

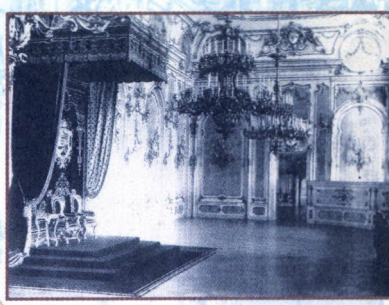
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161



Hungary's Cities and Regions at the Second Millennium

György Kurtág Talks on his Music

Their Man in Budapest

Governing the New Economy

A Thousand Years on Display

François Fejtő

on the Singular Marriage between Hungarians and Jews

The Subcarpathian Reformed Church



The Hungarian Quarterly

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- 3 *Hungary's Cities and Regions at the Turn of the Millennium*
György Enyedi
- 17 *A Transylvanian Bestiary*
Birds of the Air (Excerpts from the novel, translated by Tim Wilkinson)
Zsolt Láng
- 33 *Poems, translated by David Hill*
Ferenc András Kovács
- 38 *Their Man in Budapest*
James McCargar and the 1947 Road to Freedom
Márta Pellérdi
- 63 *Governing the New Economy*
Pál Réti
- 70 *A Thousand Years on Display*
Millennial Exhibitions
Pál Lővei

CLOSE-UP

- 87 *Assimilation and Identity*
François Fejtő on the Singular Marriage between Hungarians and Jews
Endre T. Rózsa

PERSONAL

- 94 *They Never Used the 'C' Word*
Jack Thompson

HISTORY

- 99 *At the Great Divide*
The Subcarpathian Reformed Church
László Medgyessy

BOOKS & AUTHORS

- 106 *Hungarian Doves and Yugoslav Hawks*
(Lajos Party Nagy, László Darvasi)
Miklós Györfly
- 113 'The Fowles of Heauen'—Transylvanian Style (Zsolt Láng)
Tim Wilkinson
- 119 *What Is Inside?* (George F. Cushing)
István D. Rácz
- 123 *Exiled into Existence* (Susanna Fahlström)
George Gömöri

MUSIC

- 126 'It's Not My Ears That Do My Hearing'
György Kurtág Interviewed by Bálint András Varga
- 135 *Hungaroton's Verdi Recordings—A Decade and a Half On*
Géza Fodor
- 145 *Shadowplay*
New Recordings by Péter Eötvös
Paul Griffiths

THEATRE & FILM

- 148 *Hungarian Ritual* (Mihály Vörösmarty, Pongrácz Kacsóh,
Yvette Bozsik, László Németh, Béla Pintér)
Tamás Koltai
- 154 *In the Shadow of a Masterpiece*
Film Week 2001
Erzsébet Bori

98
160

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

György Enyedi

Hungary's Cities and Regions at the Turn of the Millennium

The post-Socialist transition has produced substantial changes in the urban and regional structure of Hungary. The new structure shows growing inequalities, stronger international competitiveness and the beginning of integration into a European urban and regional system. This new structure has been shaped by two fundamental factors: the post-Socialist transition process and the new global trends of the 1990's.

The past ten years have created new conditions both for the location of economic activity and for the management of urban development (by establishing a market economy based on private property and by introducing a democratically elected and controlled local government system). Economic restructuring—the shift from an industrial economy to a post-industrial, knowledge-based economy—which started in Western countries in the 1970s, occurred in Hungary during the 1990s. Of necessity it was squeezed in time and achieved at great social costs, but it was successful. The economic success is reflected in a continuous and fast economic growth (a 5–6 per cent annual growth in GDP since 1997); in the export-led character of growth and in the restructuring of exports, of which two thirds now go to the EU countries; two thirds are produced by the engineering industry; and 30 per cent of the goods now exported are high-tech products. This new economic structure prefers to locate in larger urban centres, a skilled workforce, industrial clustering and a high level of ancillary business services being the main attractions of locations.

The 1990 Act on Local Governments abolished the Soviet-type council system, and guaranteed the autonomy of the democratically elected and controlled local governments. The quality of local government management contributes to

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the competitiveness of individual towns and villages in attracting investment, tourist events or the location of services. In sum, this post-Socialist transition managed to create, within a few short years, locational processes and urban or regional development trends that are similar to those in Western Europe.

Simultaneously, development processes in Hungary have been influenced by the new global trends of the 1990s, such as the much mentioned (and misunderstood) globalization. This exposed Hungarian settlements and regions to global competition, to a certain form of urban reindustrialization via industrial clustering, and to the emergence of new economic trends, such as the growing importance of the cultural economy (culture, higher education, etc.). The cross-party political consensus on the European integration of the country, together with wide-ranging preparations for accession to the European Union, have facilitated the penetration and absorption of modern economic elements.

All these extremely rapid changes have burdened the citizens of Hungary. After decades of what is now seen as close to stagnation, coupled with the welfare safety net of the state Socialist system, many people were unable to cope with this radical transformation or with the need for continuous training and retraining. The new challenges have produced a serious generation gap, in the form of advantages available to the young and educated who were socialized during the 1990s. Still, the Socialist system still provided the older generations with a useful skill: they have learned how to survive difficulties.

The urban and regional structures of a country usually adjust slowly. The networks composed of the infrastructure, the environments the settlements have created and the location of economic activity are all conducive to inertia. Nevertheless, the changes of the 1990s were very important. The economic base of the urban system (traditional industry) collapsed in the early 1990s. Between 1990 and 1993, GDP dropped by 20 per cent, the output of agriculture by 30 per cent. One third of the active population (no less than 1.5 million in all) found themselves without employment. These losses were comparable to the economic losses caused by the Second World War and the recovery took longer. It is now possible to state firmly that the destruction wrought by the transitional crisis was, in Schumpeter's terms, a creative destruction. The economy has been successfully rebuilt, but is now structured very differently; since it operates in a new way, its locations have changed too. Hungary now has an entirely new economic geographical map.

Five aspects of regional changes

Growing regional inequalities

It is fashionable to speak or write of the country as being split: the East/West divide or the Budapest/countryside divide is a regular topic for newspapers or politicians. What they say about this split is usually one-sided and based on prejudice, rather than on a careful analysis of facts.

Regional inequalities are usually measured by economic indices (per capita GDP) or data on living conditions (unemployment rate, average family income, etc). These inequalities are defined at the level of the basic administrative units (in Hungary, the counties). The existence of regional inequalities is evident. They reflect the uneven distribution of land and mineral resources, the differences within the settlement network as they developed historically, the inequalities built into the quality of local societies (age, ethnicity, educational structure, work ethic or trade traditions), the accessibility of dynamic centres, etc. The value of a given set of regional economic elements depends on the general trends in the economy. Now it is clear that soil fertility has a limited impact, while formerly it was decisive in an agrarian economy. Currently, in our age of a knowledge-based economy, advantageous geographical location, the quality of the settlement environment and, primarily, the quality of the workforce are the most important elements for a regional economy to be successful. All these can be improved, albeit slowly and with difficulty.

Regional inequalities can be such that a large proportion of those resident in backward areas find themselves pushed into poverty and gradually marginalized. All societies try to offset the effect of these inequalities. Traditional methods for a local society to correct itself are migration or introducing new economic activities. The 20th century saw state-imposed corrections (from different considerations and through different methods) in the countries of Europe. The major tool of state correction is regional policy.

Regional inequalities, as measured in per capita GDP or by counties, have not changed much. We have no exact data from the state-Socialist period. The Central Planning Office, in 1978, estimated that the leading county's per capita GDP was 2.5 times higher than that of the least developed county. Twenty years later, the ratio is practically the same.¹ In economic performance, the most significant regional change has been the outstanding performance of the Budapest Metropolitan Region, producing a growing gap between the capital and the rest of the country.

While there may have been little change in economic inequalities, the general public was shocked by the rapidly increasing gap in living standards between regions. This reaction may be explained through two factors: first, that the public had become accustomed to social egalitarianism and, secondly, that these inequalities were growing in a declining economy and consequently they meant poverty and increasing unemployment. In the state-Socialist system poor economic performance scarcely made itself felt in living conditions, due to an egalitarian redistribution in a state-owned economy. In 1978, in the least developed county, there was full employment and a somewhat lower than average family

1 ■ Thus the inequalities in economic performance have remained the same. The leading counties were Komárom (1978) and Győr-Sopron (1998), both located along the Budapest-Vienna motorway, and the least developed in both years was Szabolcs-Szatmár, in northeastern Hungary.

income. In the 1990s, in the same county, poor economic performance has resulted in a 15 to 20 per cent unemployment rate, and a life under the poverty line for 35 to 40 per cent of the population. Regional inequalities became a hot issue because they were growing in the most sensitive fields of an individual's life. In an egalitarian Socialist system, regional inequalities were present mostly in infrastructure and in the supply of services.

Regional inequalities in Hungary are large enough to require government intervention, but they are not exceptional by international standards. We can find similar differences in Austria, Belgium, Italy or Poland. The dominant economic role of the capital city's region is also frequent in small countries (Portugal has the strongest economic concentration in the capital's metropolitan area in Europe). Other post-Socialist countries have experienced uneven regional development (or rather decline) similar to Hungary's during the transitional crisis. Hungary has been the most successful of these countries in putting its economy into a long-term growth trajectory while carrying out substantial restructuring at the same time.

Regions are not homogenous. It is a simplification to use statistical averages to show that Western Hungary is developed and Eastern Hungary is undeveloped. Regional inequalities are better expressed (and felt) on the settlement level. In the 1990s, city regions were taking over the earlier role of core regions and growing inequalities were most evident in the settlement system. Hence an analysis of regional development should be accompanied by a study of the changes in the settlement system.

The urban vs. rural dichotomy

In the first half of the 20th century, this urban vs. rural dichotomy was characteristic everywhere in Europe. It was expressed in the urban concentration of wealth, modernization, high standards in the infrastructure, education and high culture. Rural people remained for the most part in traditional living conditions, they had traditional occupations (farming and forestry), low educational standards, limited access to communal services, and there was an important gap between urban and rural income. Rural backwardness used to be an important push factor for rural migration into towns.

After the Second World War, this situation changed in the European market economies: a rural vs. urban dichotomy has been replaced by a rural/urban continuum. Most of the rural areas (except for a few mountainous and remote Mediterranean regions) have been incorporated into the urbanizing zones; there was a social evening up (not total levelling) between rural and urban societies; the basic settlement infrastructure (e.g. running water, sewage systems) became identical everywhere, and high standard urban services became easily accessible for most rural dwellers.

This equalization process remained distorted and unfinished in Eastern Europe. The Hungarian village has conserved many more traditional elements

than, say, the Austrian village. There were important improvements in education, employment, housing and communal services, but a serious gap remained in transport, communications and commerce. Rural dwellers did not find it easy to reach (and therefore to use) urban services, the educated young left the countryside, and traditional rural life (e.g. a strong attachment to agriculture, food self-sufficiency) remained important. Even the outer zones of urban agglomerations retained much of their traditional, semi-rural character.

It was the rural economy that was especially seriously hit by the transition crisis. There is no room here to discuss all the reasons (unavoidable and avoidable) for the crisis (from the collapse of outmoded rural industry to questionable ways of reprivatizing land and the lack of an agricultural policy). Nevertheless, the conclusion is clear: Hungarian villages were unprepared to join in the competition that European settlements have been engaged in. In the 1990s, world economic trends everywhere favoured large cities and backward rural areas were among the serious losers. Rural unemployment is especially high and many rural families live on welfare. Regional development programmes had recourse to few dynamic elements in these zones. In sum: until the 1980s the rural character of an area was not an important handicap, while in the last decade, the presence of undeveloped rural areas has contributed to a major and long-lasting extent to regional inequalities in Hungary.

Changes in the urban system

Regional inequalities are closely related to the competitiveness and economic performance of the cities located within the regions. At the present stage of global economic development, large urban regions are taking over the role of the former core or leading regions. Although economic restructuring resulted in footloose locational behaviour, economic activity did not become geographically dispersed. While strictly located elements of development (like raw material, transport hubs) lost their earlier importance, knowledge-based industries tended to be clustered in urban areas where they found high-quality manpower, a range of business support services, research facilities, opportunities for interactive learning, etc.

The transition placed the cities into a competitive situation and subjected them to the shock of fast economic restructuring. By the end of the 1990s, it was easy to distinguish between winners and losers. In the Centre for Regional Studies we carried out research to analyse the trajectories of Hungarian cities during the transition. The main conclusions are as follows:

- The Budapest Metropolitan Area has produced an outstanding performance, with a rapidly modernizing economic system and a strong concentration of high standard service facilities. Budapest is the only Hungarian city which participates in the European metropolitan system.
- Many provincial cities have adapted well and recovered from the transition crisis within a few years. The larger regional centres were first (those with over

100,000 inhabitants). They were followed by smaller county seats in becoming dynamic nodes of the urban system. Their dynamism was expressed by their economic performance, by the presence of modern market institutions (one should remember that a market economy has only recently been restored in Hungary and such banal data as the density of ATMs is a good indicator of modernization) and by their competitiveness. Competitiveness has been primarily supported by the quality of the local workforce, by the business climate of the given city and by its accessibility. Despite the limited size of the country, distance still counts for much in competitiveness: distance from the unevenly located motorways, distance from the Budapest Metropolitan Area, distance from the Austrian (the European Union) border. The geographical distribution of these centres is not especially uneven; they are more frequently found in Western Hungary but they are present and are developing in northeastern Hungary, too. More than one third of the urban population outside Budapest live in these cities.

■ Medium-sized and small cities were in deep crisis at the beginning of the 1990s. Two thirds of them were classified as "marginalizing" at that time. That was when state-owned industry collapsed, collective farms were dismantled and privatization and foreign direct investments had just started. Weakened economic functions were not yet replaced by innovative elements. Within a few years, most of these cities emerged successfully from the crisis, primarily because of industrial restructuring. They advanced at a slower pace towards a service economy, except in the case of special (education, health or tourism) functions. In the case of small cities, trading traditions and geographical proximity to the dynamic large cities or urbanizing axes are of great importance. This city group is still in transition, the final outcome is not yet clear. The geographical distribution of these emerging local centres is more uneven than that of larger cities, clustered as they are west of the Tisza river, in central Hungary and in northern Transdanubia

■ The marginal group became much smaller by the end of the 1990s. There were 58 (out of 218) cities in this group, 40 of which remained in the marginal group in 1990 as well, while the remaining 18 were granted city status between 1990 and 1998.² Most of them are located in northeast Hungary, primarily in the rural areas of the Great Plain and in the former northern mining regions. Marginality will presumably continue to be a problem for these cities for a long time to come. Marginal cities are frequently found in the underdeveloped, poverty and unemployment-hit regions. Larger cities in this area are rapidly developing

2 ■ In Hungary, the Act on Local Government (1990) distinguishes between rural communities and urban communities. They have equal rights but different competences. A rural community can apply for city status—on meeting a number of criteria—to the Ministry of Interior; if the Ministry endorses the application, Parliament decides on it and the President of the Republic proclaims it. In our analysis city means urban community.

but their dynamism is due to their participation in a larger (partly transborder) urban network and the loosening of their formerly close ties with the small and medium-sized cities in their hinterland. From this springs the great difficulty in developing the marginal regions of northeast Hungary, where strong cities are unable (or unwilling) to exercise a dynamizing effect upon their rural environment.

The government's regional policy concentrates its financial assets in Northeast Hungary, following the logic that the poorest should get the most. The efficiency of this policy (of dealing with symptoms instead of introducing structural changes) is highly unsatisfactory. The transformation of the settlement network underlines the long lasting character of regional inequalities in Hungary.

Transborder effects

The state-Socialist economy was a closed economy where urban and regional development was shaped by internal conditions. Borders were a barrier to economic relations (and to the movement of individuals), consequently the border zones became marginal and were ignored by regional policy as well.

The political opening of the borders and the continuous improvement of the transborder infrastructure have made a fundamental impact on regional and urban development. Small in area (93,000 km²), Hungary has seven neighbours (Austria, Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Yugoslavia, Croatia, Slovenia). Four of these became independent recently, in the early 1990s, after the dissolution of former federal states. In effect this means that transborder economic or cultural ties involve seven legal systems, seven traditions, seven different levels of economic structure and development. A drive of 200 km west from Budapest takes you to the Austrian border, the eastern edge of the European Union. A drive of 200 km south of the Hungarian capital leads you to Yugoslavia, the scene of the most tragic events of the last decade, a country in a state of armistice rather than of peace. Fourteen out of Hungary's nineteen counties have an international border; there is no Hungarian settlement further than 100 km from a foreign country. It is no exaggeration to say that the whole territory of Hungary (like that of many a small European state) could be defined as a border zone.

Historically, the Hungarian settlement system was shaped within the geographical and political entity of the Carpathian Basin. This entity was seriously distorted as a consequence of the Trianon Peace Treaty of 1920. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was dismantled by the Treaty and the Hungarian Kingdom lost two-thirds of its former territory. New borders cut traditional ties within the urban network, a number of cities lost their hinterlands and became peripheral. Between the two World Wars, transborder contacts developed poorly because of Hungary's frigid political relations with neighbouring countries. During the Communist era, borders were difficult to cross, even those with other Socialist countries. After 1990, the opening of the borders has reestablished many trans-

border relations and helped to develop new ones. The most spectacular result was the recreation of the Budapest-Vienna axis,³ which re-established the country's centre of innovation in northwestern Hungary (including Budapest). The development of cross-border regions is also very promising. These follow the example of the Euroregions and they are partly supported by the European Union's CBC (Cross-Border Cooperation) programme. Economically, the Burgenland-Western Hungary regional development programme is the most successful. Politically the Tisza-Maros Euroregion is the most interesting, where Hungarian, Romanian and Yugoslav areas have agreed on a close cooperation. French-German cross-border cooperation contributed greatly to a better understanding between the two nations—hopefully, the same will happen within the Carpathian Basin. Although the frequent redrawing of state borders has been a contentious issue in southeastern Europe, Hungarian governments since 1990 have been pragmatic enough to sign agreements with neighbouring countries concerning the acceptance of the present borders. Cross-border cooperation is facilitated by the presence of over 3 millions ethnic Hungarians in the neighbouring countries.

A new border problem will arise when—perhaps in 2004—Hungary becomes a member of the European Union, thus making most of the Hungarian border the external border of the Union. Citizens from the neighbouring countries can freely enter Hungary now, and this may be affected by EU regulations (visa requirements for Romanian, Ukrainian and Yugoslav citizens, strict control of working permits, and so on). The Hungarian government is currently preparing a special status for ethnic Hungarians holding non-Hungarian passports to facilitate their entry into Hungary; the issue appears to be too complicated for a satisfactory solution to be easily found.

Law on regional policy

Regional and urban development can be influenced by a regional policy. Traditionally, policy measures have aimed at reducing regional inequalities. Governments cannot abolish or introduce regional processes; the processes are shaped by millions of decisions taken by economic actors, institutions, civil associations, households, individuals—but governments can correct them. The aims and methods of these corrections are summarized by a regional policy.

The paradigm of regional policy has also substantially changed. Under the state Socialist system, regional policy used budget redistribution to transfer resources from developed regions to the less developed. In the EU countries, the bottom-up approach is dominant: locally defined and partly financed develop-

3 ■ Both parties left unfinished the (potential) Budapest-Vienna motorway: the lanes stopped 30 km short of the Austrian-Hungarian border, traffic then had to take local roads. The motorway was completed shortly after the political transition.

ment projects get additional financing from national governments and/or from the Union. Most of the post-Socialist countries still only half-heartedly approach this decentralized model.

In the first half of the 1990s there was limited interest in regional policy. The economic crisis forced a focus on sectoral policy and on debt management. Modest sums were spent on the less developed counties, albeit in an improvised way. In the meantime, a new type of regional policy was systematically prepared, aiming at conformity with EU regulations. In 1996, Hungary was the first (and until recently, the only) post-Socialist country to pass a law on regional policy. The EU Commission takes a rather favourable view of the Hungarian legislation, and the new institutions for regional development it established. Basically, the Hungarian regional policy is in keeping with EU norms. Its weaknesses are the slow pace of decentralization, the limited resources spent on regional development and a unilateral concentration of subsidies in the northeastern counties. We are well forward in the learning process of how to construct a modern regional policy but it is a process that will not be short. Since 1998, the Ministry of Agriculture has taken over the responsibility for regional development, and this may not turn out to be the best solution.

Budapest, the gateway city

The concept of a gateway city is well-established in settlement geography. These cities were located on the border zones of large natural landscape units, and their main functions were to exchange the goods and products of different natural resources and to assure the—institutional, cultural, personal—contacts between the population of the large landscapes (regions). Gyöngyös, Eger, Miskolc, Kassa (Košice in Slovakia, with its substantial Hungarian population) are examples of gateway cities in the zone where the Hungarian Great Plain and the Carpathian Mountains meet.

Gateway city has acquired a new notional value as a consequence of the recent integration of the European urban system. The processes of globalization are being conveyed into the European regions by the international cities, and gateway functions are among the international roles of such cities. Gateway functions may be carried out by large urban centres that are located on the border zones of the highly developed and the less developed regions and which are able to receive, transform and redistribute innovation, information, capital and production relations that are coming from the highly developed core regions. This is not a simple transfer, and it may contribute to the prosperity of the city and its region; consequently there is a strong competition for gateway city functions. Gateway cities between the Western European core area and the Mediterranean semi-periphery (such as Lisbon, Bilbao, Barcelona, Lyons, Milan) have produced spectacular performances during the last twenty-five years.

The potential to be a gateway city is as a rule evaluated according to the following criteria:

- the size and geographical position of the city;
- the city's national and international relations;
- capital attraction and functions in international regulations;
- the infrastructural standard;
- the presence of a highly qualified workforce and an R&D sector;
- the presence of high standard business services;
- the quality of life of the urban environment;
- the capacity and willingness of the local society to adopt a multiethnic and multicultural life-style;
- urban policy promoting a (socially and environmentally) sustainable urbanization.

Let's apply these criteria to Budapest. Size and the geographical location are favourable. The metropolitan area has 2.5 million inhabitants, making it the largest in Central Europe; it has the largest income potential in Hungary and thus can maintain a highly diversified system of services. It is located near the European Union (200 km from the Austrian border).

