diseases of the various parts of the body.

Contemporaries of mine, whether they stayed in Hungary or emigrated to the United States, Australia, Great Britain, Sweden or elsewhere in western Europe sometimes remind me of that textbook horse. They are like captions that identify the neuroticizing influences of anti-Semitism, as they might appear on a diagram of their psyches. Let me give a few examples.

Former class-mate G., who was the son of catholicized Jewish parents, was always ashamed of his origins. When he was obliged to wear a yellow star in 1944, he refused to go out on the streets. After the liberation of Budapest, he enrolled at the university of Szeged, as I did too. We were needy, hungry and our clothes were shabby, but we threw ourselves enthusiastically into our studies. We were both awarded small scholarships by an American foundation that had been set up to help Jewish students who had survived the Holocaust. To the best of my knowledge, that was the sole occasion on which G. acknowledged his Jewish descent, and even then he did so in secret, when there was nobody else around, or at least no non-Jews. A few years later, he left the country for the United States where, bit by bit, he acquired a large ranch on which he kept many horses. He has seven grown-up children who, every now and then, draw me or my wife to one side and anxiously inform us that their Daddy is not aware that they know the secret of his background—nor should he be told that his children know it as that would crush him.

Every Sunday G. gets up early in order not to miss morning mass. Several years ago, when the two of us were dining in the home of one of our American colleagues, he did not blush to answer "Yes", in my presence, to our host's question as to whether he too had gone bear-hunting in Transylvania in his youth, as was the custom amongst the Hungarian gentry. "Yes, of course." And he gave a detailed account of a hunt that he had never been on. In all other respects he is a trustworthy and conscientious fellow, but on the matter of his origins he is capable of calling black white. He taught all his children how to ride, and on his spread he keeps up Hungarian customs, which are about as authentic as the plastic palm trees and cacti in the Indonesian restaurants of New York. If I send him a picture postcard from Israel, he will thank me for sparing a thought for him in the Near East. The condition is incurable; neither the members of his own family nor professional success can do anything for it.

I have plenty more of such veterinary horses. There is the well-known case of a Polish-American virologist colleague who has met with great success throughout his career by playing the figure of a Polish nobleman. He would never admit to being Jewish, but in Israel there are still a few people who attended the same Jewish school as he did back in Poland and know the truth. In Budapest there is the distinguished Professor J., who is a great friend of Israel, but when he was asked straight out at some congress dinner, in Israel of all places, whether he was Jewish he flushed bright red. He gave a worried look around and then muttered something that nobody could understand, though it was certainly anything

but a clear "Yes". Later on he came over to me and excused himself: "I can't help it, you know, it's a reflex."

The shame of it! How did the Hungarian gentry, boorish, arrogant and sottish as they often were, manage to induce such intense self-contempt in a populous class of society which could boast so many talented representatives in the fields of literature, music, the sciences and the healing professions? How was the weight of majority opinion able to oblige so many to deny their origins and zealously attempt to ape so-called gentry traditions that they never had the slightest respect for?

Denial of one's Jewish origins was so widespread in Hungary, as in the other provinces of the Habsburg empire and neighbouring countries, that I could easily fill an entire veterinary manual with cases that I have directly encountered in the course of my life. But rather than carry on with those examples, I would prefer to tell a story that I heard from somebody else—one that is essentially the same but has a happy ending.

Mrs Lantos, who is married to the Hungarian-born American congressman and owed her own life to Raoul Wallenberg's work in Budapest during 1944, did more than anybody to bring to light what Wallenberg had done and what became of him in order to keep his memory alive at a time, twenty-five or thirty years ago, when he had been all but forgotten. In the early 1980s she held a press conference in Stockholm. After the usual round of questions had been put to her, one journalist asked Mrs Lantos if she had any other recollections of Wallenberg's activities during those fateful days of winter 1944 that she had not so far related.

Mrs Lantos replied that she had been asked the same question a few years before in Canada. A journalist on the *Toronto Star* had asked her to tell them about something that had not already been published by the press. The reply she gave then had a surprising outcome.

During the dark days of December 1944 one of Wallenberg's Hungarian Jewish assistants was near to giving birth. Conditions in the hospital of the international ghetto were atrocious: there was little room, few doctors, almost no drugs or bandages, on top of which patients and staff lived in constant fear of Arrow-Cross raids. Wallenberg suggested that it would be better if the secretary were to give birth in his own one-room apartment with the help of a midwife. That was what happened: Wallenberg slept, swathed in blankets, in the unheated entrance-hall of the flat whilst the secretary gave birth to her daughter in the one warm room.

This story duly appeared in one of the Sunday editions of the *Toronto Star,* along with other examples of Wallenberg's selflessness and indefatigability.

That Sunday morning, a woman who was by then living in Toronto was thumbing through the newspaper. She began to read the story about Wallenberg and felt a chill run down her spine. She knew that she had been born in Budapest during the war, and she had heard her parents talk about a Swedish diplomat who had done a lot to help people during the period when the city was

under siege; however, she knew no details and had no idea that she might be Jewish. She took the newspaper to her parents and asked them straight out: "Is that me?" They acknowledged immediately that, yes indeed, that was how she had come into the world. That discovery precipitated a family crisis. The woman severed contacts with her parents, gave up her job and set up the Canadian Raoul Wallenberg Association, becoming as dedicated a leader of that organization as Mrs Lantos was of its American equivalent. Subsequently she also broke off her engagement, converted to Judaism and eventually married a Mr Cohen.

To get back to horses. Every deficiency disease has its counterpart, or mirror image, in a disease that is caused by a surfeit or excess of the parameter in question. Overproduction of thyroid hormones is just as much a disease as underproduction; it is bad for you if your blood pressure is too high, and bad if it is too low; a low red blood cell count is not good for you, nor is a very high count. The diagram would, therefore, be incomplete without giving an example to illustrate the opposite extreme.

My exhibit is the world's wealthiest doctor, a millionaire—indeed, billionaire—surgeon. He always sought to be best in everything he did, but, unlike the previous cases, he always laid great stress on his Jewishness, even though he was not religious. The most brilliant of all the stars at the Jewish grammar school in Budapest, he got top marks in every subject, though he was far from being the only excellent student. Most surprisingly of all, however, he was also the best at gymnastics and all other sports—a combination that was unprecedented at that school. When he won medals for athletics at the national championships in the early 1930s, the city's Jewish community regarded him as a model of the new Jew, excelling in the physical and intellectual domain alike. These expectations fuelled his ambitions ever higher. By rights he ought to have been a member of the Hungarian squad at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, but the Hungarians' interpretation of the Nuremberg laws that were operating by then in Germany made that impossible. This was his first direct experience of racial discrimination. From then onwards (though the process might have already started earlier) bitterness towards real or presumed anti-Semitism began to fester within him. He nurtured it so painstakingly that it soon took over his entire personality. Any time he formed the impression that he was dealing with an anti-Semite, whether the suspicion was well founded or not, he would make a particular point of announcing to the person concerned that he was Jewish. One caustic Hungarian Jewish woman characterized him by using an expression she had picked up from a Nazi newspaper, which had written something about savage Jewish hillmen launching an attack from the rear on "our soldiers in Abyssinia". In the woman's opinion, the epithet "savage Jewish hillman" fitted our surgeon friend to a T.

There is no doubting his courage, however. History books on the calamitous era relate that he was the only surgeon to stay behind in the desperately crowd-

ed hospital of the Budapest ghetto when all his colleagues fled. He was legendary for the ferocity of his combative spirit, which remained undimmed even after the deadly enemy had vanished. After he had started working in America, he began to get the feeling that his superiors were treating him condescendingly, so he decided he would set up his own hospital. To achieve that goal, he took to speculating in property and the stock market during the evenings and at weekends, without any slackening on his surgical duties. He got rich and constructed the hospital. A good while later, growing dissatisfied with his insurers, he bought out an insurance company too. Yet for all his money, success, and recognition he was never cured of that underlying disease.

He too keeps a dozen or so horses on his ranch in America, though not through any wish to ape the Hungarian nobility, whom he despises, but simply because his young wife—a tall, blonde, non-Jewish woman—loves riding. Dinner guests like myself and whoever else may be present are often obliged to listen to three interlinked and continually recycled monologues, which evidently display the dominant features of our host's mental world. The first is an interminable account of his younger years back in Hungary, which chiefly concerns the discrimination and persecution visited on the Jews and culminates in the events of the Holocaust. The story invariably loops back to the beginning, going round and round without his noticing that he is chasing his own tail. Our host, unlike Mother, seeks to relive the worst of times over and over again. Could it be he is afraid that the events might be repeated, and this is his superstitious way of holding them at bay? Or might it be his way of erecting a worthy monument to the dead? His second favourite topic is the anti-Semitism of the present days, which he scents at every hand, and this can be triggered by just about any thoughtless remark or devious line of thought.

The third monologue takes a great variety of forms but is readily recognized by its refrain: "...and then you show them!", or "...and then you give it to them!" What? Success, victory, the winning argument, a stunning achievement? How Jews make good in the frequently hostile and fickle world of the non-Jew? Success is the means—the sole means—of SHOWING THEM?!

But showing them what? How big a mistake they made? And in what respect? Not liking us?

It is never properly thought through but just spirals around itself. The snake bites its own tail, just as in the Aztec symbol for infinity.

Mother was not afflicted by any of the above-mentioned diseases. She did not consider herself either more or less important than other people. She simply lived in her own world. She was not religious, but she was Jewish; she saw nothing special in that, nor did she have any desire that I "should show them". She had faith in my capabilities but did not seek my success at any price. I should merely be the way I am, just as she was exactly the way she was.

And how did Mother become the way she was? Where did she find the strength? How did she remain immune to all those equine diseases which were rampant all around her? And how was her inherent sense of dignity compatible with her equally natural disdain for her own sex? Did she really see women as being less significant, less reliable and not so irreplaceable as men? And if so, what was the reason for that? Maybe as a result of my grandmother's unconcealed sorrow over her first-born being a daughter? Or the heritage of a patriarchal tradition?

For all that, there were some women she was close to at all points of her long life; she could never have got by without their devoted friendship. She accepted their friendship and frequently expressed her gratitude to them, and yet they meant less to her than her adored younger brothers and son. She was a child hewn from the block of her times, the child of an era that she did not wish to recall or think about. She liked living in Sweden and made an effort to learn the language properly—far better than many of those who immigrate at a fairly advanced age. She counted Swedes, too, amongst her friends, finding no difficulty in mixing with them. Yet deep down she was interested in neither the country nor its people: they lay outside her own world, and the country was just as alien to her as Mexico, where here youngest brother had lived, or Hungary, where her other surviving brother lived and she herself had grown up.

She was not even very keen to visit Budapest, the city we had in common, where she had raised me with such great care, only going if that was the only possibility of meeting one or both of her brothers. All the same, whenever I got back from a trip abroad she would ask whether I had been in Budapest. She never spoke about the Arrow-Cross militias or their brief reign of terror, and if I recollected one of our experiences of that time, she sometimes remembered it too, but sometimes not. She forgot all about the two sisters, for instance, as if they had never existed.

In some respects she was a paradigm of the Jewish mother, but not in others. Usually one could predict what her reactions would be: they were a logical consequence of her rigid view of the world, her pedantic love of order, and her strict self-discipline. And yet there were still occasions when she could surprise one. Two years after the end of the war, in 1947, I was terrified because I did not know how I could break to her the news of my decision to leave for Sweden. It was by then clear for all to see that the Iron Curtain would soon be descending, and there was little chance that we would ever see one another again. I was very much afraid that she would take an implacable stand against my moving and so left it till almost the last moment before telling her. Her eyes lit up: "I couldn't wish more than for you to live in such a wonderfully free country," she said. I was flabbergasted. I had not been aware she already suspected that life in Hungary was not going to be as free as the coalition government of the day, not yet totally Communist dominated, had promised. Nor had I imagined she could know anything about Sweden when my own preconceptions of it were, at best, dim and vague.

Her abiding preoccupation with food, clothes and the household duties that naturally went with being a good mother distanced her from me, and that is presumably why I undervalued her. She expected of me the conventional demonstrations of affection on birthdays and other festivals, thereby implanting in me the seeds of a deep-rooted resistance to celebrations of all kinds, especially family occasions. This in due course was to be the cause of an aching sense of deprivation and permanent craving in my own children for the sort of family gatherings that come together on these occasions which I was never able to give them.

I am sitting in an aircraft over the Atlantic. You have been laid to rest deep in the round seven weeks now. Your apartment is still untouched, and the telephone, too, is still there—the telephone on which you used to call me up to complain about how tired and weak you felt, and to inform me that it could not go on that way any longer: something had to be done, otherwise what was the use of doctors.

I was brusque with you. I asked you not to call me so often, and I brushed aside your badgering and yet routine enquiries: "Are you going to come round next week?" "Are you travelling anywhere?" "Where are you going?" "When will you return?"

You never could remember when I was due to travel or get back, or even where I was going. When I visited you on Sundays, you often thought that I had been in Budapest. But you never wanted me to say anything about your old home city—only whether I had been there. You did always ask me, though, if I had seen anything worthwhile on my trips. The little demon that resides within me replied that all I ever saw of the world was aircraft, hotel rooms, taxis and conference-rooms. Which was basically true.

You also wanted to know how the children and grandchildren were getting on. They almost never came by to visit you. In the early days you used to complain bitterly about it, but then you became reconciled to it. You asked me about them, but I did not wish, and was even unable, to give you a reply as I knew you would not have listened to what I told you. As time went by you even forgot altogether about your grandchildren's children; only your grandchildren stayed in your mind, especially my son, Peter.

I am dreaming that I am in your apartment. Night is falling. The porcelain cat that I always had to be so careful with fixes me with its stare—the same exaltedly grave expression as always. The photographs of myself on the walls look down on me: the infant, the grown man, the young married man, the lecturer. Ritually posed photos from my childhood: the boy scout, the good pupil—retouched, wooden, lifeless images. Laughing, happy snaps of your younger brothers and yourself. A picture of you and Father; you are young and holding hands. The watch that you always wanted to be able to see.

Where are you? Have you gone out for a walk?

The tapestry of Amor and Psyche that you stitched with your own hand when you were a young woman. A big and splendid piece of work which has been around as long as I can remember.

Now all these things will be removed from here. Within the next four weeks, assuming you really did not just go out for a walk.

Nothing will ever come of our conversation now, Mother. For a long time I held on to the possibility that it might, and so did you—for at least fifty or sixty years. But it just never worked out. Twenty or thirty years ago, when I read Camus' *The Outsider,* the story of Meursault, the French Algerian, who was his widowed mother's only child, I was touched by a grief which seemed to have sneaked out from the lower reaches of my conscience. What moved me was the bitterness of the novel's hero, which derived from the fact that he and his mother, despite being very attached to one another, were unable to say anything to one another.

During the last few years your hearing went from bad to worse, and every time that I called you would ask, "Where are you? Are you here in Stockholm?" If I replied that I was in America, you would still ask whether I was coming to visit you that afternoon. In the end, I wound up giving the same answer to everything: "I can't help that." Whatever you asked, that was always my answer. "Where are you now?" "I can't help that." "How are the children? Have you any news about Peter?" (It was always Peter.) "I can't help that."

Our conversation, which came to nothing. Yet it might have done. If you had only consented to wearing a hearing aid. If only you had not been so stubborn!

Would we have been able to talk then?

I think not. You can't help that. Nor can I.

Farewell, Mother. I'm keeping your cat. And the tapestry. And your genes. And the photograph on which you are holding hands with the father I never knew.

I can't help that. ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

László Kontler

The Need for Pride

Foundation Myths and the Reflection of History in Modern Hungary

Myths of origin and myths concerning other events and processes instrumental in forging the national community are of paramount importance in forming national consciousness and identity. What follows is a series of reflections on some aspects on the state of collective historical memory in Hungary in the past two centuries as it is expressed in the attitudes towards the foundation of the medieval kingdom by Stephen I in 1000 and to the Revolution of 1848. The views advanced will reflect the motivations that led me to publish a book on the history of Hungary,[1] to write a short "history without tears", as a Canadian friend has put it. I shall argue that the currently widespread infatuation with the former (1000) and the relative indifference towards the latter (1848) event can be explained in the light of the tendency in Hungary to view national history in pessimistic and pathos-ridden terms, and that all of this is highly relevant to the sense of realism and responsibility in Hungarian historical conscious-ness. It must be added that these reflections are those of a historian whose work (the above-mentioned book notwithstanding) has primarily been on topics from the intellectual history of the Scottish, English and German Enlightenment. As I cannot suppress and do not intend to conceal this aspect of my professional identity, it may not be inappropriate for me to begin by quoting Tom Nairn's opening address at a conference inaugurating the new Centre for Scottish Studies at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver in spring 2000.

First read in the series "Myths of Nations" of the Institute of European Studies at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. I am grateful to the Institute for the invitation, and to OTKA (Hungarian National Fund for Scientific Research) whose fellowship I enjoyed while writing the paper.

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Speaking on "Culture, Community and Nation: Scotland at Home and Abroad", Nairn argued that frustration at the loss of independent political power through the 1707 Anglo-Scottish Union not only bred a certain lack of responsibility and parochialism among Scots, but also made them "world-class experts in nostalgia", cultivating the image of a nation firmly rooted in the glorious past. Hinting at the period of transition at hand (as a result of devolution), Nairn was modestly optimistic as to the future. Nevertheless he emphasised that the past, and in the case of Scottish emigrants the present, too, has been marked by an image of Scottish national history as one of doom and gloom, a sense of glorious struggle in which David has been perpetually losing to Goliath.[2]

However far-flung it may seem to recall Nairn's claims here, they do have a specific relevance to my theme. A feeling of *déja vu* immediately struck me upon reading a report on his lecture. The Hungarian is well known, in the first place to himself, as someone apt to contemplate his past as a matter of extreme, almost unbearable gravity, his nation known as one robbed of its erstwhile greatness by a combination of vicious contingencies, some of which can be identified as personages in the great drama of history, in which Hungarians have been all too often rendered helpless outsiders, a small nation struggling and surviving with the greatest difficulty against the odds. Would, then, Hungary, from the eastern periphery of the Occident, join hands with Scotland on the North-West? Even more than that, I have had the occasion to observe Scots giving up their alleged reluctance to take it easy when it comes to sensitive points of their history. Last spring, I witnessed a staging of the ancient martial arts of the clans at Stirling Castle. About a dozen valiant Highlanders appeared on the lawn of the courtyard—heavy swords in hand, thick beards and colourful kilts blowing in the wind. "Anyone from England here?", the most robust of them addressed the audience in a formidable voice. No sooner than some cautious "yeas" were uttered, the cohort, swords swinging, burst out in their direction with a mighty hooray. (All the English survived the charge.) Could the same thing happen, I asked myself, if the scene were an old fortress in Transdanubia (not too many of these are still extant: the Habsburgs had most of them blown up after suppressing the War of Independence led by Prince Ferenc Rákóczi in the early 18th century), if Highlanders were replaced by Hungarians dressed as the "outlaws" led by Imre Thököly or Rákóczi's *kuruc* soldiers, and the English with a bunch of tourists from Austria? Hardly, I'm afraid. National history is a matter of pathos; irony of this kind is considered disgraceful.

The view of the national past that has been prevalent and is still all too common in Hungary is perhaps best encapsulated in the National Anthem itself. Originally a poem written by Ferenc Kölcsey (1823) at the beginning of the period of national awakening, the music written by Ferenc Erkel at its height in 1844, by its reference to "ill fate that has torn for ages" the Hungarian nation which has "already suffered the doom of times past and future" (and therefore

would deserve a "merry season" at last), it clearly reflected the attitudes I am referring to. Roughly a century later they underlie the words of Gyula Illyés, poet, novelist and national icon, from 1938: "Hungarians ... owe their existence to their audacious struggles. These struggles have been defensive from the beginning and became increasingly desperate as time went by. All hopeless. Surprisingly enough, they are at their most hopeless at the moment they are launched: the enemy is always at least twenty times stronger, and sober minds would avoid such a venture. The nation, famous for its calm and objective way of thinking, is aware that its venture can only end in failure, but still, time and again it attacks Goliath. Our forebodings always prove right, but we never learn our lesson. Our history does not teach us logic. It teaches us, and this is comforting and lofty, that things such as courage, audacity and insistence on ideas also have value in the life of nations. It is only through miracles that people can live, by the example of the phoenix, thousands of years." This translation of Illyés's words (which sound more noble and somewhat less pathos-ridden in the original) appears as the cover blurb of *The Illustrated History of Hungary,*[3] a generally excellent and beautifully produced volume, which nevertheless occasionally reflects the spirit which also imbues the lines of the venerated poet it cites. As a final illustration of my point, let me refer to a speech by József Hámori, Hungary's then Minister for the Cultural Heritage, made to a sizeable international audience at the 1999 Frankfurt Book Fair, when Hungary was the "focus country". Much of what the Minister had to say about Hungarian history, identity and their interrelatedness, fits comfortably in the stereotypical straitjacket of a small nation suffering under the blows of adversity but, even in such circumstances, making laudable contributions to European civilization.

After this perhaps overlong introduction, let me explain why I feel this reflection of Hungarian history is inadequate. All stereotypes contain a grain, or even much more than a grain, of reality. Adversity there was, and a lot of it, and the contributions, too, have been remarkable. But when this is distilled into the perspective outlined above, it runs the risk of concealing what remains truly meaningful of the nation's heritage at the threshold of the twenty-first century, or at least of establishing false priorities, and of preventing a responsible and realistic coming-to-terms with the national past. As Hungary has arguably subsisted in many periods under serious constraints, it is all too easy and comforting to persuade ourselves that whatever glory there was, is our own achievement, and whatever is unpleasant to remember, has been imposed on us. I should like to illustrate this point by describing changing attitudes to two watersheds in Hungarian history and by explaining how they relate to this kind of reflection of national history. These two junctures are the foundation of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary by (Saint) Stephen I in the year 1000 and the 1848 Revolution, which could be considered as a symbolic date for the foundation of

"modern" Hungary. But before I do this, I ought to create a historical context and attempt to sketch what is relevant of history of a thousand years to my argument.

Hungarians or Magyars are one, and the most populous, of a few peoples of Finno-Ugrian derivation in Europe, and the fact that they have been wedged among Indo-European groups has contributed to their sense of isolation and, sometimes, desperation ever since the national awakening of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries put the issue of ethnicity on the agenda. After long migrations from the Asian side of the Ural mountains, their nomadic ancestors conquered their present domicile in the Carpathian Basin in 896—over four centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire and the rise of the first "barbarian kingdoms", and nearly one century after Charlemagne reconstituted the Western Empire. This relatively late arrival only further stimulated the predilection, general in medieval Europe, to create illustrious, if contradictory, pedigrees—on the one hand as the true (Christian) civilizers of the region, and on the other as the descendants of the Huns, whose Emperor Attila in the fifth century was the first ruler who united both halves of the Carpathian Basin under a common sway. To be sure, during the first decades of their presence at the fringe of the Occident the still pagan Hungarians harassed their Christian neighbours with a ferocity that rivalled that of the Huns. However, after the first setbacks to raids of plunder, their princes keenly stimulated the transition already in progress towards a more settled life, a process that culminated in the baptism and coronation of King Stephen. The new monarch broke the resistance of pagan chieftains, territorial organization replaced that based on blood relationship and kinship, and Hungary became integrated in the community of Christian nations. Defying the hegemoniac endeavours of German and Byzantine Emperors, and in spite of recurrent periods of domestic instability (whose causes were similar to those in the feudal societies of the West), Hungary became a sort of regional power, annexing some and acquiring overlordship over other of its neighbours' territories. It survived, and relatively soon recovered from the disastrous Mongol invasion of 1241. The dynasty of Árpád, the prince who had once led the Hungarians across the Carpathians, died out in 1301. Nevertheless, Hungary not only flourished under the Angevin kings of the fourteenth century, but reached the zenith of domestic strength and international reputation in the second half of the fifteenth under King Matthias, the patron of a lavish Renaissance court, the first north of the Alps.

Despite the ups and downs, this probably sounds like a success story, and to a certain extent it was one. The old Hungarians were the last nomads who created a viable western-type feudal monarchy, together with the social structures underlying it, on the eastern fringes of the civilization marked by Latin Christianity. The several centuries' gap, however, could not be completely bridged. Some of these structures lacked the vigour which their western coun-

terparts possessed to an increasing degree; urbanization and commerce, in particular, lagged behind in Hungary, which bode ill at the beginning of the period when these were to become the vehicles of progress in the West. This circumstance would have occasioned a relative decline, even without the intervention of two external factors at the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. One of these was the age of discoveries and the resulting shift in trade routes, which consolidated the role of western Europe as the fulcrum of commerce and manufacture and, by implication, that of its eastern periphery, including Hungary, as the supplier of raw materials and agrarian products. As the noble landlords were best positioned to take advantage of this situation, the power of the nobility *vis-à-vis* the commoners as well as the royal administration grew, exerting in the long run an ossifying effect on Hungary's social structure. Second, in the wake of the collapse of royal authority after Matthias' death, there was no longer a power in the country strong enough to resist the advance of the Ottoman Turks, whose presence in the Balkans had been a menace to Hungarian hegemony there since the late fourteenth century. In the Battle of Mohács in 1526, the King of Hungary, as well as the Kingdom of Hungary as it had been known for five centuries, perished. In the struggles and rivalries that took place in the following three decades the country was trisected. The central, most fertile, areas were occupied by the Turks. Of the two rival factions of the nobility, one invited to the throne Ferdinand of Habsburg (honouring an earlier marriage treaty and in the hope that as an offspring of an international dynasty he could secure aid against the Ottomans), and the other elected one of their own rank, John Szapolyai. Habsburgs continued to rule what remained of the Kingdom of Hungary in the northwest, while out of the territories initially controlled by King John in the east a new entity, the Principality of Transylvania, emerged. The split was also accentuated in cultural and religious terms: Protestantism spread rapidly in all the territories of Hungary (including the Ottoman province), but whereas in Transylvania Calvinism became established and several other denominations enjoyed varying degrees of tolerance, the Habsburgs in their lands pursued a vigorous Counter-Reformation from the late sixteenth century on. Conversion to Islam, unlike in the Balkans, was virtually non-existent in Hungary, while the Turks did everything in their power to exploit the rivalry between the Christian denominations.

The disastrous effect of over one and half centuries of Ottoman rule and the internecine warfare that went with it (especially the "Fifteen Years' War" around the year 1600) on the country's material culture and demography conditions would be difficult to exaggerate. The entire structure of settlements and production was thrown in disarray; at the end of the seventeenth century Hungary's population barely exceeded what it had been under Matthias two centuries earlier—including now the "Greek" (Balkan Slav) settlers who started to penetrate Hungary even before the expulsion of the Turks, and their influx, as well as that

of other (Slovak, Romanian, German) settlers continued in the decades that followed to transform the ethnic balance of Hungarians and non-Hungarians in the country from 3:1 around 1500 to 2:3 around 1800.

Exhausted and divided as the country was, the expulsion of the Turks—the liberation of the capital Buda in 1686 and the campaign that ended in 1699—was achieved by an international effort coordinated by the Habsburgs, who thereafter treated Hungary and Transylvania as a conquered province annexed to their hereditary lands. Almost immediately this resulted in ferment, and a powerful rebellion led by Prince Ferenc Rákóczi defied superior Habsburg forces, even proclaiming the independence of Hungary, from 1703 to 1711. Although the revolt failed, the new masters took heed of this warning and the subsequent settlement was a compromise. Hungary's territorial integrity was maintained (though Transylvania was kept as a separate unit) and was promised to be governed according to its customs and statutes ("constitution", as we would say today). With the monopoly they possessed over the country's political institutions, the main beneficiary was again the staunch Hungarian nobility, which played an ambiguous role throughout most of modern history. Jealous of their privileges, they ardently defended the country's political integrity, which they conceived to be identical with those privileges. However, whereas political integrity might be instrumental in advancing socio-economic progress, but is in itself in most cases an insufficient condition of it, noble privileges, at least from the eighteenth century onwards, were increasingly antithetical to the very idea of progress.

Nevertheless, under the circumstances of the post-1711 settlement the whole of the eighteenth century became a period of slow but steady recovery, in which some important steps towards economic, social and cultural improvement were taken. This culminated in the "enlightened" absolutism of Maria Theresa and Joseph II in the second half of the eighteenth century, when these rulers—the former rather cautiously, the latter with a near-revolutionary zeal—themselves undertook to reform the old regime, mainly with a view to enhancing their governments' administrative efficiency, revenues and military potential. As these initiatives inevitably interfered with the privileges of the nobility (their exemption from taxes, their authority over the peasantry, their political influence through county self-governance and the national diet) as well as with those of the Catholic Church, the attempt culminated in turmoil. In the atmosphere created shortly later by the French Revolution, Joseph's successors returned to absolutism without Enlightenment.

However, Josephism did have an impact in the long run. His reform programme created a well-educated intellectual élite with a broad European horizon (mainly recruited from commoners and the numerous gentry), while the same élite, repulsed by Joseph's excessive drive to homogenize the different provinces and cultures of his empire, started to display an increasing conscious-

ness of their Hungarian identity. The tradition thus created lay somewhat dormant in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Era, but thereafter the incipient national awakening culminated in the Hungarian Reform Age, in which national goals (initially confined to language reform and the cultivation of the cultural heritage) and the tasks of social reform were propagated in tandem. In the first phase, marked by the iconic figure of Count István Széchenyi, the accent was on distinctly non-political projects (the improvement of the infrastructure, credit facilities, industries, cultural institutions), but the "Reform Diets" from the second half of the 1830s on, dominated by the charismatic Lajos Kossuth, proceeded with increasing vigour towards the ultimate claim expressed in 1848: the rule of law based on civil liberties, representative and responsible government, no closer relationship with Austria than a personal union for a Hungary in which peasants were no longer serfs and noblemen were taxed.

This liberal programme was carried through by the bloodless revolution of 15 March 1848. However, as soon as the Habsburg court recovered its strength, it was less willing to honour the commitment to the new constitution promulgated under pressure; it was also able to exploit the hostilities that arose between Hungarians and the national minorities. In the previous half-century the latter had also been undergoing their own national awakening, and from then on a pattern continued to repeat itself in the relationship of Hungarian liberals and the leaders of the national minorities until the dissolution of historic Hungary. The former insisted on the idea of the "unitary Hungarian political nation" in which each person was individually entitled to the same civil liberties and therefore there was no need to concede specific rights of political autonomy to the minorities. In principle they were willing to grant a broad range of cultural autonomy, which, when codified after the 1867 Austro-Hungarian Compromise, was rather half-heartedly effected in practice, and was anyway less than satisfactory for the national minorities (who together made up the majority of the population). From the autumn of 1848, the revolution became a war of independence in which the new Hungarian army and civil authorities were simultaneously trying to defy Habsburg forces, to set the vast social and political reforms implied by the new constitution into motion and to quell ethnic strife. They did remarkably well until the Russian Tsar came to the rescue of his Austrian fellow-emperor in the summer of 1849.

The shocking brutality of the retaliation brought Hungary into the headlines of the Western press, but neither the sympathy thus generated, nor the efforts of the emigrés, led by Kossuth, to obtain international assistance to revive the struggle, were to any avail. Passive resistance, that is, non-cooperation with the authorities of a system labelled as neo-absolutism, was the attitude of most of the Hungarian political élite, but it could not be sustained long. On the other hand, increasing international isolation inclined Austrian leaders to a compromise with

the Hungarians from the early 1860s on. This culminated in the settlement or Compromise of 1867, which, according to many contemporaries as well as later commentators, was "the realistic 1848". Both halves of the Dual Monarchy, as Austria-Hungary came to be called, were independent in their internal affairs, while functioning as a unit externally. To the Austro-Germans and the Hungarians, the measure brought parliamentary government with civil liberties, albeit with extensive prerogatives for the ruler Francis Joseph, and with virtually no further "opening" of the system for the next half-century. The political demands of the national minorities were left unmet and the very elaborate law on their cultural rights was evaded by the authorities, but they, too, benefited from the unprecedented economic and infrastructural achievements of the "happy times of peace". The gap between Hungary and Western Europe in these terms seemed to be narrowing again; the country's growing political weight within the Austro-Hungarian Empire to some extent justified the rekindling ideas of Hungarian *grandeur* and *gloire;* and it boasted an exciting urban modernist culture.

Nevertheless, the obstinate conservatism of her political system, her failure to embrace social reform and especially the rampant minorities problem found Hungary ill-prepared to cope with the strains of global war, and at the end of the First World War, which Austria-Hungary and her allies lost, the walls came tumbling down. In the days of military collapse in autumn 1918, a revolution threw into government those democrats who had for long been urging reforms and greater generosity towards the national minorities. However, the latter, backed by the Entente armies, proclaimed secession instead, and the pacifist government of Mihály Károlyi was unable, and unwilling, to use force. In a moment of profound economic deprivation and national frustration, the Communists took their chance, and in concurrence with rapid Sovietization and a Red Terror, they held out against Slovak, Romanian and Entente forces from March to August 1919. After a quick succession of two revolutionary regimes, and while the country was occupied by foreign forces, the extreme right Hungarian "National Army" hunted, with great success, for actual and suspected Bolsheviks. "Order" was restored by the time the Paris Peace Conference presented Hungary with the Trianon Treaty in the summer of 1920.

Trianon reduced Hungary to one-third of her former size, and one-third of ethnic Hungarians found themselves citizens of neighbouring states, in an evidently hostile environment. In terms of economic resources, the blow was even more serious. The peace multiplied the destructive effect of the war. As a result, no serious contender for votes in inter-war Hungary could have abandoned the claim for a full revision of the Trianon Treaty (however unjustified and unrealistic such a claim was)—albeit the government parties during the the regency of Admiral Miklós Horthy, the emblematic figure of the period, were revisionists out of conviction, not mere political expediency. After the turmoil of 1919 was

over, when right radicalism was given free rein, and some political and economic consolidation came about, the policies of the regime, like the regent himself, were largely conservative and traditionalist, with the old landed and capitalist élite returning to power. This state of affairs changed after the economic crisis of the early 1930s. Thereafter the extreme right gained ground, alternating in office with the traditional conservative right. Even more importantly and detrimentally, German economic penetration and political influence increased year by year, and the prospect that Hitler might assist Hungary in achieving her revisionist goals was too tempting for the Hungarian political élite to resist. In 1941, Hungary became involved in the Second World War on Germany's side. Deemed an unreliable satellite, it was occupied by German forces in spring 1944; after an amateurish attempt by Horthy to leave the German camp in October that year, a puppet government of Hungarian Nazis was created to implement a reign of terror for the last few months of the war. By the time the Red Army expelled the Germans in April 1945, the country was in ruins. The death toll hit the one-million mark, half of them being the victims of the Hungarian Holocaust.

In the shadow of Soviet arms, in a socio-political atmosphere and material conditions that favoured an ideology promising "to turn the world around by tomorrow" (as a well known marching song had it), experiment with democracy could have started under better auspices. The great events of 1945—the land reform and the general elections—still reflected the spirit of democracy, pluralism and progress; thereafter, the Hungarian Communists ruthlessly exploited the combination of the broad appeal of a utopian dream and the political offices they obtained on the insistence of the Soviet occupying authorities for pressure, blackmail and manipulation. By 1947 their main rivals were either in exile or in prison, their parties demoralized or subsumed into the Communist party; by 1949 the whole of Hungarian industry was nationalized, the collectivization of agriculture was under way, and the country had a new Stalinist constitution. Hungary became a member of Comecon and the Warsaw Pact. Except for Stalin's, Mátyás Rákosi's became the worst personality cult in the whole Soviet bloc; until 1953, Hungary's form of government was terrorist dictatorship. As the public scene all around the Eastern bloc responded to changes in Moscow like a seismograph, upon Stalin's death in 1953 Rákosi was replaced by the reform-minded Communist Imre Nagy, but two years later the clock was turned back in Moscow and, therefore, in Budapest again. However, once the "new course" had let the genie out of the bottle, it could not be squeezed back, and in October 1956 Hungary was the scene of the first (and only?) anti-totalitarian revolution in history. Nagy was brought back to office, the multi-party system rapidly revived and the country's neutrality was announced. After twelve days the dream was over: the Russian military intervened, the expected Western help never materialized, and Moscow's new client, János Kádár, organized a ruthless revenge.