Communication networks are unevenly developed. Budapest is Hungary's main centre and it is very well positioned to propagate innovation within the country. Relations with eastern and southeastern Europe are improving but are still poorly developed for the most part.

Budapest has had the strongest capital attraction capacity: an inflow of some \$15 billion with the bulk of it coming from transnational companies. Now that privatization is virtually complete, the capital flow has slowed down; but transnational companies have started to develop their R&D activities and to locate their Central European regulation functions in Budapest.

Gateway city functions need a high-standard communication infrastructure. This was developed at a spectacular rate in the 1990s but there is still a gap between Budapest and the Western metropolises. Telecommunications are good enough to permit Budapest to be an information gathering and processing centre in East Central Europe. This function primarily benefits the Budapest economy because the redistribution network towards southeastern Europe is poorly developed.

In Hungary there is a dense road and railroad network but its quality is unsatisfactory. Budapest is the main hub, all main rail lines and motorways lead to it. Railtrack needs renewal to increase traffic speed and none of the motorways, except for the Vienna-Budapest motorway, extend to the state frontier. Another handicap is that Budapest has the only international airport (except for a small charter airport at Lake Balaton) and this adds to its island-like position. The communications infrastructure is adequate for linking Budapest to the core

European innovation region, but the links to southeastern Europe need a substantial improvement in quality.

The quality of its workforce and the presence of a strong R&D sector are the most important strengths of the Hungarian capital. A survey of transnational corporations showed that they were highly satisfied with the quality of available labour. Labour costs are low, but quality is a more important attraction than cheap labour since the bulk of investment has been directed into knowledge-based sectors. There are large educational institutions of high quality in Budapest. Forty per cent of all Hungarian university students are enrolled in Budapest universities. The proportion of foreign students pursuing their studies is the largest among all the post-Socialist countries, partly due to the fact that some faculties use English and German as teaching languages. Budapest has a number of post-graduate institutions (including the Central European University, the International Business School and the International Management Center) which recruit students from East Central Europe.

The R&D sector was seriously affected by the transition. State funding of research (including basic research) declined remarkably; it went from 2.5 per cent of GDP in 1986 to 0.6 per cent in 1996, and is just 1 per cent now. The disappearance of state-owned enterprises (and their privatization by transnational corporations) left the applied industrial research centres without customers. The R&D sector had been oversized in the state-Socialist period, because of the technological embargo imposed by the most developed Western countries. Research institutes often produced the high-tech products (computers, instruments) which were of vital importance for some industries (including defence). The situation of the sector is improving. The most important factor here has been the re-birth of applied industrial research (at the moment, 40 per cent of R&D expenditure is financed by business, a low proportion). Most of the transnational corporations, ten years after they started to invest in production here, have recognized the opportunities for developing the research sector. An expanding R&D base makes Budapest a good place for transforming and distributing innovation, and even for the development of an independent innovation centre.

High-standard business services, the full range from financial and insurance institutions, consulting firms, a stock exchange etc., are present and operate properly. The city plays the role of an international centre for corporate management and some transnational corporations have their subregional or regional headquarters in Budapest. The frequently quoted aim of urban policy to develop Budapest into an international financial centre, however, seems to have little basis in reality. Budapest banks have limited capital assets, the stock exchange has a modest turnover, and there is no sizeable capital flow between Budapest and other Central European capitals.

The quality of urban life is rather good. Standards of the built environment, urban transport, schools and of cultural life are important for competitiveness.

Those working in the knowledge-based economy and the highly mobile managers of the large companies place great importance on the quality of life. In a survey carried out by the Centre for Regional Studies in 1998, the Western residents expressed overall satisfaction. They emphasized good schools and a colourful cultural life as the main attractions. At the same time, living costs in Budapest are among the lowest in the developed world.

Budapest has strong traditions in multicultural life, making acceptance of foreigners easy. Four generations ago (in the 1870s) only half of Budapest's residents spoke Hungarian; even today it is accepted that people on the street or in your apartment house speak other languages. However, there are some difficulties here, because of some new and—to many—surprising features: the presence of refugees and of non-European migrants. One third of the Budapest population have migrated in from the countryside, where multiculturalism was exceptional. The strict EU policy on emigration also has an influence (Hungary is a buffer zone between the EU, Eastern Europe and the Balkans). Overall, Budapest people live easily with the fact that a gateway city attracts foreigners for long periods and even permanent residence.

Urban policy for sustainable development is not well founded. The symptoms of urban social problems (homelessness, organized crime, the decline of the old central residential areas) have recently and suddenly become striking. Neither urban policy nor people themselves have had the experience and institutions to tackle these challenges. City Hall focuses on fast modernization, investors are better received than environmentalists, the building of shopping malls is stimulated more than social housing. The fragmented character of local government (23 urban district local governments have the same legal status as the City of Budapest) makes it difficult to implement a comprehensive social or environmental policy.

The Hungarian capital is seeking international functions and is ready to take part in European metropolitan competition and cooperation. The functions that are most likely to be taken on are those of the gateway city and of subregional industrial management. A successful Budapest would contribute greatly to Hungary's attractiveness and to the country's economic development. There are still open questions on how large the city's zone of influence may be and on how it will cover areas in foreign countries in eastern and southeastern Europe. For that matter, competition between Vienna and Budapest is also an open question. Three factors will be crucial here. The first is the pace and rhythm of modernization in the countries of our post-Socialist neighbours; the second is the position of Budapest within the metropolitan system of the European Union; the third is the improvement of national and urban policies related to Budapest's development. The government should abandon its somewhat biased inclination to distinguish between the "national" countryside and "cosmopolitan" Budapest. It would be desirable to follow the example of governments

in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries: they recognized that Budapest is the key element in modernization, being the country's only international metropolis. Urban policy should be more comprehensive and should pay more attention to the social and environmental weaknesses of the city.

A Hungary of regions?

An important question for urban and regional development is the territorial framework for regional policy. The "Europe of regions" slogan has caught on in the media, indeed many people suppose that establishing regions is a prerequisite for EU membership. The more informed know that the EU does not prescribe the administrative subdivision of member countries, but that access to sizeable structural funds has conditions, and that the present Hungarian subnational administrative units, the counties, do not meet these conditions.

Regionalization and regionalism varies in its historical or political background. In many (not all) EU member countries, regions were based on historical traditions or ethnic diversity. Western nation-states (Spain, France, Italy, Germany) were created by integrating earlier independent provinces, with local languages and a local culture. Regionalism within the EU meant the revival of these former provinces, where the local population has had a strong regional identity, in the form of federal states (Austria, Germany) or regionalized states (Italy, Spain). In the mid-seventies, when neo-liberal economic policy introduced the bottom-up approach in regional policy, regions became a logical framework for development planning. This strengthened their political importance.

The situation is quite different in Hungary (and in a number of other Central European countries). The nation-states in our region were created in the 20th century by the dismantling of large states (in the case of Hungary, the Austro-Hungarian Empire); the borders of states have changed several times; and federal states (Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia) fell apart in the 1990s, the last wave of the nation-state formation in Europe. There is neither ethnic nor historical regionalism in Hungary. People have no regional identity: they identify first with their town or village and its environment and then with their county.

The county is the traditional subnational administrative territorial unit in Hungary. The county system was introduced in the 11th century and always symbolized a counterweight *vis à vis* the central power. County borders have changed several times, but counties have a strong historical legitimation, and people identify with their counties. Counties are limited in their size, because there was a need for county seats to be easily accessible at the time of horse transport. During the 20th century there were several attempts to introduce reforms, aiming at the organization of larger territorial units. They all failed because of the successful resistance of the counties. Hungary was the only Communist country where the territorial system of public administration remained unchanged during the state-Socialist period.

There was a reformulation of the subnational system in the 1990s. The Act on Local Governments (1990) devolved much competence to the local (settlement) level; it has thus become a source for many bottom-up initiatives in local development, it has mobilized local resources and given an important impetus to the development of democracy. At the same time county governments lost many of their earlier functions and many of their decision-making powers were removed. Territorial functions were taken over partly by larger cities,⁴ partly by a large number of government agencies (county offices). Even after a slight modification of their status in 1994, the counties cannot take on the role of subnational government, and they are not prepared administratively for promoting and managing regional development programmes. For this reason, the Law on Regional Development (1996) established regional development councils independent of county governments, and started to build up a system of development regions for territorial planning, designing them as NUTS II regions for EU classification. This region-building process has been strengthened after 1998, and planning regions now cover the whole country. The territorial system of government now consists of 3200 (very fragmented) local governments; 19 counties of limited territorial competence; county offices of the central government's ministries; and 7 regions and regional development councils without elected bodies or competences in public administration, established solely for the purposes of regional development.

Since there is no regional identity and regional pressure in Hungary, it was purely a policy decision to establish regions. Six of the seven regions cover three counties each (county borders have remained unchanged) and the seventh is the Budapest region (Budapest plus Pest County). There is still much uncertainty over the future development of regions. First of all, their borders and their main cities are yet to be designated. Another open question is the relation between counties and regions. Will the regions become another subnational unit, together with the counties; will they replace the counties or will the county remain the subnational unit and the regions simply perform selected functions (like regional planning)? All these options are possible, and the smaller the changes the less resistance from the counties can be anticipated. There will be no popular pressure for regions—building a regional identity takes time—and there is the usual large vested interest in protecting the *status quo*. If the change is minimal, political decentralization will be slowed down. If the future implies regional decentralization, this process has to be carefully planned, has to achieve the support of the electorate and has to be formulated as a long-term goal. ■

4 ■ Cities with the same legal rights as counties.

Zsolt Láng

A Transylvanian Bestiary

Birds of the Air

Excerpts from the novel

The grey raven

It was not just that, as yet, there was no name for a plate—nor was there one for the mind. There did not exist enough of either for it to be worth christening them: a poking finger seemed enough should they happen to come under discussion.

Baron Sapré had a plate too, but he could take pride, first and foremost, in his mind, since he had acquired his plates, indeed all his tableware, the many cattle of his household, his properties, his rank, and his power as well with his mind. The peoples of the surrounding area called the richly fabled deviousness of his mind sorcery; he himself, they thought, had sold his soul to the devil, and in return had received the occult science of wizardry and evil machinations. All that had stood on the site of his cloud-wreathed castle a few years before, in the recollections of those who dwelled down below, were capriciously fissured rocks, the ruins of an ancient fortress. Then, in a single stormy night, the new snowy-white stone fortress, its towers roofed with copper and its windows dazzling back the rays of the sun, had descended from the heavens, and flat, rounded stones, big as the broad hats of the Germans, had hailed down to pave the winding road leading up to the castle, whilst the baron, who likewise plopped down here out of nowhere, had been able to drive up to it in his leather-trimmed coach with the massive wheels, his silver-helmeted foot soldiers padding behind the coach, along with his baggage-waggons and his host of serving people, and the weather-cocked chimneys of the castle had begun to smoke. A grey raven that had never been seen before also made its appearance around the castle,

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blighting the dreams of folk with its muffled nocturnal croaking. In vain did Máté Kovács Nagy, headman of the village of Zsombok, have poisoned bait hung from the boughs of the oak trees; neither the black venom milked from the throats of snakes nor the toxic salt ground from the rocks made a difference. In the end, the village headman spread the rumour that the baron fed the bird off his own thigh, and that was why it would not touch any other nourishment.

The baron rarely moved outside his castle, yet he still knew about all that happened far and wide. But it was idle to see any wizardry in the matter. Zsombok Castle towered high above the lower peaks; in fine weather the entire country could be seen, from the Eastern Carpathians to the Western ranges, from the Fogaras alps in the south to Mount Crystal in the north. And he kept himself informed about what he could not see through the sounds carried up as a supplication from care-worn hearts, because at nightfall, when the daytime commotion was stilled down in the valleys, sounds soared up to the castle on high: conversations, cries, the rumbling of carts and carriages, the ringing of iron and steel, the knelling of a bell, the whinnying of horses, the shrilling of Turkish pipes and children, the cries of women in labour, the protestations and curses of menfolk eddied and seethed around the towers.

Although tears were still pouring in a stream down his face, and his body and soul were racked by sobbing, the cogs in his brain were spinning like mill-wheels, though these wheels were doing no grinding but piecing things together. In his brain, in a fleeting moment, a thousand possibilities were checked out against one another, and he, like the Persian inventor of the game of chess, was clear that, through successive doublings, it takes but a single grain of wheat placed on the first square for a whole sea of grain to shower onto the last square.

He thrust the blunt end of his lumpish index finger to the back of his throat in an attempt to scoop from himself the waves of acute nausea that were welling up, time and time again, from grief. He started to cough, and his scrawny body clattered like a sheet of iron. Then silence supervened, and the room filled with the noises of the outside, along with the light of dawn. Sapré, rising from his armchair and shuffling across to the window, flopped onto the crenellated stone parapet and looked out.

He heard the rumbling of his carriage on the paved road to Vidrány, heard the see-saw drone of the outbursts of fury that kept erupting from George Vidrány's drunken cronies, and the blaring 'come-in-do' boomed out by the host who met him at the door. I would like to take your daughter for my wife - the sound of his own timid voice from the past struck his ear...

Vidrány goggled with bloodshot eyes, his vacant gaze gaping inanely at his guest; then, draining in one draft the goblet in his hand, he turned back towards the house, where his cronies were out-bellowing one another in their demands for a fresh barrel to be tapped. To indulge the throat, every whim, prank, revelry and, above all, merry jest. But this capped it all! He erupted into laughter,

dashed his wine goblet to the ground, slapped his knee, doubled up, staggered around, trampling underfoot the yellow irises that bordered the path. Vidrányi's head was incessantly full of foolishness; a vile morality resided within him, and his conduct was informed by boorish habits. He slapped Sapré on the shoulder then coarsely snatched at him between his legs, invited him in, saying there was room for him too. Pulling down the flap of his breeches, he began to urinate, directing the yellow arc into a mouse hole. By the time he had emptied his bladder, he had also regained his voice.

'Xenia, Xenia!' he shouted the girl's name, 'Your suitor has arrived!'

Sapré turned pale, his teeth chattered, his knees gave way as, all-atremble, he cast stealthy glances towards the house. He would flee in panic before the gaze of females, sensing that they were stripping him bare in order to make a laughing stock of his skinny body. Vidrányi started to reel his way back into the house; Sapré pulled himself together and crept dizzily in just the opposite direction, into the cover of the hazel bushes beside the lake. He threw himself down on a tree stump and burst into tears. And as he now heard that morning's sobbing from his window, the waves of humiliation seemed to wrench it from his puny chest with a magnet, and the bitter sobbing struck up again, so it was impossible to make out the painful voices of the past from those of the present.

Darkness shrouded the valley. Only above the towers did there remain a trace of light to splash the grey raven, now stealing onto the scene, with a white lustre. Sapré wiped away his tears and directed his gaze attentively upwards. He could interpret the bird's flight, the quivers of its wing pinions, the number of wing beats, the curve of its tail—a wisp of air swirled aside here, a barely perceptible eddy there, amplifying in a train of links to whip up a storm whose inundations would batter shores teeming with life. Such knowledge is important to anyone who plots the events of the future. The grains of sand trickle down in the hour-glass and, however sharp the mind may be, cannot be prevailed upon to move contrariwise; yet the flux of the grains may be arrested by precisely inscribing the path of a single grain of sand, and time will be at a standstill in that obstructed trajectory. Human deeds are not regulated by divine foresight. God may be mighty, but He is unable to attend to the details; He does not keep track of the billions of aerial molecules. Only a human mind is capable of foreseeing the future, chequered as it is with nation-wide misfortunes or insignificant adventures.

Over against the dipping sun rose the Moon. Sapré recovered his composure. He called for his valet, washed himself, asked for food. He gave out orders: the horses were to be harnessed, they were off to Count István at Gyulafehérvár.

Make haste, make haste, was heard over and over again from the carriage. By lunchtime they reached István, who stared at his guest with tiny, alarmed eyes. The last time an unexpected traveller had shown up out of the blue at his dining pavilion, with news that the Turks were pillaging in the countryside

around Alvinc, he had taken such fright that he drained the vinegar cruet instead of his goblet of wine. Thereafter he quailed at every casual visitor, and had it been up to him, he would have received no one; he protected himself from stealthy newsmongers with tripwires carrying bells. Only death did he fear more. His residence was full of mollycoddled soothsayers who, fearing the consequences of unfulfilled prognostications, flew the coop with panicky swiftness, only for their places to be taken by their ever newer fellows, dubious and sly of mind one and all. The chambers of the future cannot be decked out with alarm bells.

It was precisely about the future that Sapré wished to speak to him in person: right now it swarms as busily as a beehive, but if you fail to act the hive will empty in a trice.

But István had become snagged on the hook of speech:

'Speak up,' he bawled, cupping the flap of his ear with the gesture of the hard of hearing.

'I wish to protect you from the machinations of malicious schemers.'

'What awaits me?'

'Death.'

'Tell me more, more!'

'You must act. The coming night our prince, Sigismund, will breathe the last of his restless spirit. Count Balthazar, who has been intriguing at the Holy Roman Emperor's court some twenty years now, is just waiting for this moment, and he will be back as soon as he receives the news, with the Emperor's appointment in the bag and a small regiment behind him. And you know what his first step will be? To silence the most eminent. Power-drunk scum always start with that. The heads of five nobles will tumble on the yellow dust in the market-place of Fehérvár, and, to make the murderer's joy still sweeter, the last will be yours, István!'

A chill ran through the count. He blanched and clutched at his neck to search for his pulse; maybe it was already all up with him. After the chill, his blood began to boil; rage and unbridled hatred chased one another in hot pursuit around his seething innards, he smashed to smithereens whatever came into his hands. Finally he hunched his head between his shoulders in alarm and, blinking pathetically, turned to Sapré. The baron had no wish to anticipate events recklessly: should morning bring a black-flagged messenger from the princely court, that would be the time to break the seal on the edict carrying the future's secret.

On this, the guest withdrew to recuperate from the strains of his long journey. Paying no heed to the household hubbub around him, the usual comings and goings of those who live from one day to the next, he preferred to sleep by day rather than by night. Night-time was the busy part of the day for a child of the Moon. His imagination, as if it were the pallid stuff of light, streamed out into space to feel and spy out the tracks of the snails, which show him the paths that are without hazard to the point where he can launch out with assurance,

like the vagrant Tartar horde, into the pitch-black of nights. Everything that happens in the world below Sun and Moon is subject not merely to the necessary influence of the heavenly bodies but also to that still more vital Power which governs the paths of the planets and stars, and strews the open spaces of the universe with vortical traps. Anyone who knows the location of these passages can gain a presentiment of the true intention of this Power, and he will always stay one step ahead of the game.

That day an emissary arrived at Prince Sigismund's with an ornate gift. The casket contains a sumptuous goblet: in it wine turns to honey, but that honey is poison, insidiously lethal poison. Averroës, the Arab sage, was dispatched from this earthly shadow-world in this manner, and renegade Moorish alchemists have concocted the treacherous potion ever since. The Andalusian beaker, the first grain of wheat, the first move...

* * *

Try as he might to conspire, the hard-of-hearing Count István's secret instructions carried far, and the agitated reports of his horsed messengers could be made out even a mile off; so loud were they bellowed it was as if their bearers were being poked with red-hot irons. As a result, Sapré got wind in good time of the insolent, meddlesome, ignoble intentions of the count's steward, who feared for his position. The night after the storm, he again sat out beside his coach, took out his letters, and waited. A few minutes had barely gone by when the grey raven showed up with a noiseless beating of wings. Sapré attached the rolled-up documents below the wings, then the courier flew back to Zsombok Castle, where Domine Valentine, the baron's valet, awaited his instructions.

As soon as the storm had blown itself out, George Vidrányi had also set off in order to clear himself before the count, for relations with him had never been hostile. When news of what István was accusing him of had reached his ears, he sobered up for a moment from his years of sottishness and, on recovering his senses, suddenly grew sick of the eternal debauchery. He felt complete relief when it occurred to him to make the journey, seeing it as a form of spiritual and bodily pilgrimage. Of course, he was accompanied by the same cronies as had been revelling in his house, and by the second day of the journey he no longer had any recollection of his rehabilitated state. They headed first for Fehérvár but, on gaining intelligence of István's halting-places, broke off their journey and wended their way up towards Szatmár. Three carts trundled after them with their provisions, twice that many with the wine casks.

Xenia, against her will, was likewise travelling in the carousing cavalcade as it meandered across the country. She did not so much as glance outside her carriage, which in truth was no more than a hastily converted baggage-waggon with cushioning. When they drove up to the house of the Caspar Nagys the first evening, her father had to resort to the same force in ordering her to step down

as in setting her onto the carriage at the start. She rushed up to the guest room, refused to touch her food, and lay fully clothed in bed, pulling the eiderdown over her head. She did not fall asleep. Since she was a tot, the one thing on her mind had been how she would kill her father. Whether in her own room or in some forgotten recess of the house, she fantasized constantly about this; like finger sucking, it became an obsession, holding her in its thrall in the same way as did wine-drinking, or sweet talk to women and beasts, her father and his cronies.

The fourth night she fell asleep and, for perhaps the first time in her life, had a dream. Stone birds came down from the sky and flocked on the ground: on fields, courtyards, house-roofs and roads. She was scared of them but could go nowhere, could not even move a step. Then, as if by chance, she touched one of them, and at this mere throb of a fingertip the stone bird came to life and flew off.

On awakening, still under the influence of the dream, she decided to escape back home. She crept out to the courtyard and, by the first faint glimmer of dawn, spotted an already saddled horse that had been left loose. She led it out of the courtyard, going in front with stealthy steps; even the horse's shoe clopped just the once, and nobody started up. The servants were sprawled unconscious, in a drunken stupor, on the ground. She levered herself onto the saddle by mounting an ant's nest. She had never ridden a horse before, but the animal was an old, experienced, full-blooded steed, not skittish, and she left the reins hanging slackly to let it take her wherever it pleased, on the surmise that the horse would also want to be back home. Once they got there, she would set fire to the house, which was a perpetual haunt for strangers, hulking men who filled every available room to overflowing, with the result that more building-work had to be done to accommodate them and the old, brown-burnished dining table of sweet-smelling yew-wood had to be replaced. The sun bobbed up, as if to betoken the already flickering flames. She winced at the blinding light, and through the wincing something stirred within her body. A bird started to flap inside her; it spread its wings and beat them, like a cockerel fleeing from the knife. Racked by cramps, she stooped over the horse's neck, even drew her knees up; in this precarious balance, she was jolted onwards. The horse, as if sensing the pain gnawing at its passenger and paying sympathetic heed to what was going on inside her, slowed right down. The bird flapped ever more violently; the girl screwed up her eyes in pain. At that moment a shadow flitted past in front of the steed's legs. The animal reared up with a snort, and its rider fell senseless to the ground.

When she recovered from her swoon and opened her eyes, a bird was circling high up in the broad daylight of the firmament. Lying on her back, she gazed at the lazy, entrancing orbits. Her heart was barely beating. She could feel the dampness seeping through her dress. Her skirt had become bloodied, as had the ground beneath. She scratched dust into the palm of her hand and sprinkled it over the blood on account of the flies. She looked for the horse, but it was

nowhere to be seen. The sky too had emptied. Silence reigned in the thicket at the edge of the forest. She instinctively guessed at something, clambered to her feet and, with an expertise that she may have witnessed amongst the serving girls, tearing a strip from the frothy cambric of her underskirt, she prepared her first menstrual towel. She felt light and free. She would feel the same sense of relief when she was later to see blood spilling from the writhing bodies of the beheaded; as if every tormenting vision were ebbing away along with the blood.

She felt ill at ease wandering through the forest. Around her were fragrant wild strawberries, at the foot of every tree sprang a different tasting source of water, and yet she still went hungry and thirsty. She started at the rustling of leaves in the breeze, the clinking of pebbles on the bottoms of streams, the mysterious patterns of sunlight filtering through the sieve of the leafy tree boughs, the cobwebs that stuck to her face. Yet for a fraction of a second she was overwhelmed by a sense of familiarity that she had never experienced before—a profound, all-pervasive feeling, such a pity it was so fleeting. At twilight she began to shiver and long for warmth. She was scared to death by a pair of eyes glinting amidst the foliage of a bush, and since she no longer had the strength to flee, she burst into a frantic scream. She collapsed, as if she had slammed into a wall of hard rock; her breathing snagged, her heart paused in its beating, her skin grew pallid as the moon. Then, through the naked walls of terror, she heard the calls of her father's men.

* * *

The fog dispersed so suddenly it might never have been there. The west tower of the tortoise-shaped fortress pierced the red disc of the sun. Evening had come.

As the sky shone out, all at once silence fell in the square. A headless body was readily discernible, writhing on the scaffold, with blood spouting in all directions from the unstopped neck. The body then slumped senseless; the wild gush of blood also abated and silently trickled down from the planks into a swelling puddle in the dust. Every dog in the town scrambled there, lapping up the blood; snarling and baring their fangs, at times they snapped at one another.

The Sun's disc did not budge, seemingly stuck on the tower's flagpole or standing on tiptoe to see out the final scenes of the bloody drama. Then, on the opposite side, in the firmament above the scaffold, another scaffold arose at a vast height, a shadow of the earthly one, perhaps, yet looking the more real none the less, because, despite the outlines of distant peaks looming bluely behind the gentle hilltops, it belied the palpable high ground. And upon that heavenly scaffold a black figure of terror, hiding its face with a hood, as is the executioners' custom, rocked a gigantic axe, adjusting the axe-blade to the block as it dangled its free arm with death-presaging deliberation.

A bad sign, the thought flashed through István's mind, and even his coughing fits abated: his eyes staring, mouth gaping, he might have been the victim of a

stroke. And to put the finishing touch to this horror, the aide standing next to him, who, following his master's gaze, had also looked up at the sky, saw the arrival of some sort of storm cloud in the phenomenon and speculated that the rain would wash out the market-place entertainments that customarily ensued after executions, and with a dismissive gesture of disappointment shouted up: The devil take you!

Xenia looked down on the purpling platform from quite near at hand, on the stone stairs at the foot of Skinners' Bastion. She gradually recognised her father's garments, saw the big, melancholy head roll away in a spiral to come to rest, after a little juddering, in the middle of the scaffold. The eyes blinked oddly, not together, and the lips mouthed with a frightful twitching. The executioner's assistant, slipping as he tried to stop the rolling head with his foot, and only regaining his balance by swiftly flailing his arms, uttered an oath as he picked up Vidrányi's head by the hair to sling it into the basket. Xenia grasped at this point that the body could not be reassembled. She smiled to herself. The feeling of cold, gnawing hatred spilled out of her, spilled out like a clot of blood. She glanced instinctively up to the sky, where the familiar bird was now circling.

Only the next day was Prince István able to recover his speech, pronouncing judgement over the property of those who had been executed. Half of it could be kept by the heirs, the other part was to pass to the prince's treasury. Not a severe nor vengeful judgement. Kristóf's widow curtsied gratefully, but the girl, George Vidrányi's sole heir, was not to be found.

She had vanished.

The great bird circled above the square before gliding down before the castellan's house to alight on the shoulder of a tiny, fragile man. The little man started to caper; he danced like someone who cannot contain himself for joy. Then, quite unexpectedly, he dropped to his knees and sprawled flat on his face in the dust. The grey bird whisked off, but the man stayed prone in this peculiar pose for a while further. He was muttering something to himself that was inaudible, though the dust before his mouth could be seen to be stirring. He fell silent and cocked his head to one side, because he sensed that he was being watched. Their gazes met. Xenia took such fright that her innards tightened to a knot; she clutched her head and quickly turned into a narrow alley. Amongst the swirling scraps of the day's confused events she saw clearly before her the gypsy woman repeating incessantly, over and over again: the bird above, the serpent below.

The human-headed parrot

Count Boldizsár loved venturing into foreign lands and, mixing with seafarers, had even travelled overseas, but whilst he was away his relatives moved into his castles, pillaged his cellars and closets, stuffed their bellies with his droves

and herds, scraped the bottoms off his plates and dishes. His steward, whose job it should have been to conserve and multiply the goods and chattels entrusted to his care, colluded with the relatives (two layabout brothers-in-law) and led the way in the pillaging, putting the count's property at the mercy of his own and the relatives' rapacity, covetousness and villainy.

Of course, Count Boldizsár had no need to look to his neighbours for a bit of knavery, malice or slyness, for he was a thoroughgoing scoundrel himself, a swindler slippery as an eel, whose repertoire of chicanery had been considerably expanded in the course of his long peregrinations. A nice little family!

How might he shift the winds from the unfavourable quarter from which they were now blowing?

He had one strange little chap, a talking bird acquired on his travels at a bazaar, a human-headed parrot. The deuced creature had barely grown two spans in height, so that virtually its entire length was taken up by a full-sized man's face. From a distance he looked like a waddling human head, especially when he shuffled across the courtyard to visit the hen coops. Then anybody might have supposed he was some kind of wood elf, hobgoblin or bloated domestic dwarf. He grimaced expressively with his human features as if he had genuine feelings; in the place of a beak gaped a regular human mouth, whilst in the mouth were rows of teeth (and when he talked a lot a rancid mouth-odour enveloped him), notwithstanding which his body was covered with conventional feathers (with pungent reminiscences of his escapades amongst the hens), and it was underpinned and carried by two *bona fide* bird legs. He was partial to hens; nothing pleased him more than to amuse himself all day long in their company. By imitating the hissing of a snake, he had managed to reduce the cockerel, that vain and stupid princeling, to a quivering wreck in under two days, after which he had taken over the rule of the roost, covering the hens and eating up the corn before them.

For all that he was a lazy creature, he could learn anything with ease; he knew long passages from the Bible by heart and could spout them fluently. Many priests envied his superb memory, no less the ingenious rhetoric with which he delivered his commentaries; nor did those exegeses lack intellect, or indeed the noble tendentiousness of morality, in the view of more cultivated minds.

People came from far and wide to see and listen to him. A golden ducat had to be plunked down first, but then the count would already have flung open the door to the parrot's separate quarters. There were no other furnishings in the room apart from an armchair and a table, and upon the table an open-doored cage, woven from white canes of osier, and inside that—the bird. The visitor would sit down then ask something, whilst the bird would respond with a will. Neither the past nor the future was a mystery to him. His sentences avoided quibbling or vague generalisation; they were so explicit that even a half-wit could understand what had to be done or what could be reckoned on.

The rumours of his soothsaying prowess brought one client after another to the door, whilst Count Boldizsár was as happy as a huckster. His relatives ate their hearts out afresh, racking their brains over how they might lay hands on the new asset, the bountiful cornucopia that could be emptied in revelries without the least scrap of effort.

Yet nobody thought to ask the bird about when the flow of golden ducats would leave off.

* * *

False prophets can easily arise in the midst of a people that buries itself in self-lacerating moping, especially if that people is characterised by as much superstitious belief and childish credulity as the Székelys.

We never had a king of our own, they started to say. Then they hit upon one such who, laughable as he was, nobody laughed about.

They convoked an assembly, the gist of which was that the Székely nation, by the grace of God, elected the human-headed creature as its king. For them to flee their abject and sorry plight by going over to some king or another, to someone who might have a human form but in whom dwelt the soul of a wolf—that had happened before. But from this day on they would entertain no presumptuous hopes: the castle of Székelyrises was being built; there would be no Székelyruesit.

They picked those who were best cut out for the task of fetching the bird that knew the secrets of the future, having first liberated him from shameful bondage. Did that sound like a bird? No, not a bird, but a heavenly apparition, whom they had appointed twice over. *Nonnisi mutato habitu*—Fine feathers make fine birds, indeed. It was no chance that his face reminded them of their apostle: had he not foretold their early release from this earthly purgatory; and the fact that he had wings was also a sign of heavenly grace. To delay action after that was tantamount to infidelity. They even had a crown, one they had received from Byzantium, what is more, and kept hidden as a holy relic down the centuries.

The stately procession got under way. The steeds too were the handsomest creatures, fully a match for the equestrian stone figure on the hillside at Zsombok; the horsemen—the shapeliest Székely youths, chests swollen with pride, as though they had already successfully completed their mission. They passed under arches decked out with flowers, girls on tiptoe offered goblets of wine, the sun shone, spring foliage glistened on the tree boughs, the air was clear, the distant mountain peaks, still capped with snow, stood out sharply. Fortune was also on their side, because a chatterbox of a woman had already blabbed out where they might easily find the bird. Yet they became so immersed in the celebration that, in the end, they were left empty-handed. When they came to their senses from their inebriation and grasped their situation, they

burst into tears, each and every one: so much for the king, so much for glory. They wandered round in a daze for a while longer, clueless as to which track they should follow, whom they might ask. They did not even dare look one another in the eye but just ambled along in silence, entrusting themselves to their horses. It is told that they went into hiding amongst the Turks, but in truth, crossing paths with the vagrant Tartar horde, perhaps deliberately seeking an end, they found death from the blades of swords that know no mercy.

It had been a Friday when Sapré reached István, and the Sunday when the lords who had gathered for the bison hunt murdered Kótai. And it was Friday again when István entered Gyulafehérvár.

The Andalusian beaker, in which wine turns to honey, though the honey is poison, a lethal potion with no antidote, revealed its provenance and its occult properties only half a hundred off three centuries later. The real criminal misled everybody; he was the instigator of events, he pulled all the strings. Not once did the new Prince, Count István, notice what strings were being jerked left, right and centre. What a busy puppet! After having George Vidrányi and the other rebels executed on Szatmár's main square, he set off a search for the architect of the plot, head of the rebellion, the ringleader, Count Balthazar. Balthazar, minion of the Roman Emperor of the Germans. Who might he be? He supposed that Balthazar, in the Magyar tongue, was Boldizsár...

One morning, as Count Boldizsár was stretching himself, having just woken from his sleep, the human-headed bird waddled in (he almost never used his wings) and hopped up on the bed. For once it was he who asked the question first:

'Have you heard that your head will be cut off soon?'

'Who would do that?'

'That hard-of-hearing and so gullible lord, István—who, in his foolish naiveté, will see black as white, if others say so—now considers he has found the leader of the rebellion in you. There is only one count around here called Boldizsár. The Walloon infantrymen will be coming for you the day after tomorrow.

Hitherto Boldizsár had sought out his bird on just a single question: where he might find a fortune, and how he should multiply it. Even now nothing else interested him, yet the damned bird kept prattling on incessantly about blood and executions, lopped-off heads and a girl who was also bleeding. He had had enough of it.

He locked it in its cage then packed it off with one of his young fellows to Fehérvár, to appear before the new prince, saying that maybe he would be more interested in what that philandering devil of a wise-owl was blathering on about.

Before setting out on the long journey, the young envoy paid a visit on his intended, thinking to bid her farewell. He spent the night with her, and as they were parting he blurted out the nature of the consignment he was travelling with. The next day, the maiden, who was keeping more than one iron in the fire,

blabbed on to the stalwarts who buckled her bed what she had heard that night. The stalwarts carried the news to their brothers-in-law, and the brothers-in-law immediately galloped off after the bird. They lay in wait for the envoy at the edge of a forest, gave him a sound beating around the head with their maces, and were soon trotting back with the canvas-covered cage. They thought the bird, the most prolific gold mine in the country, was now in their hands. But the snow-white cage was empty.

Count Boldizsár had extricated himself from innumerable tricky situations, but this time he completely lost his composure and became so bereft of his wits that, to the very end, he kept on reiterating the same confused story about a double who had carried out everything of which he was suspected; a parrot who knew about this, and had very likely played an active part in the machinations, since he was the devil's brood, there was no disputing it; so that the one they should be submitting to the axe here could only be the parrot; it ought to be produced, even if only from under the ground. The hard-of-hearing Prince could make little sense of this farrago, which would anyway have overstepped the bounds of his patience. Only one person would have been able to penetrate his deafness, but he stayed in the background. The Prince, left to his own devices, superstitiously rejoiced that here, at last, was somebody whom he could have beheaded without compunction. Until now he had vainly tried to cure the twinges of conscience that he felt on account of the Vidrányis with a tea made from the floescence of the castor-oil plant; the cure seemed merely to rekindle the pangs and, what is more, he was continually having to urinate. Perhaps his internal problems would now subside! Death to the evil, power-crazed maniac! Death to the country's foe, death to the scheming Count Balthazar!

Dust-sparrows

Messire Léprádi, master of the revels, gave not a single instruction to assist the maids and lackeys, in part because he had abominated their haughty mistress from the outset, in part because he himself was unable to decide what should be packed into the travel chests and how the procession should be assembled. What was the point of the smoky horses, the carts draped in black crape, the laments accompanying the carriages, the page-boys fitted out in plain black pelisses? They were carrying a corpse, but not in a coffin. The Princess was attired in travelling clothes, and she had ordered the same for her husband. Six days before, they had prepared in just the same way to go to the Saxons, the difference now being merely in the number of servants, and that her ladyship, leaving her phaeton behind, wishes to take her seat beside her husband. The most sage Divan itself would be unable to make sense of the situation, puzzled Messire Léprádi, who, since his return from the Porte, had been keeping three women in his household on the sly. The Prince was bolstered up with hard

cushions so he could not loll to left or right or front. The toxin had stiffened his face; the skin was as if tanned by wind and sun. The spineless man, whom people had privately nicknamed the Snail, was dignified in death by being given the very thing that he had vainly longed for in life: he had the air of a real prince. He cut a figure more imposing and steelier than the celebrated Count Bazsányi, the aristocrat from the mountains of Máramaros, who, in his coat lined with fox gullets and his cap of pine-marten fur, had been able to dazzle the eye when he rode in for the assemblies that attended to the country's future. Like a steadfast sentinel, the poison that had been insinuated into the prince's body, having driven life away, denied entry to death itself; even so many days later, the tithe-gatherers of decay had still not made their appearance. Only the gases released by the jolting gave any sign of the material transformation that was gaining ground; the stench all but bloated the coach. Kata Sidonia soon got used to it, but everything reeked of the fragrance, compounded from the smells of urine, wet leaf-mould and parboiled bacon, which, having shrivelled the lavender spread on the bottom of the morocco-leather-lined trunks, spilled out of the coach windows, billowed out along the highway, and still wafted in odd whiffs from ditch bottoms for many years after the coach's passage.

Kata Sidonia tried to regulate everything in conformity with life rather than death. She talked incessantly to her husband; whenever she ate, she offered him food. From time to time, though, even she overstepped the threshold of fatigue to sink into total oblivion; then, with a start, she would lick up the spittle dripping onto the back of her hand in an attempt to struggle back to the capricious shores of the waking state. Would that her partner too were able to pluck from himself the clinging shrouds of paralysing sleep! Would that they were able, some time, to return together, hand in hand.

Neither threats nor pleas would induce her to inter her husband. What's done is done; we hacked up his murderer lump by lump. Allow us, sister-in-law, to bury my brother's cold body in his grave with befitting honour, Count András kept on reiterating. But Kata Sidonia insisted that what had taken up residence in her husband was not death but some stubborn, deranged slumber due to the bites of insects carried there by the warm winds. Daybreak would drive away the slumber, just as it would the cloud of smoke choking Fehérvár Castle... What daybreak, you crack-brain? Bishop Wenceslas threatened her with excommunication for not allowing the earthly remains to be laid to rest. What a way to tempt Providence! It's tempting Providence, tempting Providence!, the lords returning from the bison hunt echoed the episcopal sentiment. They opined that the widowed Princess had descended into the darkest pits of purblindness. They wanted to drag her away by force, but before they knew it the lady was already up and far away. Their lordships gawped helplessly; fatty meats and syrupy wines weighed their movements down: the fat clogged up the convolutions of their brains, the wine turned their blood to sludge. They ate and drank, many a

leather belt and doublet was strained; they could hardly wait to liberate themselves from their garments in order to lie abed, beneath their quilts, yet they were unable to sleep. They tossed and turned, puffed and blew, shuffled out to the latrine, squeezed the copious pestilential ordure from themselves, then lay back down with bellies bloated as before, tormented by the continually regenerating gases. They conferred, asking one another over and over again what should be done? what should be done with the widow? what should be done with Siggie Snail? what should be done about those in whose hearts a craving for the princely title had taken root? They were closeted together daily, holding counsel in lengthy vapourings. Bishop Wenceslas, being an unhealthily dry man, used the nimbleness so won to swing into single-handed action. He summoned a blind gypsy from beyond the upper town walls and, having plied him with wine and money, persuaded him to spirit the corpse out of the palace by night: take it wherever he liked, feed it to the dogs or bury it, though in that case cutting off its head. But the gypsy did a bunk without doing the job, and by the time another might have taken his place, more pressing concerns had directed the bishop's attention to other matters. Wearying of the search for the prince, their lordships were startled to notice that Count István was by now ordering the removal of gainsayers' heads by *princely* authority. How dare he corrupt the fine freedoms of the nobility so disgracefully, seethed their lordships. He is placing a noose not only around his own neck but around that of generations to come as well. We must speak to the Székelys. János Nemes is High Sheriff of Háromszék, János Daczó of Csík, János Bethlen of Udvarhelyszék, and János Kornis of Marosszék; that way it will be a triumph of the Jánosos. I'll arrange it myself, roared Bazsányi, hero of the Polish campaign. I'll arrange it, I'll arrange it!, their lordships echoed back. When István marched into Fehérvár their lordships' indignation first stilled to a mute funk, then to sweet obsequiousness. Bishop Wenceslas put on a fireworks display and a feast so grand that everyone's stomach was upset. For a week the barber-surgeons of Fehérvár could not tell day from night.

At Kolozsmonostor many had heard the grievous news, and those priests and students who were of the Catholic faith went out to the town gate to join in full-throated ceremonial mourning behind the gold-crested carriage. The howling of the improvised laments that were struck up horrified Kata Sidonia, who caught the odour of freshly turned cemetery soil exuding from beneath the brown cowls. She appealed to them to no avail, they were not to be dissuaded; they carried on their sedulous chanting, their pious miserations. When, on her ladyship's orders, the coachman lashed out on the lead horse's back and, thrashing mightily with his crop, goaded it to speedier progress, the wailing priests were compelled to pick up their billowing garments and switch from woebegone crawl to quick march. The only one to keep pace was a wayward fel-

low, Peter by name, one of the hermit monks inhabiting the caves at Turea, who at a pinch could get away even from wolves. After a good three miles, they halted in the market-square at Kolozsvár for a quarter of an hour, whereupon he greeted the Princess with his own solemn speech, offering himself as an escort until they reached the ancient town of Torda, at the foot of the Turea alps. Now, cowed priests reminded Kata Sidonia of tiger moths, those palm-sized butterflies that, when one is least prepared, flit forth from their hiding places to cling onto a person's face in spasmodic dance as one dozes in a meadow, choking one into a never-ending slumber. And yet this time she nodded in assent. Unitarian Kolozsvár had always received the princely family with disdain; there would have been slight chance of finding well-intentioned escorts there. But she had need of an escort, because the others, apart from the groom and coachman, had decamped, thank you kindly, one by one. She was comforted to discover that the priest could speak politely, was obliging, had an uncommonly clean outward appearance, was in fine fettle and also knew how to deal with people. Several impudent youngsters were at that very moment prodding at the friar's habit with long staffs, calling out in falsetto: 'Father John, have you got your britches on?' Unhappily for them, the latter kept his presence of mind, as ever. Taking a firm grip on the ringleader, he picked him up by the shirt till their faces almost met and, though he could have made himself understood in a whisper, bawled out aloud: 'I've got my britches, but I wonder about your neck.' A few years ago that would certainly not have sufficed to send his tormentors packing, because not so long before the followers of the Catholic faith hereabouts, and above all ordained priests, had been put to the sword. And in the northern corner of the main square, for generations now, had stood an oak tree with an oddly misshapen crown, to whose lower branches and protruding roots an intransigent would be tethered hand and foot, bound so he could not move, for the executioner then to strip off his garments and after that crouch down and, with a sharp blade, circumcise the fleshy parts above the ankle, slip his fingers below the skin with little wriggling movements, as if fitting on a glove, thereupon peeling it up in a single swift tug, taking care not to split the skin in the process. The oak tree's boughs themselves had shuddered from the bloodcurdling screams of the victim. Who would make amends for such things, and when?