But there was no return to Stalinism. Even the post-1956 terror was different from that of Rákosi's: it was not aimed against whole social groups arbitrarily selected in the name of some political strategy, but against specific individuals thought to be "dangerous". Politically the essence of Kádárism was the isolation of this active minority from the passive majority, and the satisfaction of a gradually broadening range of needs for the latter. Once the thaw between a shocked nation and its master began, Kádár openly proclaimed his slogan of "He who is not against us is with us". By the end of the 1960s, Hungary became the home of the first (in fact, unique) experiment of grafting the elements of the market on a nationalized economy, a country in which there was no liberty but the citizen could enjoy many small liberties in cultural and economic life as well as remarkably higher living standards than elsewhere in the Soviet bloc—provided that he/she did not meddle with certain taboos, such as Hungary's membership in the Warsaw Pact, the one-party system, or, of course, the qualification of 1956 as "counter-revolution".

By the 1980s, however, not even the excessive loans that the Hungarian government contracted could counter the effects of the economic crisis on the system; as a result of this, the foundations of the unspoken compromise between the regime and the people became undermined and the fact that the Soviet Union had lost the Cold War removed the international obstacles of political transformation in Hungary. This took place amidst much political debate, but without violence, between 1988 and 1990; the Communists, while apparently retaining many important positions in the economy, even dismantled their old party and eventually opened the way to free elections. Since 1990 the multi-party system has functioned quite satisfactorily. Despite the difficulties of the transition to a market economy—which is by now complete, but at the cost of a GDP which is only just now climbing back to its 1989 value and at the cost of processes which cause half the population to feel themselves "losers" by the changes—and despite often acrimonious debate, each government fulfilled its four year term and at each election the previous opposition took over quite smoothly; political extremism has remained marginal (though recently it is back in parliament). Hungary, together with the Czech Republic and Poland, is a prime candidate for accession to the EU in the next round of expansion of the Union, and since March 1999 Hungary has been a member of NATO.

I tried to make this account sound as dispassionate as can be reconciled with being a decent patriot. But I must say that at the end of it there seems to be a lot in favour of the view of Hungarian history I am criticizing. The vicissitudes I have related to a great extent explain the gloom that surrounds the common perception of this history, and to some extent excuses the notion of a heroic, morally superior but small nation perpetually victimized through the schemes and the power of others (whether Ottomans, Austrians, Entente governments

and their Slovak, Serb, Romanian protégés, Germans or Soviets). Explains and excuses; but not warrants. For all three ingredients that are essential for a healthy reflection of history, and consequently a healthy national consciousness, are missing from it. These are a sense of proportion, realism and responsibility. First, this view of Hungarian history is parochial and introverted, it lacks a sense of proportion in that it fails to ask whether Hungarian history is truly unique on account of the glory and the suffering, and whether it is in these that the uniqueness of Hungarian history truly consists. The horizon of the reflection of history must be broadened: everyone is unique, but it is in the uniqueness of others that one might properly recognize one's own. Second, if a community is to take and keep its future fate in its own hands, in its collective memory it must be able very clearly to delineate its own share in its past fortunes and misfortunes. If it fails in this exercise, or even tries to escape this duty, it is very likely to make false value judgements about the past, and therefore to select improperly those traditions that could be relevant for the future.

The "gloom and doom" and "escapist" attitudes to Hungarian history are already themselves part of that history, at least ever since the country's fortunes started their steady decline, from the sixteenth century onwards. As the first tribulations at the hands of the infidels were simultaneous with the rapid spread of the Reformation in Hungary, initially some comfort was taken in Protestant eschatology: Hungarians are God's chosen people whose steadfastness is put to a test by the uncommon plight, but if they show firmness in their belief, their Babylonian captivity, just as that of the Jews, will come to an end. Ideas of elect nationhood[4] sustained themselves into the seventeenth century, when it seemed that (Protestant) Hungary was wedged between "two pagans", of which the Habsburg court, armed with the Counter-Reformation, seemed as formidable as the Ottomans. By the time the latter were expelled from the country, Hungarians had to realize that, whereas for nearly two centuries they had tended to think of themselves as "the bulwark of Christendom", on account of their conflict with the Habsburgs, who in the end coordinated the liberation campaign, many in Christian Europe viewed Hungary as an enemy of Christendom.[5] To be sure, this view later lost force, only to be replaced by its variant according to which Hungary was "Eastern", in the sense the notion of Eastern Europe, emerging in the eighteenth century, had it: barren and backward, with a barbarous populace and a recalcitrant nobility.[6]

This view, to say the least, was not entirely out of touch with reality—given the circumstances it would have been surprising if it had been different. It could not have been but recognized by contemporaries, too—but with the result that the view of the Hungarian predicament based on the combination of ideas of glory, plight and what I have called escapism, started to emerge in full armour in this period. The nobility's staunch insistence on their privileges was conceived as ardour for the liberties of the nation. By contemporary standards this was not en-

tirely bogus: the *natio Hungarica* was supposed to consist only of the *nati,* the "natives" of the houses with a pedigree, that is, the nobility whose interest was therefore etymologically the national interest. Also, by vigorously defending the estates-based "constitution", that is, by ensuring the continuous survival of deliberative assemblies and organs of self-government on the municipal as well as the national level, they maintained an important political tradition that could be depended on later. However, this was at a serious cost. Elsewhere in the Habsburg lands, the nobility, however grudgingly, abandoned its tax privileges under Maria Theresa, but the Hungarian nobility resisted all attempts at collecting its contribution to state revenues. By its insistence on the maintenance of the whole network of rural relations connected with these privileges, the nobility had a major share in perpetuating the country's backwardness; this, of course, the nobility perceived, but laid it at the door of Vienna which, supposedly, pursued colonial policies towards Hungary. The pattern was set: throughout most of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth century, Hungarian Diets attributed the dismal conditions of the country to political oppression and economic exploitation by Austria. This policy of grievances was not entirely unsound, but by its neglect of internal causes it certainly did not stimulate self-searching and critical thinking.

It would be grossly unfair not to add immediately that when the unsustainability of the old regime was first recognized, that recognition came from the sons of the enlightened nobility, both its aristocratic and gentry segments, and it also inaugurated the period in which a critical reflection of Hungary's condition and history are more readily observable than ever before or, I am afraid, since. The Age of Enlightenment came to a culmination in Hungary when the magic words were uttered: the primary cause of Hungary's backwardness is not her subordination to Vienna, but the feudal system, and the way to emerge from backwardness was not by the quest for erstwhile glory, but by improvement through the polishing of the human mind and the human environment, and the forging of a sense of community, a *societas civilis* where formerly there had been only an assemblage of groups of subjects possessing very diverse rights and privileges. Gergely Berzeviczy, perhaps the brightest of the gentlemanly political-economists who came to intellectual maturity under Joseph II's mantle, was the first who pointed out around 1800, the indigeneous roots of backwardness by the most up-to-date statistical methods; doing so inevitably also implied seriously taking stock of and passing judgment on an immense and complex web of customs, statutes, attitudes and interpersonal relationships passed down through many centuries.[7] As regards the character of the protagonists of Hungarian history, the nobleman was found to be valiant and chivalrous, and to share the quality of honesty with his antagonist, the peasant. But they were also both found to be equally notorious for being unenterprising and diffident. Whence did these less attractive and, what is more, less respectable qualities arise? From legal arrangements made as long before as the mid-fourteenth cen-

tury. The inalienability of noble land had once served the purposes of preventing the fragmentation of noble estates and of ensuring the survival of the line; however, under the conditions of modernity it made the nobleman an impossible partner for banks to which he could not offer a security on loans contracted, wrote Count István Széchenyi in a significantly entitled book, *Credit,* in 1830.[8] If entailment was responsible for the lack of incentive for the nobility, statutes deriving from 1351, enacting the jurisdiction of the nobleman over his serfs and standardizing his duties, still in force at the time when Széchenyi was writing, were responsible for the legal disabilities and economic misery of the peasant, which sufficiently explained the same attitude on his part.

With these and other similarly acute insights, Széchenyi's book and initiatives brought about a shift in the whole discourse on Hungary's past and current predicament. The role of foreign agency in the growth of difficulties was not forgotten, but the overall picture became immensely more balanced; historical and public awareness improved in Hungary in the subsequent two decades more than in any comparable period, and may have been at their all time peak. Merely on account of this, the Age of Reform and its apotheosis, the revolution of 1848, would be worthy of our attention. But more than that, a realistic and responsible assessment of Hungary's heritage and condition also produced the powerful vision of a future Hungary erected on the foundation of the reconciliation of interests: a Hungary in which the elite was no longer segregated by legal privilege from the rest of the population, who were thus "lifted within the bulwarks of the constitution" (formerly strictly the property of the nobles); one in which the nation ceased to be divided through difference in legal status and became a "society" in the true sense of the word.[9] In this sense it was a republican programme (not primarily in regard of the form of government, although in the heat of the War of Independence the deposition of the Habsburgs was also proclaimed), and a liberal programme, some of which has been rendered obsolete or insufficient during the century and a half since, but other elements of it remained unfulfilled until the changes of 1989–1990 in Hungary. Finally, it was the work of simply the most talented generation of daring and devoted leaders who combined intellectual sophistication with a broad vision and political activism. Besides Széchenyi and Kossuth, there was the jurist Ferenc Deák, the later architect of the 1867 Compromise with Austria, and József Eötvös, a writer and political theorist of (hitherto unfortunately little acknowledged) European stature—and there were many others.

However, they "committed" something that seems to have been unpardonable in the judgement of collective memory: they failed in 1848, and if the Compromise of 1867 was a "realistic" issue of 1848, especially having the post-1867 developments in mind, it was also a somewhat diluted one. The failure, together with its circumstances, made a lasting impact on the evaluation and, what is inseparable from it, the status of 1848 in the public mind.

First, a theory of foreign ascendancy, conspiracy and treachery emerged: the revolution failed because the military superiority of the Habsburg and Russian forces, this was further strengthened by the malicious schemes whereby Vienna instigated the national minorities against the Hungarian government, and the fact that the Hungarian Commander-in-Chief, Artúr Görgey, turned traitor. As to the latter, in spite of his serious differences with Kossuth, Görgey was a loyal soldier of the revolution, and surrendered in August 1849 in an impossible military situation.[10] As to the national minorities, even without the overtures from Vienna (of which there were indeed plenty), they had already been explicitly unhappy for some time with the Hungarian liberals' idea of the "unitary political nation"—the illusion that once individual rights are accessible for them, the ethnic minorities, just as the peasants,[11] would readily assimilate to the new Hungarian nation. But the sentiments of the poet of the revolution, Sándor Petőfi, who Magyarized his name from Petrovics, were not shared by everyone, and the revolutionary governments' inevitable deafness to the claims of the minorities until it was relatively late, would have resulted in extremely violent ethnic strife even without the interference of the Habsburg court. Somewhat similar is the case of the peasantry: their expectations in the troubled times were not fulfilled at a pace they hoped for, and they became increasingly passive. Nevertheless, the notion of external evil has not merely overshadowed, which could be understood, but effectively annulled the internal tension in the public assessment of 1848/49: generations of high school graduates, for instance, have hardly been aware that there was extremely serious inter-ethnic violence in Hungary in 1848/49.

Second, whatever was not carried over from 1848 in 1867 and was thus not "vindicated by history", might seem secondary in retrospect. Most key issues, as I have referred above, received a treatment in 1867 similar to that of nearly two decades before. What was sifted out was a part of the spirit. Revolutionary euphoria, as always, implied some radical excess, but in the case of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 much more did it reveal the aspiration (if not the reality) of social solidarity, which was impossible to recreate after the experience of suppression, retaliation, neo-absolutism and then negotiating a settlement in a completely unrevolutionary situation.

Third, the status of 1848 was rendered uncertain by its failure: March 15 could never become July 14. How is it possible to enshrine, in a nation which is obsessed by considering itself a victim of history, the memory of a failure? 1848 became an object of veneration and lamentation at the same time, but did not give reason for celebration, and thus it has become, even despite the best intentions, undervalued, and has fallen prey to the nation's general bent of contemplating its history in terms of patriotic pathos.

During the dualist period, 1848 was remembered, and March 15 celebrated, as a symbol of national independence and as an occasion to voice petty grievances *vis-à-vis* Vienna, but not to express the idea of social solidarity, which was

an at least as important a component in the heritage of the Reform Age and 1848—imperfectly expressed and even less perfectly executed at that time, nevertheless (or rather all the more) worthy of being maintained, rejuvenated and further developed. Needless to say, 1848 and all it stood for could not have been a cherished memory in the mood that emerged after the collapse of historic Hungary in war and peace between 1914 and 1920. The circumstances were anything but in favour, first, of historical realism and responsibility and, second, of progressive traditions. As the process of disintegration, overwhelmingy stemming from indigeneous causes, was crowned by a grossly unfair application of the Wilsonian principles by the victors at the Paris Peace Conference, a sober assessment of this disintegration was ruled out. Whatever self-searching there took place, put the blame on liberals and democrats, who had sapped the vigour of old Hungary, which thus fell prey to the nationalist aspirations of neighbours and Bolshevik internationalists;[12] otherwise all responsibility was imputed to the vicious peace treaty. It goes without saying that in this way the peace treaty also contributed to the survival of precisely those semi-feudal structures whose demolition should have been the main sense of the whole transition process. Significantly, in the interwar period, 1848 as a symbol was only suitable for being placed on the banner of a (rather ephemeral) opposition movevement, the "March Front", launched in 1937 to urge precautions against the spread of Nazism, and to campaign for democracy, land reform and cooperation with neighbouring peoples.

To be sure, 1848 did not fare much better under Communism. This time, rather than ignored or repudiated, it was at first expropriated and adjusted to the ideological needs of the regime, embedded in a fictitious tradition of lower-class revolutionary radicalism whose apogee—so it was argued—was the current Communist revolution. Curiously enough, the traitor-motif survived, and was also accommodated to the view that 1848 was a class war, rather than a struggle for independence: not even Kossuth, the par excellence revolutionary hero, was vigilant enough to prevent the class enemy from infiltrating into the ranks of revolutionaries.[13] This was a warning signal to the heirs of the revolutionary tradition, in which 1848 represented the first, uncertain steps, the 1919 Soviet Republic an intermediate stage, and 1945 the true breakthrough. This supposed continuity was cemented in the 1960s into the wonderful idea of the "revolutionary youth days": a sequence of collective commemorations under the aegis of the Communist Youth League, on March 15, March 19 (the anniversary of the 1919 Bolshevik takeover) and April 4 ("Liberation Day", i.e., the expulsion of the Germans by the Soviets in 1945). Then, in my own adolescent years, the mid-1970s, the need was felt to send out to high schools each spring serious looking speakers from the municipal party cells for discussion with the "revolutionary youth", and to lay special emphasis on the fact that of these dates April 4 embodied the highest value and the greatest national holiday—whatever anybody might agitate to the contrary. This measure was a response to the pheno-

menon that by then 1848 had again started to assume the character of an opposition symbol and March 15 that of an opposition holiday. The first "alternative commemoration" in 1973, emphasizing the national and liberal-democratic character of 1848, resulted in beatings and detentions; there was a hiatus of several years, but it was then revived by the budding opposition to the Kádár regime in the 1980s. These peaceful and by no means massive protest rallies regularly ended in the same fashion as the one in 1973, until that commemorative day in 1989 became perhaps the most visible sign of the changing tide. One of the very few mass actions during the transition in Hungary, a march of about 100,000 people in Budapest clearly sent the message that many of the one and a half century-old endeavours were still unfulfilled and it was time to put them on the agenda.

One year later, in March 1990, free elections took place in Hungary. It seemed that the moment of truth for 1848 may have come, but this did not happen. In answer to the question of what the greatest Hungarian national holiday is—and, by implication, the most decisive item in the national heritage, the standard by which they wish to be measured—well over fifty per cent of Hungarians today would mention August 20 (March 15 coming second with twenty-odd per cent, somewhat ahead of October 23, the anniversary of the October 1956 Revolution and, still, April 4, the day Soviet troops expelled the last German soldier from the country). I have not yet mentioned August 20: it is the day on which, in 1083, the mortal remains of Stephen I were removed from the stone casket in which they had rested for forty-five years, and placed into a silver chest as part of the canonization ceremony of the king who founded the Hungarian state and converted its people to Christianity.[14] August 20 is the Feast of Saint Stephen, and by implication the foundation of the Kingdom of Hungary (even though Stephen's coronation took place either on Christmas Day in 1000 or on New Year's Day in 1001). Incidentally, it is also the "feast of the new bread", the first baked from the current year's harvest. I might also add that as Hungary's Communist constitution was issued on the same day in 1949, by way of an ironic transubstantiation the saint king's day was for decades celebrated as "Constitution Day".

The foundation of the medieval monarchy (usually referred to nowadays as the foundation of the state—quite imprecisely, given the fact that this term did not obtain its present meaning before early modern times) was obviously a landmark in the history of Hungary. But as the same event was arguably no less important in the history of any other nation, the quite unparalleled status of it in collective memory and public remembrance, I think, does require an explanation. After all, in spite of François Furet and other revisionist historians, the French celebrate July 14 and not Hugh Capet or Charlemagne or Clovis. For the United States, the fact that July 4 stands for sovereignty and democracy saves the dilemma, while the English, reputed for cherishing their traditions, commemorate neither Alfred the Great, nor William the Conqueror, nor the Magna Carta with an ardour equal to the Hungarian infatuation with

August 20, Saint Stephen and the relics associated with him, and especially the Holy Crown.

One of the clues, perhaps the one most often given in public discourse, is that they symbolize the Hungarian capacity for survival and that they are testimony to the valiance and persistence with which the nation has always maintained "statehood" (another anachronism) in one form or another—a merit already praised, oddly enough (but from personal experience), by the Emperor and King, Francis Joseph, over a hundred years ago, at the millennary celebrations of the Hungarian conquest of the Carpathian Basin. But if the horizon of our investigation is raised above the Carpathians, it must be immediately realized that from the north through the west to the south-west Stephen's coronation was witnessed by peoples—Poles, Czechs, Austrians, Croats—who were also establishing, or had already established, themselves in the area and have survived an equal number of equally troubled centuries (not to speak of others further south or north, such as the Bulgars or the Baltic peoples).

Next, the creation of sovereignty (yet another notion non-existent at the time) for its own sake is made out to be a reason to celebrate. There are two problems with this. First, the dimensions—not the fact—of celebrating the creation of monarchical sovereignty a thousand years ago are out of proportion with the reality of a republican constitution today. We are told that the Holy Crown of Saint Stephen (an assemblage of two crowns from the late eleventh and the twelfth centuries, never worn by our first king) has symbolized through the centuries not kingly rule, but Hungarian "statehood", but this is again problematic today. True, when in the early and mid-fifteenth centuries, unruly baronial factions held kings under control, they claimed to govern the country "under the seal of the Holy Crown", representing the community of the kingdom. But this was a community of the privileged: just as the *natio Hungarica*, mentioned above, the theory of the Holy Crown was based on exclusiveness, and did not regard commoners as members of the political body. In the early nineteenth century the veneration of the crown came into fashion anew (on the initiative of the Habsburgs) as an alternative to revolutionary cults modelled after the French. Though it was Ferenc Deák who first referred to the crown as the symbol of the lands of Saint Stephen in 1861, this usage only became widespread in the interwar years when political semantics invested it with a very specific meaning—a slogan for the revision of Trianon. If it is added that the veneration of relics (which in this case includes Stephen's miraculously preserved Holy Right Hand) is not acceptable to Protestants, another dimension of exclusiveness in the cult of the Holy Crown becomes discernible. However, no effort has yet been made to adjust the tradition of the Holy Crown to the requirements of a society based—I hope—on comprehension and tolerance. The mere assertion that it represents Hungarian "statehood" is begging the question; nor is the underlining of this by the ceremonial transfer of the Holy Crown from the Hungarian

National Museum to the House of Parliament, which occurred on New Year's Day in 2000 (the 999th anniversary of Stephen's coronation) fully convincing. So, supposing that people are at least to some extent aware of these stakes, whatever they say, "sovereignty" in itself cannot be the reason why they are attached to August 20.

All the more so as it is not very difficult to provide an iconoclastic (not to say sacrilegious) reading of "Stephen's creation". The hagiographical story that Stephen refused a crown offered by Emperor Otto III in order to avoid taking an oath of fealty and accepted the insignia sent by Pope Sylvester II instead has long been proved apocryphal (although this does not prevent it from being cited again and again). The years around 1000 were a rare moment in history when the ambition of local rulers in Central Europe coincided with the agreement of Pope and Emperor on a "project" of expanding the *respublica Christiana* eastwards, and the coronation of these new rulers took place with the endorsement of both—it could hardly have been otherwise. Stephen's "creation" took place, with the very active involvement of Roman priests and bishops and German knights, at an enormous cost in terms of ancient customs, traditions and human lives. Sovereignty? Before, by the latter half of his reign, he did rid himself of foreign tutelage, Stephen had initially established his authority against rebellious Hungarian chieftains by recourse to a great amount of foreign support. It may well be that another often quoted, and grossly misinterpreted, statement of his refers to this experience. In his admonitions to his son Prince Emeric, Stephen warns that monolingual *regni* are weak and therefore immigrants should be welcome. This has been taken as an early token of the Hungarians' well known hospitality and general tolerance—another part of Stephen's legend. I do not believe that the Hungarian national character is any less or more hospitable than any other. Alas, *regnum* in this particular case should be taken to mean not kingdom or country, but the king's retinue—in which foreign knights indeed rendered Stephen great service.

What we have here as "Stephen's creation", then, is a magisterial exercise of reason of state, an uncommon act of great statesmanship. (It is noteworthy that when his canonization was pushed through by Ladislas I, it was not even pretended that Stephen's piety accounted for it: his "saintliness" consisted in converting his people, and there was no concealement of the serious violence that had been involved in this process.) This was so successfully performed that it lay the foundations of some sort of power standing for Hungary during the first five centuries of its existence—something which it then lost, then it is thought to have regained at the end of the nineteenth century, and finally lost again, this time for ever. In 1920, Hungary, from being a medium ranking state of over 20 million—in dreams fuelled by the experience of peace, progress and prosperity at the *fin-de-siècle,* even 30 million—became a small nation of 7.5 million, with limitations on its sovereign status, but with a historical consciousness still corresponding to the earlier situation. This left an indelible mark on, among many

other things, precisely that consciousness. If the recovery of the lands of Saint Stephen is only urged by an insignificant minority in Hungary today, the successful acts of power performed by him, so conspicuously missing from our modern history, are fascinating for a far greater number (many of whom are also undoubtedly confirmed in their sentiments by the religious revival that has taken place since the fall of Communism: after all, the cult of Stephen is to a considerable extent a pious religious cult). In the contest I have implied between the two "foundation myths" of Hungarian history, associated with March 15 and August 20, respectively, reconciliation of interests, solidarity and failure is set against division, statesmanship and power. Hungarian history seems to have shown that you cannot have all of the positive elements of these two combinations together, and the same history inclines more people to prefer the latter to the former. To formulate it in the language of aesthetic theory from my own field, the eighteenth century: 1848 is an unfulfilled love affair with charming beauty, while 1000 is the intoxicated admiration of the awesome sublime.

I deliberately avoid formulating the opposition in terms of a liberal-democratic-republican tradition versus monarchism and authority, because not in the least do I want to imply that Hungarians generally prefer authoritarianism to democracy. What I am suggesting is that there is a discrepancy between the general acceptance of modernity and the transition to democracy on the one hand, and the selection of meaningful traditions on the other. 1848 is still well-respected, but overshadowed in public consciousness, supported by official pageantry, by something that is more remote, less readily adjustable to the properties of a modern political community at the threshold of the twenty-first century; while undoubtedly epochal and, what is even more important from our present point of view, not marked by failure, it can even be represented as a triumph over designs against Hungarian sovereignty (a notion obviously non-existent at the time).

I have claimed that the predominant view of national history in Hungary has for a long time been pathos-ridden, and somewhat lacking in a sense of realism and responsibility; I tried to demonstrate the interplay of these phenomena on the examples of the "foundation myths" associated with the birth of Hungary as an entity and Hungary as a modern nation; I tried to relate this to the discriminating attitudes among the public towards these two myths; and I also attempted to explain each of these themes. While I am not suggesting that this discrimination should in the future be different (though I think there would be sound reasons for this), this might come about if success and power cease to be the dominant standard against which the merit of traditions is measured, and other, more inherent values are set in the focus of the reflection of history. To finish with Tom Nairn: if devolution created a chance for Scotland to move towards such a situation, Hungary could also capitalize on the recent lifting of the limitations on her sovereignty. 1848 may not become paramount, but the state of our historical consciousness and national identity would surely gain. ❧

NOTES

1 ■ László Kontler, *Millennium in Central Europe. A History of Hungary* (Budapest: Atlantisz, 1999).

2 ■ See "Eighteenth-Century Scotland". *The Newsletter of the Eighteenth-Century Scottish Studies Society,* No. 14 (Spring 2000), p. 8.

3 ■ Csaba Csorba, János Estók, Konrád Salamon, *The Illustrated History of Hungary* (Budapest: Magyar Könyvklub, 1999); Gyula Illyés, in *Magyarok* (Hungarians. Budapest, 1938). I owe the reminder of Illyés' words to Nicholas Parsons' review of *The Illustrated History* and of my own book in *The Hungarian Quarterly,* No. 158 (Summer 2000), p. 115.

4 ■ Works by outstanding Protestant authors such as András Farkas, Gáspár Károli and Pál Medgyesi represent this trend, as do arguments by leaders of anti-Habsburg resistance movements such as István Bocskai. See Kálmán Benda, *A magyar nemzeti hivatástudat története (A XVI–XVII. században)* (A history of the consciousness of Hungary's national calling. Budapest, 1937); Sándor Őze, *"Bűneiért bünteti Isten a magyar népet". Egy bibliai párhuzam vizsgálata a XVI. századi nyomtatott egyházi irodalom alapján* ("God punished the Hungarian people for their sins". An inquiry into a biblical parallel on the basis of ecclesiastical literature printed in the sixteenth century. Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, 1991).

5 ■ Béla Köpeczi, *Magyarország, a kereszténység ellensége* (Hungary, the enemy of Christendom. Budapest, 1977).

6 ■ For a comprehensive treatment see Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map and the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford University Press, 1994).

7 ■ On Berzeviczy, see Éva H. Balázs, *Berzeviczy Gergely, a reformpolitikus (1763–1795)* (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1967). On the continuity between Enlightenment and the Age of Reform, idem., *Hungary and the Habsburgs 1765–1800. An Experiment in Enlightened Absolutism* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1997), especially Ch. 10; Moritz Csáky, *Von der Aufklärung zum Liberalismus. Studien zum Frühliberalismus in Ungarn* (Vienna, 1981); Charles Kecskeméti, *La Hongrie et le réformisme libéral. Problèmes politiques et sociaux (1790–1848)* (Rome, 1989). For the contrary view, see Domokos Kosáry, *Culture and Society in Eighteenth-Century Hungary* (Budapest: Corvina, 1980).

8 ■ On Széchenyi in English, see George Barany, *Stephen Széchenyi and the Awakening of Hungarian Nationalism, 1791–1841* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968). In Hungarian the best account still remains András Gergely, *Széchenyi eszmerendszerének kialakulása* (The formation of Széchenyi's ideas) (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1972).

9 ■ Cf. László Péter, "Volt-e magyar társadalom a XIX. században? A jogrend és a civil társadalom képződése" (Was there a Hungarian society in the nineteenth century?) in *Az Elbától keletre* (East of the Elbe. Budapest: Osiris, 1998).

10 ■ Most recently Domokos Kosáry, *A Görgey-kérdés története,* 2 vols. (The history of the Görgey problem. Budapest: Osiris, 1996).

11 ■ The two categories overlapped to a considerable extent: the overwhelming majority of the minorities belonged to the peasant population.

12 ■ The authoritative statement of this view was the conservative historian Gyula Szekfü's seminal *Három nemzedék* (Three generations, 1920).

13 ■ Erzsébet Andics, "Kossuth harca az árulók és megalkuvók ellen" (Kossuth's struggle against traitors and opportunists), in *Kossuth emlékkönyv* (Kossuth memorial volume. Budapest, 1952); for an analysis of the topic, see László Péter, "A nemzeti múlt legendái és tilalomfái" (The legends and taboos of the national past), in *Az Elbától keletre,* pp. 96. ff.

14 ■ On the canonization and its ideological significance, see most recently Gábor Klaniczay, *Az uralkodók szentsége a középkorban. Magyar dinasztikus szentkultuszok és európai modellek* (Budapest: Balassi, 2000), Ch. III; forthcoming as *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Central European Dynastic Cults in a European Context,* at Cambridge University Press.

15 ■ It would have been delightful if the masterminds of the move had made it clear that the transfer was intended to establish a new tradition whereby a bridge is created between Hungary's ancient, monarchical past and parliamentary present. (It could have been asked, though, why the building of Parliament, marred by a dubious parliamentary record from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, should be considered a better symbol of Hungary's budding modernity than the National Museum which, more than a storehouse of lifeless objects, was founded in the early nineteenth century precisely to mark Hungary's endeavour to achieve national, social and political emancipation.) This did not happen: instead, the maintenance of old tradition was emphasised, clumsily and with little credibility.

16 ■ For an overview of the literature on the coronation in the post-Second-World War period, see Tamás Bogyay's articles in *Új Látóhatár,* 1962 and 1970.

17 ■ Elemér Mályusz, "Az egynyelvű ország" (The monolingual regnum), *Századok,* 1941.

Khronos, as the personification of History.
Frontispiece of Johann Georg Schwandtner's Scriptores rerum Hungaricarum.
Copper engraving. Vienna, 1746.

Árpád Mikó

Through Our Looking Glass

History—Image.
Selected Examples of the Interplay between Past and Art in Hungary.
Exhibition in the Hungarian National Gallery, March 17–September 24, 2000.
Exhibition arranged and catalogue edited by Árpád Mikó and Katalin Sinkó.

As a national institution, the Hungarian National Gallery commemorated the millennial year with an exhibition suitable for the occasion. Its theme was the changing relationship between art and the past, specifically national history. Not an easy option was chosen (perhaps expected on such occasions), and no pleasant tour through scenes of Hungarian history, as if in a slide show, was on offer. Such presentations abound these days; we instead started out from the insight that each age created its own image of history, or more precisely, that each age reshaped its past according to its own image. History can be manipulated, and itself manipulates; the fine arts have always had an important role in this manipulation. We wanted to demonstrate the operation and effects of this mechanism.

The exhibition was divided into sixteen large sections. These were essentially thematic groupings, but as certain themes were preferred in certain ages, the sections followed each other in a loose chronological order; ultimately, they did outline a thousand years of the Hungarian state. Since the primary approach was reflexive, these thousand years of history appear, as it were, in a mirror, often a distorting mirror, which demanded a great deal of mental cooperation from the public, something they may not be used to in Hungarian exhibition rooms. The exhibition, in other words, made for a difficult reading—if very attractive, presenting important works of art.

It is always difficult to provide a non-canonical image of national history without running the risk of offending the public, especially if the image is at points disrespectful and the majority of visitors still cling to those tragic clichés of national history the 19th century cultivated. To make our perspective obvious from the very start, we placed works of contemporary art from the recent past near the entrance. Visitors could walk into the first room along the large boards of Lili Országh's series *Requiem on Seven Boards in Memory of Destroyed Cities and People.* In the room vast mirrors created a labyrinth, in the centre of which stood Erzsébet Schaár's *Sisters,* a sculpted pair standing back to back, reminiscent of Janus, looking at the same time into the past and toward the future. The faces of

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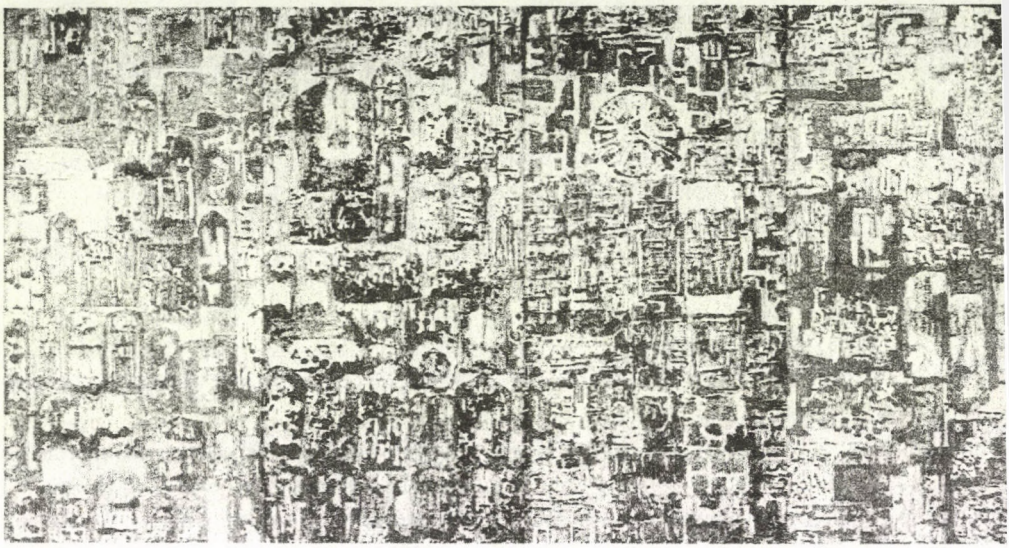
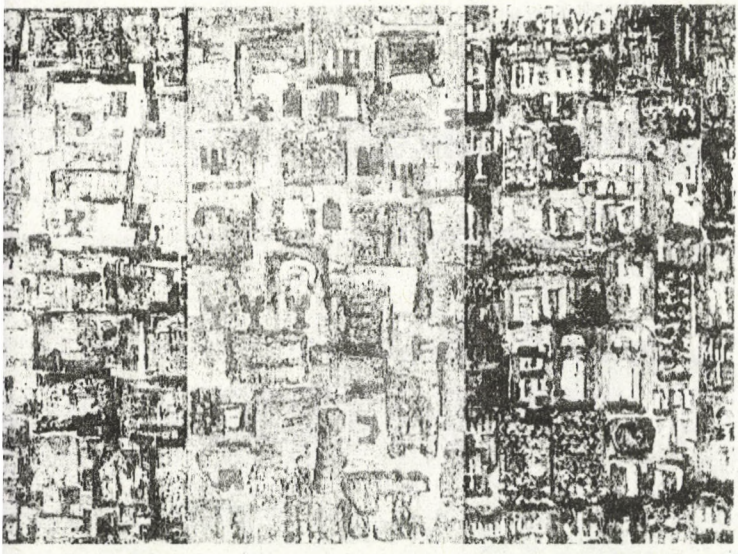


the enigmatic figures, standing with timeless dignity, are golden death masks. We placed a third gilded face opposite them, the famous medieval reliquiary from Trencsén. The two golden masks facing each other and multiplied in the mirrors created an intellectual space which was at the same time the space of the exhibition. Access to the past is through the present, and in this play of mirrors, among the golden faces visitors could discover their own as well.

The head-shaped reliquiary was also the first exhibit in the first section, *The Cult of Relics.* It constitutes a further play with time: the relic stands outside time, because the saint it represents for believers lives in eternity; the reliquiary, on the other hand, is bound to its time, as is its cult. We displayed reliquiaries which bear especially good testimony to the changes of history. When the Trencsén reliquiary arrived at the National Museum at the beginning of the 19th century, it was believed to be the portrait of the notorious 14th-century baron, Máté Csák. Later historians wished to discern a likeness of Saint Ladislaus, with little success. The 18th-century bust reliquiaries of the three House of Árpád saints (Stephen, Ladislaus and Emeric) were transferred to the Schatzkammer in Vienna by Maria Theresa, whence they returned to Hungary after the First World War, when the Venice Treaty ordained the partition of the Imperial collections. We also treated the revival of the relic cult at the end of the last century, when churches attempted to acquire as many national saintly relics as possible. The second section of the exhibition *Saint Royalties—Royal Saints* illustrated the late-medieval iconographic *topoi* of national saints. As is well-known, the canonization of Stephen and Emeric was initiated by Ladislaus, partly to legitimize his own rule. It is difficult to grasp the moment when, or the process by which, the images of saints, originally objects of a religious cult, become images of history, when their profane content becomes prominent and they start conveying a contemporary political message. "The three royal saints of Hungary" had become symbols of the country by the end of the 15th century, occasionally accompanied by the Virgin Mary as



Lili Országh: Requiem on Seven Boards in Memory of Destroyed Cities and People, *1963. Oil, wood fibre. Each board 125 x 60 cm. Budapest Historical Museum.*

Patrona Hungariae. When the emperor Maximilian I wanted to acquire the Hungarian throne at the beginning of the 16th century, he made sure to include the saint kings among his ancestors, especially Saint Stephen, whose bronze figure stands on Maximilian's Innsbruck tomb. Special too is the status of St John of Alms among naturalized saints: the body of the patriarch of Alexandria was given to King Matthias by the Sultan of Turkey in 1489, as a gift of diplomacy. It quickly became the principal relic of the royal castle's chapel in Buda, and its cult spread all over the country. With the fall of Buda (1541) and the Turkish invasion it lost its significance, and it was only in 17th-century Pozsony that they made an attempt to revive the cult, at the suggestion of that leading figure of the Counter-Reformation, Cardinal Péter Pázmány. Eventually, it became part of the private cult of the Esztergom archbishop: it has stood in the burial chapel of Imre Esterházy since the 18th century.

The third section of the exhibition *(The Legacy of Antiquity)* was devoted to the Renaissance, the renewed interest in Antiquity in the 15th and 16th centuries. Portraits of King Matthias were initiated and interpreted by humanists, and made by artists after the images of great Roman emperors. There is a unique category of representations, in which Matthias, "the second Attila," bears the demonic face of the Hun, destroyer of civilizations. In the same section we displayed so-called "pagan coin" urns and jewellery from the early 16th century, first appearing in Buda but later popular everywhere, which bear testimony to the early reception and appreciation of antiquities (hewn stone monuments, coins and cameos) found in old Roman provinces on the territory of Hungary (Pannonia, Dacia).

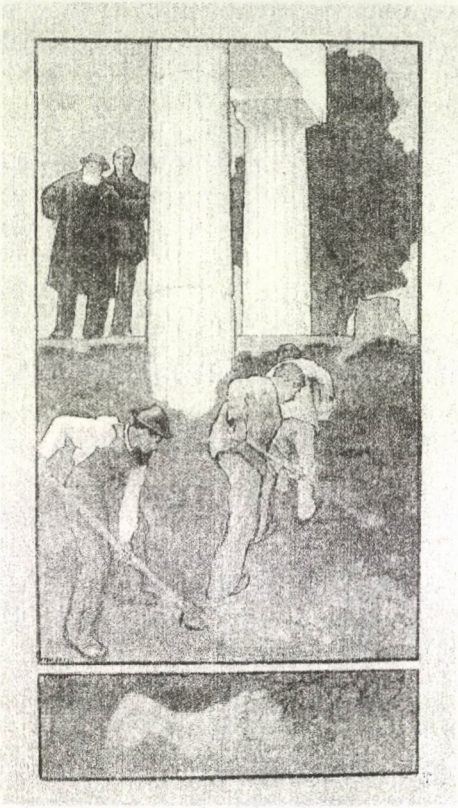
The fourth section *(Illustrated History [14th–17th centuries])* was a collection of illustrations from historical works, primarily wood engravings in printed Hungarian histories that depict rulers and battles. After János Thuróczy's 1488 chronicle, first appearing in Brünn and then in Augsburg, no illustrated histories of Hungary were published in the country until the 17th century. (*Mausoleum,* published in 1664,

Reliquiary from Trencsén, cca 1370. Hungarian National Museum.

was no more than a collection of eulogies with portraits of monarchs.) In the Netherlands, however, several volumes were published (German translations of the works of Thuróczy and Antonio Bonfini), as interest in Hungarian history grew immensely in the 16th century—due largely to the Turkish expansion. The representation of Hungarians in these volumes is sometimes very derogatory, but images of history must also include those that others create about us.

Through important examples of the late-Renaissance and Baroque cult of Hungarian saints, the fifth section *(Regnum Marianum)* illustrated the typical relations that those struggling with the Turks and the Habsburgs maintained with a sacred past. There were many and various examples of the cult of the devotional picture of Mariazell—presented to the Church by Louis the Great of Hungary—among which the most interesting is probably a small copy on parchment, painted by Maria Theresa. Her cult of St Stephen was especially conspicuous: she founded an order in memory of her apostolic predecessor, and re-established the cult of the Holy Dexter, Stephen's mummified right hand. According to the medieval legend, before his death Stephen offered his country to the protection of the Virgin Mary, and from then on the *Patrona Hungariae,* with the help of the Hungarian saints, was especially protective of the country. In the 17th century the main thrust of this idea went against the Turks, and its paradigmatic work of art was the picture above the altar of Hungarian saints in the Győr Jesuit church. In it the saints protect the country against Turkish arrows by holding up shields with the image of Mary.

Altarpiece from the Jesuit Church in Győr. Hungarian Saints' Altar, 1642. Benedictine (formerly Jesuit) Church, Győr. Oil, canvas, 208 x 105 cm.



Károly Ferenczy: Archeology, *1896. Tempera, canvas, 117.5 x 66.5 cm. Hungarian National Gallery*

The sixth section *(Late Renaissance and Baroque Images of History)* was a selection of profane images from the same period, from the ornate sepulchre of the hero of Szigetvár, Miklós Zrínyi, through mannerist allegories about the Fifteen-Year War, prepared for the Emperor Rudolf II, to *Mausoleum* (1664), which for centuries fixed the iconographic canon of Hungarian monarchs. Also displayed in this section were images of family history, with special reference to the enormously wealthy count Pál Esterházy, the *homo novus* who wanted to authenticate the antiquity and nobility of his family through the instrument of the fine arts as well.

The seventh section *(Memory of Objects)* called attention to how works of art can be used to manipulate the past. Here we displayed textile and goldsmith's work of fine quality which were attributed, rightly or wrongly, to famous historic personalities, as owners or donors. The monumental flask-shaped Gothic ceramics in the Esterházy treasury was related to King Matthias only in the 1940's, as it happens, incorrectly. The chasuble tailored from Matthias's throne tapestry was bought by Francis Joseph I for archbishops to wear at future coronations, as another token of the legitimacy of the Habsburgs' rule in Hungary.

The eighth room, in which we hang mirrors to make it hexagonal, an allusion to J. L. Borges's library of Babel, was devoted to the beginnings of scholarly activity, more precisely, to how, from the early 18th to mid-19th century, scholars began to collect pictorial sources: not merely the inscriptions on, but the representations of, tombstones, seals, archeological findings, buildings, etc. *(Beginnings of Archeological Interest).* Relics depicted ranged from the Roman *Heidenthor* of Carnuntum to such medieval objects as the mortuary crown of the Emperor Sigismund or the tombstone of the Bosnian king Miklós Újlaki. Images of history showed a development from "serious" representations (Mátyás Bél's edition illustrated with copperplate reproductions of the *Pictorial Chronicle* to pictures of fantasy, like a friar teacher's 1773 vision of the Huns—i.e., the Hungarians—leaving the Scythian homeland: in it a Bactrian camel is drawing a conical tent, that is, a yurt, installed on wheels. It was in the same room that we displayed forgeries made to exploit the trend of searching for a national identity: fake codices in bogus handwriting, phoney prayer books

(in "Old" Hungarian), a chronicle with a publishing date of 1301, containing childish illustrations (and produced in the 19th century).

The ninth section was devoted to the artistic relics of the early-19th-century intellectual movement, "imperial patriotism" *(Imperial Patriotism and Hungarian History).* Intellectuals gathered around the Archduke Johann in Vienna tried to select those episodes from the histories of peoples living under Habsburg rule which were supposed to be able to enhance cohesion within the Empire. Such a Hungarian hero was Miklós Zrínyi, who died during the defence of Szigetvár against the Turks (this was when "the sortie of Zrínyi" became a favourite painting topic), or John of Hunyad, the "Turk crusher", who in this interpretation bore a striking resemblance to the Czech national hero, Jan Zizka.

The tenth section was composed of objects from the peripheries of art, almanac illustrations and works of applied arts *(Pictures of History in the Sphere of Private Life in the mid-19th Century).* We could even display a profane example of the relic cult: when the grave of Ferenc II Rákóczi was opened, shreds from the shroud were secured by Kálmán Thaly, a scholar of the Kuruc period of great renown (and author of fake Kuruc poems), and later placed in a reliquiary designed by Gyula Benczúr.

The eleventh was the gloomiest section of all *(Images of a Nation's Calvary).* After the suppression of the 1848–49 War of Independence, works representing tragic moments in Hungarian history started to appear in great numbers. Accordingly, in this room almost all pictures contained elaborate images of the dead or dying, or

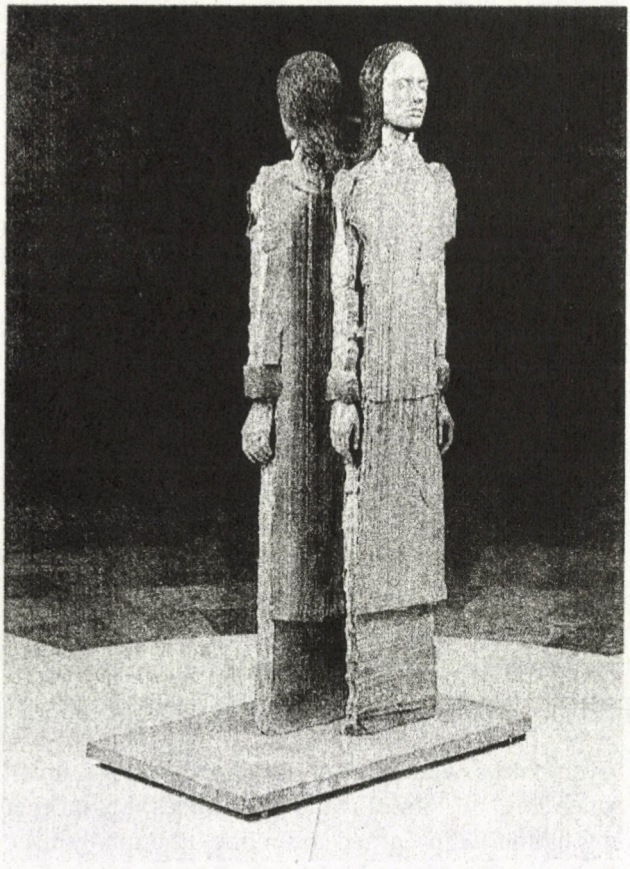
Peter Krafft: Zrínyi's Sortie from Szigetvár, *1825. Oil, canvas, 455 X 645 cm. Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts, on loan to the Hungarian National Gallery.*

death-cell scenes. While this kind of historical painting had authenticity in the middle of the 19th century, by the early 20th century the genre had almost turned into a parody of itself; Viktor Madarász's oeuvre was in itself a compact example of this tendency. His late picture in which under an oppressive dark sky a dying Petőfi is inscribing the word "Liberty" in the dust with his own blood is as close to kitsch as one can get.

The next three sections *(Allegorical History Painting in the 19th Century; Official Historical Representation; Places of Remembrance: the Cult of Monuments)* were devoted to official images of history, mostly commissioned. The history of public monuments, their unveiling and destruction, from the middle of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th, represented by photographs and fragments of the originals, gave an interesting insight into the history of the nation. The last great symbolic act was the toppling and dismembering of the huge Stalin statue in Budapest in 1956.

György Jovánovics: Man, *1968. Plaster, textile, mixed technique. 180 cm. Hungarian National Gallery.*

The last but one section *(Anti-Historicism: the Past Escapes History)* oresented examples of the various types of answers artists disillusioned with history (and historical painting) gave to questions concerning the past at the end of the 19th century. These were images of a Golden Age lost in the haze of myths, like Csontváry's ur-Hungarian myth, various modern torsos or Gyula Derkovits's *Three Generations.* The latter was painted in 1932, and served as a stepping stone into the contemporary section. After all, artists for the past few decades, perhaps more than ever before, have had definite views on the past. The works expressing these can be ironic, pathetic, allusive—a thousand different kinds. Opposite the exit stood György Jovánovics's life-size sculpture, *Man,* whose skin is covered with *fleurs-de-lis,* as if branded by history.



Erzsébet Schaár: Sisters, *1968.*
Aluminium , bronze, lead, cable, 157 x 57 x 90 cm.
Hungarian National Gallery.

Since the exit was opposite the entrance, *Man* was looking at the Janus-faced *Sisters* by Erzsébet Schaár guarding the entrance; the circuit was closed. The last section, that of modern works, bore the title *Anti-historicism: Liberation of the Past from the Bonds of History.* Looking back from that point, the whole exhibition, the work not only of artists but of researchers, appeared to be such a rescue operation. In the vestibule the visitor was greeted and bid farewell to by Béla Kondor's giant mural, *The Judge,* the Angel of Judgement holding a sharp knife between his teeth.

The 850-page catalogue accompanying the exhibition is the work of sixty scholars. The division of the volume follows that of the exhibition, adding forty studies to the detailed descriptions of 400 works of art. Eight out of the forty studies, by way of introduction, treat general questions, while the rest deal with phenomena that could not be presented at the exhibition in bodily form, but whose problems closely relate to the juxtaposition of image versus history." The lavishly illustrated volume (almost all exhibits are reproduced in colour or black-and-white photos) also has an index of names to make it more accessible. Also available are a German summary and list of exhibits and an illustrated English brochure which contains the introductory studies to each section). The volume, in effect a collection of studies, can be used independently of the exhibition, and it is hoped that it will influence and alter not only the public's view of the past but also the scholarly approach of art historians and scholars in related fields. Yet there is one thing no theory—however artfully presented—can achieve: to reproduce the personal experience one has in an exhibition room, right within the magnetic field of the original works of art. ❧

Ágnes Diósi

Brought Up to Be Different

Elza Lakatos, Journalist

I come from an authentic milieu: I am a Vlach Gypsy. I am thirty-one. I grew up in a small village, Gádoros, in Békés county. I have four sisters, and I am the youngest. My family still stick to the old ways: the men wear breeches and kneeboots and always go hatted, the women rose-patterned skirts, aprons and kerchiefs.

As children we were brought up to be different; but where I grew up there were no Magyar Gypsies, no Romungros, and as for the Beashi, for a long time I didn't even know they existed. A deep prejudice was instilled in me as a child, which told me that Romungros couldn't possibly be honest, and that I shouldn't talk to them.

My father was—I don't even know what the official term was—a small farmer. Or, rather, a horse coper. We had lots of cattle and horses. My mother worked in a factory. It was my mother who earned the money the family lived on; my father always put back what he made into his business. I grew up in pretty poor circumstances. Bathrooms were unknown and the nearest well was in the street fifty metres from our house. Two rooms with dirt floors, a large lobby, a large yard: compared to the other Roma in the village, we were reckoned well-to-do. I remember daubing the ground with cattle dung. One of my sisters milked the cows and took the milk to the dairy market. I myself went gleaning, gathered corn cobs on the stubble-field. Though my father really spoilt me—I was his favourite—I did my part around the house. We lived in a village. I was twenty-eight when I first saw a Gypsy colony.

You could say I was brought up by my oldest sister. But when she was fourteen she started working in the Eperjes sack factory, doing unskilled work in three shifts. Mother had also worked there for a long time. She was considered a

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Ágnes Diósi,
a sociologist, has written several books on the life of the Roma and on children at risk in state care.

good worker, so she took her oldest daughter along. A bitter memory I have from my childhood is how badly I wanted a doll and how mother could not afford it. Someone gave her a small doll, with one leg missing, that was my only toy. Mother bought me second-hand clothes, or I got my sisters' hand-me-downs. I was thirteen when my sister went to work, she bought me my first new dress.

I didn't go to kindergarden. We were not taken in. In the first year at primary school, the teacher made me sit in the back desk, my classmates made fun of me and I developed a serious inferiority complex. When I went home after school, father used to help me with my homework, thanks to which I did well at school. If I failed to give the right answer he boxed my ears. While the other children were playing I was studying. My sisters went to special school. They were not backward, though they all had a speech impediment. It was, I think, due to the conflicts in the family, which I could not understand at the time, small as I was. Despite all this, my parents' relations with us were very close. The family ties were strong, the sense of belonging, of being sisters and having to help each other. I can still feel what it is to have grown up in such a family.

At home we spoke Romany and Hungarian. I remember how my sister, who worked in three shifts, wasn't allowed to go to the flicks. Once she painted her nails and there was a big row at home: she was a Roma girl and she must not do such a thing. Actually we didn't stick to the norms all that strictly; at the age of twelve my father allowed me to cut my hair short. Similarly, I could wear slacks because I was small, though they made remarks in the family: it wasn't the thing to do.

When I go back to Gádoros, I can see that they still live the way they did when I was a child, it's me who has changed. Actually, as a child I already sensed that I was a bit different. Among the Roma there is a prejudice against anyone who goes to Budapest to work, they can only be dishonest because they want to live where nobody can see them, and that they're self-important. When I'm there I try to behave as if I were the same as when I lived there. I take a basket and go to the market, like all the other Roma women; I stop to talk to them. I do up my hair in a bun, I wear a long skirt, I behave like the other Roma women; they do talk to me but I can sense them keeping their distance.

When I was a child, the Roma felt more solidarity for each other; they were one, all being poor. When as a child I passed a house where Roma lived, it was natural for the woman to call me in, put the pot on the floor and invite me to eat with her children. Out in the street the women would ask each other, are you all right for money, can you feed your children. If there was a row in a family, people could take refuge in our home for a few days, or as it was not uncommon, we would go to other people's. If a man made a good business deal he would call the musicians to his home, would buy sweets for the children, and we had to get up to celebrate and dance. To this day, I often think of how well I got on with those I grew up with.

Holidays were beautiful, especially Christmas. My father had ten brothers and sisters. At Christmas father would make us sit on the wooden-wheeled wagon—we also had a wagon with rubber-tyred wheels—and we would go to grandma's. All ten brothers and sisters would be there, singing and dancing. All their children were there. My grandma is a marvellous cook. She would roll out the strudel pastry on the kitchen table, she would make stuffed cabbage—I still remember these.

Already at school you could see I was different. My parents encouraged me to study. Primary school was tragic for me. I felt terrible frustrations. There was a strong hierarchy within the class, a great distance between the poor and the well-to-do. My girl friends came from the poor end of the village. Once the son of the schoolmaster beat me up, and the children told me I couldn't complain because I was a Gypsy. I was in the third year, and a class photo was to be taken. The girls passed round the comb and I didn't dare to ask for it because I was sure they wouldn't give it to a Gypsy. Imagine then the prestige I had gained by the time I was in the sixth grade, when the pharmacist's daughter came up to me and asked me to share my snack with her. It was a great experience because I felt I was accepted. I was the only Rom in the class. My teachers were of great help.

I was thirteen when my father fell ill with lung cancer, and we children also suffered because of this. My teachers knew he was bedridden for eight months, and when I didn't show up in school for two days they wouldn't consider it unaccounted for absence. I felt they loved me and that my classmates accepted me. When he died there was a traditional Vlach Gypsy funeral, though without a priest. Someone from the local council spoke at the graveside. My classmates came with a wreath. A fight broke out, the police had to interfere; I felt ashamed before my classmates. Yet I'm sure our teacher talked to them, because when a few days later I went to school, no one said anything about what happened. I received even more respect.

Father was thirty-nine when he died. He was treated in the Korányi sanatorium, but he couldn't be saved. It was terrible to see him suffer. He was a highly respected Gypsy. He finished primary school and his teachers wanted him to carry on studying, but he couldn't as his was a very large family. He was always considered a clever man.

Mother was also held to be wise, so much so, that once she even presided over a *kris*, a community tribunal. I've never heard of a Vlach Gypsy woman doing this. It was all about the divorce of my cousin. Her husband sent her away, and she felt he wanted to take all the property, which was no small thing as they were quite well off. He beat her, and she came to us. This was why the *kris* assembled. They were reconciled, the woman went back, and they have been living together ever since.

My oldest sister left the school for backward children after the fifth form and went to work in the sack factory. My other two sisters finished this school, the

older even went on to learn a trade. The younger worked in Orosháza. She had always been sickly, an epileptic, and was given a disability allowance at the age of sixteen.

All Roma dream about marrying off their children decently, with a proper wedding. Though my sisters' suitors formally asked my mother for their hands, she didn't want to interfere. I saw a lot of girls in this small village marry in a so-called decent manner, and have had their lives ruined within a couple of months. There was for instance a girl who had a suitor from Budapest. They had met a couple of times, the parents struck the deal, they married and lived together for a few months. It was a failure. The girl's repute and self-respect are gone for ever. Such girls are branded in the eyes of the community.

My sisters chose for themselves. The oldest has four wonderful kids, the younger two—her husband is Hungarian. He has completely adopted our ways. This must come from the inside, how you respect the other. He loves his children, which helped us accept him.

When I was still studying in Békéscsaba, someone also asked for my hand in marriage. A boy from Csorvás wanted to propose, but mother told him not to come because I was studying. I was seventeen. A woman studying is suspect to the Roma, because they think she cannot remain chaste.

It was father's wish, even on his deathbed, for me to study. I somehow took a fancy for a secondary school in economics and commerce, in Békéscsaba. I decided to apply and I was accepted. I got into a very good crowd. I was a boarding student; it was the first time in my life that I was away from my family. It was the first time I had been to a town, and I was afraid of getting lost. Mother packed a huge amount of food, and I didn't dare to offer any of it to my roommates. We became friends in a few weeks. They didn't want to believe I was a Rom. Those four years were one of the nicest periods in my life. The community got hold of me and shaped me. It also initiated problems in my sense of identity. I had a difficult time to decide whether I was a Rom or a Hungarian, to find where it was that I belonged. I talked about this with my roommates, who said "even if you're a Rom, forget it, you're more of a Hungarian." At that time, when I met Roma, I said hello but felt I was different. Not superior, but different. This was how I felt during those four years, but it was a wonderful period, I have only good things to say about it. I was immature when I went there, and if I had fallen into bad company I might never have made it to where I am now. There were eight of us in the room, six later went on to college. We went out together, to discos, every one had a boyfriend but me. When they asked me if I had a boyfriend I invented all sorts of stories. Once there was an unpleasant scene in a disco, where Roma boys treated me as if I were Hungarian, and I didn't make it obvious that they couldn't behave like that as I was a Rom myself. Then once I was outed and from then on I received respect.

I left school with good marks, and wanted to go on studying, but had little self-confidence. I ended up in Orosháza as an untrained kindergarden teacher. I'm sure they knew I was a Rom. They accepted me from the start. I was among intelligent people and I was also attracted by the work. The first time I set my foot in a kindergarden I was nineteen. I couldn't imagine what it was like on the inside. It was also difficult to get used to being called Auntie Elza. But it was also a very beautiful time of my life. I had a ten-month contract, I could have gone on to the kindergarden teachers' training college. But then I met a boy. He was a Gadzho but grew up among the Roma and spoke the language. He helped me re-establish my identity, though it was also a relationship full of conflicts. He enjoyed the subordinate position Romany women had with their men, while I had feminist traits and revolted against it. We lived together for two years. It wasn't good. He took on the ways of Roma men. He had a friend who humiliated his girlfriend in company by stubbing his cigarette on her body. He too tried to humiliate me in front of others. There was a moment when I felt I would either go crazy or quit.

After the kindergarden I worked in the booking office at the railway station. He also worked for the railways. I applied for a course. One requirement was a secondary school diploma. Four people applied. A colleague of mine who didn't have such a diploma made a remark: "this one's a Gypsy." This was typical of the atmosphere of the place, but I tried to ignore it. Another thing I found difficult to deal with was how the older ones treated their younger colleagues. They were offended by my youth and that boys were flirting with me all the time. I in turn provoked them, by the way I dressed. At that time I loved to put on loud colours and lots of make-up. When I broke up with my boyfriend I also left that job.

The next job I did was force-feeding geese. It was there I met Romungros for the first time in my life. Romungros and Vlach Gypsies sat in separate rows. But as time went by I came to like them, found very good friends among them. Till then I had always heard that Romungros were deceitful, and do not know what respect means. What Vlach Gypsies use as their argument is that those who don't speak Romany are not Roma. This was what I got from home and now I saw that it was not true. I dressed geese for five years. I consider it another good period in my life. It is very hard manual work, I still suffer from the consequences, I have troubles with my spine, it hurts too. To earn enough I had to dress 100–120 geese a day. It is a dirty, smelly job that affects your lungs. Ninety per cent of those working there are Roma. I could sense the cohesion of the community. When we went home tired and hungry and someone had a roll she would share it.

Mother was a very clever woman. When father died, he left two houses for us, cattle and some money, so we could buy a large home in Orosháza. When my sisters married and had their children it was always mother who helped them

financially. Both bought their homes with the help of mother. One of them paid it off, and mother put down the deposit. The birth of the first grandchild was a marvellous experience. It is a Roma custom that grandparents look after and bring up the first child, which is what mother did with her first grandchild, she looked after her till she was twelve. Many families do this, so that the old ones do not live alone. That's why my sister agreed to leave the girl with her. She is fourteen now, and I sometimes ask her if she will give her first-born to her mother. Telling her this is the custom. She laughs and says, yes, I will.

Then completely by chance I got involved in this minority self-government thing. In the summer of 1991 a Rom from Orosháza came to me and said that he was forming a civil organization in the town and would I join? I agreed, helped to organize quite a few events, but I didn't really feel involved. But he already knew about the Minorities Act, and that as a representative in the minority self-government, you could organize a minority interest forum. It took me many months to understand what the Minorities Act was all about, to grasp what the notary was talking about, what charters, budgets, assemblies and such things are. Again, I was lucky, because I met very good people, in a tight-knit team. A few weeks after the 1994 parliamentary elections we had an event to which we invited Aladár Horváth, who heads the Roma Civil Rights Foundation and Flórián Farkas, the president of the National Gypsy Self-Government. Flórián Farkas did not come, Aladár did. This was the first open meeting I chaired, my first public appearance. This is another thing you have to learn. I prepared a lot for it. It went quite well. At that point I felt I needed to move on. I told Aladár I wanted to study, and asked for his help. He suggested the teachers' training college in Zsámbék. I was admitted, and started a correspondence course, which involved going from Orosháza to Zsámbék every other week. After a few months I felt I couldn't go on that way and asked Aladár if he could help me find a job in Budapest. He said the Roma Press Centre had just been formed, I should apply for a position. He told me to submit an application with questions I would ask if I interviewed him. They accepted me. I was able to come to Budapest to work and study. I knew no one but Aladár. I was scared I would get lost, I needed to take a taxi to the Centre. It takes a lot of courage. Something most Vlach Gypsy women and girls would not dare to do. Since I arrived I suggested to several Vlach girls I felt I could share a flat. It would be more economical. I told them I would help them find a job: they refused. All of them.

All this was another thing that was completely new to me. I didn't understand what it was all about, what they were talking about. Aladár and the others helped an awful lot. There was a period when I was working here, was a representative in Orosháza and attended the journalism course run by the daily newspaper *Magyar Hírlap.* I was up every night studying. Me and another person were the only Roma on the course. All the others were college graduates, clever

people. I have only good memories of it. We had good lecturers, who taught us the very basics. Eventually I found my bearings. Zsolt Csalog and Gábor Bernáth helped me with the first news item. We went through it sentence by sentence. Everyone helped and encouraged me. At the time I had no idea what journalism was and if I could do it. I still don't feel very talented. But my writing got better and better, and here at the Press Centre they came to realize that I know about a lot of things the others don't. We were talking about this with Gábor, and what I found self-evident was absolutly new to him. He kept asking about those Gypsy girls who have lost their virginity; why are they worth less? I wrote a long report on the issue, which was cited specifically when we received the Tolerance Award. It was about how Roma traditions are in conflict with the laws of the majority. I had doubts whether by talking about this I was not betraying the Roma. But then the feedback was absolutely positive, so they didn't consider it betrayal on my part. The awarding jury also came to the decision, after a long debate, that such writings were needed.

I'm thirty-one and I would like a family of my own. I'm very glad I did not marry at the age of fifteen, in a "decent" manner. I'm still the simple Roma girl I was ten years ago. I don't wear make-up, I don't dye my hair. But I couldn't live the life of wide-skirted Roma women any longer.

I'm really lucky to have found this wonderful community. I've learnt a lot about the culture of others, about the Beashi and the Romungro. Here, there's no prejudice against the others. We have come to realize how similar we all are.

The past two years have been really difficult. My mother died, and my sister is seriously ill. I will look after her when she leaves hospital. A happy thing amongst all this unhappiness was that I met a boy who accepts me as I am. I'd like a baby very much, but I will marry him only after my sister has recovered. ❧

István Kemény

Switching Languages

Roma in Hungary belong to communities with a variety of lifestyles. But scholars also agree that language has been important in determining such differences. The most important linguistic communities are the Romungro, otherwise known as the Musician Gypsies, whose native language is Hungarian; the Vlach Gypsies, who are bilingual, speaking Romany and Hungarian; and the Beashi, also bilingual, speaking Romanian and Hungarian.

The 1893 Gypsy census

According to one of the key documents relating to Gypsies in Hungary, around 280,000 Gypsies lived in the country on January 31,1893.

Károly Hieronymi took over as Minister of the Interior on November 19th 1892. A few weeks later he commissioned the Office of Statistics to carry out a census. The minister's objective, as declared in the preamble to the published report was "to deal with the problem of vagrancy in the whole country and, in relation with this, to settle Gypsy vagabonds in fixed abodes". The census was not confined to nomad Gypsies but also covered those Gypsies "who had completely assimilated to the civic society and who differed from the population as such neither in the way they lived nor in the way they made a living, neither in educational standards, nor in customs and habits, but at most as regards certain anthropological nuances." The census covered housing, family status, denomiational affiliation, literacy, occupation, how a living was obtained and, not least, what first language and other languages were spoken and understood. According to the 1857 census the "population of the homeland" included around 143,000 Gypsies.

In fifty-three years the number of Gypsies doubled, their ratio within the population grew from 1.16 per cent to 1.8 per cent. The excess of births over deaths, however, could only have been barely greater than in the population as a whole. This is indicated by the fact that the proportion of children under the age of four-

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István Kemény

conducted pioneering field work and large-scale surveys on the Roma and on poverty in the 1960s and 1970s. His writings, once circulated as samizdat or published abroad, have now been published in Hungary.

teen was 37 per cent amongst Gypsies, and, in 1890, 36.6 per cent for the country as a whole.

In that half century the total population grew by 30 per cent, and that of Gypsies by 100 per cent. The difference is explained by immigration, with the Danubian Principalities accounting for the larger part of the flow, and it was there that the proportion of Gypsies was highest.

Gypsies had migrated from the Danubian Principalities to Transylvania and from there onwards to the Kingdom of Hungary at an earlier date too, starting from the fifteenth century and, in much greater numbers, in the second half of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth. The scale of migration in the second half of the 19th century was, however, greater by far than anything that had happened earlier.

According to József Vekerdi, the Romungro came centuries earlier, taking a different route, via Serbia and perhaps Bulgaria, without passing through areas where Romanian was spoken. They settled long ago, and for the majority of these, Romany long ago passed into oblivion. Romany speaking Vlach Gypsies on the other hand only reached Hungary in the course of the past hundred years.[1]

Zsolt Csalog was also of the opinion that Gypsies who moved in from the Balkans in the Middle Ages abandoned their language over the centuries. Their heirs are the monoglot Hungarian Romungro.[2] He too maintains that bilingual Vlach Gypsies are the descendants of later immigrants. A third community went through the process of linguistic assimilation while living in an area where Romanian was spoken. They, the Beashi, came to Hungary sometime between the 18th and 20th centuries with Romanian as their first language. Most of them are now bilingual, speaking Romanian and Hungarian.

That, as Vekerdi and Csalog argue, the Romungro are the descendants of earlier immigrants is no doubt true. There is, however, less evidence that this earlier immigration took place centuries ago, perhaps in the Middle Ages, or that these earlier nomadic Gypsies all bypassed territories where Romanian was spoken. The forebears of the Romungro of Transylvania must surely have moved in from somewhere where Romanian was spoken and some of the Magyarized descendants of immigrants from the Danubian Principalities moved on to other parts of the country. Earlier immigration should be understood to refer to the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries.

A third of the Gypsies counted in the January 31, 1893 census were recent immigrants, post-1850 immigrants or else the children of such immigrants.

Accordingly, 38 per cent gave Hungarian as their first language, 30 per cent Romany and 24 per cent Romanian. Slovak, Serb, German, Ruthenian (Ukrainian), Croat etc. made up the rest. There was considerable divergence amongst various parts of the country.

The situation in January 1893 as regards the present territory of Hungary was that 79.5 per cent of the Gypsies gave Hungarian as their first language; 10 per cent Romany, 4.5 per cent Romanian; Serb, Slovak, German, Ruthenian, Croat etc. accounted for the remaining 6 per cent. There was thus a crying difference between the country as a whole and its present territory. The gap between the Gypsies who then lived in the country's present territory and those in Transylvania was even greater in Transylvania: there 42 per cent gave Romany as their native language and 39 per cent Romanian. Or, take the region known as the nook, enclosed by the rivers Tisza and Maros: there only 5 per cent spoke Hungarian as a first language.

It naturally also follows from the above that the 1893 Gypsy inhabitants of the present territory were the successors of earlier immigrants. Their forebears did not move in the 19th century. Those with a first language other than Hungarian were, however, very likely recent immigrants. County Baranya in southern Transdanubia is an example. Both the Beashi and the Vlach Gypsies moved there from Croatia, and the Romungro accounted for 53 per cent, or Bács-Bodrog county in the south-east, where 22.5 per cent were Vlach Gypsies from Serbia, 38.5 per cent Serbian Gypsies, 4 per cent Beashi and 34 per cent Romungro.

The 1971 national survey

Significant changes had taken place by the 1971 national survey.[3] At that time 71 per cent of the Roma were Romungros, 21.2 per cent Vlach Gypsies, 7.6 per cent Beashi. The Roma numbered 320,000 altogether, of whom 224,000 were Romungros, 61,000 Vlach Gypsies and 25,000 Beashi.

Within the given territory, the total number of the Roma had grown almost five-fold, within that figure the number of the Romungros more than nine-fold and that of the Beashi more than eight-fold. An 800 or 900 per cent growth can only be explained by immigration.

Most of the Beashi moved to Hungary between 1893 and 1918. This migration continued between the wars and even in the years immediately after ther Second World War, as Gábor Havas has demonstrated. He has also shown that some of the wood-carving Gypsies were moved in by owners of large estates from their properties further South.

Katalin Kovalcsik differentiates three sub-groups amongst the Beashi.[4] The Muntean of southern County Baranya have extensive kinship connections in Croatia, and there are many Croat words in their vocabulary. The Ardelean of Counties Baranya, Somogy, Zala and Tolna speak a Romanian dialect from the Banat. The Ticiani moved from the Nagyvárad (Oradea) area to Szabolcs and Szatmár counties after 1910 and then moved on to the environs of Tiszafüred. László Pomogy speaks of Roma who moved in from Croatia and Slavonia on the basis of papers he found in the Somogy and Zala county archives.[5]

It is also worth noting that Gypsies who in 1893 registered their first language as Slovak, Ruthenian, Serb or Croat had vanished into thin air by 1971. In other words, they had switched languages.

As a consequence of the source of their immigration, in 1971 the majority of the Beashi lived in southern Transdanubia. In Baranya and Somogy counties they accounted for the majority of the Roma living there. That same line was crossed by some of the Vlach Gypsies at the end of the 19th century, early in the 20th and, to a smaller extent, between the two World Wars. In 1971 they accounted for a fifth of the Roma in southern Transdanubia. Roma from Serbia and the Banat moved into Bács, Csongrád and Szolnok counties, accounting for 19 per cent of the Roma population in those three counties in 1971.

It goes without saying that the Vlach Gypsies moved into the contiguous Szabolcs, Szatmár, Bihar, Békés and Hajdu counties from Transylvania and other parts of Romania. Together with earlier arrivals, they account for 21.6 per cent of the Roma of that region.

Before 1918, it was accepted as natural that Romany-speaking Gypsies should move into the present Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Nógrád and Heves counties, nor did such migration meet with any out of

the way barriers between the wars. László Pomogy quotes a 1927 ministerial round-robin: "Gypsy families who had never been seen there before appear in villages bordering on Czechoslovakia, wandering from village to village... I have been informed that the Czechoslovak state is engaged in a mass expulsion of vagrant Gypsies, whom they transfer at less well observed points of the frontier, whence they disperse primarily in the area of limitrophe villages."[6]

The proportion of the Vlach Gypsies, 24.1 per cent, was highest in the Budapest region. Their number amounted to around 15,000.