Peter was promoted to general factotum. He it was who chased off dogs and audacious beggars, he who untangled the brambles that wrapped themselves around the carriage's axles, he who clambered down to springs in order to fill up the water-flasks; he even suffered the stench without so much as a grimace, and he made himself so indispensable that, at her ladyship's request, he stayed on with the princely carriage even after it reached Torda. Only at night did he lie down between the coachman and groom to catch a few hours of shut-eye.

In the half-light of dawn or eventide gloaming Kata Sidonia herself would walk a few hundred paces, stretching her benumbed limbs. On these occasions

she would hang back to slip behind some bush beside the highway, pull up her dress and relieve herself. Once, just as the wastes that had accumulated during the night were gushing out from her, she noticed that tiny, invisible hands were kneading the fine dust on the road, drawing it into little clumps, and then the clumps began to squirm, swirl and wriggle, and hey presto!, a minuscule bird would pop its head out, shake itself and finally fly off. And then she observed that the entire highway behind the carriage, as far as the eye could see, was smothered in more and more dust, so the bird that was just flying up in front of her had a thousand companions. The dust on the road rose up behind the passing carriage as if blown by a wind from deep within the ground. And the air rustled and swished, as if the jetting stream of piss were redoubling in intensity.

The birds of the sky harm nobody, said the friar.

But these ones are generated from the dust, Father.

We too shall return to dust, yet the kingdom of heaven awaits our wearied souls none the less.

They were also able to see that when the friar walked behind the carriage, the bird flocks huddled timorously in their dust nests for a while. Once, trudging along with downcast head between the two parallel tracks of the wheels, he was grubbing distractedly into the dust of the road when his staff poked a featherless, naked fledgling to the surface. He bent down forthwith and, in consternation, picked up the struggling little maggot in the hollow of his hand, speaking very gently to it, with the words of Assisi, as follows: Tiny sparrow, tiny soul, you little bundle of uncertainty and blindness, guest and companion to man, where are you going now? to what place? you pale, freezing, unfledged little thing, what are you so scared of? I'm not going to hurt you! He whispered these things, almost warbling, and in the trail of his words the emboldened sparrows took wing with a sound like the muted throbbing of an organ, whilst several dozen of them attached themselves to the friar and, from then onwards, always danced in attendance around him.

Don't resist fate, the friar told the widowed lady. If you wish for a man, then remarry. Both your age and your respectability will withstand another husband who is right for you. The deceased belongs to God.

Only his soul, the lady responded, his body is most surely mine.

For a long time the friar was to recall that a light breeze had snatched the fledgling from the palm of his hand; he could feel the faint breath of air caress the length of his bare lower limbs, and he trembled slightly. He took fright that the mysterious force would scoop him up, too, and he was unprepared for such a miracle.

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

Ferenc András Kovács

Poems

Translated by David Hill

Island-dwellers

Szigetlakók

*in elsinore on prospero's far isle
it's a gay life for fallen wenches elves
great minds in exile over-the-hill actors
slatternly clios worn-out thalias
mist-wardens petty goods buyers and vendors
nettle farmers bad-tempered benefactors
silence blackmailers final toll-collectors
shop traders of the necessary silence
who day-to-day live in a knight's-move style
in carefree frolics in a circle's centre
in elsinore on prospero's far isle
we're walking on the painted castle wall
me and the piping clownish fool
good morrow world the raving spirit hectors
sir oberon if i may make so bold
the doubt within my brain is deeply wading
as in york's frost a snorting horse might wallow
doubt knots me in a noose like storm-blown trees
squeezes strangles i wot not what this is
ever since babel i've been trying hard
to force a smile out at our aimless actions
but so far i've just managed the odd grimace*

András Ferenc Kovács

lives in Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureş), Transylvania. He has published ten volumes of poetry and is one of the editors of the Hungarian literary journal Látó.

*what's this horatio tell me what this is
i fear me we have fallen into debt
outside-inside whimpers the wind
in elsinore on prospero's far isle
i'm silent he leads he supports
we broke our magic staffs all into splinters
down in the arden mountains somewhere
the chess pieces are poised it's us they wait for*

Self-portrait for a matchbox à la japonaise

Önarckép gyufásdobozra

*(Deep in tenantless
mirrors, your voice a sand-grain,
your smile a samurai sword's
solitude, your eye
a snow-perishing pearl string,
you're verse—word-harakiri.)*

*Does it soothe you when
You fib beauty? Your mother
is a fragile bug
in a world-window, she cries
in a blue doll's house,
sweeping up sighs—in her dreams
she's a burning wing
of a curtain. Your father
in a card-castle
is patience's loyal serf,
bookshelf émigré,
refugee of clemency—
God will inherit
his silence. Your spouse is a
petal serenade
crucified upon a breath
in an hour-glass
hung over a paper dawn,*

her fingerpad a
ray-speared butterfly. You still
could be the fireman
of the matchbox, as long as
you still could be, you
explosives expert of facts—
you in the matchbox
(So, does it soothe you?) racing
free poem-kamikaze.

(Spirit sunshine blaze—
you're word, shield yourself! Revolt
in covered mirrors'
depths, pulsate, you grain of sand—
universe's eye-pupil.)

Byzantine epigram

Bizánci epigramma

Only as long as in the huge hippodrome of religions
Circus performers scamper as if on heaven's
TV screen the smiles of the saints were crazily flashing
And in the seraphic cacophony,
Along with icon-makers and—destroyers,
The dead will make statements also—
Lone coachmen, market women, hymn composers,
Historians and relic sellers in the vacuum of a
Single nimbus could tell whatever lies they want within
The light of a gilded thirst for air, light years away
From their own selves beneath the rule of an experi-
Mental glass bell as if beneath the holy dome of Wisdom they
Mouthed something about freedom's asceticism,
Not words about the moon at dawn but about the poem which
Shines out like Galateia's ivory-coloured bosom
Into the living folk's Cornelian nights—
Only the way it's possible to write, and would
Be possible to live... Only as long as it's
Possible to die for the simple reason that to want to
Live and write is: freedom.

Fragmentum

Fragmentum

Be superfluous!

*Your face flickers out—poets
don't exist, nor poetry.*

Just a single verse

*exists—the whole universe
may be one poem's endless*

changeability's

*dream, and if the silence should
open and the word expand*

in the open-space-

*phobia of divine beauty –
it will create, grow in time.*

Just a single verse

exists... the one you're writing.

But it will remain unknown

to you, forever—

unbound by desire, by law...

Pitiless totality's

counterpart. You can't

*even understand what you've
forced on yourself. No mercy.*

Just a single verse

exists.

Carouselling

Körhintásdi

*say that we're a fair ride
courtyard that's beneath us
sky beneath the earth the
nothing under god the
under courtyard earth which
round our feet the courtyard
round apartments city
round the planet god the
courtyard round the nothing*

*dizziness afflicts the
under that the earth the
god beneath the sky the
courtyard under nothing
as just mentioned circles
round the yard apartments
round the city planet
nothing round the god the
spun round nothing's pivot*

clouds above our head the
 kite above the string the
 void above the god the
 child above the yard the
 hind the faces lines be-
 hind the child the god be-
 hind the void the man be-
 hind the yard the yard it's
 god below the yard the
 god above the god the
 round the man behind the
 hind below above the
 say that we're a fair ride
 spun around death's pivot
 in an empty playground
 circling nothing circling
 some freewheeling system
 say that we'll become a
 say that we'll get dizzy
 playing in a vacuum
 arms out horizontal
 where the bats nailed to the

string above the clouds the
 god above the kite the
 yard above the void the
 man above the child be-
 hind the lines the child be-
 hind the god the void be-
 hind the man the yard be-
 someone else's yard the
 man above the god the
 man below the man a-
 void below the void be-
 man around the void let's
 round and round just whirling
 like a bunch of scarecrows
 courtyard ever shrinking
 nothing circling nothing
 of co-ordinates let's
 carousel cut free let's
 free men carousel men
 carouselling godhead
 we keep watchful eyes to
 beating frame will fly to

K. says

K. mondja

When I have fears that I may cease to be
 before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
 before high-pilèd books, in charact'ry,
 hold like full garners the full-ripen'd grain;
 when I behold, upon the night's starr'd face,
 huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
 and feel... *But stop: in fact, it's on these days
 life becomes full. But whether it's, perchance,
 good here, or beautiful—search me. But all
 moments coddle me in their laps, like light
 within an eye, unknowing, and, wasteful,
 yield flashes just because they can; they sight
 a cloud's fast shadow, wind's child, on banked earth—
 my death: the pictures live, so give me birth.*

Their Man in Budapest

James McCargar and the 1947 Road to Freedom

In both World Wars Hungary found herself on the losing side as Germany's ally. She was, therefore, on both occasions, forced to conclude peace accepting the conditions set by the victors. As a result her territory was reduced from 325,000 sq. km. ante-Trianon to 93,000 sq. km. post-Trianon, her population reduced from 18 million to 10 million. One in three ethnic Hungarians lives outside Hungary. Close to 1.5 million ethnic Hungarians live in Romania, in Transylvania and her marches, in territories which before the First World War were part of Austro-Hungary. Between the two World Wars this part of Central Europe was the *mise-en-scène* of French Great Power ambitions, after the Second it became part of the outer zone of the Soviet empire.

The victorious Allied and Associated Powers (the United Kingdom, the United States and the Soviet Union) signed an armistice with Hungary on January 20th, 1945.¹

As in other defeated states an Allied Control Commission was constituted to implement the armistice provisions.² These bodies were in operation right up to the ratification of the peace treaties. In practice they exercised full control over the home and foreign policy of the given defeated state. They were in a position to determine the nature of the country's institutions and the orientation of how it was to progress.

In Europe the system of Allied Control Commissions generally favoured the Soviet Union. With the exception of Italy, all the other defeated states were wholly or partially occupied by the Soviet Army. It was the Soviet Army that had

This is the edited transcript of a documentary film, directed by Sándor Mihályfy and transmitted on Channel 1 of Hungarian State Television on 16 November 2000.

*The interviewer was **Márta Pellérdi**, Associate Professor at the Department of English of the Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Piliscsaba. **Margit Földesi**, author of the Introduction and the Notes, is Reader in the Department of History at the same university. Her field of research is Central Europe after 1945.*

expelled the German forces and, as a result, the chairmanship and decisive voice in the Allied Control Commissions was theirs. They were able to determine the policies and economic policies of the given country, and theirs was the decisive voice in quotidian matters too. In that manner Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary and the eastern regions of Austria and Germany became part of the Soviet sphere of influence, as did Finland, which was so to speak an outpost.

The Soviet Union, the United States and the United Kingdom were represented on the Allied Control Commission in Hungary, too. Missions justified by reparation claims were also maintained by Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Marshall Kliment Efremovich Voroshilov chaired the Allied Control Commission, which was seated in Budapest.

The role of the Western Powers in the Commission was limited. They had to be consulted, that is all, but the issuing of an ukase to the Hungarian government did not depend on their agreement. As Ferenc Nagy, prime minister between 1945 and 1947, reported in his memoirs: "...the Hungarian government discovered that the Allied Control Commission was a fully unilateral Soviet institution, in which the participation of the other two great powers was often only needed to provide a cover for Soviet arbitrariness, misleading a suspicious world public opinion, and accepting responsibility for unilateral measures."³

Under the terms of the armistice agreement, as confirmed by the Peace Treaty signed in Paris on February 10th 1947, Hungary had to pay heavy reparations: \$200 million to the Soviet Union, \$70 million to Yugoslavia and \$30 million to Czechoslovakia.⁴ In addition, there had to be made good the non-quantified damage which Hungary had caused to the victorious powers and their citizens.

At the highest level the United Kingdom was represented on the Allied Control Commission by "General Edgcumbe, a dried-up old professional soldier possessed of a dry wit".⁵ He headed the Military Mission. A.D.F. Gascoigne headed the Political Mission.

The American Mission was headed by Major-General William S. Key up to July 1946, when he was replaced by Brigadier-General George Hatton Weems. Arthur Schoenfeld was the Political Commissioner, and later American Minister. There were as many as 130 Americans in the Military Mission and the Legation, amongst them James McCargar, the subject of the interview. He was *en poste* in Hungary in 1946 and 1947.⁶

Hungary, after the war, had to face up to numerous problems. She had to accept herself as part of the outer zone of the Communist successors of the Russian Empire, a Great Power which would determine the country's political, economic and cultural future. This was very difficult for a country that liked to look back to a thousand-year-long history and which, as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, had been the power which had dominated Central Europe. Furthermore the Hungarians are not Slavs, unlike the peoples of Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia (or Poland for that matter), countries which all knew how to profit

from this kinship. In 1945 a seriously war-damaged Hungary awaited a reconstruction which demanded joint action by all the parties and all the inhabitants. The form of government had to be settled. Hungary between the wars had been a kingdom without a king, headed by a regent, Admiral Miklós Horthy. Prisoners-of-war had to be brought home from the West, and in even greater numbers from the Soviet Union. And finally, the huge reparation payments had to be met.

The battle front still ran right through the middle of the country when, on December 21st 1944, the Provisional National Assembly constituted itself in the city of Debrecen, declaring itself as solely entrusted to manifest the national will and as "the sole representative of Hungarian sovereignty".⁷ On the following day they elected the Provisional National Government, with Colonel General Béla Miklós as Prime Minister and Béla Zsedényi as chairman of the Assembly.

That was when political parties were reconstituted or, indeed, newly founded. Six parties presented themselves at the first post-war elections, held on November 4th 1945.

Three parties stood for a bourgeois democracy at the time, two of them small, the Bourgeois Democratic Party (headed by Géza Supka) and the Hungarian Radical Party (headed by Béla Zsolt), and a great coalition of forces, the Independent Party of Smallholders, Agricultural Labourers and Citizens, headed by Zoltán Tildy, Ferenc Nagy, Béla Kovács and Dezső Sulyok.⁷

The parties of the Left were the Social Democratic Party (headed by Árpád Szakasits), the National Peasant Party (headed by Péter Veres, Ferenc Erdei and Imre Kovács) and the Hungarian Communist Party. Since the latter had aimed to overthrow the existing social order by force, it had not been allowed to operate legally between the Wars. Its illegal membership had been tiny. Immediately after the war, its standing and influence grew in proportion with the Soviet presence. The leadership fell into two categories: the "Muscovites", that is exiles who returned from the Soviet Union, often with wives they had acquired there and children who bore Russian first names. Many of them had acquired Soviet citizenship. These included Mátyás Rákosi, Ernő Gerő, Imre Nagy, József Révai, and many others. The others were recruited amongst members of the illegal Communist Party in Hungary, most prominent amongst them László Rajk, executed in 1949 after a show trial, and János Kádár.

The victors at the November 1945 elections were the Smallholders, obtaining 57 per cent of the popular vote. A mere 17 per cent voted Communist. But the Soviets would not allow a Smallholder government. The parties of the Left had to be included in a government coalition, the better part of the key portfolios (thus that of the Interior) being allotted to the Communists or their fellow travellers. An odd situation prevailed in the country. The government included both the votaries of bourgeois democracy and representatives of parties which opposed it.

In the years between 1945 and 1947 a war was on, fought on many battle-

fields, between those supporting bourgeois democracy, and the Hungarian Communist Party, which was backed by the Soviet Union.

A crucial battle in this war was the August 1947 election, following a dissolution of Parliament, which has entered the history books as the "blue card election".⁹

There were many abuses but it was really the blue-coloured false voting slips which turned the tables in favour of the Communists. Citizens who on election day expected to be absent from their registered homes were allowed to register their votes anywhere in the country. Exploiting the fact that they controlled the Ministry of the Interior, the Hungarian Communist Party arranged for 200,000 such false pale-blue voting slips to be printed which were then given to Communist activists. On election day these "travelling electors" mounted lorries and, with 15 to 20 fake "blue cards" in their pockets, merrily raced around the country doing their job.

Accordingly, the 1947 elections returned an Assembly with the Communists as the largest single party, with 22 per cent of the popular vote.

By 1948 and 1949 a single-party state was fully established, with nationalizations and a planned economy. Occupied Hungary stayed part of the outer zone of the Soviet Empire for nearly fifty years.

Margit Földesi

NOTES

1 ■ For the text of the armistice agreement, see *A magyar jóvátétel és ami mögötte van*. (Hungarian Reparations and What Is Behind Them. Selected Documents). Ed. by Sándor Balog, Margit Földesi. Budapest, Napvilág Kiadó, 1998.

2 ■ See Margit Földesi: *A Szövetséges Ellenőrző Bizottság Magyarországon* (The Allied Control Commission in Hungary). Budapest, IKVA Könyvkiadó, 1995.

3 ■ Ferenc Nagy: *The Struggle Behind the Iron Curtain*. New York, Macmillan, 1948.

4 ■ The author's work on reparations is supported by a Bolyai János Research Grant.

5 ■ Imre Kovács: *Magyarország megszállása* (The Occupation of Hungary). Budapest, Katalizátor, 1990, p. 267.

6 ■ See also Margit Földesi: "Egy felelős playboy a romos Budapesten" (A Responsible Playboy in a Budapest in Ruins) *Magyar Nemzet*, 16 September 2000. An interview with James McCargar.

7 ■ Margit Földesi and Károly Szerencsés: *A rebellis tartomány* (The Rebellious Province). Budapest, Magyar Könyvklub—Helikon Kiadó, 1998, p. 8.

8 ■ See Károly Szerencsés: *A nemzeti demokráciáért*. Sulyok Dezső 1897–1997 (For a National Democracy. Dezső Sulyok 1897–1997) Pápa, 1997.

9 ■ Károly Szerencsés: *Kékcédulás hadművelet* (The Blue Card Campaign). Budapest, IKVA, 1992.

I was born in San Francisco, California, in 1920. My father was a banker, a comparatively prominent man. I had no idea what I wanted to do, my father wanted me to do one thing, I didn't want to do that, and so on. My professors at Stanford were very kind to me and very helpful. Eventually they said, look, you have to aim at something, it doesn't matter what it is, you can always change later, but you have to aim at something. A great friend of mine, Walter Stoessel, who later became Deputy Secretary of State, was studying for the Foreign Service, so I followed his example. We went to a special school in Washington for three months, to take the examination. In those days the Foreign Service examination was considerably more than it is now: four days, writing eight hours a day. We had an examination in language, I failed in Spanish, but I did pass Russian, and there was history, international law, maritime law, geography. It really covered all kinds of knowledge, knowledge that you must have if you want to be a diplomat. In that year, one thousand candidates took the examination around the United States, one hundred passed the written exam and of those one hundred, they took thirty into the foreign service. The law allowed them to have seven hundred and fifty officers as compared to the four thousand officers today. It was a different world.

When I was young, there was a Russian colony in San Francisco, in the district called the Potrero, not on the well-known Russian Hill. In addition to that, there were the refugees from the 1917 revolution. The man who taught me to ride was a Russian cavalry officer; the counsellor at camp, the gymnastics instructor were both former officers of the Imperial Army. That was in the background, and I also had two periods, when I was nineteen and again when I was about thirteen or fourteen when I read enormously. In fact my father at some points would go down, buy books by the pound, come home with a bag and dump it on me! History was the thing that interested me the most, firstly Russian history but European history too.

Did you have any interest in Communist ideology in your college years?

Yes. I was at university from 1937 to 1941. At that time, one went through what we all called the Marxist experience. At Stanford then most of the students were from very comfortably-off professional homes, some very rich students. Some of the professors were convinced Marxists, a history professor for example, was a great friend of Trotsky's. He would go down to Mexico in the summer and talk with Trotsky. One year he told the class that he'd mentioned to Trotsky that the university had just established the Hoover Institution of War, Revolution and Peace. Trotsky fully agreed, yes, that's the correct order of things: war, revolution and then peace. Our professor obviously favoured that interpretation. So I went through that phase as did many of my classmates. I don't recall exactly what it was that totally disillusioned me with the whole thing. I suspect that a large element in the disillusionment was the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, which wiped out

any kind of moral basis for the Soviet theory of history. In any event, by the time I left the university, I no longer had any of this influence or interest. But it was very common at the time for people to go through this kind of intellectual experience.

When I took my Foreign Service oral examination in January 1942, the United States was three weeks into the war. The examiners were the Assistant Secretaries of State, there were four at that time. One of them was Dean Acheson, the later Secretary of State. At one point, he asked me a question. Mr McCargar, you seem to know or have studied a bit about Russia and you speak Russian. What would you say will be the Soviet policy after the war? Collective security or territorial aggrandisement? Those were the terms used in those days. I was very young but I was not completely stupid, so I danced all around that question to avoid answering. At a certain point, Acheson brought his hand down on the table and said, stop evading, answer the question. So I said territorial aggrandisement. Later when I was out, a man said that I passed the test and he took me up to a man named Loy Henderson. He was the head of the Russian desk in the State Department at that time. Mr Henderson, I said, perhaps I made a mistake in one of my replies. He just looked at me and said you didn't make a mistake. In other words, there were people who did understand what the future held for us even at that time!

My first post was Vladivostok, I was Vice-Consul. Our access was very limited, whole sections of the city were closed to us. We could not go into the port. We could only go out of town on one road. At nineteen kilometres north there was a sentry and we could not go any further.

This was when exactly?

I left for the Soviet Union in early April 1942. We flew over to Baku and from there we took a train for Rostov. During the night the Germans retook Rostov. The train stopped, and they backed up about a hundred and something kilometres to a place called Tikhoretskaya, where the line went off to Stalingrad. At Stalingrad we got off and onto a boat going up the Volga, the *J. V. Stalin*. Its capacity was 600 and we were 3000 passengers on that boat, mostly Red Army people. When the time came to retire, they gave us some food. The officers would order the soldiers into the passageways inside the ship and tell them to lie down. Then they ordered another wave to come in and lie down on top of them and then a third wave would come in and lie down on top of those, and then we were to walk over them to get to our state-rooms. It took us three days to get up the river. That was already quite a lesson about Russia and the Soviet Union. The soldiers, I talked with a lot of them, were splendid people.