There were other changes too, besides migration (including internal migration). One of the most important was urbanisation. At the end of the 19th century as well as in 1971, Gypsies tended to be village dwellers, much more so than others. This was particularly true of the Beashi.

	Romungro (Hungarian speakers)	Vlach Gypsies (Romany speakers)	Beashi (Romanian speakers)	Total
Budapest	8.3	9.9	–	7.7
Other towns	15.5	11.5	6.2	13.9
Villages	76.2	78.6	93.8	78.4
Total	100	100	100	100

There was a huge difference in the proportion of those who lived in Gypsy colonies. 65 per cent of the Romungro, 75 per cent of the Vlach Gypsies and 48 per cent of the Beashi were colony dwellers.

This, as well as other factors accounted for differences in the average number of persons per household. The figures were 6.3 for the Vlach Gypsies, 5.5 for the Romungro and 4.9 for the Beashi. 60 per cent of the Vlach Gypsies, 56 per cent of the Romungro and 40 per cent of the Beashi were members of families with three or more children. The number of dependents per a hundred in employment was 250 for the Vlach Gypsies, 221 for the Romungro and 191 for the Beashi.

In 1971, 33 per cent of Romungro, 54 per cent of Vlach Gypsies and 57 per cent of the Beashi over 14 were illiterate.

Before the First World War 60 per cent of Romungro, 90 per cent of Vlach Gypsies and 100 per cent of Beashi did not attend school. Between the wars this was down to 40 per cent for the Romungro and 70 per cent each for the other two communities. A bigger change followed the Second World War. After 1957, 6 per cent of the Romungro who came of school age did not attend, the corresponding figures being 10 per cent for the Beashi and 17 per cent for the Vlach Gypsies. Few Roma children, however, attended regularily and many of them dropped out after a few years. In 1971, 26 per cent of the relevant age-groups had completed the eight compulsory forms of the general school, 30 per cent of those whose first language was Hungarian, 21 per cent of the Romanian and 7 per cent of the Romany speakers.

The 1993/94 national survey

A large-scale process of linguistic assimilation took place between 1971 and 1993. Of those surveyed (who were at least 15 and no longer at school), 89.5 per cent declared themselves Hungarian speakers, 5.5 per cent Beashi speakers and 4.4 per cent Romany speakers. Many of those who had improved their Hungarian could, however, still speak Romany or Romanian. At the close of 1993, 11.3 per cent of adult Gypsies could still speak Beashi and 11.1 per cent Romany. Thus, at that point in time, there were 22,000 in the country whose first language was Romany and another 55,000 speaking it on occasion. The figures for Beashi were 28,000 and 56,000 respectively.[7]

The Beashi and the Vlach Gypsies are bilingual and display the diglossia phenomenon. In their particular case one language is used within the family and in any other *entrez nous* situation, the other is used for more formal, more official communication. The latter is generally used in teaching, in public offices, or on the job, that is when communicating with those of a different language. However, it is also used within the community when they are talking about school, the authorities, or the place of employment.[8]

Switching from Beashi or Romany to Hungarian as the first language was a process within the diglossia phenomenon.

Such changes are not unusual in Hungary. Thus, between the 1960 and the 1996 census, the number of those who gave Romanian as their first language declined from 15,787 to 8,730, Slovak from 30,690 to 12,745.[9] In an earlier period, in the fifty years between 1880 and 1930, the number of Slovaks living within the present borders of Hungary declined from 213,849 to 104,819.[10]

Linguistic assimilation occured earlier too, also amongst the Roma, but starting with the second half of the sixties, the process speeded up.

Forced industrialisation first produced full empoyment and, later, a labour shortage. As a consequence the number of the Roma in steady jobs grew by leaps and bounds. By 1971, 75 per cent of Beashi men worked in mines, in foundries, factories, road construction or in the building industry, in other words somewhere where communication was in Hungarian. All the week they stayed in workers' hostels or similar accomodation, where Hungarian was spoken and they spoke Hungarian.

Steady jobs and incomes for the Roma facilitated the liquidation of the decisive majority of Roma colonies between 1965 and 1985. At the time of the 1971 survey, 74 per cent of the Vlach Gypsies and 48 per cent of the Beashi lived in colonies that were isolated ghettoes in peasant villages. By the time of the 1993 survey these proportions had declined to 4.9 per cent for the Vlach and 1.1 per cent for the Beashi.

Leaving the colony put an end to membership of the traditional community, it questioned ancient customs, robbing them of their meaning, quotidian contact with the Hungarian majority became the rule, and speaking Hungarian throughout the day and every day became unavoidable. It was in those years that pediatric and child-care services were established and contact between Roma families and child care officers, pediatricians and general practitioners became regular.

Schools and kindergardens had the greatest influence. Early in the sixties some of the Vlach Gypsy and Beashi children stayed away from school altogether, and school attendance really only became compulsory for everybody at the end of the sixties and early in the seventies. At the time of the 1971 survey, a quarter of all Gypsy children completed their basic education in general school.

In this whole period the language of instruction in schools and kindergardens was Hungarian. Furthermore, the children were forbidden to speak either Romany or Beashi. The first experience a Vlach Gypsy or Beashi child associated with school was not understanding what was said to him. His ongoing and basic experience was that he suffered because of his own first language: he would have got on much better if he had been able to speak Hungarian as well as all the other children did when he started school. The obvious conclusion drawn by adult Roma was that their children must be spared such suffering and that therefore they ought to start

speaking Hungarian to them as soon as possible.

Switching to Hungarian within the home was not necessarily a decision taken deliberately. The children spoke Hungarian at school in or out of class. They also spoke Hungarian outside school. At home they used Hungarian when relating what had happened at school, just as their parents used Hungarian when speaking about work or any business transacted on Hungarian terms. Making a living, survival, leisure, taking part in everyday village life all gradually, and almost unperceived, put their stamp on language use.

Gábor Fleck and Tünde Virág, in their paper on the Beashi of Gilvánfa, identified three language strategies.[11] The "reconciled" displayed relatively slow but continuous intergenerational language mortality, while the "strategic changers" were characterised by deliberate intragenerational language change. The "function creators", on the other hand, instrumentalised the Beashi language and tradition, as creators of political prestige and a source of income. Young people at Gilvánfalva attended courses aimed at a revival of the Beashi language and the creation of Beashi literacy. Attendance at such courses was a temporary source of income, and thus important for them, but they hardly, if ever, used Beashi outside the classroom. Factors making for language change proved stronger and more lasting than those which put a brake on them.

But let us return to the nature and consequences of language mortality. The children find themselves caught up in institutionalised education at the early age of three. Kindergardens, like schools, require the use of Hungarian. Out of school, children spend most of their time in the streets with their school and kindergarden friends, and not at home with their families. In that environment the use of Hungarian is just about exclusive. Since Hungarian is learnt within the cohort, the knowledge of the language is bound to be gappy. Thus Hungarian is not learnt at school, but from the cohort, and not properly, or sufficiently well.

It is also common knowledge that, as regards the completion of the general school course, what matters in the case of Roma children is language. 22.9 per cent of Romungro children do not complete nor do 41.6 per cent of Beashi and 48.2 per cent of the Romany.[12] The principal reason for the poor performance of the Beashi and Vlach Gypsy children is that at the age of six or seven many hardly speak Hungarian.[13] As well known, what gives rise to anxiety amongst the majority of Roma children is that long-term unemployment is the predictable fate of those who do not complete the general school course.[14]

The answer to such problems could be —and should be—a three-year bilingual kindergarden, where Beashi or Romany are not despised (let alone barred) but exist on an equal footing, if necessary even enjoying priority, where the children learn Hungarian properly, having a good command of it by the time they start school. What is needed is a sufficient number of kindergarden teachers who have some familiarity with Beashi and/or Romany and who are properly trained to turn such kindergardens into child-friendly places. Such kindergardens can only be established if Beashi or Vlach Gypsies parents want them. The matter is relatively simple in hamlets where all the children are Beashi or Vlach and somewhat more difficult in villages with a mixed population. Some sort of segregation appears rational where the children speak two or three different languages at home, given two con-

ditions: that the parents agree, and that the kindergardens prove successful, that is that the segregated kindergardens themselves create the conditions allowing segregation to cease after three years.

The language of schools is the language of the middle-classes, children from working-class and peasant homes are therefore under a handicap when they start school. This goes for the Roma too, only more so, even if Hungarian is their first language. But school examines the child on progress in culture as a whole, teaches only half of it, leaving the rest to the family. Furthermore, this more essential part of culture is not found in textbooks and could therefore, most appropriately, be called concealed culture, and more of this concealed culture is passed on to their children by members of the professions than by working-class parents. Given all this, we may add that a Roma child receives least of all of this concealed culture.[15]

Basil Bernstein first formulated a theory on the language use of different social classes. A brief summary of his views appeared in Hungarian in 1971,[16] in 1972 Mária Pap and Csaba Pléh reported on their own quantitative research on the connection between speech and social status.[17] Allow me to note that, as the first in Hungary, at an international sociological conference held in September 1969, I drew attention to the way in which handicaps at school were related to the language habits of a social class.[18]

The report on the 1971 research project also mentioned other features in the bringing up of Roma children. "There is more intimacy in the Roma parent–child relationship and less aggression than is the case in the average Hungarian family. That, however, is in no way to the advantage of a Roma child at school, only the disadvantages of growing up in a Roma home are effective there."[19] Roma children are much freer at home. That, in a Hungarian school today, is read as being less disciplined. It should be added that in a Roma home children are generally treated as more grown up and more equal. This equality is clearly unacceptable in Hungarian schools today.

In 1971 it was also clear that the speech of Roma children differed from that of middle-class children and of schools in more than structure: it not only lacked all the more abstract concepts, their lexical range was different, lacking the names of a multitude of concrete objects, no wonder since they were not familiar with the objects themselves.

In the seventies and eighties Zita Réger published a number of papers drawing attention to the fact that the pre-school language socialisation of Roma children lacked an important aspect that kick-started literacy for others: they had no books of fairy tales, no lavishly illustrated cardboard folders for small children: in other words, no books.

Kindergardens and schools exist in Hungary which are well able to cope with linguistic challenges, those with which bilingual Roma children are confronted, as well as those the Romungro have to cope with. It would be good if such kindergardens and schools and the curricula they use could be pinpointed and if these curricula could be made available and recommended to kindergardens and schools with Roma pupils.

The flip side of the coin is no better known. Some of the Roma children spend three years in a kindergarden, others two, others again only the compulsory pre-school year, and there is a fourth group who do not go near a kindergarden at any time. There are no data on the Roma membership of particular cohorts in either

schools or kindergardens. Up to the 1992–1993 school year, schools recorded the number of Roma amongst their pupils. The methods by which those data were obtained were prohibited by data protection legislation. In 1994 Gábor Kertesi submitted a proposal which would have made it possible to record data on Roma pupils, their numbers and educational progress, as well as the educational institutions they attended without infringing human rights or data protection provisions: the data protection people approved, but the proposal was nevertheless not implemented.

In the spring of 1995 the Ministry of Education and Culture commissioned the national minority staff members of the Training Centres of the School Inspectorates to carry out a survey, using questionnaires in all educational institutions where, as far as they knew, the ratio of Roma pupils had reached or exceeded 10 per cent.

The survey covered 18,459 Roma children in 838 kindergardens. At the time of the survey there were around 33,000 Roma children of kindergarden age. (An estimate based on the 1993/94 national survey). We were not told the age of the 18,459 children nor the duration of their kindergarden attendance.

Relevant data on the kindergarden attendance of all Roma children of kindergarden age were obtained as part of the 1993/94 survey. This revealed that 40 per cent of the three-year olds, 40 per cent of the four-year-olds and 72 per cent of the five-year-olds attended a kindergarden. Some of the six-year olds were already school first-formers, 85 per cent of the remainder attended either kindergarden or pre-school preparation. The 72 per cent attendance of the five-year olds must be interpreted in the light of the date of the survey which, for some of them, was within a year of the time they were due to start school. More than half of the children thus only attended pre-school preparation, or a year, at most two, of kindergarden (it is established that three years of kindergarden are needed for success in the first year at school). It ought to be added too that the majority of the children registered does not attend regularly.[20]

The first Roma classes were established early in the sixties on the basis of a 1961 HSWP (Communist Party) resolution with the declared aim of the "improvement of the condition of the Gypsy population". The Party resolution was followed by a ministerial ukase in 1962 which made possible, and encouraged, the setting up of such Roma forms, of a transitory character. To quote the directive: the study groups and day-boarder groups will operate with a transitional character, they will serve the purpose that the children taught there should be able to pursue their studies after a year or two in ordinary forms.

This period of transition proved to be long lasting. Seventy such forms were established in 1962, ninety-four in 1963 and 181 in 1974.

These forms were much debated in the seventies. Some of those who took part argued for segregated forms and schools as a means towards furthering a future Roma national community. Others pointed out that in such segregated classes, the children experienced fewer failures and more success, nor did they have to suffer the insults and injuries of racialism. Opponents of segregation argued that teaching conditions were not as good in these forms, classes were not streamed even in schools where streaming was the rule for non-Roma children, the teachers were less well trained or qualified, the buildings were in poorer condition, less was expected from the pupils, hence the children learned less and poorer achievements and standards ob-

tained the same marks. All this meant that the children could not be transferred to ordinary classes after a time, thus their handicaps became entrenched and irreversible.

Seven hundred and seventy Roma forms were in operation in the 1999/2000 scholastic year, teaching 9,000 Roma pupils. In a further 740 forms Roma made up more than 75 per cent of the pupils, a total of 93,000 Roma children in these latter forms.

This is the point at which I wish to return to the three-year bilingual kindergardens and the segregation they involve. To quote Aladár Horváth: "In our opinion segregation is only rational if it is voluntary and if it serves the purpose of securing extra services for the children through which they can successfully overcome their handicaps, and it is only appropriate if all this happens in a period of time that allows the children to overcome their handicaps in the early years of schooling, so that the children can be guided back into the ordinary system of public education. According to competent educationalists such a segregation can be considered proportionate if it lasts no more than three years."

An observation on the concept of segregation may provide an apt conclusion. Article I of the Unesco Agreement on the fight against discrimination in education states that discrimination means any kind of differentiation, exclusion, limitation or favour based on race, colour, gender, language, religion, political or any other opinion held, national or social origin, financial situation or birth, the aim or consequence of which is the hindering or cessation of equal treatment in the field of education. In a report on special schools for Roma children, Hungary's national minorities Ombudsman drew attention to the fact that, in terms of this definition, discrimination consists not only of unfavourable direct interference. It is also discrimination if the right to education of children is not secured, if the educational system or the educational institution operates in a way that ensures that Roma children fall behind, cannot keep in step with other children, that their integration should not take place in their school years and, as a consequence, not later in life either.

The future of Roma children in education

What can be expected in the near future? Will Roma children complete the compulsory years in school? Will they make it to schools granting the *érettségi*, the secondary school leaving certificate? Will they complete these, and to what standard?

The future cannot be foretold, but from what has happened over the past forty, and particularly the past ten years, some trends can be extrapolated.

The 1971 national research project gives us some idea of how things were forty years ago. Youngsters aged fifteen were questioned then, as were, naturally, adults and the old too, including those who went to school before 1960, or should have done so.

In 1971, half the Roma between 35 and 59 had never gone to school, and those who did, had completed one, two or three years of the set course. One in twenty completed eight years or more.

1961 was a year of change. The Communist Party leadership passed a resolution on the Roma situation, one part of which was that Roma children were to complete the eight stages of the prescribed course. The resolution was followed by ministerial directives and a campaign was on the way to ensure the school attendance by Roma children. As a result of this, by 1971 26–27 per cent of young

Roma between 20 and 29 had completed the eight stages. This was an achievement compared to the previous one in twenty. The reality was nevertheless that three quarters of the children managed to complete no more than four stages of the prescribed curriculum, that they were functional illiterate and continued to be so.

Decisive changes occured between 1971 and 1990. The clear majority of males took jobs in mines, foundries, mills or in the construction industry, half the females too became wage-earners, the greater part of colony dwellers moved into villages and towns (their new housing may not have been good but nevertheless these homes were an improvement on the huts.)

These and other factors produced a situation by the 1993 national survey which showed that more than three quarters of young Roma between 20 and 29 had completed the eight stages of the general school course. A real achievement compared to 1971, but diminished by the fact that the 23 per cent who did not could look forward to long-term unemployment. Furthermore that 77 per cent figure is highly questionable. Only 44 per cent complete the eight stages by the age of fourteen or fifteen, the others sometime later, after a succession of failures and years repeated in school. They were given a certificate but nothing to back it. The certificate was issued to be done with the child. In fact the recipient is no more than semi-literate.

Only those who complete the eight stages in the proper time can make it to a secondary school. In the seventies or eighties, very few went on to a trade or academic secondary school. Half of those who did dropped out at some time. For almost thirty years one or two per cent within a cohort managed to obtain the secondary school-leaving certificate.

Things began to change at the end of the eighties and even more so after 1989. The 1993 survey showed that 3 per cent of the 20 to 29 year olds had obtained the secondary school-leaving certificate. This was more than 1–2 per cent, but only just. Major changes were, however, noted by the segregation survey recently completed by Gábor Havas, Ilona Liskó and the present author. Before citing the data I must stress that our survey concerned general (primary) schools, we obtained no data on secondary school-leaving-certificate holders, only on the proportion of Roma children who obtained admission to trades or academic secondary schools.

In the 1998/99 scholastic year 15.4 per cent of Roma children who completed eight stages of the general school course attended a trade, and 3.6 per cent an academic secondary school, that is a total of 19 per cent in a secondary school that granted the *érettségi,* secondary school-leaving certificate, 56.5 per cent a school for apprentices. 15 per cent were not attending school and 9 per cent were in the type of special school which is not much more than nothing. Compared to the past, these are great changes indeed.

One of the explanations is that admission to secondary schools is much easier. The number of places in academic secondary schools grew from 106,000 in 1985 to 221,000 in 1996. The growth in the number of places was 40 per cent in academic and 70 per cent in vocational secondary schools. Because of what is called normative financing, teachers in secondary schools have a financial interest in admitting as many pupils as possible, and in the ongoing attendance of those admitted. The number of non-Roma among general school leavers has, however, steadily declined since 1989. In 1989 it was still 171,000, but only 114,000 in 1999. A result of this was that in 1989, 47.4 per cent of

them were admitted to secondary schools, but 70.6 per cent in 1999. There were fewer applicants for more places, and under such circumstances even Roma children were admitted, just as Roma had been given jobs in mines and foundries twenty years earlier. I ought to stress right at the start that standards of admission were lowered to maintain numbers. It was no longer as important to be white and non-Roma, nor was it as important to know something. This was even truer when it came to retaining pupils, only more so.

I ought to mention that for fifteen years or more now standards in general schools have also been steadily declining. There is less insistence on children repeating the year and they put up with the fact that pupils know less and less.

It is part of this general trend that 17- or 18-year-old Roma children are given their (satisfactory) report even if this is not backed by knowledge, and it is part of the same trend that in future years a growing number will receive it in much the same way at fourteen or fifteen, knowing little.

It is becoming ever easier to gain admission to secondary schools and to complete the course. This suits the children since there is less homework, it suits parents, since family allowances and further education grants are paid, and while the children are at school, they are not unemployed. It suits the schools and the teachers' unions, since it avoids having to make teachers redundant, it suits the government because there are fewer unemployed but also because the more attend secondary school and the more obtain the *érettségi* the secondary-school-leaving certificate, the closer we approach the West where all this happened long ago. And it suits all those too who favour the integration of the Roma since surely all those families must be considered integrated where the children complete secondary schools. And it suits those too who don't like to speak of integration because of the vagueness of the term but who would like to see less hatred between Roma and non-Roma, since it is certainly true that the process here outlined makes for less hatred.

The way I see things then is that, in the future, a growing number of Roma children will make it to secondary schools, of the vocational variety in the first place, but also to academic secondary schools, and the drop-out rate too will be smaller than in the past.

To get back to our research data: in the 1996/97 scholastic year 13 per cent of general school-leavers registered with a secondary school, 16 per cent in 1997/98 and 19 per cent in 1998/99.

I should add too that we did our field work in schools where the Roma pupils accounted for 25 per cent or more of all pupils in 1992, in other words in poor schools. But when it comes to continuing education it is not poor schools that make up the vanguard. It is just about certain that the figures are better for those Roma children who attend better schools in circumstances where one cannot speak of segregation. Countrywide 70.6 per cent continue their education in secondary schools; in the schools where we did our field work only 56.5 per cent of the Roma did so. These figures too support my argument.

Thus the gates of secondary schools are wide open. But the promise can only become reality if the parents exploit this opportunity. On a national average 70 per cent of parents did so, recognising that it is difficult to survive on the labour market with just an eight-stage general school course or apprentice training, that finding a job is becoming more difficult every year.

But a far smaller percentage of Roma parents opt for a secondary school education for their children. We questioned parents too on what they planned for their children. On a broad average 22 per cent chose secondary school, 57 per cent apprentice training, 4 per cent opted for immediate employment and 17 per cent had no clear idea about what they wanted their children to do. In this respect the social background made a difference. In Budapest 37 per cent of parents chose a secondary school, in Transdanubia 29 per cent, elsewhere the figures were below average. 56 per cent of parents with a secondary-school-leaving certificate and 33 per cent of those with skilled-worker training opted for a secondary school for their children. The ratio for others was smaller.

One could say that it is something to boast about that one in five of Roma parents opted for a secondary school and one might well ask why this happened in the mid-nineties. But one might equally ask why this happened so late in the case of non-Roma parents. One answer might be that earlier such a choice would not have been rational. Full employment was the rule, there was no need to feel anxious about a job. An *érettségi* certificate did not mean more money. It was in the eighties that educational qualifications started to count in finding a job and in the size of the pay-packet. In the nineties they became crucial.

In that light, one might well ask why only 22 per cent nationwide, and only 37 per cent in Budapest? It would appear that time is needed to prompt a rational sizing up of the situation, more time at a greater distance from Budapest, and more time still if you are less well off, or if you are illiterate or semi-illiterate.

Nor should one forget that attending a secondary school is more cumbersome and more expensive if you live in a village than for town-dwellers, even more trouble and even more costly if your village is off the beaten track. An even greater role is played by the fact that some families are in such a financial situation that attendance at secondary school is simply out of the question.

In spite of all this I think it likely that secondary school attendance will spread amongst the Roma just as it did amongst the non-Roma. That it should spread to the whole age-group is, however, out of the question. I think it unlikely that a higher ratio than 70 per cent will come about, if what we have in mind is not merely starting but also finishing. More than 80 per cent is, I should say, out of the question. The same ratios may eventually be recorded for the Roma, but only after much time has passed.

Whatever the future may hold, the present position is such that the standard of living of one in five Roma families permits secondary school attendance by their children, allowing for ambitions in this field, as in others, that are comparable to those entertained by non-Roma. What counts, however, is that in one in four families, the children are not even able to complete the full general school course, and in a further 30 per cent not within the proper time, and only in such a way that the certificate they are given when leaving school suggests greater knowledge and skills than they actually acquired.

The educational standards of non-Roma are different. It is characteristic of the bottom third that their children do not make it to secondary school. At the top, 17.5 per cent of those between 18 and 22 participate in some form of tertiary education, 108,000 attending universities and 171,000 colleges of higher education.

Which means that the gap between the Roma and the non-Roma has grown no smaller in forty years. ❧

NOTES

1 ■ József Vekerdi: *A cigány népmese* (The Gypsy Folk Tale), Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1974. p. 16–17.

2 ■ Zsolt Csalog: *A cigánykérdés Magyarországon 1980 előtt.* (The Gypsy Question in Hungary before 1980) Budapest, Bibó István Emlékkönyv. 1979 and 1991. Vol. 2. p. 282.

3 ■ István Kemény, Kálmán Rupp, Zsolt Csalog, Gábor Havas: *Beszámoló a magyarországi cigányok helyzetével foglalkozó 1971-ben végzett kutatásról* (A Report on the 1971 Survey of the Situation of Gypsies in Hungary). MTA Szociológiai Kutatóintézet kiadványai. Budapest, 1976, p. 9.

4 ■ Katalin Kovalcsik: "A beás cigányok népzenei hagyományai." (The Folk Music of Beashi Gypsies) in: *Cigány néprajzi tanulmányok* (Gypsy Ethnographical Studies) ed. Gábor Barna. Salgótarján, Mikszáth Kiadó, 1993. pp. 231–244.

5 ■ *Cigánykérdés és cigányügyi igazgatás a polgári Magyarországon.* (The Gypsy Question and the Administration of Gypsy Business in Postfeudal Hungary) Budapest, Osiris-Századvég, 1995, p. 11.

6 ■ Op. cit. p. 11.

7 ■ The 1991 census showed 48,072 Romany speakers. What actually happened was that Beashi speakers were also registered as Romany speakers. Beashi in Hungary, speaking Hungarian in the presence of non-Roma, are prone to call their language Romany although they are well aware that what they speak is a dialect of Romanian. See Andrea Szalai: "A beások" (The Beashi). *Kritika,* December 1997. p. 7.

8 ■ Zita Réger: *Kutatások és vitapontok. Műhelymunkák a nyelvészet és társtudományai köréből* (Research and Points in Dispute. Social Science and Linguistics Workshop). August 1988. MTA Nyelvtudományi Intézet, p. 159.

9 ■ Árpád Mészáros–János Fóti: "Nemzetiségek, etnikai csoportok a 20. századi Magyarországon." (National Minorities and Ethnic Groups in 20th-century Hungary). *Regio,* 1995/9, p. 322; Anna Borbély: "A magyarországi románok nyelvhasználata a változások tükrében" (Romanian as Spoken in Hungary in the Light of the Changes) *Regio* 1995/3. discusses the changing first language of Romanian native speakers in Hungary.

10 ■ Anna Gyivicsán: *Anyanyelv, kultúra, közösség.* (Native Language, Culture, Community) Budapest, Teleki László Alapítvány, 1993. p. 62.

11 ■ *Egy beás közösség múltja és jelene* (The Past and Present of a Beashi Community) Budapest, MTA PTI Regional Research Centre, 1999.

12 ■ István Kemény: "A romák és az iskola," (The Roma and School). *Educatio,* 1996 Spring, p. 74.

13 ■ loc. cit. p. 79.

14 ■ loc. cit p. 84.

15 ■ *Beszámoló a magyarországi cigányok helyzetével foglalkozó 1971-ben végzett kutatásról.* (A Report on the 1971 Survey of the Situation of Gypsies in Hungary) p. 45.

16 ■ *Valóság,* November 1971.

17 ■ *Valóság,* February 1972.

18 ■ *Industrialization, Urbanization and Lifestyle.* International Sociological Conference. Balatonfüred, pp 209–210.

19 ■ *Beszámoló a magyarországi cigányok helyzetével foglalkozó 1971-ben végzett kutatásról.* (A Report on the 1971 Survey of the Situation of Gypsies in Hungary), p. 45.

20 ■ Katalin Pik's 1999 paper discusses the irregular kindergarden attendance of Roma children in 7 villages, and the resulting dysfunction.

György Kertész

Generation 2000

Tamás Kolosi: *A terhes babapiskóta* (The Pregnant Rusk).
Budapest, Oziris, 2000, 301 pp.

The fourth child of Hungary's 37-year-old Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, came into the world to unprecedented attention from the media. Given her family and its background, the youngest Orbán will have enormous opportunities and, when she grows up, she will no doubt belong to the elite. The opportunities for her coevals are also more or less outlined in the cradle: only a very few will have the chance to break through the barriers of the social class they were born into. Although Hungary in the coming twenty years is very likely to catch up significantly on the developed world, the chief beneficiaries of this economic growth will be the higher strata of society. Tamás Kolosi, however, envisions a different ideal for Hungary: the chairman of TÁRKI Social Research Centre thinks that, in the medium term, there is a chance to construct a kind of society where, besides the few rich and an equally small underclass, the majority is made up by the middle classes.

Equality of opportunity is a political slogan that voices an illusion going back centuries, and which seems increasingly impossible to achieve, says Kolosi. In his *Terhes babapiskóta* (The Pregnant Rusk) he attempts to describe the structural changes this society went through with the transition. The title refers not to a genetically engineered baby food, but to the shape* of an ideally structured society, in which the—though stratified—middle class dominates. Hungary is of course very far from this model, as only one third of the population has money to spend over and above their daily necessities, the remaining two thirds only being able to cover their bare essentials, and 10–20 per cent can be considered poor.

Tamás Kolosi is a social scientist who has a penchant for scandalizing both fellow sociologists and the general public. He does not believe, in the present circumstances, that poverty can be completely eliminated, and thinks that the real chal-

* ■ Hungarian *babapiskóta* have the shape of a bone or dumbbell with a thinning middle section. A pregnant rusk would be thickest in the middle. [Trans.]

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lenge facing social policy is not to do away with relative poverty, but to prevent mass pauperisation, and to provide the conditions of decent human existence for the poor. But research—including his own—shows that movement between the various classes and groups is limited, which is why for Kolosi the most important criterion for society is the extent to which it can provide opportunities to individuals to choose values beyond the social level they would otherwise remain embedded in, and whether they are allowed to act according to these values. The possibilities to choose are fewer at the top (due to group pressure) and at the bottom (due to constraints) than in the middle of the social hierarchy.

The question of the losers and winners of the transition is treated in detail in the book. This is no accident: the topic is of interest to sociologists and the public at large, and it has also received scholarly treatment from many hands. Kolosi refers to the almost complete agreement among sociologists that "both in societies of the Soviet type and market economies, those doing manual work can be found in the lower regions of the social hierarchy, and in this respect no change is to be expected in the course of a peaceful (non-revolutionary) transformation." It is not surprising, then, that works discussing the consequences of the transition concentrate on the elite, and that they study processes of mobility in the upper layers of the social hierarchy that were initiated by the transition, what happened to the old ruling class, and where the members of the new ruling class come from. To give a simplified overview of the difference between the situation before and after the transition, Kolosi suggests that we start from "the classic Marxist theory, according to which in a capitalist society it is the capitalists who are on top. In a society of the Soviet type, it is the party bureaucracy that is on top, and the question of the new elite is whether the capitalists, the new economic elite, derive from the party bureaucracy in the course of a peaceful transition, or from elsewhere."

There are several hypotheses in circulation about the development of the post-transition elite, into which no one climbed from below. These include Iván Szelényi's idea of the parking orbit, as well as "the revolution of deputy heads of departments", which is one of Kolosi's favourite notions. According to the former, the pre-war economic elite did not disappear during forty years of Communist rule, but hibernated, as it were, in a parking orbit. But they were only waiting for the moment when their skills could be used on a large scale, to continue where their fathers had been forced to stop fifty years earlier. In this hypothesis, it is the reactivation of pre-war capital that is responsible for the emergence of new enterprises after the transition. The revolution of deputy heads of departments, on the other hand, describes a situation in which the pre-transition second line, less visible to the public, was able to amass capital which it could use to the best advantage in the new era. Contributory to this was the fact that

> at least in the early phase of the transition, position capital that was profitable earlier could become a downright disadvantage. During the transition from a one-party system to a democratic one, politics becomes necessarily more emphasized than in "peacetime". Previously filled political positions may provoke extreme reactions in this early phase—at least when viewed through the filters of the new political elite and mass media. As a result of this intense political "compensation", those persons or groups who in the one-party system filled the most conspicuous elite positions start with a handicap because of their political activity. They can, of course, continue to convert

successfully their network capital, just like their cultural and material wealth, into new wares, but their one-time prominent political roles diminish the positive value of their capital. Exploiting this situation, those who were previously cast in the second line—having had a similarly elite position but not having to cope with the disadvantages of political exposure—now try to make use of the temporary power vacuum. Thus—at least in an initial phase of the transition—the coming of the second line to the fore is observable.

To sum up, the composition of the top 20 per cent of society was little altered by the transition, though there was great movement within this group. The uppermost 1–1.5 per cent, on the other hand, was completely renewed, though this is not to say that any of the lower, impoverished classes had a chance to rise into the economic or political elite. This transformation can be put down to, among other things, the more important function of money: in the eighties social roles were dependent on money only to a degree of 12 per cent, but this factor had become 40 per cent by the mid-nineties. This could well increase further because in developed countries—among which Hungary certainly belongs, though being one of the poorest in the club—the ratio of income dependence is about 50 per cent.

Yet, it is the increasing gap between incomes that has produced the greatest tension in Hungarian society. Before 1990 the difference between the top and bottom quintiles was fourfold; today it is eightfold. Despite this, there is the paradox that those on a higher level are more dissatisfied with their condition than the poor. Sociology created the concept of relative deprivation in the fifties, and this now neatly applies to post-transition Hungarian society. The reference groups have also changed, and while the elite of the Kádár era compared their situation to that of the elite in other Socialist countries (and could acknowledge with satisfaction that circumstances here could be considered enviable), now it is the elites of the developed countries that provide the benchmark. In comparison with them, Hungary has little to be proud of, as most members of the reference group live in better circumstances.

Hungary no doubt belongs among the developed countries, has even been a member of the OECD, the developed countries' club, for five years. But, Kolosi warns, once in, Hungarians can order only the cheapest wine—even in the former poorest countries (Greece, Portugal and Spain) the well-to-do live better than in Hungary. In those countries people in the highest income bracket make twelve times as much as the poorest, exactly because this is how they can approximate their standard of living to that of the comparable groups in the richest countries. Which means that in Hungary the circumstances of those already quite well off will improve, and only when they have reached the international standard will there be a chance for the poorer classes to catch up.

The idea is supported not only by international evidence but by the experience of the transition. The winners were already among the beneficiaries of the previous regime, as Kolosi's own research proves. The new protagonists of the economic elite before the transition were "either members of the management of state-owned firms, or established their own businesses in the eighties, or were active in the "second economy". Some did all three before becoming significant entrepreneurs. Three fourths of the large capitalists of today come from one of these three typical groups. Even among the remaining fourth

there are few who had no network or financial capital before the nineties. Those who did not, however, almost without exception maintained good relations with foreigners, and this was what provided for their success in the new socio-economic situation.

The most important question has always been, and still is, what one needs to get into the elite or to stay there. Those who succeed today give the same three or four tips. When questioned by Kolosi's team, one in two of them attributed success, apart from their own personal qualities, to the economic boom of the transition. Also, one in two entrepreneurs mentioned that they had been active in the second economy thriving in Hungary in the eighties, and already had a private business in operation before the transition—managing it perhaps as a sideline while keeping their main jobs.

Another reason for the entrenchment of these old groups is that the transition in Hungary was headed by what is called in Central Europe the "intellectuals", who asserted their own interests. Thus, for instance, they created a protective shell around the healthcare system, fearing that leaving it open to pure market principles would mean that they would have access to a service of—even if relatively—worse quality. The unfortunate state of the Hungarian healthcare system is notorious, as is the fact that even for the most basic services patients have to make their own contributions, given the appallingly low salaries paid to everyone in the health sector. The cash-filled envelopes you have to dash are just one aspect, but to know which doctor you have to dash you need connections. If the relative financial position of intellectuals has deteriorated, they were at least able to compensate for this through their connections; should conditions be clarified in healthcare, they will have no chance to make up for the relatively huge decline in their incomes. These habits and attitudes, ingrained in the Communist era, are so deep-rooted that only a new generation, the one now growing up, can do without them. This is like the wanderings of the Jews led by Moses, says Kolosi: those born in slavery could never arrive in Canaan.

Though it is difficult to compare the situation of education with that of healthcare, what at least is similar is that in free educational institutions those coming from the higher social segment are in a better position, regardless of their actual financial status. The elite focuses its attention on a handful of secondary schools—primarily in Budapest and a very few in the provinces—and does everything to ensure that their children are accepted in these, since from them there is a road leading straight to the universities which guarantee the best jobs. These are closed circuits, where kindergarden friendships further develop at shared school desks, and reach their full maturity in boards of directors.

Qualifications had always been one of the most important factors of success, but this will be more so, says Kolosi, who calls attention again to the so-called school slope. This denotes the fact that Hungarian kindergardens are among the best in the world, primary schools do well in any international comparison, while the same cannot be said with full assurance any more about secondary schools. Universities and colleges clearly do not figure highly by international standards. Despite this—or for the very same reason—qualifications are of key importance for life opportunities, which means that the Prime Minister and his wife—like all other parents of a new-born child—must seriously consider what school career to prepare for their children.

This they will no doubt do, as children have become more important to young couples in the higher classes than ever before. For the generation of the prime minister's party, FIDESZ, still the party of the young, who were in their twenties when the change of system took place—and this perhaps distinguishes the majority from Fidesz-affiliated members of the political elite—having many children is not mere conservatism. It is in fashion among the young well-to-do to have three or more children, who are integrated in the family with a modern attitude, rather than in accordance with the traditional roles offered to children, says the sociologist. This too is a determining factor for the future success of Generation 2000. Family background will play an ever more important role in achieving success. This could even be considered natural, as before the nineties it was more difficult to keep privileges within the family—even if the elite of the late-Kádár era developed very effective mechanisms for this purpose. But now it is no longer necessary to promote the children in secret ways; parents can transmit their values, whatever their nature, to their heirs without scruples.

Kolosi also finds that in the future individuals will be more responsible for their own success, and that the concept of success has become multi-dimensional. While the future of the generation born in 1950 was pre-determined to a degree of 70 per cent, children born today stand a 50 per cent chance that they will not be constrained by the circumstances they are born into. The real appeal of the pregnant—i.e. the thickening— rusk model is that movement within a broader middle class would be easier than between different classes.

This does not mean that differentiation is not still with us. While in the sixties the indicator of a family's wealth was whether they had a television (later, a colour TV), today the home computer has a similar function. However, those who did not have a television in the sixties, did not start in life with the same handicap as those children who do not have access to a PC, and hence, to the Internet.

The elimination of social disparity is an illusion, but politics must undertake to reduce differences. The invisible borderlines within the country that separate the East from the West and the North from the South cannot be wiped out, but their effect can be diminished. Inequality between towns and cities can and should be reduced. ❧

Gábor Kiszely

One of Many

A Case History From the Secret Police Archives

ÁVH – egy terrorszervezet története *(State Security Authority—the History of a Terror Organization) by Gábor Kiszely was published by Korona in Budapest last autumn and was an instant bestseller. This is the first attempt at a comprehensive history of this hated and feared organization, amply decumented by material that has been made accessible thanks to the opening up of archives. The picture is by no means complete, nor does it provide sufficient detail but it is a first step. The ÁVH, the Communist Political Police, kept the whole country in fear and trembling. Interrogations accompanied by sadistic torture were in no way second to those of the Gestapo and the Soviet parent organization which, with the help of "Comrade Advisers", kept an eye on its operations to the very end. It was originally founded by Gábor Péter, once a journeyman tailor, who had worked his way up in the Party hierarchy, first underground at home, then in exile in Moscow. He headed the organization as Vice Marshal until his destiny caught up with him. In 1953 he was arrested by his own organization—not that anyone objected to the cruelty of his methods. He fell victim to internecine struggles within the top leadership.*

The 1952 story taken from Gábor Kiszely's book is one of many thousands of horrifying ÁVH cases. To this day no-one knows who Bálint really was and why he was chosen for his role in a Titoist conspiracy trial. He was an insignificant nobody, a petty criminal, and after he was given the full ÁVH treatment, he readily confessed to everything he was charged with, in the vain hope that his life would be spared. Gábor Péter, who was himself already under arrest, also has his say in the documents. The whole story is a perfect illustration of ÁVH methods, how the compilation of the trumped-up charges was made and "the evidence" put together, what the interrogations, the role of the Soviet advisers, were like and the cynicism of post-1956 Kádár justice. Kádár carefully created the impression of distancing himself from the excesses of the Rákosi era. Mild sentences, however, in fact gave their blessing to what was supposedly condemned.

The book will be reviewed in the next issue.

Gábor Kiszely,

a historian, has published books on Israel, Rome and Freemasonry. His collection of essays on Israel won him the Pro Urbe Award of Jerusalem. At present his main interest is fascism, in all its manifestations, past and present.

All we know about László Bálint is what is found in ÁVH files, arguably manipulated for the purpose. According to them he was born in 1919, in Zenta, a town in Yugoslavia that was part of Hungary before the First World War. He was soon in trouble, a member of the underclass, a professional criminal after moving to Hungarian territory. After the War he illegally crossed back to Yugoslavia where the UDB (the Yugoslav political police) engaged him and entrusted him with kidnapping the Yugoslav exile leaders active in Hungary and bringing them back to Yugoslavia. At the end of this in no way verifiable story, appropriate to a cheap thriller, in the summer of 1952, László Bálint and others were engaged in an exchange of fire with Hungarian security forces in the Szeged area in the course of which Bálint was wounded and arrested.

He is first mentioned in the Prosecutor's Plea dated December 11th 1953 in the trumped up case against Gábor Péter, the former head of the ÁVH. "In the second half of 1952 there were daily beatings, which were particularly sadistic in the case of László Bálint and his fellow Yugoslav kidnappers. László Bálint was taken to the building of the Investigation Branch after his arrest. There, in the presence of ÁVH officers László Juhász, Tibor Vajda and József Kovács, Gábor Péter gave instructions for the severe ill-treatment of László Bálint's aged mother and mother-in-law, and then his younger brother and other relatives in László Bálint's presence in order to make him confess. When they recognized that Bálint would not confess regardless, József Kovács, on Péter's instructions, used his rubber truncheon on Bálint who was lying sick in bed, also twisting his testicles, going on, together with Gábor Péter, to stick pins into his scrotum. Later Péter sent for a pair of pliers and instructed Kovács to nip off Bálint's toe. József Kovács made a cut into the little toe on the right foot of László Bálint, a sick man confined to his bed. Colonel István Bálint, a medical officer, also took an active part in this beating."

The case is also dealt with by the Procurator Fiscal's Office in a motion for the retrial of Gábor Péter and eight associates, dated May 10th 1957. "In the autumn of 1952, in Csongrád and at Section VII in Budapest, József Kovács, on [Gábor Péter's] personal instruction, tortured with extraordinary roughness the UDB agents László Bálint and Sándor Kenyeres, furthermore Bálint's relatives, Bálint's sister-in-law, Mária Somogyi, the wife of Dr György Bálint, as well as a sergeant of police, and finally two peasants who, *bona fide,* had provided transport for Bálint and his associates. Gábor Péter too took an active part in this inhuman torture. Gábor Péter and József Kovács beat the severely wounded László Bálint with rubber truncheons on the bare soles of his feet, and other parts of his body, including his scrotum. They repeatedly stuck a coarse sacking needle into his testicles, then he [Kovács] on Péter's instructions, forcefully closed pliers on one of his toes. József Kovács knocked the women down, stuffed their mouths, and then used his rubber truncheon on them."

In testimony dated March 25th 1957. József Kovács gives his version of events. "In connection with the Bálint case I beg to report, that the beating up of Bálint also occured on instructions received from Gábor Péter. He called on me on one occasion to pick up a rubber truncheon and to accompny him. We went to Fő utca [High Street], where László Bálint lay in a prison cell. Gábor Péter began to interrogate him but he did not provide satisfactory answers. Bálint lay in bed, sick, having been shot through the lungs, but he was on the way to recovery. Péter gave me instruc-

tions to beat him on the soles of his feet. I obeyed, beating him gently, whereupon Péter took the truncheon from me and started to hit hard. Similarly he gave instructions to beat Bálint's testicles but once again he was not satisfied, he took the truncheon out of my hand and it was he who beat Bálint's testicles. Suddenly he did an about turn and ordered that needles be brought. They arrived and he gave instructions that I should prick Bálint's soles and testicles. I obeyed gently and with revulsion. Thereupon Péter took the needle out of my hands and repeatedly stuck it into Balint's soles and testicles so that blood spurted. When Bálint still refused to confess, he ordered pliers to be fetched and instructed me to cut off his little toe. I only obeyed inasmuch as I tweaked the toe, living a bruise but no injury.

Even before Bálint's beating up I had to present a woman on Gábor Péter's instructions, Bálint's sister-in-law and others presented Bálint's mother. These two women had to be beaten up on Péter's instructions and in his presence, as I remember I beat up both women, in such a way that I beat the soles of their feet with a rubber truncheon. In spite of this, Bálint did not confess, Péter lost his temper and Bálint's above-mentioned ill-treatment was the consequence."

In his testimony of March 27th 1957, Dr István Bálint (no relation) an ÁVH doctor and colonel, gave his own version of events. "It is a fact that I was present in the room where László Bálint was interrogated by Gábor Péter, László Juhász and József Kovács. I was in conversation with Colonel of the ÁVH József Ferencsik in a more distant part of the room. I was present having been called by Péter. It was my duty to observe the state of health of László Bálint in respect of whether he could be interrogated since he was severely wounded. When arrested, he had shot himself in the mouth and the bullet had passed through his brain. Because of László Bálint's condition, a medical officer was always present at his repeated interrogations. I too had been present at other interrogations. In such interrogations there were repeated occasions when there were no beatings. This too shows that I was in no way called to be present with the duty of expressing an opinion regarding possible beatings. What happened on this occasion too was that I noticed from the other corner of the room that, in the course of the interrogation—they had just asked László Bálint for the names of Yugoslav spies—they suddenly attacked him. József Kovács and László Juhász beat him. Whether Péter too struck at him I can no longer remember. It is not true that I went over to László Bálint, holding his shoulder; what is true, however, is that I negatively gestured with my head, expressing that László Bálint must not be beaten."

At the hearings of the re-trial which started a few weeks later, Dr Bálint's testimony was amplified by new features which the court did not go into. Dr Bálint said that László Bálint, arrested after an exchange of fire, was admitted to the hospital of the Szeged Town Command. He continued: "We found him at Szeged, in the hospital, but he was unconscious. He had been shot through the brain and the lungs. I stayed there in Szeged at László Bálint's side for three days. He was completely unconscious. I reported daily to Péter who said that according to Mátyás Rákosi I had to do everything possible for László Bálint. Later László Bálint was taken to Budapest to the Mosonyi utca prison, and a special medical team headed by Dr Körösi attended him. László Bálint was interrogated concurrently with therapy, in my presence and Dr Palló's. László Bálint was transfered from the Mosony utca to Fö utca prison but there too, he was confused. I

was present at an interrogation, and so were Péter, Juhász and Ferencsik, Vajda and József Kovács and others too. Questions were put to him, but he did not want to, or could not answer. László Bálint lay in bed but he did not answer. Thereupon József Kovács went for him and started to beat him. Thereupon I protested with my head. A few minutes later Kovács left off the beating. Then they brought in László Bálint's elder brother and beat him up in his presence." [...]

Answering the Presiding Judge, Gábor Péter said: "As far as I remember Dr Bálint put his hand on László Bálint's shoulder, meanwhile József Kovács beat the soles of László Bálint's feet."

Dr Bálint: "That may have been so, but I did not hold down László Bálint's shoulder. This testimony was recorded in the basic minutes, since I was allegedly afraid of László Bálint, since he could have betrayed me, that is why we beat him up."

Neither the judge, nor the prosecutor showed any curiosity in what reasons Dr István Bálint might have had to fear that the man in custody would betray him. Who was László Bálint? What did he know and why was what he knew so important that Gábor Péter said the following on May 10th 1957, as recorded in the minutes? "It is true that on Mátyás Rákosi's repeated instructions I arranged for László Bálint, who was in custody, and also for his relatives to be beaten up." According to the documents, László Bálint was a professional criminal and petty kidnapper. Why then was his case cited again and again as a capital crime in the prosecution of Gábor Péter and his associates, given that the ÁVH had ill-treated thousands with like brutality both before and after. Such questions must remain unanswered for the time being, since those fearing the answers managed to efface all traces. What has survived, however, is sufficient to give some idea of the machinations of the ÁVH.

Gábor Péter went on insisting in his testimony. "I still declare with emphasis that Dr István Bálint was present at the interrogation of László Bálint's relatives in order to express a medical opinion in respect of whether those in custody could bear, and to which point they could bear, the ill-treatment to which they were subjected. It is also true that Dr István Bálint cooperated in holding down László Bálint in such a way that he held him by the shoulder while József Kovács carried out the ill-treatment."

In the re-trial motion, dated May 10th 1957 re Gábor Péter and eight associates, the Procurator Fiscal's Office established: "In the course of the re-trial investigations Dr István Bálint denied any cooperation beyond mere presence, what is more he testified that, on a number of ocasions he protested against the ill-treatment of László Bálint, claiming that his presence was only needed in order to express an opinion on whether those in custody were fit for interrogation. As against this, Gábor Péter repeated his testimony of the original trial, namely that Dr István Bálint held down the person in custody by the shoulder while he was being beaten, and that he nodded to indicate that the beating could be continued. At the same time, József Kovács explained that Gábor Péter also wanted already injured parts of the body to be given the rubber truncheon treatment and that is all that Dr István Bálint had protested against.

The defence that Dr István Bálint was only present during the ill-treatment to express an opinion on the fitness for interrogation of those in custody, is unbelievable. It is only in the rarest of such cases, mostly where mental illness is involved, that a medical opinion is called for. Circumstances suggest that the issue was precise-

ly the likely physical damage that required the presence of a medical officer at interrogations coupled with beatings. This is borne out by the fact that Dr Bálint was also present at the ill-treatment of László Bálint's relatives—without protesting (at least according to the available data)—yet all of them, excepting László Bálint himself, were in good health."

In a judgement dated June 15th 1957 in the case of Gábor Péter and associates, the Military Division of the Supreme Court declared Dr István Bálint not guilty of the abuse of official authority, of criminal action against the people, of offences against the people, of a conspiracy involving fraudulent abuse of trust to the detriment of personal liberty and of corrupt practices. József Kovács was sentenced to five years imprisonment, which were declared to have been served by the time of the re-trial.

Who László Bálint really was and the background of the whole affair continues to remain obscure. We know much more about the preconceived scenario. On October 10th 1952, Colonel László Juhász issued the following instruction. "Responsible leaders and group leaders must be allotted to the case. Accordingly—as we have done in the past—the organizational structure of the investigation of the case must be established, who are in charge of which part, who belong to them, what kind of work they must put their minds to, which of the accused are in their custody. A certain reserve force should also always be at the ready.

When the stable organizational structure of the case will be fixed, we shall approve it. Those in charge and the investigators will have to be convened either together, or in succession and the huge importance of this case—not just for Hungary, but internationally—will have to be pointed out, the fact what a blow all this will mean, not just for the Titoists but also for their principals, the imperialists, if we do our job well. It will have to be pointed out that, in all the people's democracies, this is the first terrorist case which is so amply shored up by material evidence, showing who is in favour of war, and what methods are employed by the other side."

Three weeks later, on November 5th 1952, those entrusted with carrying out the job are asking for further instructions:

"1. Will we process in the summing up those parts not clarified in the examination which they discussed amongst themselves, e.g. plans for attempts on the life of the Prime Minister of the Hungarian People's Republic connected with his home, and plans to blow up bridges?

2. To what degree can the names of Yugoslav exiles figure in the confessions of those in custody?

3. Must we keep quiet about the huge quantities of money and gold, or can these be mentioned in cases where the issue is a villa to be purchased for the terrorist group.

4. Should the shooting be left out altogether or may the puncturing of the tyre [...] and the alarming of the civilian population because of the firearms figure?

5. Should the policeman and the custom officer figure amongst the witnesses, which would mean that they would unjustifiably be raised to the rank of heroes, on the other hand they would stand unmasked as cowards?

6. Would it not be advisable to bring in one or two border guards as witnesses from the region where five Titoist bandits opened fire at the border police and cut through the wire?"

The answer is provided, and the 121 questions of which the proposal related to the case of László Bálint is made up can finally be classified under five headings:

I. The presentation of the accused as a debased, degenerate personality, capable

of anything and socially exceptionally dangerous.

II. The UDB is where base criminals meet. Its agents are recruited amongst those who commit crimes.

III. The UDB is an organization that commits common crimes: robbery, looting, assault and murder.

IV. The UDB is financed by the Americans. It is an auxiliary of the American intelligence agencies.

V. The UDB trains agents to commit terrorist acts, espionage, murders, to blow up things etc. and sends them across the frontier."

The implementation itself is just about as smooth, as daily reports attached to the interrogtation reports of László Bálint—who soon recovered his health—show.

November 4th 1952.
Attitude and behaviour: He is in a confident mood. He tensely looks forward to negotiations with Comrade Vice Marshal [Gábor Péter], when, as he puts it, he will discover his fate. He is confident that he will be given a chance to continue living. That problem very much concentrates his mind. He stated that he would very much like to continue living, but he is ready to obey the instructions of Comrade Vice Marshal in every respect. It is typical of his attitude that he sees his fate in every way in terms of the conversation to be held with the Comrade Vice Marshal, he expects the solution of all his problems from it. He frequently asks whether the senior officers of the ÁVH are perhaps angry with him. He has decided that at the earliest opportunity he will ask the Comrade Vice Marshal to forgive him for his initial attitude.

November 5th 1952.
Attitude and behaviour: Developing favourably, he is looking forward with great excitement to your being satisfied with his minutes. 'If the Vice Marshal is not satisfied with my minutes, they can take me to the gallows, there is no more I can tell.' Staying alive is constantly at the forefront of his attention. He speaks a great deal about the possibility that he might work for the ÁVH. [...] There is another new feature though. Occasionally he says that he does not care how long a sentence he gets, as long as he stays alive. [...] He speaks a lot about wanting to get instructions from Comrade Vice Marshal, which he would carry out, come what may.

November 8th 1952.
He is firmly resolved to carry out instructions received from Comrade Vice Marshal under all possible circumstances. [...] He reckons with an audience of the Comrade Vice Marshal this week.

November 9th 1952.
He reckons with being able to talk to the Comrade Vice Marshal within a day or two and that he will receive new instructions. He is full of plans for the big job ahead.

November 10th 1952.
He returned cheerful, almost enthusiastic from his audience with the Comrade Vice Marshal. He spoke a great deal about the Comrade Vice Marshal, about the trust he put in him. What impressed him particularly was the calm in which the audience took place.

His mother's fate bothers him and he decided that the next time he would ask the Comrade Vice Marshal that his mother should not be punished but set free.

It was in that state that the visit of Comrade Colonel came, after which he regained his balance. 'Sir, I am ready to do anything the big chief asks for, they can't just put me down, can they?'

November 11th 1952.
We reworked his confession in accordance with the principles laid down by the Comrade [Soviet] Advisers as questions

and answers, we prepared the minutes of the suspect.

He stressed repeatedly that he put himself in the hands of the Comrade Vice Marshal, 'come what may.' He insists that he won't waver at the hearing. 'I will do everything that the Vice Marshal asks of me, even if they take me to the gallows two hours later, but why should they hang me?' Right through the day he repeatedly asked for the judge's questions, referring to what the Comrade Vice Marshal had said. 'Let me see those slips of paper so I can prepare myself properly. I'll show them that László Bálint is a man with his feet on the ground.'

November 12th 1952.
We reworked the suspect's minutes, he is relatively calm and he insists that he will do his bit at the hearing. [...] He does his best to learn the stuff as well as possible. Sometimes he complains that we should have started sooner, the hearing will be upon us in next to no time. 'László Bálint will do everything that is humanly possible.' He has great expectations regarding the conversation with Comrade Vice Marshal. He expects words which will allow him to weigh up his own fate even more clearly.

November 13th 1952.
We talked over his new, reworked synopsis.

In the last hours of the interrogation he repeatedly mentioned that tomorrow his testimony would surely be spoken into a microphone. The reasons he gave were that in 'big cases' (Rajk, etc) that was the custom, he too had heard them on the wireless long ago.

November 15th, 1952.
In the first break during the hearing—after his interrogation, he was tense waiting for the opinion of the top comrades—right from the first moment he stressed that he would have said more but they did not let him. The appearance of Comrade Vice Marshal calmed him and cheered him up. In the later breaks he repeatedly asked for my opinion, 'I wonder why the old man said that I should watch the behaviour of the others, that can only be explained in one way.' In the breaks he considered the judgement which was still to come. In his opinion he would receive a death sentence. 'The question now is whether the Vice Marshal can stop the carrying out of the sentence, I would really love to go on living!'

After the hearing he stressed repeatedly that he would have done better if he had been allowed to go on speaking, then his attention turned to next Monday. He wanted to know whether, after the judgement was given, he would be hanged, or would he really be allowed to live.

His affection for his interrogator grew more powerful, he asked anxiously if he will visit him on Sunday. All in all: once again he put greater trust in Comrade Vice Marshal.

His problem is whether Comrade Vice Marshal can stop the sentence being carried out.

November 16th, 1952.
He has anxious doubts concerning the sentence, he is afraid of a death sentence. 'But if it happens then let it happen quickly. Later I would really go mad.' From time to time his thoughts are wholly on a new life, he becomes altogether different speaking a lot about his plans of the things he would do for the ÁVH. It was interesting to hear him say that after the sentence, 'if they do not do away with me, I will write down my real life for the Vice Marshal'."

November 17 1952.
After the end of the hearing in the morning, during the six hour waiting period af-

ter it, his mood fluctuated. Pessimism dominated.

After the conversation with the Comrade Vice Marshal he was as transformed. None of the other conversations with the Comrade Vice Marshal had as big an effect on him as today's. After the proclamation of the sentence he was completely calm, in spite of repeated warnings by his officer in charge, he could barely restrain himself from drawing attention by an excessively cheerful look on his face, and an excessively cheerful attitude.

As regards his more distant future, he alluded to it once or twice, but optimistically. His problem is that he cannot carry out some of the tasks given to him by the Comrade Vice Marshal without exposing himself, bearing in mind that there are always two of them in his cell. He intends to speak about this to the Comrade Vice Marshal."

But on that day the Budapest County Court, in open session, sentenced László Bálint to death. Another twelve persons were sentenced to longish prison terms for aiding and abetting a criminal act.

November 18th, 1952.

He is generally calm but smaller doubts manifest themselves again. In the interests of maintaining his calm over a longer period of time, his officer in charge referred to the fact that Comrade Vice Marshal had travelled abroad for a fortnight's period of rest, and therefore he could not directly occupy himself with the case. Therefore essential changes could not occur. A rest was called for.

Following an enquiry by the Ministry of the Interior concerning László Bálint, the Metropolitan Prosecutor's Office answered on February 1st 1966: "According to our data he was sentenced to death and executed." ❧

András Mink

David Irving and the 1956 Revolution

In a libel action that generated worldwide interest, a court in England ruled in April 2000 that it was not libellous to brand the British historian David Irving as an apologist for Hitler and a Holocaust denier. The Second World War and the Nazi leaders, however, do not cover the entire range of Irving's scholarly attention: one of his works also discusses the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, a 600-page book brought out by Hodder and Stoughton of London in 1981 to mark the 25th anniversary of the Revolution. Recent research among the Hungarian Foreign Ministry's documents held in the National Archive put Irving's work in a new and interesting light.[1]

Irving's 1956

Surprising though it may be, no Western historian produced a detailed book on 1956 up until the mid-1970s. There were, of course, some comprehensive accounts written by Hungarian authors who had managed to escape to the West (Tamás Aczél, Tibor Méray, Ferenc Fejtő, György Mikes, George Urbán, Miklós Molnár, Ferenc A. Váli), as well as the recollections of Western observers, not to mention various essays and political pamphlets that attempted to place 1956 into a world history context.[2] The propaganda of the Kádár regime basically put forward three claims in connection with the "counter-revolution" of 1956.[3] The uprising was organized and directed off-stage by Hungarian reactionaries (former landowners, the clergy, former Arrow-Cross members and Horthy's followers), whose aim was the restoration of the previous, part-feudal and part-capitalist order and/or the Nazi (Arrow Cross) regime. Revealingly, in 1957 the Hungarian envoy argued in front of the UN special committee that the Hungarian government was under obligation, in accordance with the terms of the Paris Peace Treaty of 1946, to clamp down on Fascist stirrings. The other factor was the alleged activity of foreign intelligence organizations, "the imperialists". This could explain both why the Hungarian people (i.e., the Hungarian Communist Party) had been unable to put down the "counter-revolutionary rebellion" on its own, and provided

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justification for the Soviet intervention. And finally, a prominent role was assigned to the "revisionist traitors" (the Imre Nagy group) who had deliberately subverted the party and prepared the ground for the takeover by the forces of reaction. It is regarding these questions that the Hungarian authors in exile and western observers alike unanimously repudiated the allegations of the Kádár regime, pointing out that the spontaneous popular uprising of 1956 was sparked off by the deceit and brutality of Mátyás Rákosi's Stalinist regime. The insurgents fought against dictatorship and for national independence, and not for any restoration of the old social order.

When Irving embarked on his research, political interest in 1956 had already started to wane in the West. By 1966, one had the feeling that the Western media were willing to turn a blind eye on 1956 as a result of Kádár's successful efforts at consolidating his rule.[4] However, by the time Irving's book was published in 1981, this momentary lapse of interest had passed. It was not just the anniversary that placed Irving's book in an entirely different context. Dramatic changes were fermenting inside the Soviet Empire and superpower relations, changes which all worked towards enhancing the significance of 1956. From a major tragic episode in the Cold War years, it was beginning to take on the status of the Soviet Empire's Stalingrad.

It is worth examining Irving's book in this context. I shall not bother pointing out the factual errors. From the historian's viewpoint there is much more to learn by studying what kind of picture Irving presents of 1956 in 1981 to a western audience that unanimously regarded the 1956 Revolution as a democratic popular movement.

The title *Uprising!* already indicates that, in defiance of the popular view, the author does not see 1956 as a revolution. In his Introduction he quotes Trotsky: *"Historians and politicians usually give the name of spontaneous insurrection to a movement of the masses united by a common hostility against the old regime, but not having a clear aim, deliberated methods of struggle, or leadership, consciously showing the way to victory";* then he continues his argument by claiming the following: *"What happened in Hungary in October 1956 was not a revolution but an insurrection. It was an uprising. When it began it was spontaneous and leaderless, and it was truly a movement of the masses bound by one common hatred of the old regime."*[5]

In his introduction Irving dissociated himself from the view that assigned to Imre Nagy and the group of intellectuals rallying around him—whom he repeatedly calls "eggheads"—a glorious role either in the uprising, or in the preparations leading to it. *"Nor am I tempted to shed tears over the fate of Imre Nagy, who found himself cast willy-nilly in the role of rebel premier. I (...) find little that distinguishes him from the other faceless Communists who were carried into power from Moscow exile, and sustained there by the guns of Soviet tanks."*[6]

Irving takes an avid interest in the Jewish element among those who played a role in Hungarian history after the war and during 1956. The book's English edition begins with a biographical rundown of the main protagonists.[7] Each entry, where it is at all possible, begins with the statement "Jewish" (Irving actually makes occasional mistakes), a statement which precedes information relating to occupation or position. In the rest of these potted biographies Irving fails to mention whether or not the person is "Magyar". He reveals nothing of the origins of Cardinal Mindszenty (originally Péhm), György Marosán or János Csermanek (Kádár's

original surname), surnames that all suggest non-Magyar origins). Interestingly, this biographical list was not included in the German edition of the book. Irving explained to a reviewer of the German edition, Wilhelm Dietl, "this could have caused misunderstandings in Germany."[8] Jewish origin is indicated even for individuals who had absolutely nothing to do with the events in Hungary, as with one French journalist: "Michel Gordey, Jewish reporter on *France-Soir*".

Irving makes no bones about his opinion that the Jewish question and anti-Semitism played a crucial role in the Hungarian events. The latent anti-Semitism of the ordinary population was aroused by the all-out terror unleashed by the Jewish clique both among the Muscovite Communists and in the ÁVH (State Security Bureau), still trying to avenge the mass-murder of Jews in 1944. While still in Moscow, through his dealings in the Comintern, Mátyás Rákosi seized leadership of the Hungarian Communist Party with "the tact of a kosher butcher"); upon his return to Hungary he used similar brutality in slicing up the non-Communist political parties. After all this it was small wonder if the *"regime's high Jewish profile caused deep popular resentment..."*[9] On the basis of the interviews conducted with Hungarian refugees of 1956 as part of Columbia University's Oral History Project, he states: *"Paradoxically, the anti-Semitism generated by the Communist activities was so pervasive that many Jews were themselves infected by it."*[10] The second, 1986, edition of his book also had a subtitle, "One Nation's Nightmare".[11]

This explains why Irving's account wasted no words on the political turn that the year 1953 (Imre Nagy's first premiership) had brought, just as it also ignored the Party's internal opposition gathering around Imre Nagy, the Petőfi Circle, the workers' councils, the local revolutionary committees, and the re-established political parties, all of which were considered important political factors in historical works devoted to 1956. In Irving's view, Imre Nagy drifted helplessly with the events. Initially he tried to preserve the Party's power. Irving takes Marosán's claim at face value, whereby Imre Nagy had consented to inviting the Soviet troops on the night of October 23.[12] Later, Nagy was forced to accept the insurgents' demands under the pressure of the the street. *"Bit by bit he was dragging himself like a mortally injured cowboy along the dusty track down which the rebel hordes had long galloped with their demands. He could never catch up."*[13]

Irving regards the insurgent street-fighters as the true protagonists of 1956. In that light it is all the more peculiar that, with a few exceptions, he habitually refers to them as "rebel/revolutionary mob" or "hordes". He has little sympathy for the secret police, the ÁVH, yet he hints that *"As Münnich and his evil cronies must have foreseen, in the country's present mood the result of disbanding of the ÁVH was bound to be a pogrom."* As, indeed, the events proved. *"The mob rage was primeval, primitive and brutal. It was the closest that the uprising came to an anti-Semitic pogrom, as the largely Jewish ÁVH officials were mercilessly winkled out of the boltholes where they fled,"* Irving writes on the lynchings.[14] Similarly to the "counter-revolutionary" accounts loyal to Kádár, Irving, too, presents the bloodbath in Köztársaság Square as the crucial turning point, the moment when Imre Nagy and his government completely lost control of events. It was typical of the ensuing chaos, according to Irving, that on November 1 the Communist apparatchiks rallying around Nagy were already talking of a possible repetition of the White Terror that had fol-

lowed the put-down of the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919.[15] As the story goes, it was precisely these developments, the death of Party Secretary Imre Mező and the threat of a civil war, which motivated Kádár to switch to the Russian side. The picture is a dramatic one: Kádár swears revenge at Imre Mező's deathbed.[16] Both he and Khrushchev had to hurry if they wanted to salvage something from the situation. *"A historic decision confronts Khrushchev. He cannot risk a NATO presence in Hungary, nor can he delay his action too long: at any moment a final pogrom may liquidate the country's remaining flunkies."*[17]

After the revolution, Kádár and his followers tried to justify the invitation of the Soviet troops by calling attention to the imminent threat of the "henchmen of the counter-revolution" preparing for the final showdown, with the West standing by ready to invade, while the Party, somewhat shaken—or, according to a later version, deliberately maimed by "Imre Nagy and his accomplices"—was no longer able to normalize the situation.

Analogies

As contemporary western reviewers themselves pointed out, Irving's book shows analogies with the theses of the propaganda of the Kádár regime. The most notable analogy is that Irving, too, empties 1956 of its democratic political content. There are no heroes in Irving's account of 1956. Imre Nagy, the puppet on a string, is not a hero; neither are there any heroes among the Party's anti-Stalinist opposition, the "eggheads", or among the mob, or among the cowardly and opportunist fellow travellers. Sándor Kopácsy, Budapest's police chief, is a sly time-server;[18] Colonel Maléter, Minister of Defence in Imre Nagy's government, divorced his first wife on Party orders.[19] Irving pays no attention to political agendas and events, the workers' councils and the students, the demands and the press of the revolution, the negotiations, the political deals, nor to the analysis of the dilemmas and situations that the actors had to confront.

Irving credits, and uses without criticism, all the defamations that Kádár and his followers heaped upon the prominent figures of the revolution. The message of these insinuations was that, rather than being guided by political ideas, and instead of making moral and political decisions, the leaders of the "counter-revolution" merely lost a struggle for power.[20]

Instead of offering political analysis, Irving merely draws up vivid pictures of pogroms. This was at variance with the generally accepted view held by both the contemporary opposition and the western public, as well as with reality. Like the Kádár regime's propaganda machine, Irving's book challenges the view that 1956 was a democratic movement enjoying broad popular support. Both representations claim that the lynchings—the manhunts against Communists and other progressively minded people according to the Kádár propaganda, and the pogrom against the Jewish Communists in Irving's book—were essential parts of 1956, rather than being tragic but marginal incidents, also few in number. At this point, however, the relationship between Irving and the Kádár regime's interpretation assumes a paradoxical nature.

At the core of the Kádár regime's picture of a counter-revolution was the claim that the struggle that had been continuously waged between Fascist anti-Communist elements and progressive forces since 1919 broke out with renewed force once again in 1956. The White Terror, lynchings and pogroms of 1956 were the latest editions of the White Terror of 1919

and the Arrow-Cross atrocities of 1944. Exploiting the dissatisfaction of the masses disillusioned with the Rákosi regime, the dark forces of the past, the déclassé gentry and the Fascist lumpenproletariat tried to seize power with the active involvement of the western spy organizations.

According to the official interpretation, the "counter-revolution" of 1956 was a Fascist stirring, because it was directed against the Communists. Irving did not claim that 1956 was a Fascist rebellion, yet he paints the same picture from a different perspective: in 1956, just as in 1919 and 1944, the people's wrath was primarily directed against the Jews who happened to be Communists.

Irving's book documents, and indirectly proves, what Kádár's ideologists had always maintained about 1956. It has taken over all the elements that have fitted into his anti-Semitic preconception. And most importantly, it has taken over their views on the fundamental character and dynamism of the events. The question that now remains is how he had come by his information.

The genesis of the book

According to a rather complimentary review published by *Der Spiegel* on May 4, 1981, Irving was the first Western historian who, in addition to the classified files held in Western archives (the article seems to know that Irving had some contacts within the US secret services) had access to the "seemingly inaccessible" Hungarian sources.[21]

The book's Introduction reveals that Irving had visited Hungary on several occasions. He interviewed, among others, András Hegedüs, Hungary's Prime Minister at the time when the revolution broke out; (later, after the 1960s, Hegedüs turned against the dictatorship and became an opposition politician and thinker). He also talked to Péter Rényi, who during the 1970s and 1980s was deputy editor of *Népszabadság*, the Party's official daily paper; to György Marosán, a former Social Democrat who was, for a number of years after 1956, Kádár's "strong man", and who, until his fall from grace in 1962, was seen as Kádár's rival; and to several politicians active in 1956, including Miklós Vásárhelyi, the press secretary of the Imre Nagy cabinet. In the Introduction, Irving acknowledges his special gratitude to Ervin Hollós, the Kádár regime's most influential historian on the "counter-revolution", who was a police lieutenant colonel after 1956, acting as head of the Political Investigation Department of Budapest, and the *éminence grise* behind the reprisals following the revolution.

According to the archives of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry, David Irving made contact with the London Embassy of the Hungarian People's Republic in 1973.[22] We learn of this first contact from a document filed later, in 1974.[23] According to this, Irving offered to *"come out with a book that challenged the fashionable western interpretation."* He promised to draw an "objective" picture of 1956, one that also included the elements of the official Hungarian view; in addition, he also offered to *"hand over the photocopies of documents related to the events of 1956, held in British, West German and US archives."* The authorities concerned were of the opinion that Irving's offer was worth considering. After conferring with the HSWP (Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party) Agitation and Propaganda Department, the Foreign Ministry issued the necessary visa to Irving,[24] who on his first visit to Hungary in 1973 met Péter Rényi, the hardliner deputy editor of *Népszabadság*. To inspire trust, Irving declared that he had never read the Western publications

on 1956, because he did not want to be influenced by them. Rényi, by contrast, was of the opinion that Irving *"does not know Hungarian history, and wants to dish up cheap sensations, rather than write a scholarly in-depth analysis (...); wants to rely on the power of novelty and surprise to make an impression (...). It was to that effect that he wished to conduct an interview with Comrade János Kádár. (...) Comrade Rényi thought that the publication of such a book, one that was not at variance with our views and which reflected reality, would not be unfavourable to our interests. But that would require the involvement of suitable, skilled and informed historians and perhaps even institutions, as well as a great deal of energy."*[25] The report mentions that Rényi had tried to dissuade Irving from the project.