Were you an intelligence officer while you were in the Soviet Union?

No. I was a very junior officer in the Foreign Service. They did not have time for any proper training. Mind you, this was just the month that the war broke out from the American point of view. The confusion was total in Washington. They

needed people and they expected you to learn on the job. What one learned in the Soviet Union at that time was that the normal diplomatic procedures were not effective. Everything had to be done clandestinely. In Vladivostok, if we talked to somebody, they were arrested the next day.

How did you react to the regime in the Soviet Union?

One learned a great distaste for the Communist regime as it was manifested to us. The cruelties were perfectly evident. For example, during the war children were working in factories, that was necessary. But being late for work three times meant the death penalty. Perhaps the severity was necessary, but we were revolted by the cruelty. This does not mean that we were not very sympathetic to the Russian people as we knew them, what little we saw of them. They are marvelous people. If you spoke the language, you were able to acquire great insights. I came out of the Soviet Union at that time with the conclusion that a people gets the kind of government they deserve. I thought the inability of the Russian people to rise against or combat this tyranny was a defect in the national psyche. With time and experience I don't hold that view any longer. Because the despotism in the Soviet Union found the means to make it quite impossible for people to stand up against it. It has to be recognized that what they did in the war was absolutely overwhelming. The cost was unbelievable, in terms of human lives, millions and millions, a terrible cost. But the Russians are a great people.

I came back to Washington in 1943. The State Department reached an agreement with the White House, which at that time was not very happy with the Foreign Service. Under the agreement the twenty-five youngest officers were to be transferred to the Army or Navy. I went into the Navy and had hoped to go into the OSS and go into Eastern Europe. The Mission to Hungary was being prepared at this time, and to Prague too. The Mission to Bucharest had already gone in, I think.

Why were you so interested in Eastern Europe?

It was part of this exotic background, Europe, and all that. It was the Russians and the lands neighbouring Russia which were of principal interest to me. But that posting was not to be. A captain in Naval Intelligence called me and said, you'll get your orders in a couple of days to the Aleutian Islands. So I went to a coaling station where we waited for the Russian ships passing through. It was awful, the weather was unbelievable.

I was to work with the Russians in 1944, as the liaison officer with the Russian merchant marine and with their Navy when they were there. The Aleutian Islands are rather extraordinary, just a chain of volcanoes and many are active.

I was there for one year in 1944-45. I was very lucky. The war was soon over and I was teaching Russian to some of the sailors at Dutch Harbour. After I'd been several months at this, one of these sailors said to me, "Oh, I just thought Russian was the same as English but written differently." So I wasn't making great progress!

How good was your Russian?

It was very fluent then, I dreamed in Russian.

What was your training as an intelligence officer?

I slipped into intelligence, I didn't get trained for it. When I went into the Navy, I was automatically classified as an intelligence officer, assigned to Naval Intelligence. That's simply the Navy's way of doing things. It was assumed that as a Foreign Service officer, I would cope.

Were they right?

Well, yes. If you are looking for intelligence, you apply the same perspective and the same methods to diplomatic work as you do to clandestine work. In Dutch Harbour, every week I wrote a report which was sent out by the Navy by wireless. I must have been reasonably successful, because nobody ever criticized them.

I was assigned to Budapest by the State Department in early 1946. My wife decided to stay in New York rather than go to Budapest with me. I rented a house in Bimbó Street in Buda. This photograph is from the garden side, that is from the front gate, and this is again from the garden. That house still stands. This is a photograph of Endre Márton and his wife Ilona, who were imprisoned later in the early 1950s. By the time of the Revolution in 1956, they were both out of prison. Though they wanted to stay they were advised to leave. Endre Márton came to the US, and was the Associated Press correspondent for the State Department for about twenty years.

The house in Bimbó Street came with a gardener and his wife did the cooking. I had an operation on my neck in Budapest and I came out very weak. That cook produced goose liver in the big glass jar with all that goose fat, it was a wonderful way to start the day! This is an invitation to lunch, not very elegant, from the Deputy Prime Minister and Mrs Rákosi. Well, I went, as did the Minister from our Legation in Budapest.

The Minister and his wife and three or four of us were present. Mátyás Rákosi¹ sat at one end of the table, I sat next to Ernő Gerő.² He was a tough-

1 ■ Mátyás Rákosi (1882–1971). Was Commissar of Production under the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919. Imprisoned for almost sixteen years under the Horthy regime. Went into Soviet exile in 1940. Returned to Hungary in January 1945 as a Soviet citizen. General Secretary first of the Hungarian Communist Party (MKP), then after fusion with the Social Democrats, of the Hungarian Workers' Party (MDP). As Prime Minister of Hungary (1952–1953) he still held Soviet citizenship. He gave his name to a generally hated age, as "Stalin's best Hungarian disciple", he was the personality of the Personality Cult. In the summer of 1956 he left for the Soviet Union and stayed there in disgrace until he died.

2 ■ Ernő Gerő (1898–1980). Based in the Soviet Union between the wars, a leading itinerant Comintern official, an activity which earned him the sobriquet of the Butcher of Barcelona. A leading Hungarian Communist official after the War, largely responsible for economic policy. In 1945 Minister of Transport. After Rákosi's departure, General Secretary of the MDP, a post he held at the outbreak of the 1956 Revolution.

looking man and he was a hard man. But he did one trick that was quite impressive. He spoke Russian to me, he spoke English to the Minister, he spoke Spanish to the Minister's wife and, of course, Hungarian around the table. And I think he was speaking German to some of us. All at the same time. A tour de force—he may have done it just to impress us, but it was quite a performance!

This is a photograph of Brigadier-General Weems, who was the second commander of the American Military Mission, and the second representative of the United States on the Allied Control Commission. He was a Brigadier-General from the mountains of Tennessee, and they speak a bit differently there, to the point that I frequently could not understand him. I would be interpreting for him with the Russians and I would just have to guess what he was saying and say what I thought he said, not necessarily what he actually said. But it did not matter, since the Russians were running the whole show.

For the first Hungarian wine festival after the Second World War, October 13, 1946 at Tokaj they invited the whole diplomatic corps. First we went to Tokaj and visited the wine cellars tunnelled into those strange hills. There was a big dinner at Sárospatak, at the famous Calvinist College there. Which was where I made my first connection with Councillor Osokin³ of the Soviet Embassy. We were sitting across the table from each other and I said, let's get together when we go back. He said fine, so I called after a week or two. He said let's have lunch. Good. This all in Russian. So I said, fine, such and such a café at one o'clock. No, he said, lunch but at 5.30 in the afternoon. The first thing that happened was that a bottle of brandy went down, then another one. Eventually we ate something. Now, I had a rendezvous that evening with a young Hungarian lady at the house of Baron Ullmann, the head of the Credit Bank. So I took Osokin along with me. You have never seen such disorder! We came in, and the people there knew that this was a Russian, after all, I introduced him. People panicked, they almost screamed and quickly made their way out of the apartment. Actually being there was much more dangerous for Osokin than it was for the Hungarians. When Osokin went out to telephone his wife, she gave him unholy hell after he had told her where he was. Osokin just said, you talk to her, and he put me on the phone. There was a torrent of abuse. "Come home, stop what you're doing!" After about a month, I went to Georgiy Pushkin⁴ the ambassador, on something, and I asked after him and Pushkin said Osokin had gone to Moscow. I never heard about Osokin again. It is perfectly obvious what happened.

3 ■ Osokin. In 1945/1946 a prominent member of the Soviet Mission as part of the Allied Control Commission in Hungary.

4 ■ Georgiy Maximovich Pushkin. Political Commissioner of the Soviet Mission as part of the Allied Control Commission in Hungary (1945–1947), later Soviet Ambassador to Hungary.

What was Pushkin like?

Pushkin was an apparatchik, a very capable one, very cold, merciless. He had been Consul-General in Urumchi, in Chinese Turkestan, Sinkiang was the Chinese name, up until about 1943. We had a man who came from Berlin, an American diplomat, returning gold and silver and so forth to the Hungarians. This man had been in Urumchi. Oh, he said, my great friend Pushkin. So we dropped around to pay a call on Pushkin, who was affable. He could smile, he wasn't a block of stone. But I considered Pushkin a very dangerous man.

When did you actually get to Budapest?

I arrived in April 1946. I flew from Paris to the American airbase outside Vienna and they drove me from there to Budapest. That was the first time I'd ever seen Hungary. I got to Budapest at about 5.30 in the afternoon, there was a cocktail party going on at the legation. I met a great many people some of whom are still alive, for example Hanna van Horne, who was born Countess Mikes and then married Géza Teleki, the son of Prime Minister Pál Teleki, who committed suicide in 1941.⁵ She and Géza Teleki were there and I'm still in touch with her.

I didn't go to Budapest as an intelligence officer. I went to work in the political section, and helped out as best I could on whatever was going on.

Did you ask for a Budapest posting?

I came back into the Foreign Service from the Navy and I bumped into an old university friend who was stationed in Budapest as a Foreign Service officer. He'd gone in with their first group to establish the Legation in 1945. I suggested that I would like to go to Budapest. So when he went back to Budapest, he told the Minister that he had a friend who was a Russian speaker, an officer who was available. The Minister put in a request for me at the Department of State and I got the Budapest post. But there was no intelligence assignment connected with that at that point. After I had been there about three or four months, this same friend was transferred out of Hungary to South Africa. Back in Washington he mentioned to me the existence of something he called the POND, a term used within the State Department, which was a secret operation run jointly with the War Department. It had been established in 1942 on the orders of General Marshall, who was Chief of Staff of the army. This ran as all these organizations do: one man in each embassy or legation, who had secret communications and funds and authority and didn't have to tell the Chief of Mission what he was doing. When my friend was leaving he asked whether I'd be willing to take over that function. I said yes and that's how I got into all this. About a

5 ■ Count Pál Teleki (1879–1941). A geographer of international standing, twice prime minister of Hungary, in 1920–1921 and from 1939 to his death in April 1941. He took his own life since he saw no way in which Hungary could avoid participating in the war as an ally of Nazi Germany.

year later in June 1947 I was called back to Washington and then I met the people who were running this particular operation. I used this occasion to ask for authority to take people out. Ferenc Nagy's⁶ end came while I was on that trip. We'd known since January 1947 what exactly was going on. Rákosi's famous salami tactics were to gradually undermine the positions of the Communists' competitors. The "great conspiracy", which was built on nothing, was announced in January.

Could you tell us something about that great conspiracy? What followed when Béla Kovács⁷ was arrested in February?

They announced that a conspiracy had been uncovered before that, in January. I'm not clear on the sequence of events now after all this time, but it seems to me that that was when Pálffy-Österreicher⁸ was arrested. They started the action within the army and then it spread. The previous summer three aristocrats had been arrested walking in Budapest (in summer clothing) and were taken off, one was Géza Pálffy, one was a Pallavicini, the third one I don't remember. But we knew that they had been sent off to the Soviet Union. We knew that Bethlen⁹ was in the Soviet Union, that he was probably going to die there. We didn't know anything about Raoul Wallenberg, the Swede. Hungarians told us about Wallenberg, but we didn't know anything about his case, we had no knowledge of him, we never heard anything about him. With all this in the background, they came out and announced this conspiracy and it spread to include everybody. Béla Kovács was the big obstacle to the Communist takeover. Béla Kovács was a tougher man than

6 ■ Ferenc Nagy (1903–1979). A prominent member of the Smallholders' Party after the War. Prime Minister of Hungary between February 1946 and the end of May 1947. His small son was used to blackmail him into staying abroad when on holiday. Died in exile in the U.S.A. on the eve of a return visit to Hungary.

7 ■ Béla Kovács (1908–1959). General Secretary of the Smallholders' Party and editor of *Kis Ujság*, its national daily. Minister of Agriculture in 1945–1946. Forced to resign all his offices in 1947, as a result of Communist pressure. The Communists wanted to involve him in what was called the Anti-Republic Conspiracy, but their machinations were unsuccessful since Parliament stood by him, refusing to waive his right to immunity. He was in custody, most of the time in the Soviet Union, until April 1956. On 4 November 1956 he entered the American Embassy in Budapest asking for asylum but was refused.

8 ■ György Pálffy (Oesterreicher) (1909–1949). Professional soldier and staff officer. Since 1942 an illegal Communist but at the same time a member of the Intellectual Division of the Smallholder's Party. In March 1945 appointed commander of the Military Policy Section of the Ministry of Defence. Promoted to the rank of General. In 1948 Deputy Minister of Defence. In 1949 one of the accused in the trumped up trial of László Rajk, former Interior Minister. He was condemned to death and executed.

9 ■ Count István Bethlen (1874–1946). Conservative Prime Minister of Hungary (1921–1931), his tenure of the office was the longest between the wars. It was he who stabilized and consolidated the country after the traumas of a long and lost war, the short-lived Soviet Republic which followed it, and the provisions of an oppressive peace treaty. Taken to the Soviet Union by the Red Army in 1945, he died in 1946 in as yet unclarified circumstances.

most of them, he was very much tougher than Zoltán Tildy¹⁰ and, although I persist in being a tremendous admirer of his, than Ferenc Nagy. Nagy had the responsibility as Prime Minister. But Kovács, as the General Secretary of the Smallholders had a different responsibility. He was a party man and an admirable man. I remember the night when he was arrested. I got the word about 10.30 at night.

The purpose of announcing the conspiracy was to destroy the Smallholder majority in Parliament. The November 1945 elections were the only free and fair elections held in Soviet-occupied areas after the war, with the Smallholders coming up with 57 per cent. So the Communist and Soviet—because the Russians backed the Communists every inch of the way—plan was to destroy the Smallholder majority. And this was what Béla Kovács was fighting against. He was the essential man to get rid of if you wanted to go further. When Kovács was arrested, it was perfectly clear that at some point, one did not know when, but at some point Ferenc Nagy would go. With Tildy one wasn't quite sure. I cannot even remember now at what point Tildy did disappear from the scene. After the Smallholders came of course the rest of Zoltán Pfeiffer's¹¹ Independence Party, which he had put up when the Smallholders started to fall apart. Dezső Sulyok¹² had been persuaded to leave and the tactic was working. The Smallholders' Party fell apart. Pfeiffer formed his Independence Party and he was very badly beaten up by a bunch of thugs, with bicycle chains in a town south of Budapest where he was giving a talk. He was in hospital for a week or more. An important element was the Social Democrats. That is, the Hungarian Socialist Party. Károly Peyer¹³ the long-time head of the Hungarian Socialist Party had been sent to Mauthausen by the Germans. He could not get back to

10 ■ Zoltán Tildy (1889–1961). A Calvinist minister, President of the Smallholders' Party after 1945, and Prime Minister. Elected President of the Republic in February 1946. Forced to resign in July 1948 and placed under house arrest. Minister of State in the 1956 Imre Nagy government, condemned to six years in prison after the suppression of the Revolution. Released in 1959.

11 ■ Zoltán Pfeiffer (1900–1981). A lawyer prominent in the Smallholders' Party in 1945–1946, under-secretary in the Ministry of Justice. In March 1947 founder and first President of the Hungarian Independence Party, the second largest party in opposition following the August 1947 elections. Pfeiffer himself felt in danger and left Hungary with his family as James McCargar explains on p. 55. He died in the U.S.A.

12 ■ Dezső Sulyok (1879–1965). A lawyer and prominent member of the Smallholders' Party. Headed the Bank Supervisory Centre in 1945. A candidate for the office of prime minister in 1946. As a result of Communist pressure, he and twenty of his fellows were expelled from the Smallholders' Party because of his clear anti-Soviet and anti-Communist views. He then founded the Hungarian Freedom Party which soon became highly popular. In the summer of 1947 he was forced into exile and he died in the U.S.A.

13 ■ Károly Peyer (1881–1956). A locksmith by training. One of the best-known and most influential leaders of the Social Democratic Party between the wars. A member of Parliament between 1922 and 1944. Joined the Hungarian Radical Party in 1947. He left Hungary in the autumn of 1947 and died in exile.

Hungary quickly enough and Árpád Szakasits¹⁴ took control of the party in Peyer's absence. The Russians and the Communists just used Szakasits throughout the whole thing. Peyer was in eclipse, he was on the wrong side as a loyal party member. He decided to openly combat the Szakasits wing of the Social Democrats before the elections of August 1947. We shall see how the elections took place following which in November state conspiracy charges were brought against him, but he managed to escape to the West on 14 November. By June 1947, when I had asked for authority to take people out, the conspiracy hysteria was in full swing. I asked for authority for twenty-five people.

I spoke about my plan in the State Department and to the military who were running the POND organization. Then I flew to London to bring back our new minister, and while I was there one of my liaison people gave me the written authority to take twenty-five people out. Fifteen were supposed to be members of Parliament and ten I could choose. That was a step forward. First of all I had to set up a mechanism to do all this. When we were starting on that, things just got worse and worse all along. Eventually, I would get news from various sources that such and such a deputy's parliamentary immunity would be lifted three days from now. They were perfectly open with the signals. Such a signal would mean that the man had to leave within three or four days. But by that time I had a mechanism.

Was there information you were able to send back to the US which you found out sooner than other sources?

In this kind of work every tiny thing is grist for the mill. It's like television today, there's never enough material! I would file regular reports and the difference between my regular political reporting and the special reporting was not very great. The people who were running the secret thing all had the material I was sending back as a diplomat. It was largely a lot of housekeeping things I sent. But I would also get transcripts of Cabinet meetings—I won't tell where from—and I would send them off. They were in Hungarian, so I could not do anything with them myself. If the source was secret or clandestine, then I would use that channel. The daily political report at the end of every day to the State Department was sent by secret cable. This is the distinction between those two kinds of work that I was doing.

You had a cover, didn't you?

I was Second Secretary of the Legation, head of the Political Section.

14 ■ Árpád Szakasits (1899–1965). Journalist and editor. Between 1945–1948 General Secretary of the Social Democratic Party, 1948–1950, after the fusion with the Communist Party, President of Hungary. Arrested in 1950 and sentenced to imprisonment for life but set free in 1956. Between 1959 and his death, member of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party.

In your book, A Short Course in the Secret War, you mention that you had a cover activity, which was to look for Jewish assets.

When I first wrote that book, I falsified a number of things to avoid anyone putting two and two together. One of the things I said was that I represented an organization which did not exist any more, which was true. But I intimated that I was not employed in the Legation. I was doing that to avoid embarrassment to the State Department. In the latest, 1992 edition, on which the Hungarian edition is based, I corrected all those falsifications in various footnotes, revealing that I was Second Secretary and headed the Political Section. So if you will, that was a cover. There was an operation run by the State Department, which was called SAFEHAVEN. This went along from 1945 to 1947 and was devoted to unearthing Nazi assets that had been hidden here and there. It continued to be part of my function as a political officer in the Legation.

What was the point of using a pseudonym, Christopher Felix?

At that time I was still concerned not to cause embarrassment to the State Department. Mind you, this was sixteen years after I had been in Budapest. There is no particular meaning to the pseudonym. I just woke up in the morning and the name occurred to me! *A Short Course in the Secret War* came out under the name of Christopher Felix in 1963. The American edition was followed by English, French and German editions.

Why did you decide to write down your experiences?

I was leaving the Free Europe Committee, and I was going to try and make a living as a writer. Around 1960–1961, there was very little literature, and what literature there was on this subject was pretty bad. There were American journalists who purported to know a great deal, and I thought it was very, very bad stuff, which was misinforming the public. As you may have noticed, a good two thirds of the book is devoted to the techniques and methods of secret operations. But I realized that some kind of a story was necessary, so the second part of the book is about the Hungarian operation. But as I say, it was heavily disguised in that first version. The third edition, if you read the footnotes and the chapter notes, tells you the true story

Let's get back to POND, the network you took over from your colleague. You had to keep in touch with certain people on the Hungarian side. You identified them in your book as Leo, Eugene, Paul, Simon, Jane, George, Henry, Lewis and Guy. Which parties did they belong to? What was their background?

With very few exceptions, these people were not agents, they were not suborned by the United States. These were people who were hostile to the Communist takeover of Hungary and therefore turned to us, for assistance. In exchange for that assistance, they gave us information about what was going on so that we

would know what to do. When I took the thing over, the first group was very heavily aristocratic. They were perfectly splendid people. But there was nobody from the labor orientation, from the Social Democrats. Of the people who come to my mind, one was an aristocrat but not from one of the great old families. As many Hungarians of that class were at the time, he was very pro-British, admired the British upper class. Him as a member of the Peasant Party struck one as bizarre. But there was not much of a choice. There were only four parties: the Communist Party, the Smallholders, the Socialists and the Peasant Party. The head of the Peasant Party, Péter Veres¹⁵ was a charming old man. He had a very good man in his party, Imre Kovács¹⁶, not to be confused with Béla Kovács. That attracted a lot of people because there were some who did not want to be lost in the Smallholder majority. Party membership was really not a large feature of these people's personality or sources of information. One name I recall was Gyula Desewffy, also of an aristocratic family, and Gyula Desewffy was not an agent.

He was one of your helpers?

Yes, but he was not an agent of the Americans. Gyula Desewffy was the editor of *Kis Újság*. Because of that he was an important figure in the Smallholder Party. He would come around regularly and tell me what was going on in the Smallholder councils and so on. This was not to provide secret information but because they needed our help in order to stave off the Communist attack on them. Which was courageous as the Communists had the whole Russian occupation forces behind them. You have to remember that we at the Legation, quite legitimately, would write to a Hungarian ministry. As we had direct diplomatic relations with the Hungarian government, it was normal that we talked with ministries. If we wrote to the ministry, the person there would forward it to someone planted there and the Russians would tell them if they were to answer our communication or not. This was the kind of thing that we were up against all the time. Secret sources would not have been as necessary as they became if you had the normal contacts that go between governments with standard relationships. Life in Budapest was more complicated.

How many people were willing to give information in your network who were not really agents?

There were a great many people who wanted to be on the good side of the Americans. Or wanted help from the Americans.