During the following years there was internal discussion on the usefulness and actuality of Irving's offer. However, contacts with Irving were not severed, and the direct negotiations were conducted by the Hungarian Embassy in London. In a letter dated October 9, 1974, Ambassador Vencel Házi came out in favour of supporting Irving's project. He pointed out that "books of right-wing conception" were coming out one after the other, bearing in mind first and foremost William Shawcross's Kádár biography. Published in 1973, Shawcross's book irritated the Hungarians to such a degree that they tried to stop its publication by applying pressure on the Foreign Office's Press Department.[26] On that basis, therefore, Vencel Házi recommended the following course of action: "(...) *we recommend that D. Irving's offer be seriously considered, since he has promised to incorporate in his book our own view on 1956, along with our proofs of Western subversion, and he will publish the available material in connection with this only with our prior approval."*[27]

Jenő Randé, head of the Foreign Ministry's Press Department, did not share the Ambassador's opinion. In a letter written on November 4, 1974 he argued: *"Despite the books by Shawcross, Barber, Háy and Mindszenty, we do not think his book to be timely, it would stir up the subject just when interest in it was ebbing away. (...) On top of that, we have no guarantee that Irving would write the book at a high professional standard and that it would be received favourably by the British press."*[28] The Foreign Ministry's apparatus was firmly of the opinion that there was nothing to be gained from keeping the subject of 1956 open. It would impede Hungary's efforts to improve relations with the West, and would only limit the country's manoeuvring space; in addition, keeping the discourse on 1956 open would only serve the interests of those who would like to continue keeping Kádár's Hungary in a political quarantine.[29]

The documents fail to mention the name of the person who made the decision at the top level to support Irving regardless of all these objections. Tamás Pálos, the deputy head of the Agitation and Propaganda Department, played an important role in tipping the scale. In November 1974 Pálos wrote to Mihály Kornidesz, the head of the HSWP's Scientific, Public Education and Cultural Department. He argued: *"I think it requires a political decision to decide whether we should lend support to a Western journalist in writing a book on the events of the counter-revolution of 1956. My view is that we should, because so far only one-sided accounts of the events have been published in the west, and our White Book*[30] *has never been circulated. Therefore, in the final analysis, we would merely make the material published in the White Book and in the books written by János Molnár and János Berecz*[31] *available to Irving. This involves no risk at all,*

as these books have already been published. Also, a consultant would be able to influence the writing in our favour."[32]

Naturally, Pálos was fully aware of the possible risks and counter-arguments. On January 6, 1975, just one day before the final decision, he wrote to Károly Grósz, the Department's newly appointed head (Károly Grósz later became Kádár's successor, appointed as Prime Minister in 1988 and serving as the Party's last First Secretary in 1988-89): *"(...) on the basis of the Hungarian documentation he is willing to refute the works published in the West on the subject. (...) Two factors should be weighed against one another here: 1) the West has already lost interest in 1956, and Irving would revive this interest, opening new opportunities for right-wing emigrés and giving rise to further polemics. 2) We must counter-balance the works published in the West. (...) Our recommendation is, therefore, to accept Irving's offer. We can steer his work in the right direction by asking him to sign an agreement with the publisher, Kossuth Publishers, about the preparation of the basic materials, while Kossuth Publishers would deal not with Irving but with the British publisher interested in the publication. As a consultant, Comrade Ervin Hollós should assist Irving, and the government organizations concerned should help Comrade Hollós."*[33]

On the following day, the Agitation and Propaganda Committee endorsed the proposal of the Agitation and Propaganda Department: *"The Agitation and Propaganda Department made it known that, at his own request, a British journalist would like to write a book on the Hungarian counter-revolution in the spirit of the HSWP's political statements and documents. The Committee agrees."* On the other hand, the committee's resolution makes it clear that *"we shall not lend any financial support to Irving's endeavour."*[34] Still on this same day, Pálos sent a communiqué to Jenő Randé at the Foreign Ministry's Press Department: *"The Central Committee's body affected in the matter was of the opinion that it would be expedient to make the books and documents published on the Hungarian counter-revolution available to the British journalist David Irving, and assign a consultant to help him in the work. We recommend Comrade Ervin Hollós as a consultant."*[35] Irving was given the green light.

According to Jenő Randé's report, Irving arrived in Hungary for his second visit on March 9, 1975.[36] This time he stayed only for a few days in order to meet his assigned consultant, Ervin Hollós. Since Hollós was busy, they only met once, on March 12, for dinner at the Hotel Gellért. The Foreign Ministry's interpreter, Erika László, reported that Irving had failed to make a good impression on Hollós. Irving asked Hollós to compile some sort of a list of source documents for his next, longer, visit in the autumn. The report also mentions Irving stating that *"should the Hungarians fail to provide material for his topic, he would probably drop the idea of writing the book altogether."*[37]

There is a hiatus in the documents after this. We know that Irving returned to Hungary on numerous occasions between 1975 and 1979, and conducted several interviews during his stays. He also visited Moscow, where he had a chance to talk to General Batov, who had commanded the strategically very important Sub-Carpathian Military Region during the revolution. The documents held in Hungarian archives, however, shed no light on these trips. We can once again pick up the thread in the summer of 1978. We find Rezső Bányász, at the head of the Foreign Ministry's Press Department at the time, the man who subsequently became the government spokesman. In a letter dated

July 29, 1978, he advised the Agitation and Propaganda Department to sever relations with Irving. Bányász believed that Irving was not a serious writer, and he was not familiar with Hungarian history either. On top of that, Bányász was already aware of the media response generated by his book on Hitler—*"he wrote a book that took a favourable view of Hitler"*—and he also warned of Irving's intention to meet disreputable characters (presumably he was thinking of members of the opposition in 1956). But Pálos still stuck to his earlier decision, pointing out in his brief reply that *"in the matter of the British historian David Irving, we continue to stand by our decision made in January 1975."*[38] Therefore, they continued maintaining contact with Irving. In the autumn of 1978 Irving once again applied for a visa. The London Embassy's report to the Foreign Ministry noted that *"the collection of material for his book on 1956 progresses nicely. He received new material from the USA, including the complete CIA file on Comrade János Kádár, which is approximately 5 centimetres thick and contains everything that the CIA had ever compiled on Comrade János Kádár. The Hungarian authorities will probably be satisfied with the book's tone, because he had obtained the telegraphic correspondence between Radio Free Europe and New York in the said period, which clearly outlines Radio Free Europe's role in the events of 1956."*[39] However, the Foreign Ministry's evaluation on the following day still showed some vacillation: *"Irving's activities and aim are not clear, because they reveal two tendencies: 1) The CIA's hand is in it and they want to leak certain information, the purpose of which is still unclear. 2) If we assume his loyalty to us, then it is possible that he wants to write a book in which he would disclose the intervention of the US agencies in the 1956 counter-revolution. He will write the book, whether we let him in or not, so it makes more sense to let him in and sound out his intentions."* Rezső Bányász summed up what was to be done as follows: *"1) I recommend that we inform Comrade Pálos; 2) My impression is that Irving is leading us on; 3) I, too, feel that we should let him in. The press attaché of our Embassy might ask him privately whether he would be willing to share his material with the Hungarian historians—naturally for the purpose of archiving only, not for publishing at home."*[40]

It was decided, therefore, that for the time being they would not sever contacts with Irving. The only explanation for this is that they were still hoping to get hold of classified western intelligence. Irving himself felt that the trust in him was dwindling away. In a letter sent through the press attaché in London, he once again asked for an interview with Kádár: *"I would like to talk with him for half an hour on general principles concerning the establishment of socialist construction in Hungary, his own widely recognised role in stabilizing and promoting Hungary's positive image at home and in the West, and on other matters; I would leave it to him to decide whether he feels able to discuss the particular episodes around which my book is centred."*

Irving made a definite promise that on this visit he would bring the CIA materials in question. With the letter he also enclosed a document that he had found in Radio Free Europe's archive in Munich. This document is Item 7487/56 (dated July 28, 1956, ten days after Rákosi's removal, describing how Kádár had been tortured in prison.[41]

The London Ambassador János J. Lőrincz warned against complying with the request. In his opinion the interview would merely have served to legitimize statements made in the book. As to the book itself, he set little store by it: *"there might*

be some favourable parts on the role of the Western organizations, but rather sensationalist." And then the recurring dilemma: *"For us the topic of 1956 is inconvenient, regardless of the tone."*[42] Nevertheless, the Hungarians could not bear losing the promised documents. Overturning his earlier, decidedly negative view, Rezső Bányász wrote to Ervin Hollós on March 27, 1979, addressed to the Scientific Socialism Department of the Budapest Technical University. *"Comrade Hollós should meet David Irving (...) and offer to proof-read the manuscript. By this we do not, of course, mean that you should review the English text, but we would like you to sound out Irving about the main message and concept of the book."*[43]

In August 1979 Irving once again applied for a visa. In his cable he raised the question of the interview. By that time Tamás Pálos's response, too, was negative. *"(...) he has already visited Hungary on several occasions, and it has turned out that his views and political statements are confused, and they are not backed up by a serious publisher. Lately he took part in the televised debate about Sándor Kopácsi's book and made negative statements, so much so that KÜM [the Foreign Ministry] has already severed all links with him. On the basis of the above we suggest that you leave the cable unanswered; instead, our Embassy in London should inform him that Comrade Kádár would not be able to see him. KÜM and BM [the Ministry of Interior] should decide whether they would give Irving an entry visa in view of his recent television appearance."*[44]

He got his visa in the end. In September 1979 Irving returned to Hungary once again. Although he did not get to see Kádár, he did meet Ervin Hollós, and he handed him copies of the telegrams that the Budapest Legation of the United States had sent between October 23 and November 4, 1956. In connection with the documents, Rezső Bányász, the head of the Foreign Ministry's Press Department, quarreled with Ervin Hollós. Bányász was resentful that Hollós had failed to hand over the documents to the Foreign Ministry. Hollós retorted that he naturally handed in the documents, but he did so to the appropriate Hungarian official body. Without a shadow of a doubt he was alluding to the Ministry of Interior.[45] ❧

NOTES

1 ■ David Irving: *Uprising!* Hodder and Stoughton, 1981. 628 pp. The book was published in German under the title *Aufstand* the same year.

2 ■ Primarily, the early analyses of Hannah Arendt, Andy Anderson, Nicolas Baudy, Basil Davidson and Martin Illik. See: *1956 kézikönyve* (1956 Handbook) Vol. III. Bibliography. 1956-os Intézet, Budapest, 1996. pp. 16–40 and 51–69. The first historical work on the subject was Bill Lomax's book, which came out in Great Britain in 1976.

3 ■ The fourth cause, the "mistakes" of the Rákosi regime, obviously played a marginal role in Kádár's propaganda.

4 ■ In its article of October 21, 1966, *Die Zeit* wrote about the peaceful coexistence of the party and the people. ("Friedliche Koexistenz ... von Partei und Nation, das ist Ungarn 1966.") Almost the same words were used by *Rheinscher Merkur* ("Ungarn – zehn Jahre danach"): "Es ist keine Liebe und keine Freundschaft, aber ein Arrangement auf der Grundlage des Status Quo – eine friedliche Koexistenz unter dem Druck der Realitäten." On October 22 the American news agency UPI reported that there was no sign of commemorating the revolution on this Saturday. And as to the *Nouvel Observateur,* it commented October 26, 1966 as follows: "Kádár a très vite repris a son compte le programme de Nagy ... moins la neutralité, moins le pluralisme politique, qui est également celui de Gomulka."

5 ■ David Irving: *Uprising!* Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1981. p. 5. The passage is quoted from Leon Trotsky's *The History of the Russian Revolution.*

6 ■ Irving, op.cit. pp. 9–10.

7 ■ Who is who in Hungary. Irving, op.cit. pp. 13–16.

8 ■ See: *Süddeutsche Zeitung,* May 17–18, 1981, p. 11. Showing good judgement, Dietl gives the title of "Anti-Semitic Investigative Journalism" *("Antisemitische Spurensuche")* to his review.

9 ■ See Chapter 5 entitled "The High Profile"; op.cit. pp. 45–50.

10 ■ Irving, op.cit. p. 48.

11 ■ Here, too, the subtitle in the German edition was modified to read "One Nation's Tragedy". The anti-Semitic line, and its absurdity, was discussed by two contemporary reviewers. George Schöpflin: "Revolution as Melodrama." *Times Literary Supplement,* April 3, 1981; and Kai Bird–Bill Lomax: "The Secret Policemen's Historian. Apologist for Hitler; Apologist for Soviet Repression". *New Statesman,* April 3, 1981.

12 ■ This claim was a recurrent element in the Kádár regime's portrayal of the counter-revolution. It also comes up in the Ministry of the Interior's secret folder entitled "Az 1956-os ellenforradalom az állambiztonsági munka tükrében" (The Counter-revolution of 1956 in the Light of the State Security Operations), and consequently in several other publications of the Kádár period. This concept served two purposes: on the one hand it tried to defame Imre Nagy by suggesting that he was no different from Gerő and the rest of the Stalinists, and on the other hand, it showed how cunningly Imre Nagy tried to disguise his counter-revolutionary conspiracy even at the last minute by pretending to support the Party's cause.

13 ■ Irving, op.cit. p. 372. Imre Nagy represented as a puppet on a string or a Trojan horse was also a favourite theme of the Kádárian propaganda.

14 ■ Irving, op.cit. pp. 396, 397.

15 ■ Irving, op.cit. p. 452.

16 ■ Irving, op.cit. pp. 425, 427. Kádár never visited Mező at his deathbed.

17 ■ Irving, op.cit. p. 443.

18 ■ See the chapter *Colonel Kopácsi shrugs again,* op.cit. pp. 405–422.

19 ■ Irving, op.cit. p. 78. This is, of course, a lie.

20 ■ It was in 1989, precisely after Imre Nagy's reburial, that Károly Grósz received "information" from the KGB chief Valery Khruychkhov (one of the leaders of the attempted neo-Bolshevik coup in Moscow in August 1991) that as an agent of OGPU, Imre Nagy sent several of his comrades to the gallows in Moscow in the 1930s. Therefore, he was no different from all the other Stalinists. The available sources do not support Khruychkhov's (and Grósz's) claims. On the relationship between Imre Nagy and the Soviet state security forces, see János M. Rainer: *Nagy Imre. Politikai életrajz* (Imre Nagy. A Political Biography) Vol. I., the chapter entitled "Dossziék" (Files). 1956-os Intézet, Budapest, 1996. pp. 199–212.

21 ■ Naturally, access to these sources was limited to those who had been able to obtain permission from the authorities.

22 ■ The documents related to Irving's activities in Hungary can be found among the classified papers of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry and the documents of the HSWP CC (the Party's Central Committee) Propaganda and Agitation Department. I should like to call attention to two important sets of documents that have the papers related to Irving more or less in one place. Magyar Országos Levéltár, Külügyminisztérium, TÜK iratok (Hungarian National Archives, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, TÜK [Top Secret] papers): XIX-J-1-j/1978, box no. 27, file no. 003449/2 (title David Irving újabb beutazása—David Irving's Recent Visit); and MSZMP Agitációs és Propagandaosztály 1974-es iratai (1974 Papers of the Agitation and Propaganda Department), 228f. 22. cs. őe (file no. 001643/1974, Memos to Comrade Grósz).

23 ■ Gábor Göbölyös's memo to Tamás Pálos. HSWP Agit.Prop. 1974, 288 f. 22. cs. 29 őe. pp.13-14. Göbölyös refers to a letter sent by the HSWP CC Agitációs és Propagandaosztály in 1973, marked Ag.276/2.

24 ■ Af/276/2/1973.

25 ■ Göbölyös' memo, ibid.

26 ■ Lajos M. Lőrincz, head of the department, sent a memo to Tamás Pálos on August 9, 1973: "Protesting against Shawcross' book at the FCO." They called the attention of the British to the point that the publication of the book would be "injurious to the Hungarian political and public leadership and the feelings of the entire Hungarian people, in view of the respect and popularity that surrounds János Kádár both as a human being and as a political leader." The

Hungarian side threatened to sabotage the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, should the book be published. The British turned down the appeal saying that they had no means to prevent the book's publication. 288.ff.cs.27 őe./1973/ pp. 86–90. See also among the Foreign Ministry's TÜK papers: XIX-J-I-j/1973, box 24., 6-81/002314 (hostile British press campaign); furthermore, see 6-816/ 002587/4-ig (Comrade Kádár in the British press); also, XIX-J-I-j/1974/ box 21. 6-816/ 00952/2-ig. Shawcross' book on Comrade Kádár).

27 ■ Ambassador Vencel Házi's letter dated October 9, 1974. 001643/1/1974. XIX-J-I-j/1978.

28 ■ See the above folder.

29 ■ See introductory commentary in folder marked XIX-J-I-j/1978/.003449/2.

30 ■ One of the aims of the five-volume propaganda book, which was published in 1957 (also in English, German and French so as to sway international opinion), was to influence and counter-balance the study and report carried out by the United Nations' Committee No. 5. *Ellenforradalmi erők a magyar októberi eseményekben* (Counter-revolutionary Forces in the October Events in Hungary), A Magyar Népköztársaság Minisztertanácsa Tájékoztatási Hivatala, Budapest, 1957.

31 ■ This is a reference to the book by the official party historian János Molnár *Ellenforradalom Magyarországon 1956-ban* (Counter-revolution in Hungary in 1956), Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1967; and to the book by János Berecz (Secretary of the Central Committee and Politburo member in the 1980s): *Ellenforradalom tollal és fegyverrel* (Counter-revolution with Pen and with Arms), Kossuth Kiadó, Budapest, 1967.

32 ■ Letter to Comrade Kornidesz, Ag. 154/2/1974. In: 288 f. 22. cs. 29 őe. p. 18.

33 ■ Memo to Comrade Grósz. ibid. pp. 20-21.

34 ■ For a reference to this see file XIX-J-I-j/1978.

35 ■ Ag. 154/5. January 7, 1975. In: XIX-J-I-j/1978 box 27, 003449/2.

36 ■ Document 00375 from the file 003449/2, box 27 of XIX-J-I-j/1978.

37 ■ Ibid.

38 ■ Both letters can be found in the file XIX-J-L-j/1978/.

39 ■ KÜM, Sajtófőosztály (Foreign Ministry, Press Department). 003449/2, October 18, 1978.

40 ■ Memo by Kovács and Bányász, dated October 19, 1978, ibid.

41 ■ Irving's letter to Bánlaki, the press attaché of the London Embassy, dated January 30, 1979. XIX-J-I-j/1979/ box 24. (The original copy of the Item enclosed by Irving can be found in the Open Society Archive, Budapest, '56 Items.) János Kádár, who succeeded László Rajk as Minister of the Interior after the latter became foreign minister, and was arrested in April 1951 on Rákosi's orders. He was in prison until 1954 without being charged, tried or sentenced. To the best of our knowledge he was not tortured. The aim of the gesture is clear: Irving wanted to prove that he did have access to valuable western intelligence material. At the same time, he also wanted to show that he was aware of the fact that Kádár had suffered under the Rákosi regime, and that he believed the story, thus demonstrating that he meant to give an unbiassed picture, not wishing to equate Kádár's role in 1956 with the terror of the 1950s.

The Item tells the well-known legend about ripping Kádár's fingernails. The information is said to have come from "a confidential source". Here is the brief report:

"János Kádár left the ÁVH prison physically mutilated. During the investigation his fingers were "sharpened". The fingernails on his left hand are missing. The torture—allegedly on Mihály Farkas' direct orders—was carried out in the cruellest possible manner.

At the moment Kádár is regarded as the destined leader of Rákosi's opposition within the MDP. His closest followers have been recruited from the rehabilitated victims of Stalinism.

In addition to the group formed by the victims of Stalinism, there are two main groups within the Hungarian Workers' Party. Naturally, Rákosi's removal from office did not put an end to the group of orthodox Muscovites, whose members had played a prominent role in serving the Stalinist course.

The other main faction of the Party is formed by the secret followers of the Imre Nagy line, who were able to stay within the ranks of the Party only because after Imre Nagy's fall they practised self-criticism and swore loyalty to the Party's official line.

The Kádár group and Imre Nagy's followers are at the moment in the majority in the party leadership against the orthodox Muscovites."

The evaluation by Radio Free Europe's analysts is very interesting: "The tortures inflicted upon Kádár are UNCONFIRMED, but consistent with general information available here on the cruel investigation methods of the political police. It is anybody's guess whether Kádár might be the leader of the anti-Rákosi faction of the Party. However, this information is not supported by any specific argument. The statement about the orthodox Muscovite faction within the Party and about the "secret followers" of Imre Nagy are obvious speculation on the present political situation within the Party."

Irving's choice was deliberate. The report not only describes Kádár's torture, but it also states that he and his followers were the real victims and the real opposition force of Rákosi, rather than the opportunist Imre Nagy group, whose members swore loyalty to the Party. Incidentally, Kádár always denied the rumour that he had been tortured, but the story formed part of the "whisper propaganda", playing an important part in proving that Kádár himself was a victim of the regime, rather than the successor of the Rákosi regime.

42 ■ János J. Lőrincz's letter dated February 21, 1979, ibid.

43 ■ Ibid. Document 00177/1/1979.

44 ■ Memo to Comrade Győri. Letter no. Ag/611/2, 288f. 22 cs. 3 őe./1979/, p. 178. The television programme was probably devoted to former Budapest police chief Sándor Kopácsy's book published in 1979 in Paris under the title *Au nom de la classe ouvrière.* The document fails to specify what the Hungarian objection had been to Irving's comments.

45 ■ Rezső Bányász's letter dated October 2, 1979. In: XIX-J-1-i/1979/box 24.

Tim Wilkinson

Tangles with History

An English Reader's Notes on Recent Hungarian Writing

László Márton: *Árnyas főutca* (Shady High Street). Budapest, Jelenkor, 147 pp.
Endre Kukorelly: *Rom, a Szovjetónió története* (Ruin, A History of the Soviet Onion). Budapest, Jelenkor, 122 p. • Lajos Parti Nagy: *Hősöm tere* (My Heroe's Square). Budapest, Magvető, 184 pp.
Péter Esterházy: *Harmonia Cœlestis*. Budapest, Magvető, 712 pp.

Whether a text is categorized as history, biography, personal memoir, fiction or poetry, the boundaries between these genres are fluid and intimately bound up with changing attitudes to personal and public identities and hence responsibilities. These are particularly turbid and often choppy waters to negotiate if one happens to live under an authoritarian régime, whatever its stripe—political, social or commercial. All four authors reviewed here were born in the 1950s—three before the turning point of Hungary's 1956 uprising, Márton a few years later—so all began their literary careers in the relatively benign climate of Kádárist "goulash" Communism. They also played more or less conspicuous parts in exploiting the limits of what was permissible, subverting officially approved "socialist realist" stereotypes and offering fresh approaches to the constructions of "reality", history and tradition. The new discourses that were opened up by these literary strategies helped prepare the ground for the country's non-violent 1989–90 change of régime. The framework may have shifted since then, but identity, in one or another of its protean facets, is an issue for writers in all societies, including—perhaps especially so—those with nominally democratic and largely free-market institutions, as this clutch of recent works corroborates.

In his previous novel, *The True History of Jacob Wunschwitz* (1997), László Márton explored seemingly obscure ructions in the Lower Lusatian town of Guben at the opening of the 17th century. *Shady High Street* takes on a subject that many older Hungarians, like their neighbours in Austria and elsewhere, would prefer to suppress from their consciousness: the conditions under which it was possible for the SS and their local helpers to round up and exterminate the Jewish populations of territories under their control. Through the device of imagining a virtual collection of photographs of individuals in an anonymous (but identifiable) town, situated in the area close to what is now Hungary's border with Slovakia along the Danube,

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and by compressing a decade of events up to early 1945 into an imaginary single day, Márton deftly outlines a gallery of characters and incidents to impart a sense of the mundane cruelties and absurdities of the gathering tragedy that led to almost all the 400,000 Hungarians of Jewish descent who were then living in the provinces being wiped out at Auschwitz within a bare six weeks from 15th May to 7th July 1944). Two main characters, both female, serve to link the various strands of the narrative: photographer's assistant Gaby Gőz, who survives the war in a "safe house" in the Budapest ghetto, and Aranyka ("Goldie") Roth, a clever schoolgirl, who is given the gruesomely ironic task of mediating both the official Christian-nationalist ideology of that era and also, in ghostly afterlife, a Judaic counterblast in the form of Old Testament texts relating to the feast of Purim. References to emblematic contemporary texts, such as Ortega y Gasset's *The Revolt of the Masses,* the works of the popular ultraconservative author Ferenc Herczeg, as well as well-known popular songs, but it is the rhetoric of poet Sándor Petőfi, "heroic" activist of Hungary's 1848-49 revolution and a hollow totem figure for régimes ever since, which is subjected to the most withering attack. The book ends at a local fair in the summer of 1944, with a chilling reference to its programme and a wrenching jump-cut to the present: "Patriotic songs, air-defence exercises, folk dance. Open-air holy service, to be conducted by Father Kelemen Király (sometime König)... who is... about to go off to Berlin... At the parsonage on Hildegard Strasse, a hundred paces from the place where we are writing these lines in the early autumn of 1998, he will later receive Ferenc Szálasi... and will express his approval of the latter's religious zeal and selflessness. 'I was drawn to the compelling conclusion,' he would later write, in the early Seventies, "that I was dealing with a man of noble spirit and pure intentions.'" (Szálasi, the Arrow Cross leader, came to power in October 1944 and was hanged after the war as a war-criminal.) Not surprisingly, the book has touched more than a few raw nerves since its publication.

The uncomfortable message of Márton's book—that few of us can escape a share of responsibility, however slight, for the evil that is done in our times—applies equally to Endre Kukorelly's *Ruin,* though here the confrontation is with the shades of a more recent past. The wry twist of the long "o" in the book's punning subtitle—"A History of the Soviet Onion", as it were—has nothing to do with vegetables, or at most only rotten ones: in Hungarian it has connotations of "antiquated", "obsolete", "clapped out". The decrepitude of the Communist's material world is the least of the targets of the 23 laconic, mostly untitled homilies, bearing various dates between February 1987 and April 2000. They are incandescently scathing and unforgiving reactions to its sheer spiritual bankruptcy, as sparked by Kukorelly's recollections of events in his own life—childhood; the obligatory spell as an army conscript in the wake of the Czech events of 1968; a three-week holiday in the fabled West (London, Paris) in 1978; visits to the Soviet Union in the early 1980s—but more particularly his encounters with a wide range of illustrative texts. The deepest scorn is directed at fellow-travelling writers, with the biggest punch being consigned to a ghastly "Coda". Under the ominous mark of the number 666, this responds to a line from a 1950 poem by Zoltán Zelk, then one of the most servile lackeys of the Stalinist régime ("Comrade, what else should I weave into my song") by assembling a series of short verses concerning a death sentence passed by a "people's tribunal", a

prisoner's reflections, a search for contraband in a peasant's barn, and a wife's letter to the military authorities enquiring about the fate of a husband condemned to death in 1949. The anger is so all-consuming, not even sparing the author himself, one is left wondering how any identity could survive it.

Lajos Parti Nagy, like Kukorelly, made his initial reputation as a poet before turning to stage plays and prose, achieving considerable success with a 1994 collection of short stories, A Swell on Lake Balaton, which linked an ear for plausible slang coinages to a facility for inventing engagingly sardonic offbeat plot motifs. His first novel, My Hero's Place, employs similar ingredients to tell a bizarre story of how pigeons organize under the umbrella of a Palomist Life Movement to take over power from humans in Budapest during 1999. It starts promisingly enough as what reads like a mystery or sci-fi thriller, with neighbours mysteriously disappearing from the author's apartment near Heroes' Square in Budapest, a trio of homeless down-and-outs finding themselves inflated to the size of the Parliament building, and so forth. However, the second part veers off into the "inside" story of how Caesar Tubica ("Squab"), a columbine scientist, has discovered a method of xenotransplantation that enables him to turn humans into "racial comrades", and uses the author's alter ego as his first guinea-pig, so to speak. The bulk of the book is told in a series of implausibly discursive e-mail messages from the "altered" ego, dated between Friday 28 May and Wednesday 10 November, as assembled and commented upon by the author on the eve of 6 December, the festival of "Pure Wheat". The plot is self-conscious enough to incorporate the character of Kálmán (who achieved minor celebrity as a professional competition eater) from the title piece of the earlier short-story volume, but the device of an author claiming to lose control of the creatures of his own fantasy is a recurrent novelistic conceit. Wittily crafted as Parti Nagy's language is, it is hard to take this as the telling satire of modern-day Hungarian mores claimed by the dust-cover. One does not imagine anyone flinching under the attack, least of all the racist bully-boys of the Hungarian ultra-right. More a turkey than a truly airborne creation: an awkward hybrid of Animal Farm and Clockwork Orange, but without the concentration and bite of either.

No doubts about the last author, who was widely recognized as the most influential Hungarian writer when still in his thirties. Esterházy's book is wilful, exuberant, plagiarising, eccentric and humane. It delights in its fiction, freely acknowledging the conversation that joins author and reader, and using every device that late 20th-century critics label post-modernist. Esterházy is also a slyly self-conscious cultivator of kindly feelings. At a first reading, *Harmonia cœlestis** is a work of two equal but very disparate halves. Book 1, a sequence of 371 "Numbered Sentences from the Life of the Esterházy Family", is an apparently rag-tag collection of unlinked passages on a vast miscellany of topics, only a minority of which mention the Esterházys, whilst Book 2, subtitled "Confessions of an Esterházy Family", looks like reminiscences of key events in the early life of the author and his more immediate family forebears, presented in a series of 201 passages (also numbered), organized in nine chapters. As with everything from Esterházy's pen (he famously

* ■ The book was reviewed by Miklós Györffy in *HQ* 159.

eschews use of a typewriter let alone a computer), nothing can be taken at face value, as indeed the very first sentence hints ("It's a bitch having to lie, if one does not know the truth").

Few of the "sentences" of Book I are actually sentences, though typographical enhancement of the final punctuation point of each passage is intended to reinforce that appearance. Some texts relay what purport to be documentary fragments of the family's history—for instance, a 10-page extract from "an eighteenth-century Hungarian-language inventory, in five books, of my father's chattels"—as well as a string of anecdotes about the family and its most prominent retainers, wrinkled or otherwise, such as one about "my father", disgruntled at being obliged by two visiting English lords to invite Joseph Haydn to join them at the princely dining table: "On a sudden notion (in revenge), my father cancelled the devilled kidneys that had been intended for supper but could be said to be fatal for a gout sufferer like Haydn... (That proves how well we treated Haydn)." Most readers will come across passages that sound maddeningly familiar, such as a twist on Schrödinger's thought-experiment ("Schrödinger enclosed my father in a solid-walled box..."), or which they can place with some certainty, such as the wickedly funny short story about the execution of "the young Esterházy", which has been appropriated, and not for the first time, from Danilo Kiš. More than likely, every one of the "sentences" can be pinned to a quotation from some printed source or another, suitably shaped to the author's name and purpose, as one might guess from the explanation of the book's overall title. As we are told early on, this is taken from a collection of religious works published under Prince Nicholas Esterházy's name in 1711, but modern research has shown that a fair number of the tunes and probably the compositions themselves "can be surmised to be not by him (or not him alone)." Indeed, but what we are not told is that the Esterházy in question was a Prince Paul.

Quoted documents also figure in Book 2, not the least of which purport to be extensive extracts from the memoirs of the grandfather, Count Móric Esterházy (he briefly held office as Hungarian premier in 1917). The bare facts of a transit document, dated 16 July 1951, by which the lorry removing the infant Esterházy, his parents and their worldly goods to internal exile in the village of Hort in north-eastern Hungary (with the elderly grandparents travelling by car in convoy), are fleshed out by a saga of what actually happened *en route* and after their arrival at the house of "kulak" farmer Simon and his wife, "Aunt" Rozi, into one of whose two rooms the four adults and infant were billeted. There is much about the father's experiences as a manual labourer (potato picking, road laying, etc.) as well as young Esterházy's memories of playing and going to school with other village kids, the family's return to Budapest after 1956, secondary school, and army service. It is all told with an exquisitely aristocratic flippancy that deliberately makes light of what were often desperately difficult days for them, as for much of the population: "Early on I thought that my name would simply work like an anecdote. Nothing bad can happen in a Hungarian anecdote." Filling in a form that asks for details of parents' and grandparents' occupations, for instance, he writes "landowner" but then finds the space is not big enough to specify how much land they held (we have learned already that they owned some 80,000 acres). The account tails off in the 1960s with a description of the Esterházy family hilariously masquerading as (West) German tourists as they take advantage of the

tourist coupon given by a relative to dine at one of Budapest's first-class restaurants, where they out-bluff a fawning head waiter who attempts to palm them off with distinctly unfresh frogs' legs.

Authentically as it reads, one needs to note that Book 2 is prefaced by a warning that "the characters in this romantic biography are fictitious characters... and do not, never did, live in reality". The reminiscences are interwoven by a continuing proliferation of anecdotes about long-dead Esterházys, and many of the stories have suspicious echoes of the fragments of Book 1. The discernible unifying theme is nothing less than a sustained and devastatingly inspired assault on the near-universal patriarchal ordering of life. There is no enormity so base, venal, heinous or bizarre to which a father—and especially an Esterházy father—will not stoop: "In the 18th century my father killed religion, in the 19th century—God, and in the 20th century—man." The very figure of the father is at best ridiculous, including his sexual organs: "In the 'at rest' position—no shame here, it's a matter of fact—they are small, shrivelled, and easily concealed in bathing suits and other pants..." (this is part of a witty reprise of an already uproariously funny "Manual for Sons", translated from the German by Peter Tatterpatter, which may be familiar to aficionados of "experimental" American literature of the seventies). Even the most disturbingly enigmatic statements yield to such a reading: "By my father's lights, with minor reservations, life is wonderful. For by my father's lights the normal, natural, obvious thing is to die in Auschwitz... What is not normal, not natural, in other words miraculous, is not to die in Auschwitz. It is equally not normal, not natural, and therefore miraculous, not to end up in Auschwitz (in other words, to die or not die in not-Auschwitz)". Here one must recognize a passage from *Kaddish for the Unborn Child,* a haunting meditation by fellow-Hungarian novelist Imre Kertész on the reasons for choosing not to be a father.

There may be a harmony in heaven, and the planet may be well enough, provided a man could be born in it to a great title or to a great estate, but that is not the fate of most who do not belong to the species *esterházy europaeus.* Yet lesser mortals are here granted the privilege of savouring comic writing of the highest order. This really is the great Hungarian novel that the world has been waiting for since time immemorial: a chronicle of its times, sociological description, a conspectus of problems that currently bug us, a satire, a philosophical book. For all that, it is not a book in search of cheap success, and whether it is seen as a light or heavy read depends entirely on the reader. It is, in any event, a masterpiece that one hopes will soon find its way into English, whilst praying it will be handled by someone fully equal to the task. ❧

Mátyás Sárközi

Steep Are the Stairs

The Right to Sanity. A Victor Határ Reader. Budapest, Corvina, 400 pp. 3000 Ft.
ISBN 963 13 4819 9

"An enormous output of work!" was the reaction recently of one of Victor Határ's reviewers in a Budapest literary weekly. He went on to say that, for historical reasons, readers in Hungary were unable to follow the year by year growth of this oeuvre, for the emigré writer's books were banned in the country of his birth. However, in 1990, all of a sudden, volumes of prose, dazzling poetry, dozens of plays and his essays in philosophy became available, and the Budapest critic felt overwhelmed by this deluge. He complained that since the collapse of Communism there is now such an abundance of Határ's works on the market that it is difficult to read them all. And he added: "What shall we do with the equally large number of his books published in English?"

To put the young Hungarian reviewer's mind at rest, this new selection of poetry, drama and prose is Határ's first ever book in English, and at that it was published in Budapest, by Corvina. Its purpose is to show the author's extraordinary talents and his unique capabilities to the world. The question is, however, whether this handsomely produced book will lead to international recognition for its author, and to his discovery by a foreign readership.

As no editor is credited for the book, we have to presume that the author made the selection himself, choosing five short stories, five excerpts from his novels, eight examples of his philosophical writings, fifteen poems and a one-act play. Given his huge oeuvre, the rights and wrongs of the selection could be discussed at length. But would any kind of selection open the way to Határ's international acclaim?

The first fifty-eight pages of the volume are taken up by a foreword-cum-autobiography, under the not entirely fortunate title of "My Dear Diary". This describes the author's arrival in Britain, and his subsequent settling-in and self-acclimatizing himself. A main dillemma is whether he can consider himself an "Englishman *à titre d'honneur*"? Határ arrived in England in 1956, at the age of 42, already established as an author in Hungary. Since then he spent more years than that in his country of adoption, a reason for considering him fairly Anglicized. But to his *Diary* he

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confesses his doubts: "The more my mind, my nerves, my digestive system became adapted to the English milieu—to the cadence of the language and the rhythm of everyday life on these Isles, the more I learnt about Anglo-Saxon literature, the more I became steeped in various idioms, slangs and dialects, proverbs and archaisms, cockney-isms and body-language—the more the sad truth dawned on me that there was a supreme, near-metaphysical barrier in literature that was as good as insuperable for me."

Of course, the Englishman *"à titre d'honneur",* with his selection of wide-brimmed artist's hats, and outlandishly long coats is the epitome of the "continental gentleman", as he takes his daily constitutional along the streets of Wimbledon, muttering lines of poetry or wisdom into his pocket dictaphone. In Határ's writing one can feel a shade of English influence. The way he creates the structure of his prose (incidently, he is a trained architect) has something in common with the Victorian Gothic of George Gilbert Scott, and the dated elegance of Határ's style brings to mind the mock-Edwardian reverberations in the poetry of John Betjeman. Which shows that one cannot live for thirty years in a large red-brick house (a "mini-château", according to the writer) on the fringes of London, in the ever-so-English urban village of Wimbledon, without some effect of this Englishness imposing itself.

"My affinity to David Hume, to Coleridge, to Sterne, the Sitwells, Joyce, to J.B. Cabell is greater than to anyone of the 'classics' of my old country," states Határ in his foreword. To Sterne, whose *Tristram Shandy* and *Sentimental Journey* he had brilliantly translated into Hungarian before he left Hungary? To Coleridge and the Sitwells? Yes. To Joyce? In the sense of dazzling linguistic virtuosity. To much forgotten Cabell? Perhaps a great deal. Cabell was chided in his own time for the "opulent monotony of his decorative manner". These words would admirably describe Határ's prose, but for the very notable difference of his surrealist playfulness. In France, where foreign writers have always been taken more seriously than in Britain, this has had its effect. During the 1960s and 1970s there was a ray of hope that Victor Határ's prose would be given some recognition by certain French literary circles. In 1963 Julliard published the love-story "Pepito et Pepita", which prompted Alain Bosquet to discuss what he called "the Rococo of Victor Hatar" in *Le Monde.*

In 1970 Határ's most easy-flowing novel, *Anibel,* was brought out by Denoël, followed by *Archie Dumbarton,* a "metaphysical" story, intended to demonstrate the author's successful metamorphosis into Englishness. In reality an overwritten, dense text, too clever by half to be digestable. These books, however, secured Határ's entry into the *Grande Larousse,* and for a while his works were discussed at conferences devoted to Surrealism. (Not without reason: Határ's work is often determined by the subconscious. He even claims that chunks of his fiction and some of his poems are based on actual dreams. Of course, Surrealism is not quite the English reader's cup of tea, and Joyce or Beckett only get away with it through the fact of their being Irish.

The curious mixture that makes up Határ's style, his quasi pre-Raphaelism kneaded with the thoughts of a philosophical mind, does not make easy reading even in Hungarian. But in his native tongue he is able to give all his texts, prose or verse, *belles lettres* or non-literary essays, a certain rhythm and an almost musical cadence. In his poetry this musicality is coupled with sensibility, an element which is generally missing from his prose. There-

fore, it seems to me that Victor (or, in Hungarian, Győző) Határ's verse is more likely to be taken up by posterity than his novels and stories. In this new anthology there are, perhaps, too many of his prose-poems, but the selection, all in all is fairly satisfactory, and George Szirtes, István Tótfalusi and Péter Zollman were succesful in rendering Határ's subtlety into versions of equal worth.

Határ sees his opportunity for international recognition in a wittily anachronistic historical novel, with overt references to our own age and times, and some added snippets of philosophy. To this end, he wrote the story of Julian the Apostate, investigating the origins of Christianity and attacking Pauline dogma. This six-hundred page novel carries Határ's hopes for world recognition, and in *My Dear Diary,* composed for the Frankfurt Book Fair and not without some self-promotion, he mentions that some trustworthy readers of the Hungarian version had expressed regret that the book has not been written in English, "as it has the stuff of a popular paperback in it". Therefore he suggests that an enterprising publisher needs no more than to get hold of a good translator and success will be guaranteed. This last remark can be taken as a sign of dissatisfaction concerning the existing English translation, produced by the late G. F. Cushing, Professor of Hungarian at London University and a classical scholar. Judged by the excerpts from *Turncoat Destiny,* the *Youth of Julian the Apostate,* in this anthology, it is not Professor Cushing's fault that the heavy text, full of names and unexplained classical terms, is somewhat on the boring side.

This brings us to the book's section of philosophy, containing a brilliant essay, *The Right to Sanity.* Victor Határ, in interviews, has repeatedly pointed out that he considers himself first and foremost a philosopher. His encyclopaedic knowledge is impressive, and when he writes on philosophy he is in his element. Yes, he is verbose. He is definitely not aiming for any no-nonsense simplicity, that he leaves to people like Bertrand Russell. There is a cascade of fine words to charm the reader and, apart from esoteric flashes, among the garnishing there are some interesting original thoughts. Határ's attacks on the Churches are obviously heart-felt, and his concern over the dangers posed by Islam fundamentalism is genuine.

Around the corner, within a stone's throw from my house in Hampstead, there is a small café called The Coffee Cup. In my batchelor days I used to spend many hours there, chatting with friends. A stocky old man came in almost every day, ordered a lemon tea, rumaged in his large briefcase, pulled out sheets of paper and went on correcting hand-written texts, crossing out and adding lines. Some said that he was Bulgarian, others maintained that he was a refugee from Nazi Germany, a great writer, who had been unable to place his novels with English publishers. One day his photograph stared out at us from every newspaper: Elias Canetti, in his old age, had been awarded the Nobel Prize.

World recognition sometimes comes late. In Sándor Márai's case it was posthumous. We cannot foretell what will happen to Victor Határ's extraordinary oeuvre. Now a selection of his works is available in English. Not an ideal selection, not always showing him in the most favourable light, and the book is only available in Hungary. But, one hopes that, somehow or other, it may get into the right hands, and someone, with an ear for the cadence of Határ's luxuriant texts, will take a special interest in giving them to the world. ❧

Kálmán Ruttkay

What is What and What Isn't

István Bart: *Angol–Magyar Kulturális Szótár.* (An English-Hungarian Cultural Dictionary.) Budapest, Corvina, 1998. 272 pp.

Scepticism seems to be an occupational disease of lexicographers. The late Professor Országh once remarked that if you had been long engaged in dictionary-making you would doubt even that *book* meant *könyv*; and the great Russian linguist of the first half of the 20th century, L. V. Shcherba, himself a lexicographer, went so far as to claim that a bilingual dictionary ought to be a bilingual explanatory dictionary, listing headwords in one language, supplying definitions, not equivalents, in another. The hypothetically ideal formula of "one word—one equivalent" simply does not work, and in cases of emergency a lexicographer must resort in practice to Shcherba's principle.

Nor is the consumer of dictionaries free from the contagion of lexicographical scepticism. If he happens to be a *gourmet* who enjoys reading dictionaries, he will not be put off by occasionally having to go through long definitions instead of one-word equivalents. But if he cannot afford such luxury, and must use a dictionary as a practical tool, life will be hard for him. The translator—the user *par excellence*—may find that sometimes an innocent-looking piece of text can cause him headaches. A sentence like "The Attorney-General had haggis for dinner" does not even look innocent, and while haggis presents the most obvious difficulty, the rest of the sentence is not simple either. In a bilingual dictionary, also called a translator's dictionary, (which should be for our present purpose the latest version of Országh's *English–Hungarian Dictionary* (1960) completely reworked by Tamás Magay, published as a "first edition" in 1998, to be referred to henceforth as Országh-Magay), he will find that in Britain the Attorney-General is something like our *legfőbb államügyész*, ("supreme state attorney") while, if he is American, his rank should be rendered as *igazságügy-miniszter* (minister of justice"). How accurate these equivalents are need not bother the translator, as long as the Hungarian word fits the text he produces, and the Attorney-General eats his haggis in a piece of fiction, and does

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not function in his official capacity in a specialist study.

Dinner presents difficulties of a different kind. Országh–Magay explains it in pointed brackets which indicate a "definition of the word when there is no equivalent in Hungarian", that it is the main meal of the day eaten at noon or in the evening, and accordingly we have two equivalents also: *ebéd* and *vacsora.* Since dining at noon is a provincial or lower-class custom, the Attorney-General's *dinner* must be an evening meal, a *vacsora,* which, however, fails to make clear that it is the main meal of the day and what social implications *dinner* has.

Haggis is, of course, a far more critical case. It has not found its way onto international plates and menu cards, as say, *pizza* has and which, therefore, need not be translated. In Országh–Magay *haggis* is *skót nemzeti étel: erősen fűszerezett vagdalt aprólékkal és zabliszttel töltött birkagyomor* ("A Scottish national dish: lamb's stomach stuffed with spicy minced scraps and oatmeal"), something too long for an Attorney-General to eat in Hungarian. Seeing that the difficulties of all three words in my sample sentence are, broadly speaking, cultural, the translator might be relieved to find István Bart's *English–Hungarian Cultural Dictionary.* However, it will not be long before he must realize that this is not a dictionary for him, even though he can receive a great deal of valuable additional information from it; e.g. that haggis is an indispensable feature of the Burns' Night Celebrations, and also that it is traditional to frighten the English with it, who generally find the dish disgusting. The entry contains a complete recipe in English which will enable the translator to cook a "culturally" authentic, even edible dish of haggis, but it will not take him closer to a serviceable Hungarian word.

Mr Bart bluntly tells us that we should not look, in his dictionary, for words the meaning of which can be found in traditional bilingual word-books; what he is interested in is notions, phenomena, objects and their lingual counterparts, commonplaces, beliefs, nursery rhymes, characters of tales, popular sayings, well-known quotes etc., familiar to all native speakers who understand and use them as a matter of course, while foreigners find them, very often, merely allusive and puzzling. It is precisely the sum total of these, says Mr Bart, that constitutes the culture of everyday life; it is these that make up the British form of life, and draw its "lingual map". What he is relating is not two words, not even two languages, but two cultures, and he dedicates his work to Dr Ebeneezer Cobham Brewer and George Mikes, authors of *A Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* and *How to be an Alien* respectively, "the inspiring sources of this work."

Bearing all this in mind, I am somewhat puzzled, for more reasons than one. Mr Bart can be spectacularly inconsistent on occasion, e.g. when, not observing the guidelines he has set for himself, he includes the entry **PTO please turn over (fordíts),** something we can find, treated more exhaustively in Ország–Magay as *"PTO röv please turn over, fordíts, ford., 1. a következő oldalon".* Or must we have the Apostles' Creed, particularly in an entry deficient and redundant at the same time? Mr Bart defines it as *"a Hiszekegy' ("Hiszek egy Istenben, mindenható Atyában...") a keresztényi hit kinyilvánításának imája: I believe in God, the Father Almighty...".* In Országh–Magay we find *"az apostoli hitvallás, hiszekegy".* Do we need more? Is Mr Bart's much longer article essentially more informative?

It is unfair to criticize a dictionary for containing more than can be expected of it in keeping with its compiler's principles,

as long as our legitimate demands are met. But this is not quite the case here. E.g. from the abbreviation **PTA** an arrow directs us to **parent-teacher association** under which we have" **(PTA → a 'szülői munkaközösségnek' (SzMK) megfelelő szervezet)** ("an organization corresponding to the parents' panel"). The arrow is obviously out of place here, but this can be dismissed as a minor technical blunder. However, if PTO, an example already quoted, can be handled neatly and economically, with the abbreviation written out in full and explained in Hungarian "on the spot", without directing the Hungarian user to another headword, I cannot see why the same could not be done to PTA which, in terms of lexicographical techniques, does not differ from PTO. More important is the question: how far does this entry illustrate one of Mr Bart's professed intentions, that of relating one culture to another? I know little of what a Hungarian *"szülői munkaközösség"* ("parents' panel") does, and absolutely nothing of the activities of the English PTA; but I guess that there must be differences between them, being products of two different educational and social systems. If there are such differences, they ought to be pointed out; if there are none, **PTA** has no place in Mr Bart's dictionary.

There is no such thing as an absolutely perfect dictionary, but, I am afraid, the mistakes of this one seem preponderant. This is not to deny that quite a number of its entries are real gems in every respect, e.g. **pub,** an "English institution to be found even in the smallest village which has no continental counterpart". What is called an "English pub" on the Continent, Mr Bart aptly warns us, "resembles it only in its Disneyland trappings." We are informed in detail of what a pub is not, and the translator is sufficiently discouraged from choosing *"kocsma"*, one of the two equivalents in Országh–Magay, while the other, *"kisvendéglő"* ("small restaurant"), is tacitly ignored. The translator may resent the cruel trick Mr Bart plays on him when he almost offers him a solution: "it could be, perhaps, called, more than anything, a *"söröző"* ("beer-house") but then this has a German flavour." On the whole, the article, dealing with its subject both descriptively and historically, is a most informative, comprehensive, well-written, eminently readable mini-essay.

Another, "culturally" very English subject, **tea** receives a similarly thorough, informative treatment, and Mr Bart can display his interest in the social, or sociogastronomical aspects of his topic when he speaks of the alternatives of pouring in your tea first, and the milk afterwards, as is done in "better" circles, or in the reverse order which is "lower-class", but is alleged to produce a better flavour. He mentions that the spread of coffee has been detrimental to the custom of drinking tea, and some of its cultural manifestations; "even the custom of the **→ early morning cuppa** drunk in bed (and prepared obligatorily by the husband)" is endangered by the increasing popularity of coffee. Following the arrow, and coming to **early morning cuppa/tea** we get no explanatory definition, only a quotation of 15 lines from George Mikes, one of Mr Bart's "sources of inspiration". As a piece of amusing, somewhat cheaply witty journalism, it is good fun, but a dictionary entry, however entertaining it is meant to be, must not be, even slightly, mis- or disinformative. "The heartily smiling hostess, or an almost malevolently silent maid" bringing in the cup of tea could be accepted as "characters" to enliven the narrative sketch, if we had not been informed in the passage quoted above that the "early morning cuppa" is "prepared obligatorily by the husband" which, I believe, implies that bringing it in is part of his obligation, though

certainly not at 5 a.m. as Mikes says, obviously to make a point.

I cannot judge whether losing the "early morning cuppa" is a national disaster comparable to the introduction of the metric system, or the disappearance of the tripartite currency L. s. d., which does not figure in Mr Bart's dictionary, while some other, "culturally" less English abbreviations do, such as **Ph. D.** (current in Hungarian as well), with an arrow guiding us to Doctor's degree, where we get a rather general definition with no specification of the various fields in which this degree can be obtained. We have separate entries for **D. D. → Doctor of Divinity: D. Phil,** written out in full as **Doctor of Philosophy → Ph. D.; D. Sc. → Doctor of Science,** where a somewhat inaccurate definition as **"természettrudományok doktorátusa"** ("doctorate of the natural sciences") can be found, which, of course, ought to be *"doktora"* ("doctor of"); we cannot find the alternative abbreviation Sc. D.; there is no entry for, or reference to, D. Litt (or Litt. D.), Doctor of Letters or Literature; D. Mus., Doctor of Music; D. C. L., Doctor of Civil Law, all to be found in Országh–Magay. You could conclude that these titles are no longer in use, and the entry for **doctor** seems to support this inference. We are told that the title, unless it is that of a medical doctor, even if it is fully legitimate, sounds so insufferably pompous that no native speaker is likely to use it, except, perhaps, to address a foreigner (a Central-European), out of courtesy, and in order to be on the safe side. This is clearly untrue; in and outside the academic world it is currently used in addressing or mentioning people who bear this title. Reading on, we can see that Mr Bart insists on playing down "doctor" in order to enhance the effect of a passage quoted from Mikes: "Do not call foreign lawyers, teachers, dentists, commercial travellers and estate agents "Doctor". Everybody knows that the little word "doctor" only means that they are Central European. This is painful enough in itself, you do not need to remind people of it all the time." The informative value of all this is zero. What comes through most is Mikes's Central-European frustration, amusing and touching at the same time with its strange pathos of irony.

Another important ingredient of his mental-emotional make-up is his ambivalent attitude to England, the English, and all things peculiarly, "culturally" English, verging on what Freudians call "Hassliebe". A good instance of this is found in the entry for **foreigner,** the whole consisting of a paragraph taken from Mikes. "It is a shame and bad taste to be an alien... There is no way out of it. ... Once a foreigner always a foreigner. ... He may become British; he can never become English. So it is better to reconcile yourself to the sorrowful reality." If in the **doctor** entry the effect is somewhat cheap and only skin-deep, here he proves himself to be a master of wielding a vitriolic pen. "There are some noble English people who might forgive you. There are some magnanimous souls who realize that it is not your fault, only your misfortune. They will treat you with condescension, understadning and sympathy. They will invite you to their homes. Just as they keep lap-dogs and other pets, they are quite prepared to keep a few foreigners. ...There are certain rules, however, which have to be followed if you want to make yourself as acceptable and civilized as you possible can. Study these rules and imitate the English. There can be only one result: if you don't succeed you become ridiculous; if you do, you become even more ridiculous."

As a gourmet, I ought to, and indeed, do feel gratified at such examples of enjoyable reading. In the remote past, how-

ever, I participated in dictionary-making long enough to be infected with the lexicographical-lexicological virus for life, and although I can fully appreciate wit happily displayed, whether Mikes's or Mr Bart's, I certainly cannot turn a blind eye on the all too many instances of inaccuracy and sloppiness in this dictionary.

Just a few random examples: **Low Church** defined for Hungarians as "a Protestant-like wing of the Church of England..." would seem to suggest that the **Church of England** is *not* Protestant, whereas it is. This is correctly stated in the entry for the Church of England which tells us also that it is the national, the Established Church; that its head is the monarch (Defender of the Faith), etc. There is no arrow pointing at the title in brackets, yet we have a separate entry for it, making it clear that it means the defender of the Roman Catholic faith, "a title of the English kings in the Middle Ages which they kept even after Henry VIII." This is just not quite true. If, instead of simply paying lip-service to Brewer's *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* Mr Bart had consulted it in this instance, he could have avoided the mess he actually made of the entry. Brewer's defnition of the Defender of the Faith is: "The title given by Pope Leo X to Henry VIII of England in 1521, for a Latin treatise *On the seven Sacraments.* Many previous kings, and even subjects, have been termed 'defenders of the catholic faith', 'defenders of the Catholic Church,' and so on, but no one had borne it as a title..." That the handling of the subject is disorientating is bad for the Hungarian user, but the gourmet is not catered for either, since Mr Bart misses here a good opportunity of displaying his skill in ironic presentation. A mere enumeration of the bare facts is ironic in itself: in Henry VIII we have a king who burns Lollards, writes a treatise against Luther, for this he obtains the title of Defender of the (Catholic) Faith from the Pope, not long before he breaks with Rome and, perhaps in spite of himself, becomes instrumental in promoting Protestantism in his country and establishing the Church of England, virtually disqualifying himself for the Papal title which he and his successors, nevertheless, continue to bear.

Church matters do not seem to be Mr Bart's forte; see e.g. the entry for **Free Churches** in which he makes a muddle of "established" and "recognized" churches. But sometimes we find a network of errors in the secular field as well, produced by something like a chain reaction. In the entry for **mace,** we are told that "in the → **House of Commons** it is placed on the table at the beginning of every session, ... in the **House of Lords** its place is on the woolsack; on festive occasions the → **Sergeant at Arms** carries it before the → **Speaker,** and the → **Lord/High/ Chancellor** respectively, the two being one and the same person, though functioning in two capacities, that is why, accordingly, there are two maces." Following an arrow, we come to **Speaker** where we find a correct article on his office and functions as chairman of the House of Commons described in detail. From references to the **Lord /High/ Chancellor** we can conclude that the latter and the **Speaker** are two persons functioning as two chairmen in the two Houses of Parliament. Reading on, led by arrows and misled by inaccurate wording, we feel more and more bewildered. E.g., is the **Sergeant at Arms** one person, functioning alternately in both Houses? Or only in the House of Commons, as the respective entry informs us; and is the **Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod** his counterpart in the House of Lords, whose "black rod" might be the equivalent of the "mace"? The article on the **Leader of the House**

is informative and correct, but if we want to check the statement that "in the → **House of Lords** it is the → **Lord Privy Seal** who holds this office" we are told that "as a rule he functions also as the → **Leader of the House** in the → **House of Commons**". Following another arrow we come to the **Lord President of the Council** who "presides at the sessions of the → **Privy Council**," etc., and "also functions as the → **Leader of the Council,** and the **Lord Privy Seal,"** unless the latter functions in this capacity in the House of Commons as the article on **Lord Privy Seal** suggests. So we have three candidates, one too many, for two posts. Am I asking too much if I would like to know who is who, who is what, and who is where?

Ecclesiastic, governmental, political, administrative, legislative, juristic institutions, posts, dignities are, no doubt, tricky things, and in the absence of actual and dictionary equivalents it is particularly difficult to explain them to the Hungarian reader. But, then, this seems to be precisely one of the tasks undertaken by Mr Bart, and I have good reason to be frustrated, if I do not see his promises and my legitimate expectations fulfilled. Sometimes, however, easier matters are handled in an equally inaccurate way, e.g. **Promenade Concerts,** defined as "literally a concert with the audience not seated, but walking round and round..." That Mr Bart may have had some misgivings is evident from the slightly contradictory statement that this series of concerts "is particularly popular with young people who, mostly stand (*the promenaders)* throughout the program..." etc. The truth is that the Royal Albert Hall can *seat* a huge audience, but apart from those who sit through the concerts, there is a great number of generally young people who, having booked no seats, sit, even lie on the floor, or stand, or, if they please, occasionally walk, but that there should be a constant promenading round and round, is simply wrong. Inaccuracy, even the slightest, is inaccuracy, something a dictionary-maker cannot expect to be praised or generously forgiven for.

I have been unable to find out what prompted Mr Bart, on occasion, to abandon the well-proven principle and practice of alphabetical presentation. One would logically expect that the word doctor should be the first item preceding those containing the word in phrases, compunds, etc. But no! The line opens with **Doctor of Divinity,** followed by **Doctor of Medicine, Doctor of Science,** and it is only at this point that the headword **doctor** appears, to be followed by **Doctor's degree.** That Mr Bart is capable of absolute alphabetical strictness is evident from the fact that names beginning with the abbreviation Dr follow the headword downstairs. Saint and St are treated in a similarly correct order, **Saint Andrew** following **Sainsbury's,** and **St Andrew** coming after **squire.** I could, perhaps, reconcile myself to Mr Bart's idiosyncratic deviations from the alphabetical order, if there were a system in them, if a principle were consistently put into practice; but that is not the case. E.g., *British* and names, phrases formed from it as an adjective + a common or proper noun, are handled in what I would call the logical and lexicographically correct order: *British* standing at the head of a long line of entries in good alphabetical order: **British Academy, the; British Army of the Rhine; British Association for the Advancement of Science;** ending with **British United Provident Association.** Coming to French, I am surprised to see that it is preceded by **French fries,** and followed in a separate entry by **French, the.** The handling of **Irish** and its combinations is different, but equally messy.

One more negative remark: I find that there are far too many English words and phrases in the explanatory parts of the entries. Where the entry contains a reference, with an arrow, to an English headword, it must be included in the Hungarian text in English; otherwise the arrow would lose its function. Sometimes whole passages in English are legitimately embedded in a Hungarian article, e.g., the brilliantly witty illustration for **Eurospeak.** But if we read that *The Independent* is *"a legújabb* (1986) *ún.* quality paper", ("the latest (1986) so-called quality paper") and we look in vain for an entry for the latter phrase, we might feel that we are let down by Mr Bart who, in his turn, can object that he has not used an arrow to direct us to the phrase concerned, and also that the user could be expected to know that much. Further on, he speaks of the paper as *"politikailag elkötelezetlen, mindig "ügyeket" és nem pártokat képviselő* (crusading) *napilap..."* ("a politically not committed daily that always stands for 'cases' and not parties..."); the word in brackets, *crusading,* sufficiently explained by what precedes it, is negligible.

Too many English words and phrases occurring in a largely Hungarian context often have a ludicrously macaronic effect, e.g. in the entry for the *London Review of Books,* "a The New York Review of Books *mintájára megalapított kritikai hetilap, mely is of humble strike-breaking origins. ...* [it] *came into existence when* The Times *and its* Literary Supplement *went on strike (1979) ..."* etc. This reminds me of a sometime American–Hungarian shopkeeper's compaint: *"Olyan* busy day*em volt, egész nap* ring*ott a* bell*em."*

My strictures have not been motivated by the love of cavilling, but by the conviction that when, as I hope, a new edition of this dictionary is called for, a thorough vetting and revision of the present text will result in an excellent final version, the book Mr Bart must have had in mind, but has failed to produce. ❧

István Rácz

Johnny Grain-o'-Corn, the Hungarian Hero

Sándor Petőfi: *John the Valiant – János vitéz.* A bilingual edition. Translated by John Ridland, illustrated by Peter Meller. Budapest, Corvina, 1999, 177 pp.

Sándor Petőfi is one of the first names Hungarians learn as young children. The average child in Hungary will have memorized some lines of his, even some short poems before he or she learns to read or write. One should add straightaway that Petőfi's poetry does not need to be forced down schoolchildren's throats: they almost always learn these poems with pleasure. In nursery schools they enjoy the smooth rhythm, in their early school years they are enchanted by his descriptions of landscapes with their remarkable precision in representing the plants and animals of the Hungarian plain; in their adolescent years they admire his political courage, and once they become adult readers (if they still keep on reading) they discover Petőfi the intellectual poet. Petőfi means all this and much more: although he only lived to be twenty-six, in his short career as a poet and politician he became a national hero, an emblem of Hungarian independence.

The versatility of his poetry is amazing, but *John the Valiant* (in an earlier translation: *Sir John*) is one of his central and best known works with a diversity of tones in itself, showing nearly all the virtues Petőfi is known for: the moving expression of love, the representation of innocent eroticism, his power in relating heroism in battles and, not least, brilliantly comic passages replete with humour, sarcasm and irony. It is a children's classic in Hungary, which is re-read and re-discovered by adults (as children's classics usually are).

Petőfi criticism often discusses *John the Valiant* and *A helység kalapács*a (The Hammer of the Village) together. The latter was written a few months earlier than *John the Valiant* (1844), and is noted as a hilariously funny parody of epics, showing Petőfi's "irreverence" (as George F. Cushing rightfully termed it) at its best. (Adolescent Hungarians, although they may be too irreverent themselves to accept anything put on their reading list, always revere Petőfi for this poem.) It is perhaps not the last mock-heroic epic in world literature, but it is certainly one of the best of its kind.

Whereas in *A helység kalapácsa,* Petőfi caricatured a mode of writing that he

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thought was outdated, in *John the Valiant* he created a new form to replace conventional epics (which were still being written in Central Europe in the first half of the century): the kind of narrative poem that is closer to the Byronic novel in verse than to the classic epic form, but (unlike *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* or *Don Juan*) is deeply rooted in folklore. To put it another way, in *John the Valiant* Petőfi's ambition was to show that he was able to replace the classic epic, and not only to ridicule it. (This is true even though a subtle analysis of the poem can point out some features that Petőfi must have learnt from Homer, Virgil or Zrínyi, the 17th-century author of a Hungarian national epic.)

Needless to say, *John the Valiant* is open to a variety of readings. It is a fairy tale with the fiction of a charmingly naive narrator and that of an equally naive audience. One can read it as a sentimental story, as a psychological allegory, as a narrative exemplifying Petőfi's aesthetic idea that beauty must become true (not unlike in John Keats's poetry), and in many more ways, but the basis of understanding this poem is the reader's "suspension of disbelief", a readiness to play the role of the naive listener.

On the surface this means Petőfi's famous "simplicity", a fiction he created in place of the inflated style of romantic epics. This is what most Hungarians even today would accept as a norm, but a feature that most foreign readers notice as something peculiar. George F. Cushing, for example, wrote: "He made poetry look too easy and walked the tightrope between simplicity and banality with remarkable good sense" (*The Passionate Outsider*, p. 163). Importantly, he added: "It is here that his translators have often failed him."

The question, then, is how a translator can show the values of the text while maintaining Petőfi's "simplicity" of style. The closer the style of a poem is to everyday discourse, the more difficult it is to translate, since the nuances of such texts (not necessarily noticed by the translator) are particularly significant. (To take an example from English as a source language, Philip Larkin is one of the most difficult poets to translate.) Furthermore, Petőfi's poem will largely change its meaning once it appears on the horizon of a different culture. For Hungarians, this text is like their daily bread and butter (I recall once hearing old bricklayers at work quoting some stanzas from it to check whether they still remembered); for a foreign readership this will inevitably be something of an exotic curiosity (which is not to doubt the significance of a good translation).

John Ridland, the translator of *John the Valiant* (there being only a translation in prose available before) is fully aware of this dilemma, but he also thinks one can make a virtue out of necessity. In the introduction he elucidates on it: "Foreigners, however, may have some advantage. Newcomers to a language or culture may never learn all its nuances as seamlessly as natives, but we can approach its so-called 'Immortal Poems' not as marble monuments but as living speech. They may become fresher poems for us than for native readers, to be read more directly than before they'd been certified as classics."

This is a very healthy starting point for the arduous job of a translator, and Ridland was able to add two more virtues: his insight into the universe Petőfi created in this poem, and his awareness of the horizon of expectation he had to reckon with. The numerous references in the introduction to the classics of British and American verse are metonymies for the interpretive community he must have had in mind when translating Johnny's adventures.

Choosing the names, of course, was the first of the numerous problems the trans-

lator has had to face and solve. One possibility would have been to leave them untranslated; after all, they are proper nouns. But if these are telling names, leaving them untouched would not have carried this "telling" quality for the foreign reader. Petőfi's friend, János Arany, for instance, translated Robert Burns's Tom O'Shanter as Kóbor Tamás, and it has worked perfectly for Hungarian readers. Ridland did the reverse: Kukoricza Jancsi became Johnny Grain-o'-Corn. (It is probably not mere chance that Burns's poem is referred to in the introduction, although in a different context.) How careful he was when constructing this name is shown in a footnote added to the introduction, where we are also informed that he deliberately used sometimes Nell or Nelly, sometimes the original Iluska for the heroine, using this latter "to remind Hungarians of her original name ... occasionally when the meter allows". This seems to be more of a problem, for two reasons. First, if this translation is intended for an English-speaking audience, what is the point in thinking of Hungarian readers? (Why should they go to the water-jug if they can go to the fountain?) The second reason concerns meter: despite the translator's intention the name Iluska does not fit the rhythm of the poem, as I will attempt to point out below.

Let me, however, make it plain that Ridland chose well when using anapaestic rhythm to translate Petőfi's alexandrines, and his application of full rhymes in contrast with the predominant assonances of Petőfis stanzas is equally justified. In most lines he has either kept the original number of syllables in the line (12), or has made the line one syllable shorter. In the latter case, the first foot is usually an iamb or a spondee followed by three anapaests. But the form that he deviates from and returns to is the anapaestic tetrameter, such as this: "Like a tent, while he watched the wild thundercloud spout." This is the meter of Byron's "The Destruction of Sennacherib", the exact opposite of Petőfi's falling rhythm, but, amazingly, it works. Not only because this is the "corresponding folk measure" in English (as the introduction tells us), but also because this is a rhythm that suggests excitement and dynamism. (Petőfi also used it in some poems.) This is particularly appropriate in the description of the battle in France and John's adventures in the second half of the narrative, but a quality corresponding to the original is also achieved in the most moving lyrical parts. If one compares the line *"Utószor látlak én szivem szép tavasza"* with its translation ("It's the last time I'll see you, my heart's only spring"), one will immediately notice that the meter is exactly the opposite: syllables 1, 4, 7 and 10 are stressed in the original; syllables 3, 6, 9 and 12 in the translation. The first is more elegiac, the second carries more anxiety, but is a brilliant recreation of the original.

What makes the translator's decision to use the Hungarian name Iluska weak is that, surprisingly, it is always scanned with a strong stess falling on the second syllable (I'luska). The line "Hey Iluska, fair angel, my soul's only bliss!" fits in the rhythmic pattern I outlined above, but this analogy with the meter of the whole poem distorts what is really Hungarian about this name. (Some further examples are: "And my darling Iluska, I hope that will do"; "Well—Iluska's stepmother, that heartless old bitch"; "In the lap of Iluska, his Nell, his darling". Even English-speaking Hungarians will feel encouraged to put the stress on the second syllable of the name.)

On the whole, the translation is a success: it reads well and has managed to capture the atmosphere created in the original. Only in some minor details does it show that the translator used rough translations (not speaking Hungarian him-

self); these are mostly some unpoetic lines, which fail to re-create the poetic purity of Petőfi's diction. (This purity is also made more artful at all those places where the translator has used italics to indicate stress. These are either unnecessary or stand instead of a better solution. Petőfi himself never used italics.) A further sign of Ridland's method is the mechanically repeated form used for translating certain words. A case in point is that he always translated *"hát"* as "well". *"Hát"* has a great number of meanings, however, expressing hesitation is only one of these, and Petőfi hardly ever used it in this function. Where Petőfi wrote *"Hát nekigyürkőzik"* in the translation we read "Well, he rolled up his sleeves". The stylistic effect is not exactly the same in the English version. Of course, this is no serious misunderstanding, but it is still revealing that there has to be a comma in English, unlike in Hungarian. The contextual meaning of *"hát"* in such cases is closer to "then" or "listen" (which does not mean that these words should have been used). Similarly, translating *"hogyne"* as "why not?" (instead of "of course" or "sure") is misleading.

But one notices such minor details that want further polishing mainly because Ridland has a brilliant feel for using various registers of the English vocabulary. He has taken care to make a distinction between *"mostoha"* (Nelly's *stepmother*) and *"nevelőanya"* (Johnny's *foster mother*). The first gets a negative connotation; in the lexicon of the poem it actually becomes a synonym for "witch". The translation is rich in idioms recalling the tone of dialects ("You didn't sleep on spotless linen"), and even archaisms are used in the words of the giants. The specific vocabulary of Johnny's voyage home (more specific than it ever could be in Hungarian) increases a feeling of familiarity in an English-speaking audience as well as some punning phrases do, such as: "The griffin was nursing her brood on the shelf: / Then a scheme in John's brain began hatching itself."

The introduction will need revision in a later edition (and hopefully we will not have to wait long to see it). The name Petrovics was Serb (not Slovak); the 1848 revolution "echoed" the revolution in Vienna a few days before (not Caesar's assassination on 15 March) and finally, there was no "uprising" in Hungary in 1989.

These are wrinkles that will be easy to iron out, and they certainly will not affect the overall success of John Ridland's translation, which is matched by Peter Meller's illustrations. These pictures are based on the contrast between black and white, and a number of methods are used to recreate the light-darkness symbolism of the poem. In some cases a black background predominates (particularly in the picture representing Johnny's night in the bandits' house on page 59 and, of course, the one showing the Country of Darkness on page 149), whereas white, as an unframed background in some other piece, makes for an intimate relationship between text and design. Ridland is right in his acknowledgment: these illustrations "deserve reproduction in any future edition or translation", but this fruitful cooperation with an excellent photographer is also to the great credit of the translator. Through his enthusiasm, stamina and talent, there is every hope that *John the Valiant* will become a children's and adults' classic outside Hungary as well. ❧

Tamás Koltai

Zeitstück

György Spiró: *Szappanopera* (Soap Opera) • Pál Békés: *Tévéjáték* (Teleplay)
Endre Fejes: *Vonó Ignác* (Ignác Vonó) • György Schwajda: *Himnusz*
(National Anthem) • István Örkény: *Tóték* (The Tóts)

György Spiró, the outstanding novelist and short story writer, a playwright who has had several fine plays performed in many countries, has now come up with *Soap Opera*. A man and a woman talk about compensation for Jews for eighty minutes in the hallway of a flat. The Man works for a company which offers to represent claimants for compensation, the Woman is a potential beneficiary, by right of her father's death in Auschwitz. One would be perfectly correct in thinking that such a conversation cannot take place —especially in the depth it does—in this place and on such a scale, between an icy lawyer and a lady radiologist, whose self-respect, emotions, and whole existence are perturbed. Not that Spiró would even claim it to be anything other: *Soap Opera* is not a psychologically realistic drama. As a result, the possibility of a relationship developing out of repulsions and attractions between the two, a male-female relationship is out of the question. This is no concern of the play, since Spiró does not exploit his characters. He allows them to exploit the clichés of banal, everyday communication. However, it is not the individual, not the psycho-physical personality, that is to say, not the species that he is interested in—he does not even give the characters names—but the type, the subject of an experiment conducted by society. The mouse injected with a new strain of virus, whose behaviour is observed. Or not even that—simply branded.