15 ■ Péter Veres (1897–1970). Peasant writer, politician. One of the founders of the National Peasant Party, he was its chairman from the beginning of 1945. From May to September of 1947 he was Minister of Reconstruction and Labour, from September 1947 to November 1948 Minister for Defence. From 1954 he chaired the Hungarian Writers' Association.

16 ■ Imre Kovács (1913–1980). Populist writer, politician. His book *Silent Revolution* (1937) led to his prosecution and conviction. One of the founders of the National Peasant Party; he acted as its Secretary until 1946. After Béla Kovács's arrest, he left the Party and went into exile in 1947. He died in the USA.

But who actually provided information?

There were fourteen or fifteen people who were regularly in touch with me. Of those only two or three were actually part of the mechanism. For example, I communicated with one of the most important members of the group through a barmaid in a bar. After work I would go and have a drink, pass her a piece of paper, she would take it. I'd go back next night and there would be something for me. It made me look like a drunk, but it was how you did things.

Could you tell us something about these two or three people who were part of the mechanism?

The barmaid link that I just mentioned to you, that's a mechanical thing. She was what is called in the parlance of the profession a cut-out. That's the person who establishes a link between two people, the person in the middle who is not seen to be performing that service. This was not a source of information. This was performing a service which was very useful to me and to the operation.

What was the background of those who were in a position to provide information?

A number of them were what you would call professional people. Lawyers were well represented. Lawyers, journalists, that kind of people.

And as to party membership?

Party membership did not have any ideological significance. You could be a believer in I don't know what and be a member of the Smallholders or the Socialists. But none of these people were members of the Communist Party. They were either Smallholders or Peasant Party or Socialist Party.

Did you rescue any of these people later on?

Yes, I did. One of the key people in the organization—I mean, in the group—had the function simply to get people out. He did not pass information to me, he just got people out. So I was able to help a number of people escape. Some managed to get out legally, they had passports that were still valid, as you know, there was a scramble for passports. There were jokes in Budapest in the autumn of 1947, about the man who goes to his tailor and says, I'm going down to Balaton, get me a tropical suit, for he was obviously going to Brazil. Getting out was on everybody's mind at the time.

When exactly did you decide you wanted to rescue people? You made your recommendation in June 1947.

In my recommendation to the State Department I made it very clear that I had in mind people who had been on our side during the Second World War, in other words, they were against the Nazis, and were similarly on our side now, given the Soviet threat. I made that point because I thought it would become neces-

sary. And it did very quickly. By then I fortunately had the authority to go ahead. I exceeded my authority, but nobody ever reproached me for that. I had to submit my accounts. I budgeted each escape at 100 dollars a head. There were all kinds of arrangements to be made. When accounts went in after I left, it was perfectly clear that this was not twenty-five hundred dollars, this was sixty-three or sixty-seven hundred, whatever the figure finally ended up as.

Did anybody protest?

No. On the contrary. It was extremely well viewed at that time. This special group in Washington in the army gave a commendation to me that was supposed to go into my personal file in the State Department. I found out many years later, in about 1980, why I have never seen it. It was withheld from my personal file.

Why?

What happened was that my Minister, Selden Chapin, had written to the State Department. He noticed that I had not been promoted for some time. He did not say what my work was, but intimated that it was done at the request of another group. The answer came back from the State Department that there was no objection to me getting some kind of award or distinction, but the people who authorized them to do these things should speak up. So they did. But the commendation was withheld from the file. Now the reason for this, I conclude, is that there is always hostility between secret operations and regular diplomacy and the practitioners thereof. I have talked with CIA people here in Washington. They said to me that we destroyed the careers of a whole generation of Foreign Service officers. I talked with retired Foreign Service officers, they said we could do all that so much better than the CIA. That's the underlying hostility. Now the reason I think my commendation was withheld from my file—it cost me dearly in the years to come—was because the State Department was hiding this organization illegally. The National Security Act of 1947, establishing the CIA, gave the CIA a monopoly on collecting information abroad. They shared a bit of it with the FBI. The State Department was running the secret operation and was hiding it because it was actually counter to what the legislation prescribed. That's the reason they did not want it in the record. There were other people too who worked for the organization at the State Department. I don't know what happened to their records.

The State Department did not accept you, or at least they did not feel responsible for you later on, neither did the CIA. You sort of fell between two stools.

Exactly. The CIA said why, he was a foreign service officer when he did this sort of thing. Endre Márton, who was the AP correspondent in Budapest up until the 1956 Revolution did something about it. I think I mentioned earlier he and his wife,

Ilona, had both been in prison. She was the United Press representative. There were no American journalists in the last few years before the Revolution. Later, as a correspondent working at the State Department, Márton went to someone protesting, aren't you whipsawing this man? And the man said, well, that may be, but that's the way it is. So that was their attitude. Whatever legal complications may have been, this reflects this bad mixture between the two sides of the house.

What about the people that you rescued: Zoltán Pfeiffer, Dezső Sulyok?

I never knew Sulyok, who, as a matter of fact, was allowed to leave legally. There was no problem. The Communists were actually glad to have him leave. For a certain number of people that I arranged to get out or whom I took out, it may have not been contrary to what some of the Russians and some of the Communists thought of as a way of getting rid of these people. That would not have stopped my doing it, because the threat to them was perfectly obvious. Peyer, for example, and Róbert Gábor.¹⁷ Some months after they had left, they were tried in absentia and sentenced to death. In Gábor's case, that sentence was still on the books in 1991 when he went back to Hungary for the first time after he had left in 1947. Somebody took it off the books as the plane was coming into Budapest!

Just in time.

Just in time.

Zoltán Pfeiffer?

I had been told early on to take Pfeiffer out. In fact, that was one of the messages that came along with the authority to take people out. I spoke to Pfeiffer and he said I will tell you when I have to go out. This was before he formed the Independence Party in February 1947, following the arrest of the Smallholders' Party Secretary Béla Kovács, as an attempt to rescue the independent wing of the party. Some days before the 31 August election he was beaten up as I told you. The elections were falsified using those notorious blue cards. By October it was obvious that he had to go. At that particular point, the British had an unfortunate mishap and the Russians and the Communists, I was told, had arrested about a hundred people who were connected with the British. So everyone was lying low, that's no time to do anything. On the other hand, Pfeiffer had to leave with his wife and five-year-old daughter. I was given this instruction with respect to Pfeiffer several months before and I realized the only thing I could do was to do it myself. I told this story in the book. A member of Parliament, and his wife, were in the group too. I used one of the military mission vehicles with cases and a bag. And it worked. We got to Vienna, from there Pfeiffer went on to the United States. And I was never long enough in the United States to see a

17 ■ Róbert Gábor. (1919–) A Social Democrat and trade union leader.

great deal of him but I kept in touch with them. After his death, his widow came here to say goodbye, as she moved to San Francisco where their daughter was living and working. She died there this last December. Of the other couple, I remember the woman being in tears. She broke down terribly after we got into this house in Vienna at the thought of leaving her country. It was touching. Hungarians have that love of their country. She showed that.

Were you present in person?

I drove the vehicle.

Were there any searches?

No. I was a little bit taken aback, because a part of the peace treaty, which was not yet in effect, was that the Czechs would get what was known as the Bratislava bridgehead, the five villages on the south bank of the Danube across from Bratislava. I had not realized that they had already taken that over, so as I was driving along I expected to get into the Soviet zone of Austria. Instead I found myself in Czechoslovakia. I was taken aback, but nothing happened, I got through, then I got into the Soviet zone, nothing happened. There was a checkpoint halfway between the Austro-Hungarian border and Vienna airport. A sentry at a barrier, I stopped. He wanted to see what was in the back of this vehicle, a station wagon kind of thing. An army one. I was wearing an army parka and I did have my diplomatic passport, and I showed that. But you don't talk with a Russian sentry about the fine points of organization within a diplomatic mission. I said I do not know what's in there, they're boxes belonging to some American general, I cannot let you see them. Well, this went on for a long time. I got out, I walked around the car with him, I pulled out a pack of American cigarettes, and I went on like that with the pack of cigarettes. I did not actually offer them, but he just reached and took one. So I did it again, he took another one, he took about ten or twelve cigarettes. That was the end of it. And so when we got to Vienna, the signal was to slap the boxes twice. This I did and said, "Bécs". I'd learned that much in Hungarian. That's what the Hungarians call Vienna.

On one of your rescue missions you saved the lives of six scientists and their families by taking them out of Hungary.

That was a rather special case. On one visit to the Embassy in Vienna, I was introduced to a Commander in the United States Navy and he gave me the names of six Hungarian scientists. I do not know exactly what their fields were. The problem was to get the six and their wives out, and the US Navy would take care of them. This Commander gave me 5000 dollars in cash, which was a great deal of money. He said that this money was to get them to the United States. So I gave them the 5000 dollars. Then I did not hear about them for two or two and a half

months. They finally got in touch with me again, and they had bribed their way out, they all had exit visas. We had our aeroplane going from Budapest to the American airbase outside Vienna. But one of the wives just could not get an exit visa, and the husband was not going to go without his wife, understandably. So I gave them instructions where this lady was to go the evening before their departure. I had a box from the military, and we put her in the box for the whole night. The next day I had the box carried to the airport in Budapest. When our plane came in, the six Hungarian scientists with the five wives got on the plane as the pilot had a manifest for those eleven people. But then we put the box on from the Legation in Budapest with a label that said nothing about the contents. Everybody was pretty nervous, since the Russians usually found out about such things. There had already been a trial in Romania about some people who tried to do that. Anyway, they took off and this lady climbs out of the box while they are in the air. The pilot was horrified. Well, they worked that out. But the most unhappy man was the Commander from the Navy. I saw him some weeks later in Vienna, and he complained that the group came to Vienna without any money! I said, yes, they spent it, they were bribing people to get out. But that money was supposed to get them all to the United States! He was absolutely horrified. I said, that's your problem! I don't know how he ever explained it but all twelve of them came to the United States.

Are there some people still alive out of those who you rescued?

I never kept a list. The couple who came with Zoltán Pfeiffer and his wife and child, were the Acsays, and I have not heard from Acsay¹⁸ since then. He came to the United States and he was an architect and he was working in New York somewhere. But I have never heard from him directly.

What about Barankovics?¹⁹

I knew Barankovics, but my only connection was as an officer of the Legation. I mean I chatted with Barankovics but I never went out of my way to see him. I felt that Barankovics was heading for trouble. I think it was Barankovics that I told at the reception at the Soviet Legation in November 1947, look, a year from now you, me and most of these people will not be here in Budapest. He was gone within less than a year. I never saw him when he came to America.

Did you help him get out of the country?

No.

18 ■ László Acsay (1903–?). Architect, member of the National Executive Committee of the Smallholders' Party and Member of Parliament. The architect of the American Legation (1946). Left the Smallholders' Party in January 1947, joining the Hungarian Independence Party led by Zoltán Pfeiffer.
19 ■ István Barankovics (1906–1974). Roman Catholic priest, President of the Democratic People's Party (1945–1949). In the 1947 elections they came out as the largest opposition party. Forced into exile early in 1949.

What about Zoltán Tildy?

Viktor Csornoky²⁰, who was Tildy's son-in-law, came to see me in Bimbó Street, just after the August elections of 1947. I had staying with me a friend from Prague who was the *Time-Life* correspondent in Eastern Europe. Csornoky was quite tactless, he immediately started by saying you have to get my father-in-law out of the country. I tried to signal to him to keep quiet, but he just went on. So I said we'll talk again and asked this American friend to simply forget about this. Then I talked to the man who handled these things but he said it could not be done from Budapest. You could not get the President out of Budapest. Tildy had a place at Lake Balaton, whether this belonged to the Hungarian presidency or to him personally, I don't know. The place was right on the lake. I said, have him go down there, and we'll look at it from there and see. So he went down at the same time as Tildy did and surveyed the whole thing, came back and said that it can be done. Risky but it can be done with eight people. I explained this to Csornoky but he came around to my house and said now it has to be to twelve. I consulted the man again, who said, we can't do it, too dangerous. You just can't do it with that many people. It involved getting them into small boats and rowing across the lake, you know, all kinds of difficulties such as to house them, because you could not get people out immediately from Balaton over into Austria. Csornoky insisted on twelve, and the question became moot, because *Time* magazine came out with a little piece saying that the Hungarian President was trying to escape from Hungary. Tildy had been on the radio, saying how marvellously democratic the election was, it was all an expression of the popular will, you know, the usual thing. I reproached my friend in Prague, who protested that he had told *Time* not to publish. This is why you really can't trust journalists if you are in the position that I was in. My friend said, well, we told them not to use it but then some editor in New York did. Well, that cost a lot of people a great deal. Csornoky became Minister to Egypt. I was briefly in Genoa at the time of the Italian elections in 1948 and he got in touch with me there by letter. I did not answer because I knew that Csornoky was going to be in trouble. Soon after they called him back from Egypt and he was executed.

Why do you think Tildy wanted to escape at that particular point in time? Didn't it occur to you that it might be a set-up?

Tildy was powerless. The Hungarian president had little power according to the constitution. He was a figurehead, the symbol of the country and I can't believe

20 ■ Viktor (Bun) Csornoky (1919–1948). Lawyer, journalist, diplomat. Son-in-law of Zoltán Tildy. Member of the Smallholders Party from 1942. Appointed First Secretary at the Washington legation in November 1945, returning home in December 1946. Posted as chief of mission to Egypt in November 1947, summoned home in July 1948, arrested, condemned to death on trumped-up charges, and executed on December 7, 1948.

that his own son-in-law would have been a provocateur. If the request had come from someone else in the presidential guard, I might have given credence to the idea that it was a set-up. But it was Csornoky who made the request. As to why Tildy wanted this, I think he was being obliged to publicly acclaim this election and it would have been quite a coup for the opposition to the Communists if Tildy had escaped and had confirmed that the elections had been falsified all round. After the scandalous election in January 1947, the Peasant Party leader Stanislaw Mikolajczik had left Poland, and this finally alerted people in the West to what was going on in all these countries and how the Russians were running things. But never at the time and never since have I considered that that could have been a provocation, coming from where it came and from a man who paid with his life for his indiscretions.

The "blue card elections" took place on 17 August.

Two leading Communist officials attended a conference held in Poland at which they were instructed how to run a falsified election. That much has been confirmed since from sources that became available after the break-up of the Soviet Union. My understanding of it at the time was that one of the techniques was this blue card of which two hundred thousand were printed. That was the figure given to me. If you had a blue voting slip, it enabled you to vote several times. You simply presented the blue card and you voted and then you could go off to another polling booth and vote again. It was advertised as an option for people to vote who could not get there otherwise, and then they had to find the people who would vote a number of times for them.

What were you doing on the day of the election?

I was in Budapest and I stayed there. Jointly with the British, we sent teams around the country to observe the election. One of our young men who was rather new at the Legation, spoke Hungarian and went to a village about a hundred kilometres south of Budapest along the Danube. He started making announcements, "vote Smallholder". We got a protest almost immediately from the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior! They were right, that should not have been done. The reports that we had from these teams showed that there was a great deal of falsification and intimidation of voters. You have to do more than falsify, you have to get them to do what you want them to do. And you do that by intimidation. The British Minister in Budapest was a careerist, a member of the British Labour Party. He was trying to advance his career with the Labour government then in power. He told us it was one of the finest demonstrations of democracy that he had ever seen. That is what he reported to London. However, we drew up a report about fraud and intimidation and all the rest of it. Then on my Minister's instructions, I telephoned that report to the American Embassy in Paris. I got Douglas MacArthur,

the nephew of the General on the phone and said the Minister wants me to transmit this dispatch to you, would you please take it down. Which we did, knowing that they were listening to our line and would understand, you know, what our position was on the elections. We of course sent a cable to Washington too. But the trick was to do it on the open telephone line where the Communists and the Russians could pick up what we were saying. We did that deliberately.

Not that anything could be done.

No. Nothing could be done.

Another name. Béla Varga.²¹ Did you rescue him as well?

I knew Varga well. Varga was one of those who recommended me for the Order of the Hungarian Republic when he returned to Budapest in 1991. I had known him during the years that he was living in New York. I saw a great deal of Varga. The Hungarian National Committee, supported by Free Europe, was of course headed by Varga. Varga had very good connections within the Republican Party in the United States and Ferenc Nagy had very good connections with the Democrats. They kind of divided up alliances. But I saw a great deal of Varga.

Did you help him escape?

No. He did that entirely on his own. In fact, I was very surprised when it happened. I thought he might come to me, and suddenly I found out he was in Vienna!

Why did you have to leave the country in such a hurry?

I was the Political Officer in the Legation. I had what we call a legman, a man who was providing me with information. I think he was President of the Parliamentary Correspondents' Association. His name was Imre Déri. A tiny man. I was fascinated by Déri, he had covered the Battle of Warsaw in 1920 and I always got Déri to tell me about the Battle of Warsaw and he would. There was nothing secret about how we worked. In countries where you do not know the language there is always somebody that you rely on. Déri, who was covering Parliament, would come in in the morning and tell me what he thought was going on. Then he would go to Parliament and come back around 5.30–6.00 p.m., give me a written report of what had happened during the day in English. Then I would write a cable which I would send to the State Department on the daily developments. Of course the reports weren't always terribly exciting, a lot of it was just political infighting, but for people who follow the subject that is extremely important. Déri was arrested in late November, or maybe early December, and taken to the Markó Street prison. One of our officers went to see Déri, who was holding up

21 ■ Béla Varga (1903–1995). Roman Catholic priest. A founding member of the Smallholders' Party, Chairman of the National Assembly between February 1946 and May 1947. Forced into exile in the summer of 1947. In 1990 he returned to Hungary.

well. He was tried two months later and put on an absolutely splendid performance! He got up, and said this is all a lie, this is all a creation I have nothing to do with it, my job was this, and so on. He was acquitted and let out. But when our officer went to the jail one of the jail officials said to him, "we are going to get McCargar next". We obviously had to report that to Washington. The Minister sent a cable and the State Department cabled back saying McCargar should leave within four days. I can't remember the exact day. I was out by the fourth day, sometime in mid-December. I simply took a train and went to Prague. No problem, no difficulty.

Did you leave legally?

Of course. The Legation then notified the Foreign Ministry. At that time, one of the principal figures in the Foreign Ministry was György Heltai,²² who would later become Imre Nagy's political advisor during the 1956 Revolution. He escaped to Belgium, then he came to New York. He was teaching at Columbia University and then he got a teaching post in South Carolina, where he died in 1994. We became great friends. But at that time, he was a very, very, energetic, vigorous Communist. Our Legation reported to the Foreign Ministry that I had left the country, and they duly replied. I forgot the exact wording but they used a diplomatic phrase which meant that they accepted this news with great pleasure.

You rescued so many people. The last passenger was the 75th.

Well, people were full of admiration for a short time but that passed. In the long run all that secret work did me more harm than good in the service.

Was the Hungarian government responsive to what you had done?

The Hungarian government has been very kind. I went back to Hungary in 1991 with my wife, who had never been to Budapest, and she was anxious to go. We took the boat from Vienna, which is a marvellous way to come to Budapest. One of the people that I saw was the mayor, Gábor Demszky, and I saw the Speaker of Parliament, György Szabad. He very kindly gave me this beautiful medallion of the Budapest Parliament, with a very nice statement. He received my wife and me in his office in Parliament. We were told to be at a certain gate at a certain time, and there was an officer with drawn sword who took us around. He took us up the staircase which is the longest in Europe! Then the following year

22 ■ György Heltai (1914–1994). After underground Communist activities during the war, he was delegated by the Party to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Active in preparatory work for the 1946 Paris Peace Conference. In 1949 he was sentenced to ten years in one of the trials associated with the Rajk prosecution. Released in 1954 and appointed deputy foreign minister in Imre Nagy's cabinet on 1 November 1956. He left Hungary after the Soviet intervention. Between 1959–1964 headed the Imre Nagy Institute in Brussels. From 1964 to his death he did research in the US and later taught history at a university in Charleston, S.C.

President Árpád Göncz gave me the Order of the Hungarian Republic. I have gone back to Budapest twice since that first return, and everybody has been very nice indeed to me. The Hungarian edition of *A Short Course in the Secret War*, based on the 1992 English edition, came out in 1993 and I was very pleased about that too.

As William Faulkner put it, "The past is never dead, it has not even passed." This to me is one of the most important sayings of the second half of the twentieth century. The belief that a new era is at hand, a new epoch, things are different. On the surface things are indeed different, When I was born, nobody travelled by aeroplane, yet they were already fighting in aeroplanes, but the railroad was a great form of transportation then. What we have now is awful flights on aeroplanes. That sort of thing changes. But the relation of the past to the present and to the future to my mind never changes. There is always, within all of this, a leftover from the past, some of which we may recognize and some of which we may not recognize. Still, it's always part of our rationale for living, part of the explanation of why and how we do things. You cannot dismiss the past from your mind.

I had identical reactions from two Hungarians who know the past. One is of the right, the other of the left. But both say the same thing. They are deeply distressed, and not by the economic situation, nor by the political situation but by what they have observed of the effect of all those years under Communist and Soviet domination on the people themselves. On the way they think. The way they react to their circumstances. The expectation that all will be taken care of by some all-powerful authority, or even more significantly, that it should be so taken care of. As one of the men of 1956 said to me, "The tragedy of the country today is that 1956 failed. It gave them 33 years more and those years changed them, not for the better." The tragic legacy. My guess is that in time it will become the part of that past of which Faulkner spoke.

What do you make of Faulkner's words now?

I think they are perfectly applicable to the situation. Again this is a circumstance where time does not necessarily heal all wounds but time does produce changes. The kind of inertia that people are speaking of as widespread among the Hungarian population under the Communists or even today will diminish, as more people move on. That past will be there, but people won't have the same roots as the people living today or living in 1992 had. Unless there is some unhappy circumstance that none of us can foresee. The impact of the past will attenuate and change as time passes. ♣

Governing the New Economy

In Hungary's post-Communist history, 1998 was the first time when the incoming administration inherited a fully operating market economy. In 1990, with 90 per cent of the means of production owned by the state and a highly centralized economy, the first freely elected government set out to establish the legal framework of a market economy and launched massive and institutionalized privatization. In the meantime market forces and, most notably, the rapid collapse of established relations with the former Soviet bloc compelled swift adaptation to the new situation. By 1994 the coalition of Socialists and Free Democrats under Prime Minister Gyula Horn was still faced with the privatization of about half of the productive assets of an economy that was suffering serious instability after the second half of 1993, and was threatened with a slide into another debt spiral.

In June 1998, the Orbán administration took over a country that was not only equipped with the institutions of a market economy (the front runner among all the former Socialist countries) but had also gone through the macro-economic transformation required by the transition (see Table 1). The latter was achieved in some of the former Socialist countries (for example, Poland) by shock therapy; in Hungary the same was effected by what was called the Bokros Package,¹ announced in March 1995. Although the parties of the centre-right coalition coming into power after the May 1998 elections (Fidesz—Hungarian Civic Party,

1 ■ The programme designed by the then Minister of Finance, Lajos Bokros, to stabilize the economy, which introduced substantial cuts in welfare spending and a crawling-peg devaluation of the forint, was vehemently criticized by the parties of the opposition. A good many of the welfare services cuts were, in fact, re-instated following a decision by the Constitutional Court. However, the Hungarian economy's foreign trade deficit started to improve after 1996; the country's credit rating continuously improved; and its foreign debt decreased, with the result that by the new millennium Hungary had completely escaped from the debt trap.

Pál Réti

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Economic indices in the first year of the Horn and the Orbán governments
and in 2000.

	1994	1998	2000
Private sector share in GDP (per cent)	55	85	85
FDI stock by the end of the year (in billions of US dollars)	7	16.4	19.4
Current account deficit/GDP (in per cent)	9.4	4.9	3.4
General government expenditure (in per cent of GDP)	58.7	49.4	44.8 *
General government deficit (in per cent of GDP)	8.4	5.6	3.6
General government debt (in per cent of GDP)	88.2	62.3	60.7 *
External debt/GDP (in per cent)	68.7	56.9	59.9 *
Consumer prices (percentage change)	18.8	14.3	9.8
Unemployment (end-year, in per cent of labour force)	10.7	7.8	5.7
GDP (percentage change)	2.9	4.9	5.3

*1999

Source: Transition Report 2000, EBRD; Central Office of Statistics.

Independent Smallholders' Party, Hungarian Democratic Forum) had all strongly criticized this macro-economical stabilization, as regards both its methods and the mode and extent of privatization, the government programme published in the summer of 1998 was nevertheless building on its results. "The foundations of a market economy have already been laid in Hungary, and the government can safely build on the established economic, legal and institutional systems", a document, "At the Threshold of the New Millennium", concluded. The same document also declared that "by 1998 the privatization process in Hungary had essentially been completed".² Under the conditions specific to Hungary, the government's decision to introduce changes seemingly affecting governmental structure only (i.e. the defining of economic policies as the joint duty of a new Economic Ministry and the Ministry of Finance, in other words, ending the latter's economic primacy) amounted to an indirect admission of the stability of macro-economical foundations. Ever since the 1980s the Ministry of Finance had been effectively in control of a seriously indebted Hungarian economy, even though the idea of creating a Ministry of Economic Affairs with at least the same weight as the Ministry of Finance had tempted both the previous prime ministers, József Antall and Gyula Horn. They both had second thoughts, however, because of the dangers of slackening fiscal discipline.

The Fidesz government did "choose the future"—a chapter heading in the government programme—in other words, unlike its predecessors which had talked of managing the crisis and stabilization, this administration promised rapid growth, a rise in living standards and the creation of new jobs.

2 ■ *Az új évezred küszöbén* (At the Threshold of the New Millennium), Bp. 1998. p. 16.

Although, as outlined above, the incoming administrations faced very different situations in 1994 and 1998, the continuation showed remarkable similarities as far as the uncertainties of economic strategies were concerned. For eight months, the Horn government's Minister of Finance, László Békesi, had been continuously complaining about the threat of economic instability, verging on a crisis, but the cabinet did absolutely nothing to stop the process. (There was a similar paralysis during the term of the Antall government's first Minister of Finance, Ferenc Rabár, largely owing to the fact that György Matolcsy, then secretary of state in the Prime Minister's office, Minister for Economic Affairs in the current government, was busy setting up a rival centre for economic policy.) Right from the formation of the Orbán Cabinet it was clear that the Minister of Finance would not be in charge of economic policies. The circumstances of Zsigmond Járαι's selection for the post already indicated that much. In the first weeks following the election victory it was still far from certain how responsibility would be divided between the two ministries, as the nominees for both offices were economists and financial experts. The original candidate for Minister of Finance was László Urbán, who had been instrumental in shaping Fidesz economic policies from the start, and who had very definite ideas about the future. It turned out, within days, that his ideas were in fact a little too definite. That was when Viktor Orbán's choice fell on Zsigmond Járαι, a man who did not belong to the Fidesz inner circles, and whose name had been considered as a possible candidate for Minister of Finance when the outgoing coalition had been in power. He made it clear from the start that he would be content with the role of a "budget minister". Once the government was formed, the departments devoted to analysis and policy-making within the Ministry of Finance were moved to the Ministry of Economic Affairs, then headed by Attila Chikán. As a former director of a Student Residence Hall, Chikán had been the spiritual mentor of several Fidesz economists, contributing personally to the party's economic programme for the 1994 elections. Chikán, whose professional qualifications the opposition did not dispute, had all the necessary qualities to turn his ministry into the centre for the government's economic policies, but he never grasped this opportunity. During his eighteen months of tenure he failed to come up with the new economic strategy he had promised before taking office.

The Orbán government introduced two spectacular and decisive measures in economic policy at the very beginning of its term, indicating that they were serious about controlling public spending, one of the main items on the party's election manifesto. One was the abolition of autonomous self-governing organizations in the social insurance sector—a move that had been pushed through Parliament before the formation of the new government. Fidesz was the only party in that, since 1990, had consistently argued against the idea of having one-third of the national budget removed from the effective control of the only fully democratic and functional institution, Parliament, and placed in the hands of a "self-government"

of dubious legitimacy. The other spectacular measure was sacking the entire management of Postabank and restoring the state's proprietary rights. With the majority of its shares owned by the state, this bank had gone "independent", distributing large sums of money in areas alien to banking and had entangled itself in various impenetrable deals.

From the viewpoint of the economy, the first year of the new government's term of office was characterized by survival rather than creative construction. Starting with the summer of 1998, various crises brought on by external factors came in quick succession, and the relatively successful handling of these crises meant that the government had the appearance of being busy, even though as yet it came up with no economic strategy. In August 1998 Russia had serious liquidity problems. Although Hungarian exports to Russia only amounted to 4 per cent of total exports, in certain branches and in certain areas (tin and food industry, in Eastern Hungary) dozens of companies were threatened with bankruptcy, with large numbers facing unemployment. At the same time, the pulling out of large amounts of capital by Western investors (who tended to treat the entire East European market or even all emerging markets, uniformly) threatened to bring down the Budapest Stock Exchange, along with the exchanges in Warsaw, Prague, etc., and put the forint under great pressure. The government and the MNB, the Hungarian National Bank, did not panic at this flight of foreign capital and the temporary weakening of the forint. Against all expectations, the MNB reduced the monthly rate of the forint's crawling-peg devaluation; the MNB also intervened on the Western markets to protect the forint and raised the prime rate. It was partly due to these measures, carried out in consultation with the government,³ that the Hungarian economy survived the Russian crises with losses that were small in comparison to those suffered by other countries of the region.

In Autumn 1998 an unusually severe flood devastated Hungary, followed swiftly by another one in Spring 1999. The government spent tens of billions of forints on flood defence and reconstruction, monies mostly taken from development funds—road and railway construction—as well as by introducing uniform cuts in all sectors of the budget. Partly in consequence of this, in its first eighteen months in office, the Orbán administration did just the opposite of what the analysts and the opposition had been afraid they would do on the basis of the Fidesz' election promises. Instead of generous spending, an austerity approaching that of the the 1995 Bokros Package characterized the cabinet's fiscal policies, which was manifested in the reducing of or abandoning of infrastructural investments—such as the motorway construction programme—and also in the modesty of the increase of wages in the public sector. On the other hand, the government, in line with its election agenda, restored certain social benefits to families and abolished university tuition fees while keeping the budget balanced.

3 ■ 1999 Regular Report from the Commission on Hungary's Progress towards Accession. E.U.

Unlike during the term of the previous administration, the lack of a coherent economic policy this time did not have painful and wide-scale consequences on the balance and growth of the economy. Ever since the second half of 1996, the Hungarian economy has been growing dynamically and at an increasing rate, primarily because of a double-digit increase in exports based on the foreign investments of previous years. In addition, thanks to a tightly planned central budget, the economic indicators continued in balance. In the meantime, continuing the trend set off by the Bokros Package, the share of central redistribution in the GDP continued to decline; in consequence, the role of the government's economic policies in influencing the economic process did, in fact, diminish.

As the economy stayed on the right track, the government was not compelled to carry through the promised structural reform. In other words, the Orbán Cabinet missed a unique opportunity to introduce the remaining crucial reforms that had been overdue since the political changes of 1989–90. This was the first administration that was in the enviable position throughout its first three years of office—and according to the economic forecasts, the same will also apply to its fourth year—to have an economy that was growing faster than the European average, while the deficit in both the budget and in the balance of payments was decreasing.

The Orbán government got as far as starting work on reforms in taxation and healthcare, but soon gave up on both counts. The transformation of the taxation system by cutting taxes and contributions substantially was one of the most potent election promises made by Fidesz, and most of it was even included in the government's programme. In preparation for the budget for the year 2000, the idea of tax reforms with substantial reductions was briefly considered, but the Prime Minister promptly blew the whistle on it—blaming the resistance of the employers' and employees' organizations—and announced that radical reforms in the taxation system should no longer be expected in the present term. The cabinet expended a little more energy on reforming the healthcare and social security system, which is generally regarded as both wasteful and inadequate. In the first year a separate secretary of state was appointed to supervise the preliminary work in the Prime Minister's Office. But when the Prime Minister decided to replace the Minister of Health eighteen months before the upcoming elections, he was in a way admitting that no real effort for change had been made. Now the government is essentially where it was at the time of taking office, as it had, by that time, already accomplished the first item on its agenda, which was the abolition of the "self-governments" in social security, and ever since then it has been vacillating as to what to do with the healthcare system—a hard nut to crack, no doubt—now directly under government control but just as inefficient.

The past two and a half years have intimated that important elements of the Orbán government's economic policies have often been subordinated to the objective of staying in and consolidating power. The strict fiscal policies employed in the first half of the term enabled the government to spread a little money about in the

State financing for the Széchenyi Plan 2001–2002

Programmes	2001	2002
	in billion forints	
Strengthening entrepreneurship (encouraging SMEs bridging facilities, investment incentives)	31.4	37.3
Housing (adding to and modernizing the existing housing stock, modernizing home loans, facilitating home acquisition and boosting mobility, increasing rented housing, social aspects)	69.9	72.6
Tourism (incentives for therapeutic and spa holidays and for conference catering, theme parks, access to chateaux and castles, tourist information base, quality travel products)	25.0	28.1
Research, development and innovation (national R&D programmes, extending support for existing R&D institutions)	17.5	37.0
Development of an information society and economy (governmental sub-programme, setting in modern communication and information instruments and improving access, laying the foundations for an electronic economy improving the quality of life and awareness)	15.0	28.9
Construction of motorways and their infrastructure (M3 motorway from Füzesabony to Polgár, a Danube Bridge at Szekszárd with associated priority roads, modernizing and extending the M7 motorway, associated infrastructure: modernizing railway lines, regional airfields, flood protection)	132.1	120.9
Regional economic development (incentives for regional innovation systems, establishing regional clusters, incentives for regional electronic model markets, small area model programmes for economic development, incentives for the production and marketing of important specifically Hungarian products)	5.0	6.0
Total	295.9	330.8

Source: Economic Ministry (www.go.hu).

last year before the elections, without jeopardizing the economy's equilibrium. This also means that all the reforms that have long-term benefits but are inevitably accompanied by conflicts and public discontent in the short term will be cancelled.

In the second half of the cycle the government's economic politics took a spectacular turn. This was first heralded by Attila Chikán's replacement by György Matolcsy as Minister for Economic Affairs. Matolcsy's appearance in the govern-

ment also had a symbolic message: he had written the chapter on economic policy in Fidesz's election programme, promising to keep growth at a stable 7 per cent, which was the rallying cry in the Fidesz campaign manifesto.⁴ At the same time, he drew a great deal of criticism for his contribution to the election campaign, most notably for his promise of 7 per cent annual growth, considered by most analysts as voluntaristic. His appointment as Minister for Economic Affairs could have signalled an early start of the next election campaign.

The second signal of an economic turn was perhaps even more symbolic, and it is not known how closely it will affect the economy. This was the announcement of a new strategy, called the Széchenyi Plan, evoking rapid modernization as it was named after István Széchenyi, the great 19th-century statesman and modernizer, which came just a few months after Matolcsy's appointment. The rhetorical character of the project was plain from the start: in preparing the first draft, Matolcsy simply took the recently approved budget and produced a listing of the government's goals along with the budgeted sums, all arranged according to a preconceived idea. Although much noise had been made about the plan in government circles—the Prime Minister himself centred his annual public address on the topic in February 2001—it has remained an ideological construction to the extent that no mention was made of it in the two-year budget for 2001 and 2002. At the same time, the Ministry of Economic Affairs has already announced tenders involving tens of billions of forints to be spent on designated projects (see Table 2).

At the moment it is not clear how the money distributed under the aegis of the Széchenyi Plan will help the small and medium enterprises' integration into the multinational division of labour, how it will lend an impetus to the tourist industry and how it will induce growth in the less developed regions. Indeed, how it will attract the necessary private capital also remains to be seen. The drab fiscal rigour of the first few years gradually yields to a more colourful governmental strategy—one that is evidently taking pains to preserve economic balance—involving infrastructural investments with the engagement of broad sections of Hungarian enterprises and the injection of government money into small and medium enterprises. And finally, the year directly preceding the general elections will probably see a substantial boost to consumer demand by raising the wages of public servants and public employees. ■

4 ■ Pál Réti: "Új hazai gazdaságfejlesztési terv – Hét magyar népmese" (New Plan for Domestic Economic Development – Seven Hungarian Folk Tales), *HVG* April 1, 2000.

Pál Lövei

A Thousand Years on Display

Millennial Exhibitions

The year 2000 marked the thousandth anniversary of the crowning of the first king of the country, (Saint) Stephen I of the House of Árpád (d. 1038). This event is looked on as the founding of the Hungarian state. It took place at Christmas 1000 though some believe it was on the first day of the new millennium.

A few years ago Hungary celebrated the 1100th anniversary of what is literally called in Hungarian the landtaking, the conquest of the Carpathian basin, a conquest that started in 895 and took some years to complete. The 1000th anniversary of the Conquest, due to delays in preparation, was not celebrated in 1895 but in 1896, with the National Millennial Exhibition in Budapest, which was originally intended to be a World Fair. A century later Budapest wished to have another go at staging a World Fair and was to organize the 1995 event in conjunction with Vienna. When the Viennese withdrew, Hungarians decided to go it alone and hold the Budapest World Fair in 1996. The government which came into power in 1994 cancelled the project for financial reasons. After this retreat, still censured by some, the country focussed its attention on the 1996 anniversary, for which most museums organized, despite belated political and financial decisions, surprisingly successful exhibitions.

The majority of events in 2000 covered topics similar to those covered in 1996: there were exhibitions on medieval Hungary, primarily based on archeological finds (such as an exhibition in Győr, on the secular and religious centres of Győr-Sopron-Moson county in the North-West; or the exhibition presenting Veszprém in the age of the Árpád kings, when it was the coronation city of queens, including Gisela of Bavaria, wife to Stephen); ecclesiastic collections again exhibited their treasures (the Győr and Vác dioceses); there were pro-

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Areas of research: medieval sepulchral art, heraldry, architectural history.

grammes focussing on the past century (such as the Sopron exhibition casting an eye over the 20th-century history of the town); exhibitions devoted to more specialized topics; and medieval codices were again on display. Some exhibitions, however, reflected on the millennium by making time the central subject (an international trend) and abandoning a national or regional framework.

During the nineties, the Hungarian National Gallery presented a major exhibition each year, in spring or autumn, with a medieval, 19th or 20th-century focus. The opening of the annual Budapest Spring Festival, devoted to the arts, was often synchronized with the opening event at the Gallery. The 2000 programme was entitled "History—Image: Selected Examples of the Interplay between Past and Art in Hungary." The exhibition, which was arranged by Katalin Sinkó and Árpád Mikó, centred on material that was interesting, thought-provoking and varied in genre, from antiquity to the 1989–1990 transition. It represented not a particular period or oeuvre, but the whole timespan as studied by art historians in Hungary.¹ Almost seventy people were involved and contributed data, studies and descriptions for the catalogue: archeologists, literary historians and historians, and some sixty art historians, the latter a representative selection of a somewhat narrow group of Hungarian scholars. All but four live in Budapest (the others in Esztergom, Miskolc, Pécs and Székesfehérvár) and this is illustrative of the situation in Hungary: there are hardly any art historians employed in provincial museums or other related institutions.

The exhibition must be considered a huge professional success. The massive catalogue, 851 pages of small print, features new findings in many fields first published here and, one hopes, will inspire new directions in Hungarian art history. Since the exhibition and the catalogue was the joint venture of scholars who rarely, if ever, collaborate, the event was indeed a special present for those engaged in art history, as it offered, through its study of the ever-changing relation of art and history, an opportunity to examine their own position with respect to their subject, history, and the history of their discipline.

The Hungarian National Museum mounted "Images of Hungarian History"² and this exhibition chose a different approach to the relation of history and images. The history of a thousand years was represented by the images of those who helped shape this history: Beatrix Basics showed us statesmen from Stephen I to the first post-transition prime minister, József Antall. The material, portraits and representations of historical places and events, were taken from the Hungarian National Museum's Historical Portrait Gallery, a department of that museum that does not get the attention it deserves, the Historical Photo Archive, and the Coin and Medals Collection. Beside works

1 ■ Árpád Mikó, "Through Our Looking Glass", in *The Hungarian Quarterly*. No.160. Winter 2000, pp. 75–83.

2 ■ *Képek a magyar történelemből* (Images of Hungarian History). Guide. Beatrix Basics and Bence Képešy, eds. Exhibition in the Hungarian National Museum, 28th April 2000–26th June 2000. 36 pp.

that are often displayed, there were some that are never or rarely available to the public.

The relatively narrow corridor of the Museum is unsuited for the hanging of larger pictures such as life-sized Baroque portraits of aristocrats, consequently the Historical Gallery was drawn on for its prints. In the arrangement Saint Stephen was immediately followed by the Hunyadis (John Hunyadi and Matthias I), which meant the important kings from the House of Árpád were omitted, as indeed were the Anjou kings and the Emperor Sigismund of Luxembourg. Louis II, who fell at the fateful Battle of Mohács (1526), was followed by members of the Zrínyi family, representing the nation's long struggle against the Turks. Then came the Rákóczi War of Independence, Maria Theresa, Count István Széchenyi and other figures from the Reform Era, Lajos Kossuth and events of the 1848–49 Revolution and War of Independence, and finally, Francis Joseph (d. 1916). Kossuth and Francis Joseph also provided the transition into the photographic section, where leading statesmen, such as Ferenc Deák, Count Gyula Andrassy and Kálmán Tisza, were accompanied by the politicians of the inter-war period (István Bethlen and Pál Teleki) and persons responsible for the tragic fate of the country in the two World Wars: István Tisza, Miklós Horthy and Ferenc Szálasi. Images of the Communist regime (represented here by Mátyás Rákosi, Imre Nagy and János Kádár) were primarily the petty hackwork of the age, with the exception of some 1956 photos of Imre Nagy. Coins, almost 270 in all, were arranged in similar sections, although the arrangement stopped at the First World War.

The arranger emphasized that her choice of individuals was subjective. Insufficient material in collections as well as lack of space accounts for the omission of important medieval figures and no one could have objected to the faces included up to the late 19th century. In the 20th-century section, there were bound to be counterfeits that were displeasing or even loathsome to some.

The medieval figures absent in the above exhibition were present in the treasury of the Esztergom Cathedral, through their seals, which were often beautifully wrought works of art. In "Sealed History,"³ arranged by András Hegedűs, director of the Primate's Archives, some 140 seals were on display from the period between the middle of the 12th century to the Battle of Mohács (1526), most in their original context, with the documents. In recent years Hungarian art historians have taken a new interest in seals, a fact that greatly aided the organization of this exhibition. The Primate's Archives, together with the Esztergom Chapter Archives, holds the second largest collection of medieval documents after the Hungarian National Archives, and this was the first time it was put on such a generous public display. Indeed, many of the seals of monarchs, popes, barons, major and minor ecclesiastical figures, chapters and convents, as well as

3 ■ *Megpecsételt történelem. Középkori pecsétek Esztergomból* (Sealed History. Medieval Seals from Esztergom). Catalogue. András Hegedűs, ed. Esztergom, 2000, 181 pp.

of towns and cities, had not been available to the public before. Beside the wax impressions, there were also some gold and lead bulls. During the two months of the exhibition the Treasury had more than 43,000 visitors, the majority of whom presumably looked over the seals as well. School groups brought here were probably most impressed by a 1233 copy of the golden pendant seal of Andrew II (d. 1235), the nearest likeness to that which was used on a 1222 decree, known as the Golden Bull (after the seal itself). The Bull is often compared to England's Magna Carta and all seven original copies of it have been lost. Andrew II's bull was made of gold leaves soldered together, and the other gold seal at the exhibition, on a 1465 charter granted by King Matthias, is of solid gold.