For example, you are put on a list because, let us say, you are Jewish. Now, it so happens, they do not want to exterminate you, but compensate you. To give you money because someone close to you was exterminated. Incinerated. Perhaps made into soap. Now, it is being *undone*? Because you are on a list? Where does this list come from? And how do they know who is *entitled* to be on it? Whether the list was prepared in line with legislation enacted (the so-called Jewish Laws) in Hungary at the end of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s—and those alive today have simply inherited the list. Similarly, did the list also exist in the 1960s, in the Ministry of the Interior, and people were summoned and extortion practised? Maybe they thought that at some stage it would come in useful, and lo and behold,

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Tamás Koltai,
editor of Színház, *a theatre monthly, is* The Hungarian Quarterly*'s regular theatre reviewer.*

it did, since now it appears that money can be made out of it, ergo *being Jewish is business.* The Woman, as represented by György Spiró, puts these and other questions to the Man dealing in the dead, as an answer to his clear and irreproachable business offer.

As for the Man, he replies to the reply. Why suspect ulterior motives in everything, why is it not possible simply to accept what life offers, especially when it is free? Why so many scruples? And if there have to be scruples, then why not when she is recommending pharmaceutical products as a second source of income, when she is dealing with people who are at someone's mercy? Since those medicines have been tested on African outcasts, who knows how many of them will die? And, by the way, why does the Woman consider that she has suffered exceptionally, when *his* family rose to be workers from being peasants and, having become the ruling class, suffered privations? So she should not play the anti-Electra here (she immediately corrects him: anti-Antigone), who is not willing to bury her dead in her memory.

The dialogue runs like this, as in a Greek tragedy (by mentioning Antigone, Spiró is intentionally doing a favour to those who are having difficulties placing the piece within a particular genre) the two characters are raised to the heights of rhetoric, the writer's fertile mind delivering the intellectual ammunition. We, on the other hand, find ourselves in the stream of everyday mythology in which we live. From time to time new characters come on to the skéné (the empty space of the raised hallway) through the hall door, as in classic drama, to spread the conflict to other social archetypes. (Not, however, to disrupt the developing intimate atmosphere —much to the disapproval of certain analysts). The Mother is the indelible past, the Girl and the Boy are the hopeless future. The Neighbour is the people, or the chorus, who enters, noses around, metacommunicates, saying "these", then "we", subtly drawing the distinction: the domesticated mob, perhaps not the one which sings about the train for Auschwitz in a football stadium but, should the train happen to depart, it would stand and cheer.

Spiró dares to write what he thinks of the world and finds the appropriate compact dramatic form. In *Soap Opera* the mythology of the quotidian takes on real, rhetorical forms. Some would claim that this is nothing other than the superficial adaptation of a current social situation. A play for the moment, in German, a *Zeitstück,* representing the transitiory present, carrying no message for the future, and with little chance of surviving the passage of time. Yet, the present-day "unloading" of conflicts is definitely cathartic. Two performances have also proved this, both directed by János Vincze, one in the Pécs Third Theatre, the other in the "Budapest Studio Theatre". Vincze realizes the piece fully, the stage with seating on all sides itself being the "raised area" on which there is nothing other than a door frame. The noise of the lift, the automatic on-off stairwell lighting and the monotonous musical rhythm, turned up from time to time, are paradoxically not natural effects but the sign of a metaphysical field. What must be acted out here is not psychological details, but rather human and rhetorically proven fundamental attitudes. The Woman handles the moral absurdity of compensation with a bitter, self-reflexive irony and some indignation, like someone who cannot believe she is pouring out her life to a stranger. The Man (thirty-three and to whom success is essential, a familiar type) is not the worst either as an official or a person, he is sharp-witted (of course, Spiró is sharp-witted), and he has empathy

as well, but he simply does not understand the problem. He is programmed to be problem-free, and goes forward with pragmatic determination. Neither is he able to grasp why it is not possible for her to go along with him—in thinking or to a restaurant. Our not understanding the other person is a Spiró hobby-horse, and this explains our general and aggressive inability to communicate. Just as in his other plays, here too the characters are deaf to each other. The Girl unpretentiously looks after her own interests, the Boy is indifferent, the Neighbour is all basic prejudice, the Mother is a victim of cerebral arteriosclerosis. And they go on acting this endless social soap opera of feigned caring, from which many parts are still to come.

In his notes accompanying the premiere of his new play, *Teleplay,* Pál Békés proudly admits that he has written a despised *Zeitstück:* "Some of the classics, for example the works of Beaumarchais and Chekhov, were, in the first place, for the moment. For the 18th century French moment and the 19th century Russian moment. Only they survived them. And they have remained true because they are masterpieces."

Teleplay is set in and around a State-run broadcasting channel, recognizably the Hungarian State Television (MTV), which has been operating as a public company for a few years. Békés, a writer of short stories, novels and plays, was, for a brief period recently also employed by MTV as one of the heads of the art and literary departments, until he was laid off along with several hundred others. His experiences are thus first hand. Of course, in order to know MTV's problems it is enough to be a television viewer and reader of newspapers. Under "socialism", MTV was vastly swollen (staffed by more than three thousand) but it established significant artistic values. Since then, staff has been reduced by nearly half, but the financial management continues to be chaotic and wasteful and it is constantly struggling with a lack of funds. It has debts at present of almost ten billion forints. Standards and viewing figures have fallen disastrously in the last few years, its best personnel have been lured away to various commercial channels. Newspapers are full of reports on the shocking state of in-house affairs, the anarchy of dismissals and appointments, and the lack of professional working conditions.

Békés's play takes place in the arts production office, which is just in the process of moving. (This is an everyday occurrence at MTV which had outgrown its headquarters and was spread over the city in various buildings.) Since the cutbacks started, properties have gradually been sold off and the remaining production offices have continually had to move. (Indeed the headquarters, the pre-Second World War Stock Exchange is already on the market and MTV will have to quit it before the end of 2001.) A new head of the production office has been appointed, an ambitious though somewhat naive graphic artist, with serious plans. His patron is a mysterious person—who just happens to be off sick and does not turn up—a sort of sub-manager, whom everyone simply calls "sub-man". Our man wants to launch ambitious new programmes, instead of which he has to sign off the financing for previously commissioned quizzes and the usual *dreck.* He permits the shooting of films abroad by various film crews, among them a seemingly interesting children's series. Meanwhile, an intrigue has started up against him. A lady presenter and a weather girl are pushing ahead in the hierarchy, and the producer of his favourite series uses up—or rather embezzles—its entire budget halfway through the production.

Gradually our production head is deserted by everyone apparently with him and he is dismissed on the very same day he is given a television award. (This is a fact of life now in MTV, with an individual may be assigned a new programme in the morning, in the afternoon he may receive a letter of dismissal and find that his security pass for MTV headquarters has been withdrawn.) In the final scene he finds himself in that same empty office at which he had arrived a few months earlier: the editorial staff are once more moving.

Although *Teleplay* is a *piece à clef,* local knowledge is not required: it fends for itself as a satirical comedy. There are a few stereotypes in it. For example, the eternal deputy chief editor who survives every boss, the pushy weather girl, and above all the old mother hen of a secretary—a sort of old mother hen type, who lugs the lace curtains, tablecloths, coffee percolator, all of which are registered in her name, from office to office—even the door-knob for the toilet in the corridor too. It is a tragicomical picture and goes beyond television's inner workings. It really is about that state of things in which the old "socialist" structure has already been demolished but the new has not yet been built, and in which the media is only important as a mouthpiece for those in power, including the political parties. Indirectly this is all in Békés' play, which Gábor Czeizel directed at the Debrecen Csokonai Theatre.

If we accept Pál Békés's claim that Beaumarchais and Chekhov also wrote *Zeitstücke,* then we can only use this category when speaking in derogatory terms of forgotten stage works. A certain time after their premières, reviving them would occur to nobody. The distinctive feature of the lasting *Zeitstück*—if this is not a contradiction in terms—is that it keeps in mind the interests of later ages. At present three such Hungarian pieces feature in the repertoire. These were produced in the 1960s and the birth of each one is connected in many ways with the real present of its moment.

Endre Fejes is equally significant as a novelist and dramatist, and his heroes are recognizable by the fact that they slip out of time because they cannot find their places in the world. These stories are set in the "dictatorship of the proletariat". A writer freer of ideologies than Fejes is hard to imagine, equally so is one who more authentically documents the age. The essence—not the surface. Fejes' characters have narrow horizons, their existence locks them in false illusions. In that world of the Kádár era, which belied any expansion of horizons—existence—a daydream and any attempt to realize it can only be understood as escape. The absurd thinking of the age, at the expense of not a little self-manipulation, was only able to accept it thus if, instead of the truth, it called the hero wanting to escape the truth down the road of the daydream "negative". Even this ideological stunt was only just able to save certain of Fejes' works from being banned, the most significant example being his novel *Scrap-Iron Yard,* which has been translated into several languages.

Today the question is whether after the Fejes-heroes the works themselves have slipped out of time? The recent past was detrimental to plays: they are no longer our contemporaries but the distance necessary for an overview is still lacking. The action of *Ignác Vonó* spans the long years from 1917 to November 3rd 1956. (At dawn on November 4th, the Soviet army set out to suppress the Hungarian Revolution.) The historical *tableau vivant* slowly fades and becomes part of the school curriculum. Few people can sit in the auditorium who could live through Ignác Vonó's destiny—the portrait of an

era—as a personal biography; Vonó, an infantryman, who was shot through the wrist on the Italian front during the First World War. Although this would help the understanding of the story's "class-content".

On the front Ignác Vonó conjures up before him the illusion of a green-eyed girl. Recovered from his wounds, as a proletarian with a deformed hand, however, he conjures up a different world. He wishes to get away from the slums, from the ground-floor "flat" (a kitchen and a room) which he sublets. He does so even under the dictatorship of the proletariat, when, supposedly, "he is in power". He daydreams until he is mistaken for a former landowner, a member of the "upper class", a mistake he does not correct for the refined convent-educated gentlewoman. Indeed he actually marries her. He will be regarded as "ex ruling-class", under the post-Second World War brand of Communism called people's democracy. Right up to the stormy days of the 1956 revolution, when his new friends, relatives of the lady, ask for his papers so that he can be given political duties. Ignác Vonó is all but exposed—but is saved by the Russian tanks. From the dawn of the restoration of the dictatorship he can once more remain "Sir". The widow Mák, the slum caretaker-wife, is hopelessly in love with Ignác Vonó and has come to claim him back from his state of "unacceptability". At the end of the play, however, she plaintively cries out, "What will become of *me* now, a prole?"

Fejes has written a grotesque play on slipping out of time. Ignác Vonó and Mrs Mák's teasing formalities returning periodically, these choreographed "scenes" substitute for the acceptance of truth; twice: that of historical and personal destiny. When the time is out of joint, in 1956, the time of the Revolution, Ignác Vonó's stable pseudo-existence, "this handstand, interwoven of lies, rubbish tip of a life" alongside his meek aristocrat wife, seems to be becoming undermined. Only when time is "pushed into place", does it get back to "normality": to the even falser world in which it is possible to be happy as a "class-alien".

The twistedness of the Fejes-grotesque is as out of place now as every subtle, playful, shaded piece with aesthetic quality on offer today. At present we are living in an age of effects which are coarse, touch a tender spot and are unambiguous. For a performance of *Ignác Vonó,* on the other hand, a little emotional and intellectual sensitivity would be required on both the part of the theatre and the audience. For want of this, Dezső Garas' production at the József Attila Theatre is as can be expected. Not bad, since the actors are good, but it does not even attempt to explore the hidden layers of the piece. Above all, the keynote of the lyrical hovering. The jex-changes here between Ignác Vonó and Mrs Mák are cabaret scenes, rather than poetically constructed prose duets. Coarse backchat and not the rehearsals of a kitchen home-theatre, in which feigned and real feelings become stylized into a game, for the sake of not having to seriously face up to the latter. This light-hearted series of substitutions—in place of a life-drama, a stage-drama—is the play's great invention, its mainstay and validates its mentality. In performance it must be given room to breathe. It must be given pace and rhythm and must embarrass with its unsolvable riddles of frankness and truthfulness. Here, it is rather a game of ping-pong, with shorter or longer rallies.

In a sense a similar dialogue runs through György Schwajda's *National Anthem,* which is also about that sort of lie which the "concept" forces upon reality. *National Anthem* too is a bitterly ironic criticism of

the rule of the proletariat, which in its own day avoided only by chance—after a fashion—ideological persecution. Its post-Beckett absurd characters are the end products not of existence but of "existing" Socialism. They sit not on the edge of being but of communism. And it is not Godot's help that they are waiting for but that of the trade union. More precisely, they are not waiting. Schwajda's upside-down Beckett is about people sobering up from the social security illusion, It is about that world which the rabble couple, symbolizing society, is only capable of putting up with when under the influence, and when entranced by the National Anthem.

The backbone of the piece is the repetitive early morning dialogue of Józsi and Aranka. Józsi, sobering up from his delirium, daily interrogates his wife about the details of his previous night's running riot, using a repeater fact-finding technique. From the repetitions it gradually comes to light that Józsi always comes home drunk, beats up Aranka every night, and every night gets their three children out of bed so that they can all sing the National Anthem as the radio station closes down at midnight. Every morning Józsi promises that things will be different, and this is true in that the situation deteriorates from day to day. The unhappy family also attracts the attention of "society" and, in order to "help", heavier and heavier fines are imposed on them for alcoholism. So, naturally, they find themselves in an even worse situation, now they do not even have anything to eat. Then a "socialist brigade" is sent to help, but they just have a beer and record the fulfilment of their "socialist pledge" in the brigade diary. The couple even feature on television as a negative example, and their children are taken into care. Finally Józsi avenges the great "help" by killing one of the helpful social activists.

This grotesque play has been revived by the New Theatre, directed by János Taub. The slow-motion rhythm and delayed pertinent moments in the exchanges between the two characters works well. However, history ceases to be the underlying element of the play. Not the reality of life—but the social system; today the contrast between consumerism and privation is even more striking, the success-hype (maybe not on ideological grounds) is greater, the sublimity of the unjustly hackneyed National Anthem, however, is more damaged than it had been. Schwajda's meta-communicative, "opposition" satire was devised for the "people's democracy"; its subversive anti-ideology required audiences then to "read" between the lines. This new production simply thoroughly criticizes the old world. The socialist brigades. The socialist trade union. The play's criticism has become completely lifeless. The director evidently feels this so, by way of contrast, he projects advertisements of today's luxury items. However, today's advertisements should be compared with today's poverty line. In contrast to yesterday's poverty, there is yesterday's rose-coloured music on the radio. Schwajda's play cannot be dragged into present. Rewriting it is the only possibility.

"That which exists now, does not last forever", says Professor Cipriani, one of the characters in *The Tóts,* by István Örkény. Both the line and the character himself have been left out of the play's newest production. As if the prediction had come true, and a great many things would no longer be current in *The Tóts,* written in the 1970s. The question is significant because we are talking about the most successful Hungarian play of recent decades, with its many productions abroad in translation and frequent revivals here at home.

In contrast to the director's opinion it seems that life, as far as its degree of absurdity is concerned, is just beginning to catch up with Örkény's play. Doctor Cipriani's comments, or as he is called by those around him, "Doctor Süsü" [Oddball], become increasingly valid. For example, confusion of ideas is a feature of our present, and the person who dares to call a shoe a shoe may be called sick. And that nowadays practically noone knows his own body measurements, the small individual honestly believes himself to be gigantic and this gives rise to various problems. The play gives us the incident between the Major and Tót, who is the village fire-chief. One of their problems is that Tót is tall, the Major is short. And so the former has to double up in the latter's presence. And in the evenings with his family they have to fold boxes because this is the Major's favourite pastime. And during this time he has to hold a torch in his mouth so as not to fall asleep. The rationale behind all this is that if the Major enjoys his stay with the Tóts in their mountain village, then once returning to his unit on the Soviet front he will take the Tót boy, Gyula, into the well-heated battalion office.

The action takes place during the Second World War, but at the time of the play's premiere everyone knew that it was about the post-Stalin, "soft" dictatorship.

Örkény's question is how long a person is willing voluntarily, out of courtesy (or out of fear and defencelessness) to hunch up and, with a torch in his mouth, to "box". How long will he yield to despotism? How long will he surrender himself? The answer *The Tóts* supplies is "for the time being". But this "for the time being" could go on for an irrationally long time. The Tóts are still buttering up the Major for their son's sake and right to the very last they do not know that he has already died on the front. They endure the Major until he leaves. However, at the end of the play the Major has the cheek to return, as the buses are not running. And this, the Tóts can bear no longer. They have already entered into the spirit that their self-surrender has come to an end. The fire-chief then cuts the Major into four pieces with the enormous cutting machine designed for the cardboard boxes. This is the symbolically absurd conclusion to Örkény's piece.

The production in the Pest Theatre was directed by the young Attila Réthly. He presents a straightforward formula: amicable despotism grinds down voluntary victims. The Major is a young, obnoxious little dictator (usually played by a middle-aged actor). He barks and roars, in the pantomime in which cutting margins becomes symbolic, commanding those obedient puppet-like figures like the general of a puppet army. His youth is an advantage: it is more dramatic if a runt terrorizes a fire-chief who has lived through a lot. Numerous opportunities flow from this, opportunities in the area of power and protection techniques (friendly threats and heroic submissions) which could have been exploited if the young director had experience in such things, and took a greater interest in the inter-personal relationships than in the stage effects. The effects are nevertheless fruitful, in several points allowing the play to exceed everyday verisimilitude. The light changes make certain scenes unrealistic and dreamlike. At the end all the characters revolve on doors built into the wall, or on windows, almost to infinity, like a perpetuum mobile. The time is not yet up, everything could begin again from the beginning.

As far as permanence is concerned this much is certain, *The Tóts* is that sort of *Zeitstück* whose validity has been proven for more than thirty years. ❧

Erzsébet Bori

Brave New Cinema

Kornél Mundruczó: *Nincsen nekem vágyam semmi* (This I Wish and Nothing More)
András Fésős: *Balra a nap nyugszik* (Seaside, Dusk) • Frigyes Gödrös: *Glamour*

For many long years, we have been short on cinematic debuts in Hungary. Entire classes of directors have graduated from the Academy without producing a feature film as their diploma work, without an opportunity to introduce themselves. Last year, this negative trend was reversed, and this year has seen a real breakthrough. At the Budapest Film Week in February, it was the directors showing their first films who created the sensation; and, once the summer doldrums were over, distributors plucked up their courage: this autumn, three full-length first films were showing in Budapest cinemas. Kornél Mandruczó *(This I Wish And Nothing More)* was twenty-four, a second-year student director, when he was given his chance; András Fésős *(Seaside, Dusk)* is just under thirty; while Frigyes Gödrös *(Glamour)* was something of an outsider. He came from the world of amateur filmmaking, proving at the age sixty that it's never too late to begin—even for someone who, for decades, was not allowed to get any closer than that to the industry.

This I Wish And Nothing More created something of a storm, chiefly because of its bold choice of subject. Its protagonists are from the gay scene, in which they are a sort of underclass, rent-boys hanging around an elegant Danube promenade, waiting for their clients. This is a world unknown to most filmgoers, whose familiarity with these types—if any—is limited to the movie screen: the kids from the Piazza del Popolo and the boy gang in Gus Van Sant's *My Home, Idaho,* a tribute to Pasolini.

Not until the characters are riding the cable-car up to Buda Castle and come out with the words "I'd like to be Alain Delon, wearing sun glasses day and night" do we find where the film's title comes from—a song by the alternative ska band Channel Two. It also takes some time to work out just who is who, what he does, and who his partner is. At first, the character called Daddy might be taken to be Bruno's father, whose new family is not too happy to see the prodigal son born of the first marriage, and it's easy to interpret the "Two boys and one girl" triangle in the traditional way as well. The four of them are protagonists: the well-heeled lawyer, formerly a family man, with a crush on rent-boy Bruno, giving him money, taking him into his house, and getting him out of

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scrapes. Ringo, the trusty friend and brother-in-law, is also hopelessly in love with Bruno, and so is Mari, the delicate, blond wife. The younger people live outside the city in an inherited half-completed house. Mari, an artiste, and Bruno, a hang-glider, are preparing a stunt they hope will catapult them to world travel, world audiences, fame and fortune. In the meantime, Bruno and Ringo get into a beaten-up Trabant twice a week and head for the capital and the life of the rent-boy, eking out the money that can be earned in public toilets or in the homes of clients by the occasional theft. Although prostitution itself is not a crime, it is a life that teeters on the edge of criminality, occasionally crossing that edge. Ringo is openly gay, but like someone intoxicated by his own courage, with nothing to lose. Mari lives in her own dream world, unaware—or, rather, refusing to be aware —of where the boys go, how they get the money; while "Daddy" desperately tries to keep himself together and keep up appearances. Bruno is the central figure of the film: it's him that everybody wants, everybody dances attendance on him, and he is the one who commits the tragic offence. He steals, deceives and lies, leads a double life, all the while imagining himself to be some kind of laconic cowboy cantering unblinkingly through all the slime and *drek* of life. He swears, and he is firmly convinced, that there is absolutely nothing wrong with him, he's not gay like "them", but a loving husband in a happy marriage, and the meatrack is just a way of making your bread until something better turns up and the big dream comes true. Is it possible to live such a lie and get away with it? It seems to be, for a time at least. Bruno brings ruin on everyone around him, and then rides away. Even Ringo's death fails to force him to face the facts: all he feels is that the ground is slipping away from under his feet, but he doesn't search inside himself, he simply puts the blame on Mari.

The film avoids the pitfalls of naturalism, but these do not include either sanctimoniousness or lying. Its elements are alternately humourous and grotesque, resorting, at certain points, to that tried-and-tested weapon of filmmakers, the cut. The absurd scenes (the Chippendale Show improvised before the expert eyes of women police officers, or the customer in purple silk clothes ordering a cleaning of some clogged pipes) are most effective. They manage to boldly overstep the boundaries of reality, yet any Budapest taxi driver could tell you even more hair-raising stories. Characteristically, the most naturalistic scene in the film is a family reunion, with papa and mama coming to Sunday lunch, whose main course, only a short time before, was white with red eyes, unsuspectingly munching on a carrot. The rabbit stew might prompt some to head for the exit, but many would not even sit down to see this film after reading any brief synopsis in programme guides.

This I Wish And Nothing More is not a film about prostitution, not even about homosexuality, but about lies. Its heroes are not street lads but human beings dogged by misfortune; the more they try to run from their destiny, the more hopelessly they are entangled. And that is not a predicament unique to prostitutes or the gay, but part of the human condition.

The film allows life to run its course, lets the characters tread their own path, and leaves the viewer in peace—giving as much freedom as is seldom to be enjoyed in the cinema these days. It does not try to offer a philosophical scheme or interpret things, events or motivations. That's where it gets its credibility from. The poetically young director—in Hungary, a twenty-something can, at best, hope to be a lyrical poet; it's the forty-year-old novelists and

film directors who are more likely to be called "up-and-coming"—has totally departed from the standard clichés. It could be that was done all the more boldly because he doesn't even know them. He does not follow any models, and if we are reminded of the first, rough-hewn works of the French New Wave, this is only attributable to the rough-hewn nature of his talent. But talent it is, and no mistake.

In András Fésős's film, we meet a blind young man or, to be more precise, a young man who is going to go blind. What we do see is a messy life headed for utter disaster—and some vague, dimly felt desire for change. The hero (Levis 501, a fake World War Two bomber jacket—a legend coming to new life—and a remarkable collection of sun glasses) contracts for just one more smuggling trip (drugs). Although the spirit is willing, there is a lack of an exit strategy, so the flesh-is-weak principle prevails. Just the recipe for a *deus-ex-machina* turn. You can call it what you will: kismet or a stupid accident: Alex gets mixed up in a family row, is involved in an accident, returns without his car or his cargo from his last journey and has gone blind. His new condition, which he bears with dignity, itself offers at least a basis for starting a new life, but it is romantic love that brings ultimate salvation.

The woman is called Maria, a Hungarian expat living at a fair distance from the old country, in a vacation resort in the former East Germany, on the island of Rügen. Hers too is a lonely life, and she too is waiting for redemption. Here, too, divine intervention is called on to bring together two individuals—one blind, in Budapest and the other living in the distant north—who were destined for each other; the machinations of the gods are unmistakable, even if they try to make it look as though it were simply just another wrong number. Once on the line, Alex parades his best spiel, drawing a serene response of "scumbag" from the dream lady: an infallible omen of a big romance in the offing. The first call was a wrong number, but the ones that follow are intentional. Slowly but surely, they do hit home, too. In the meanwhile, we get a pretty serious misunderstanding, thanks to Zsolt, a childhood friend; but anyone whose affairs are arranged at the highest level cannot fail to win in the end.

Once the main title comes up, András Fésős thoroughly scares his audience: a philosophical dialogue in German between two kids on swings, and then a recital by a lonely old man instantly carry us into the sky above Berlin. After the credits, however, we seem to find ourselves watching another of those hackneyed old Hungarian gangster movies—that in itself is a pretty scary feeling. But, from this point onwards, events take a lucky turn, in that the hero goes blind, removing him from the Hungarian underworld once and for all. But Wim Wenders does return to stay with us, as we watch Alex's shambolic goings-on. Indeed, his presence no longer annoys us, and we receive him as a long lost German friend. And when he introduces himself to Maria as Alex Winter, we can only applaud the choice of a name that Wenders often gives to his favourite characters, one that suits him so well.

András Fésős evinces a surprising sense of proportion for a director on his debut: in the way he constructs his narrative, plans and composes his images, and in how he utilizes the modest resources available to a Hungarian filmmaker. He knew what he wanted, picking the sort of partners that best enabled him to translate his ideas onto the screen as closely as possible. The dialogue is incredibly life-like. (Gábor Németh co-wrote the script and has already in *Presszó* (The Café), proved his skills as a screenwriter). The music, by Tibor Szemző, is wonderful; and András Nagy, the most

promising of the new generation of cinematographers, absolutely deserved the prize for cinematography. The actors are very good: Győző Szabó puts on a no-frills performance as the blind man; the only quibble one might make is that some of the quicker exchanges between Alex and Zsolt (László Keszeg) are not sufficiently clear. Andrea Takáts, not seen so far, etches the figure of Maria with flawless sensibility. *Seaside, Dusk* is a worthy example of how, instead of making a desperate lunge to pack everything in, it's possible to pick the best of everything—meaning the best of all that was reasonably achievable and consonant with the basic concept of the film.

Frigyes Gödrös is not exactly a prolific director; indeed, looking at his films and his career, I would even say he is not the combative type. Following a short film he made in collaboration with Miklós Kornai, *Da Capo,* he teamed up with Dr Putyi Horváth, in *Private Horváth and Friend Wolfram,* which was screened at the '94 Film Week. Then, after a long break, and even longer in the making, his first full-length feature film was finally produced. *Glamour* was shooting for close on five years, and we can safely add to this two more years if we think of the novella the script was based on and the scenes that had already been fine-tuned in the earlier film.

Private Horváth and Friend Wolfram was an amateur film, through and through: cheap, black-and-white, and personal. Yet, its appeal was by no means restricted: it did manage to break out of the classic formula where "We and our pals make a film about ourselves and our pals", a formula, of course, not to be belittled in any way as long as it aspires to reach a wider audience beyond the immediate relatives, friends and customers of the makers. What enabled *Private Horváth and Friend Wolfram* to pull this off was that the two heroes/filmmakers profiled their own families. In doing so, one of them was able to use the family films his grandfather made; the other had to reconstruct his recollections, and stage the landmark events in the life of the family.

The family is capable of miracles. If I can see what his pram was like, what he was given for Christmas, or what his mother had in her coffee, I will be curious to find out what Dr Putyi Horváth thinks about happiness, which I would otherwise be utterly indifferent to. I was captivated by *Private Horváth and Friend Wolfram:* what better proof of my profound admiration for it than the fact that I saw it again and again at every opportunity, not getting up even on the fifth occasion when Gödrös trundled Dr Horváth into the empty landscape.

That film had introduced some of the momentous elements in the legendry of the Gödrös family. These include the father's abandonment of his Jewish roots, so that, for him "the thread is broken"; the German girl from the Reich, chosen to bring in fresh blood; the upholsterer's-cum-furniture shop braving the storms of history; the hiding place leading from the wardrobe into the cellar, where Jews and army deserters, including a Wehrmacht officer brother of the mother, together ride out the war.

A Jewish Hungarian (Hungarian Jewish) fate, the life paths of three generations in 20th-century Hungary: a formula that draws almost instinctive parallels with István Szabó's movie *Sunshine.*

But first, a few words about this soup business. Meat-soup is a metaphor for survival, family cohesion and the retention of values. Soup is the first course in a traditional Hungarian meal, and without it the meal is not complete. Soup is the first casualty when poverty strikes, when shops run out of food, when there is political upheaval or a basic shift in lifestyle. Looked at from the perspective of soup, modern-

ization, with the added burden of Socialism, has been something like a scorched-earth raid in terms of the havoc it has wreaked. When, in the basement refuge, the family sink their spoons into a rich meat-soup, German and Hungarian Orthodox Jew and convert to Christianity, boss and employee, Jewish labour camp inmate and deserter from the front alike defy the spirit of the age; and, not much later, in the '50s, they show their contempt for the régime by the charade of displaying a bowl of "paprika potato stew" (a staple dish of poor families) to the inquisitive eyes of the caretaker checking on what the tenants put on their tables, and then conspiratorially sitting down to a candle-lit dinner of soup behind drawn shutters.

Soup is synonymous with abundance, a preservation of tradition, resistance and freedom. In 20th-century Hungary, there was every reason to hold so tenaciously onto the soup-bowl if one was going to survive, especially if one was Jewish. Here there was no organic development or honest, gradual improvement of one's financial status—almost every generation had to start from scratch, because, as the grandfather puts it, "In this country, they always take something away from somebody." As for the father, to him Switzerland is the country of his dreams, the happy country which has no historical eras. Because "historical era" means that people come driving the cars or motorbikes of the day, flaunting government ordinances or guns, and off they carry your chest of drawers.

The family business started in the pre-war years tosses on the churning, hostile waters like the ship of state in Greek poetry. It is, alternately, a relative dressed in a German uniform, the grandfather with his sidelocks, or a trusty assistant learning to be a proletarian, who has to be asked to post himself at the shop door to avert any imminent threats. And, surprise, the heroes of *Glamour* all escape the worst.

"Falsification of history", a charge also levelled at István Szabó by some of his critics. *Sunshine* is a "big movie", not only in its execution, but, more importantly, in the sense that it views the significant events from the perspective of history and philosophy, rather than from the viewpoint of the particular individual forced into or caught up in these situations. So much so, that even the shaping of the characters was carried out downwards: it's not flesh-and-blood figures we see, not the victims crushed under the wheels of the relentless advance of history, but types whose fate serves to illustrate age-specific situations —models with some flesh added on to make them look like real individuals, some features to give them a face. *Glamour,* by contrast, works from precisely the opposite starting point: it is every bit a "small movie", happy to look no further than the world of a child, which orbits round the parental suns from which it receives light and warmth, and beyond which there is no life. Questioning the father's choice (a betrayal, in the eyes of the grandfather) is quite out of the question. The father decides on assimilation, and then runs and hides because he wants to stay alive, and—if possible—to keep the shop, too; on Fridays, the lucky survivor waits for his wife with a pillow in his hands at the bedroom door. The mother holds out, embroidering red hearts on the shirts and the pillow-cases, cooking the meat-soup, raising her pelvis every Friday, gripped, now and then, by nostalgia for home. Is there any room for moral questions here?

Questions, indeed, more properly to be put to those who took the nation into war, losing half the country in the process. The grandfather would not, for the life of him, air his views on politics, but he knows exactly just where he stands on all these issues.

Both *Sunshine* and *Glamour* make only the vaguest of referenc to historical turning-points, but where the former stylizes upwards, the latter does so downwards. Of course, the film treats this from the bottom, with a fair amount of irony; the figures who represent successive terror régimes tend to be more comic and subject to human frailty than frightening. Which is not necessarily to be put down to the director's mode of vision, his generous heart and the all-embracing "glamour"; it could, equally, flow from the survivors' sense of humour.

The film deserves credit for mostly succeeding in portraying events through the eyes of a child. We get a sense of fracture in the flow of the narrative where it arbitrarily switches its point of view. Intimately familiar as the world of grownups is to the child, it is equally mysterious, with the adored parents the most mysterious of all. So when he wants to talk about them, mould their lives into a story, it is not enough to collect the family's trove of anecdotes and piece together his own personal recollections; after all, a family legendry is a tangled web of elements of fact and fiction. The son, too, will need his imagination if he wants to picture his parents as children or passionate lovers, or his own family without himself in it.

The literariness of the words of the narrator are therefore not disturbing but using a narrator in a film is always a risky decision and only on the rarest occasions is the overall effect a happy one. *Glamour* does have some scenes that seem overshadowed by the commentator, leaving little room for the images to live in. But the biggest problem, the most abrupt change of style, comes where the child claims a central role for himself in the history of the parents. In the episodes on the 56 tram or that of the "hanging judge", the unity of the film sunders, with tender or mocking irony giving way to passion. *Glamour* has not turned out to be twice as good as the portion of *Private Horváth and Friend Wolfram* devoted to the history of this same family.

Cast, images and music play a pivotal role in imposing unity on a film that, building from episodes, is protean in its visual style as well. Károly Eperjes inserts himself into the role of the father with his accustomed assurance, and here, too, he can do no wrong. The surprise is György Barkó's performance: the Orthodox Jewish grandfather with patriarchal ambition that he brings to life is at once realistic and a caricature; it is authoritative, intimidating and loveably comical. The other surprise is Eszter Ónodi: an actress at the beginning of her career could well be thought to be too young for the mother's role; added to this is the fact that she scarcely has any lines: she has to depend on gestures and her eyes to get across that she is a German girl, a woman in love, and a loving mother.

The music, by László Melis, is highly allusive, preserving its humour even where the story loses it. A modest budget means a pivotal role for those responsible for the film's look, the cinematographer, the costume designer and the art director. *Glamour* is one of those rare works where an aesthetic approach to the photography is not a handicap. Sándor Kardos is visibly in his element, not only where beauty is the concern. Sometimes he accentuates the grotesqueness of a scene by running a rear view of the proceedings (officers arriving or departing in an automobile or on a motorbike on their property-seizing missions), and sometimes he counterpoints an exuberance of feeling (on the face of the parents in love) by shooting from below with a distorting lens.

Glamour is a curious film. It has as many flaws as there are stars in the sky, but, as you watch, these tiny, twinkling dots slowly fade from view, so that all you see is a golden shine, a radiant light. Glamour, if you like. ❧

There may be a harmony in heaven, and the planet may be well enough, provided a man could be born in it to a great title or to a great estate, but that is not the fate of most who do not belong to the species esterházy europaeus. *Yet lesser mortals are here granted the privilege of savouring comic writing of the highest order. [Péter Esterházy's* Harmonia Cælestis*] is the great Hungarian novel that the world has been waiting for since time immemorial: a chronicle of its times, sociological description, a conspectus of problems that currently bug us, a satire, a philosophical book. For all that, it is not a book in search of cheap success, and whether it is seen as a light or heavy read depends entirely on the reader. It is, in any event, a masterpiece that one hopes will soon find its way into English, whilst praying it will be handled by someone fully equal to the task.*

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