*The sigillum maior of the chapter of the Esztergom see: After 1319.
Photo: National Board for the Protection of Historical Monuments.*

The Christian Museum of Esztergom put on "Cult and Relics of Hungarian Saints", in which the two exhibits that excited the greatest interest were on loan from abroad. The first was the magnificent reliquary (made around 1480–90) of St Adalbert, who was instrumental in the foundation of both the Hungarian and Bohemian churches and who died a martyr's death among the pagan Prussians. It was on loan from the Treasury of the Prague Cathedral and Chapter. The second came from the Dominican convent in Dubrovnik, which sent its relic of Saint Stephen's skull kept in a baroque embossed silver reliquary made in Dubrovnik. Also on display were other relics of St Adalbert in 19th century reliquaries, from the Treasury of the Esztergom Cathedral, which was also the source of a spectacular joint reliquary of Hungarian royal saints, with a miniature copy of the Hungarian crown on top, made in Vienna in 1854. The oldest exhibit was a reliquary from around 1370 from the collection of the Christian Museum, from the Rhineland, made to hold a relic of a knightly saint. Other exhibits included an Italian silk chasuble from the late 15th century, the ornamental cross of which is embroidered with images of the canonized Hungarian kings and St Gellért (Gerhardus): it was bequeathed to the Treasury by Archbishop János Kutassy, who acquired it in 1590. The 1728 gilded silver monstrance made in Vienna, with statuettes of St Stephen and

his son, St Emeric, was presented to the Treasury by Primate Count Imre Esterházy.

Superior goldsmith's work and textiles appeared in the company of relevant paintings and graphics. The full-length painting of Blessed Gisela, wife of Saint Stephen, was made around 1700, and came on loan from the Nieder-

Esztergom, Cathedral treasury. St Stephen on the Kutassy chasuble. End of the 15th century. Photo: National Board for the Protection of Historical Monuments.



münster convent in Passau, where she lies buried. A Flemish portrait of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary from around 1520, as well as two Baroque representations of the almsgiving saint, by Giovanni Battista Pittoni (1734) and Daniel Gran (1736), were borrowed from the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, as was Bernhard Strigel's painting (1511–12) of St Ladislaus commending Wladislaw II and his sons to the patronage of the Virgin Mary. Apart from these fine paintings there were paintings included for the sake of illustrating iconographic points rather than for their artistic value, like the late 18th-century images of St Stephen and St Emeric with a faulty perspective and distorted proportions by an unknown painter. These charmingly clumsy pictures were loaned by the Archiepiscopal Seminary in Esztergom. Notable graphic representations included the well-known woodcut (from around 1500) of St Margaret of the House of Árpád, and Hans Baldung Grien's engraving of St Martin, who was born in Pannonia, both from the collection of the Christian Museum. The Museum and the Cathedral also loaned 18th and 19th-century pictures of three Catholic priests who died martyrs' death at the beginning of the Thirty Years' War, in 1619, in Kassa (Košice), one of whom,



Europe's Centre around 1000 A. D. A poster for the exhibition at the National Museum.

Márk Kőrösi, was a canon in Esztergom. The three martyrs were beatified in 1905, and canonized by John Paul II a few years ago, on the occasion of his visit to Košice.

One of the most significant exhibitions of the millennial year was a joint Czech-Polish-Hungarian-German-Slovak event, "Europe's Centre Around 1000 A.D."⁴ It was declared the 27th Council of Europe Exhibition. Designed to be on the road for two years, the exhibition opened in the Budapest National Museum, in the autumn of 2000. It will move on to Berlin in the summer of 2001, to Mannheim in the autumn and winter, before finishing in Prague and Bratislava. The idea originated in the Deutsche Verbände für Altertumsvorschung and the Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin. An international committee (with three Hungarian members) worked for three years on the programme outline, which was then passed on to national committees for them to work on such details as exhibits, borrowings, catalogues and studies. The Hungarian material was compiled by the Medieval Department of the National Museum, headed by Ernő Marosi, the chairman of the national committee.

Posters and tickets for the exhibition, as well as the front pages of books and booklets of studies and the huge billboard hung onto the front of the museum, showed an illustration from the Munich Gospel book of Otto III, in which three

4 ■ *Europas Mitte um 1000. Beiträge zur Geschichte, Kunst und Archäologie. Handbuch zur Ausstellung* Vols. 1–2. Catalogue. Alfried Wieczorek and Hans-Martin Hinz, eds. Stuttgart, Konrad Theiss Verlag, 2000. 998 pp. (539+459) pp.

female figures pay homage to the Emperor. This is a somewhat modified version of the original image: in it there are four figures, Roma, Gallia, Germania and Sclavinia (that is, the Slav province, which is obviously Poland), so Gallia was left out, all of them crowned ladies, and the position of the names has also been changed. The illustration was well chosen; it is a pity visitors seeking the original source could only find a facsimile at the Budapest venue, in a knee-high display case.

Original or copy? The question was a central problem of the whole project. The catalogue tells at which venue an object is exhibited in the original. Apart from archeological finds, it seems that few of the delicate manuscripts, goldsmith's work and other treasures are to be displayed at all venues. Some are present, at all venues, in reproduction only. The Holy Roman Emperor's crown, the holy lance and the Attila sword cannot be moved out of the Vienna treasury, so they appear everywhere in reproduction. The Hungarian crown is represented with a copy in which the materials were identical in every respect (jewels, etc.) although the original is in Budapest, removed by a political decision from the National Museum to Parliament in the very year of the Millennium. Even politicians accepted the expert opinion that the coronation mantle could not be transported, so that stayed in the National Museum and took an important role in the exhibition. Size and difficulties of transportation account for plaster casts of a Gottland rune-stone, as well as of pillars and stone tables erected for Slavic pagan gods, and the marble relief of the Adalbert Well of S. Bartolomeo all'Isola in Rome. The bronze gates of the cathedrals in Mainz and Gniezno could simply not be removed. The oldest extant Slavic record, the Kiev Leaves, using the Glagolitic alphabet, produced in the early tenth century on Czech territory, as well as codices connected with the mission of Saints Cyril and Methodius, were represented by facsimiles, the originals being in the Vatican, Kiev and Moscow. Also present in facsimile was the 1086 Vysehrad Codex, which had an important role at the coronation of the kings of Bohemia.

Codices, textiles and smaller works of art were given a particular treatment by organizers: different copies of manuscripts on the same topic, objects of a similar function and age were displayed at all venues, with their descriptions printed in succession in the catalogue. In this way, major works, occasionally chief works, of the period thus became interchangeable with their closest parallels. *Sacramentaria* from Lucca, Udine, Paris and Mayence, 11th and 12th-century copies of the Fulda Chronicles from Vienna and the Vatican Library; various versions of the legend of St Vincent from 10-12th-century codices; 10-11th-century pontificals from Wolfenbüttel, Schaffhausen and Aosta; *Sacramentaria* written in Fulda, from Göttingen, Vercelli, the Vatican Library and Münster; biographies of St Adalbert from Wolfenbüttel, Aachen and Admont. The exhibition's organizers carefully distributed the remnants of the library of the Emperor Otto III: from works collected for him in Piacenza and then kept in Bamberg, those included

were a medical codex, which also contains the list of books, fragments of two rare volumes of Livy, tracts on natural history by Isidore of Seville and the *Corpus Juris* of the Emperor Justinian.

Applied arts items were grouped together, such as the sepulchral chalice of Bishop Gervase, made before 1067, an inscribed Byzantine onyx cup from the 10th or 11th century which belongs to the treasury of San Marco in Venice, and another piece made from agate. Similarly connected were portable altars from the Musée Cluny in Paris, from Bad Gandersheim and Paderborn; chalices with matching patens from Minden, Hildesheim and Siegburg; croziers associated with St Godehard, Reginbald and Servatius, from Niederalteich, Augsburg and Maastricht. The catalogue thus records an imaginary perfect, and at the same time virtual, exhibition—by combining half a dozen exhibitions operating on the principle *pars pro toto* and adding some extra relics.

The idea behind the "Europe's Centre Around 1000 A.D." exhibitions is somewhat narrow: it illustrates the missionary and political expansion of the Holy Roman Empire, and especially of the German territories, towards the Slavic and Hungarian states, to what would later become Central Europe, without making an attempt to demonstrate the influence of the Byzantine Empire, very important at the time, either on the Holy Roman Empire or the new kingdoms. (A few objects of Byzantine origin or influence are of course displayed.) Relations to Scandinavia or the Slavic nature of Eastern Europe were mentioned only tangentially, especially by reference to Kiev. This is how Arabs appear, with relics of their impact on the sciences, as for instance objects relating to the Spanish studies of Gerbert of Aurillac, later Pope Sylvester II (945–1003), and to the work on astronomy of his learned followers, very important indeed for the evaluation of Arab influence.

The exhibition series is not without its political aspects, and not only because it is financially supported by the Council of Europe. As the organizers declare in the forewords of the publications, the aim was to document and illuminate the western integration of Central European countries from the perspective of art history, to represent links that have existed for a thousand years but which have grown imperceptible in the 20th century, and which have a new relevance through the expected EU membership of these countries. On the German side there was a belief that the idea of *Renovatio Imperii Romanorum*, the renewal of the Roman Empire, the work of Charlemagne, revived by Otto III, had originally included Central Europe as well, the kingdoms of Hungary, Poland and Bohemia, then in process of formation. One cannot help feeling that France, which (apart from lending a few objects) is so conspicuously absent, may be resisting the political intention underpinned by this special interpretation of *renovatio*: Gallia is even absent from the poster, though around 1000 she symbolized the western provinces of the

Holy Roman Empire, the Netherlands, and Lotharingia, along the rivers Meuse and Moselle.

As this review is written, the exhibition has already closed in Budapest but has not yet opened in Berlin, so we cannot tell how an "overindulged" German public will react to it. What is certain is that even the German version of this exhibition, which will presumably be richer in material, will not be able to compete with displays with a fabulous array of original exhibits such as "Ornamenta Ecclesiae" in Cologne in 1985, the Bernward Exhibition in Hildesheim in 1993, or the Carolingian Exhibition in Paderborn in 1999.

The Budapest exhibition was unfortunately not very attractively laid out. The installations were manufactured by the German organizers and are travelling with the exhibits. The designer apparently did not take into account the peculiarities of the National Museum. Showcases and display screens sometimes seemed lost in the interior, as on the corridor housing the entry to the exhibition, at other places they were jam-packed. In a West-European site the arrangers would surely have avoided the embarrassment of having all film projectors out of order by the second half of the duration, with no attempt made to get them in working order again. Thus the interactive room was available only for a short time after the exhibition opened.

Despite these deficiencies, the public did find informative and well-composed sections and groups of exhibits. Such were the sections at the beginning, "Science and World View" and "Art," with the ten books on architecture by Vitruvius from around 800, made in Cologne, with 11th-century annotations, from the British Library, and a book from the Széchényi Library, Budapest, copied around 1000, with a poem by Uffingus, a Benedictine monk who lived in the St Liudger monastery of Werden around 980. On display were an 11th-century Byzantine alabaster paten, with enamel, decorations from the treasury of San Marco in Venice, the Servatian pectoral cross made in Trier and now in Maastricht, and a 10–11th-century ivory casket from the Palazzo Venezia in Rome.

Never before have quotidian Hungarian and Slavic objects from around 1000 (or as in the case of the exhibits, from the 9th–12th century period) been grouped together in this manner. The organizers arranged the carefully selected and varied material into the categories the objects themselves suggested: agriculture, hunting, fishing, pottery, textile making and metal production. It was interesting to see wooden objects that survived in the damp earth of the northern Slavic territories—the dry soil of the Carpathian basin would not have preserved such items. Beside the quotidian objects, there were luxury articles that got to the region through trade, like kowrie shells from the Indian Ocean found in the Hungarian Great Plains, Kashmirian carneole from Bohemia and Moravia, Baltic amber, Mediterranean gems, Kiev jewels and North-Sea whalebone carvings, found in Central Europe. Moravian objects from Mikulcic were presented in their complete splendour, masterpieces included. Beside finds from a Blatnica prince-

ly grave showing Avar and Carolingian influence, excavated in the 19th century and now in the National Museum, Hungarians were able to see for the first time finds from the extensive excavations in Slovakia carried out in recent decades, which illustrate the varied culture of the 9th-century Slav inhabitants concentrated around Nitra.

Because of the joint programme (and political changes in Slovakia), visitors to the Budapest exhibition saw finds from a Hungarian prince's grave, excavated in 1959 in Zemplín, which the Slovaks did not lend for the 1996 exhibition centred on the conquest of the Carpathian basin.

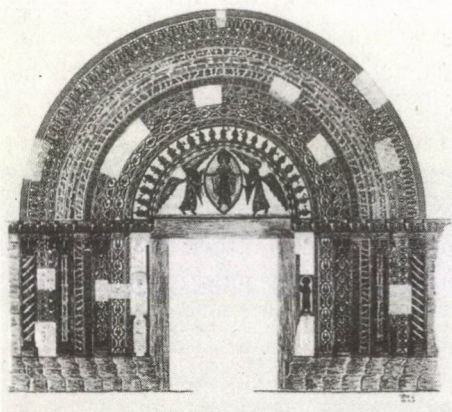
Only a few stone fragments and excavation plans represented one of the most important foundations of Stephen I, the Virgin Mary priory in Székesfehérvár, at the Budapest exhibition. The burial place and later cultic site of St Stephen and his son, prince Emeric, and the coronation church of medieval Hungarian kings, many of whom were buried there, the church fell into ruin during 150 years of Ottoman rule. In the 18th-century rebuilding of the town it was cannibalized, and its last visible remains were pulled down when the late-Baroque episcopal palace was built. Excavation started on the site in 1848. They were extended to larger areas in 1862, 1874 and 1882. The walls were then reburied and not uncovered until 1936, when the National Committee for Monuments started diggings again. The area was opened to the public in 1938 as an open-air museum, on the 900th anniversary of the death of St Stephen. For the exhibition of the most important carvings a modern building was erected by the town wall. The number of carvings found have multiplied since 1965, when Alán Kralovánszky started excavations which he continued until his sudden death in 1993, after which they were supervised by Piroska Biczó. Restorers have found that humidity and air pollution visibly damages the carvings, so the 1938 building had to be evacuated. The open-air museum was to be restored as a National Memorial by 2000 and a new building was planned. It has not been built yet, so the carvings were temporarily moved to a former Soviet barracks, where they have been restored properly. Meanwhile art historians, with Klára F. Mentényi in charge, catalogued them and prepared them for publication.

For want of a new museum, only a temporary exhibition could be arranged in the Székesfehérvár King St Stephen Museum to display the most important finds and carvings. The exhibition was entitled "*Basilica grandis et famosa*," after a 1077 legend of St Stephen, which talks about his "famous and grand basilica wonderfully wrought." Older and present-day survey charts and photos only provide a rough outline history of the building and a study of a church reconstructed and altered many times, though many of the findings are new and had not been published before. The cataloguing of the carvings has helped to establish connections between related pieces. Collecting remnants that have been kept on different locations has provided for a more accurate reconstruction of

individual parts of the building. The most important and spectacular achievements were displayed in partial reconstruction at the exhibition.

The vast doorway of the church, built on the western façade between 1150 and 1170, with richly ornamented figural jambs, must have stood where the bishop's palace now is. Its fragments were identified in the course of ten years after 1962, by Sándor Tóth, who produced a reconstruction drawing of the portal and built part of it for a local history exhibition. With the identification of further parts, the design has become even more accurate, and a more complete reconstruction could take place. More recently it has proved possible to outline the superstructure of the 14th-century rood screen, through the uncovering of its base and the identification of its fine Gothic bosses. The museum plans to publish a series of monographs on the finds and the complex of buildings.

Since the Széchényi National Library created the appropriate conditions for displaying delicate codices and manuscripts, they have put on quite a few memorable exhibitions on medieval subjects. The 1985 show, "Codices in Medieval Hungary," aimed to give an account of Hungarian books in the Middle Ages, displaying works in thematic groups. Many valuable manuscripts which had found their way into other countries in the course of the centuries were on loan for the occasion. In 1990, for the 500th anniversary of King Matthias's death, there was an important exhibition, "Bibliotheca Corviniana 1490–1990," at which 131 of the 216 identified genuine codices (*corvinae*) from the monarch's famous library were displayed. The material was on loan from a dozen countries. The library celebrated the 1100th anniversary of the Hungarian state in 1996 by exhibiting some of its treasures. Appropriately named, "Treasures, Art Treasures, Common Property: The *Cimelia* of the National Széchényi Library," the exhibition featured 119 manuscripts and incunabula from the holdings of the library: from ancient papyruses through 33 *corvinae* to the first printed map of Hungary dated 1528. The most important first written records in Hungarian, such as the *Funeral Oration* and the *Lament of Mary* were also on display. Beside



Sándor Tóth's reconstruction in a drawing of the Romanesque portal of the Virgin Mary priory in Székesfehérvár.

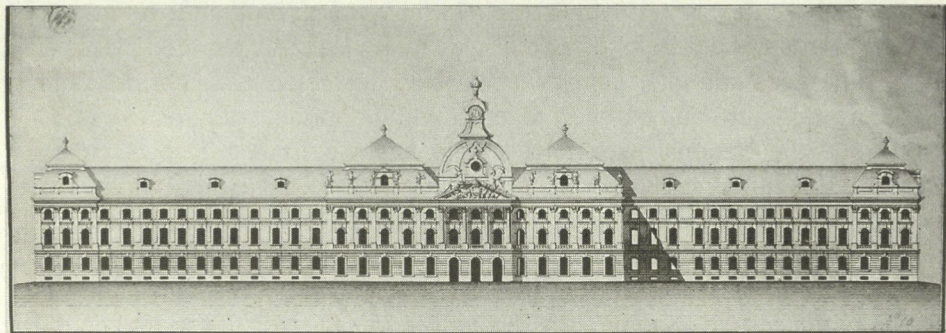
Gesta Hungarorum by Anonymus, the *Illuminated Chronicle* and the first book printed in Buda, there were also on display many jealously guarded pieces from the Middle Ages and later periods, as lavishly decorated publications commissioned by monarchs and prelates, together with important scientific works.

In 2000 the National Széchényi Library again presented a spectacular exhibition,⁵ this time treating fewer subjects in greater detail: a mere three codices were dealt with extensively. The first room was devoted to the Admont Bible, now in Vienna. The two-volume gigantic Bible was probably made in Salzburg in the 1130s, and as marginal notes testify, was in the possession of the Benedictine monastery in Csatár, Hungary, until it was pledged in the middle of the 13th century. The codex itself was not loaned by the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, thus reproductions had to be displayed. Two torn-out pages, however, were there in the original, lent by the École des Beaux-Arts, Paris.

The next section introduced the *Hungarian Anjou Legendary*, which was made in the 14th century in Bologna, and is thought, on the basis of illustrations related to Hungary, to have been made for a Hungarian member of the House of Anjou. Its known fragments are now in six collections, two of which—the Pierpont Morgan Library and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, both of New York) lent twelve complete and two fragmentary pages. By the 17th century the codex had been cut into several pieces, of which newer and newer fragments have appeared in private collections and on the market in recent years; beside being an especially richly ornamented picture book, this also explains the renewed interest of scholars.

Quite a few works have survived from the library of one of the most influential figures in the last ten years of Matthias's reign, Orbán Nagylucsei (d. 1491), bishop of Győr and then Eger, treasurer, and administrator of the Vienna diocese. The third room was dedicated to his memory. The immediate occasion was the restoration of his psalter, in the course of which they found, under what had been believed to be a contemporary battered red velvet binding, the original leather cover. Its gilded Renaissance motifs are the exact replica of those on the *corvinæ*, except for the monarch's coat of arms. This was the first time they found a work from the workshop of the court bookbinder which was not intended for the king's library but for a member of the court. (The codex itself had earlier been considered the product of the same Buda workshop that illuminated many of the late *corvinæ*.) The painstaking work of restoration could be studied on video, with a commentary by the restorer. Beside the psalter, other volumes from the prelate's library, many decorated with his arms, were also on display, along with photographs of volumes kept abroad.

5 ■ Orsolya Karsay–Tünde Wehli–Árpád Mikó: *Három kódex* (Three Codices). Millenary Exhibition of the National Széchényi Library. Catalogue. Orsolya Karsay and Ferenc Földesi, eds. Budapest, National Széchényi Library–Osiris, 2000, 166 pp.



After Sebestyén Zeller: The eastern (Danube) façade of Buda Castle after 1758. Hungarian Architectural Museum. Photo: National Board for the Protection of Historical Monuments.

The building which houses the National Széchényi Library and the Budapest Historical Museum used to be the Royal Palace. Its history has never been presented in a way similar to a recent exhibition by the Historical Museum. "Centuries of the Royal Palace at Buda"⁶ started in the cellars, where primarily photographs and reproductions outlined the history of the original complex of buildings that was demolished during the Turkish occupation.

The main body of the exhibition was arranged on the ground floor. Cartoons by Károly Lotz which he prepared for the dome of the Habsburg Hall, destroyed in the Second World War in the glass-covered southern courtyard, were hung. The corridor opening from this courtyard was suitable for a detailed display of the modern history of the building, using spectacular original plans and engraved views. The constructions originally served military purposes: the first building after 1714 was raised for the commander of the castle and his staff. The rectangular block was later included in the larger complex which, from the middle of the 18th century on, was being built as a royal palace; its southern wing is today the home of the museum. Maria Theresa authorized further construction in 1748, which lasted till 1768–9. The designs were by imperial chief architect Jean Nicolas Jadot de Ville Yssey (1710–1761), they were later modified in their details, probably by Nicolaus Pacassi (1716–1790) and Franz Anton Hillebrandt (1719–1797). This building already featured a domed emphasis on its main axis (still a feature of the palace today) though when the Jesuit-founded Nagyszombat University moved to Buda and operated in the building between 1777 and 1784, the dome on the Danube side was replaced by an observatory tower. It was Joseph II who decided the building should regain its functions as

6 ■ Gábor Alföldy–Szilvia Andrea Holló–Károly Magyar–Enikő Speknek–Gabriella Szvoboda Dománszky: *A budavári királyi palota évszázadai* (Centuries of the Royal Palace of Buda). Guide. Katalin F. Dózsa, ed. Budapest Historical Museum, 2000, 82 pp.

seat of government, though Saint Stephen's Crown only arrived at its new home from the Vienna treasury after his death. The palace became the residence of Habsburg palatines, including the Palatine József, (1796–1847), who was highly popular in Hungary.

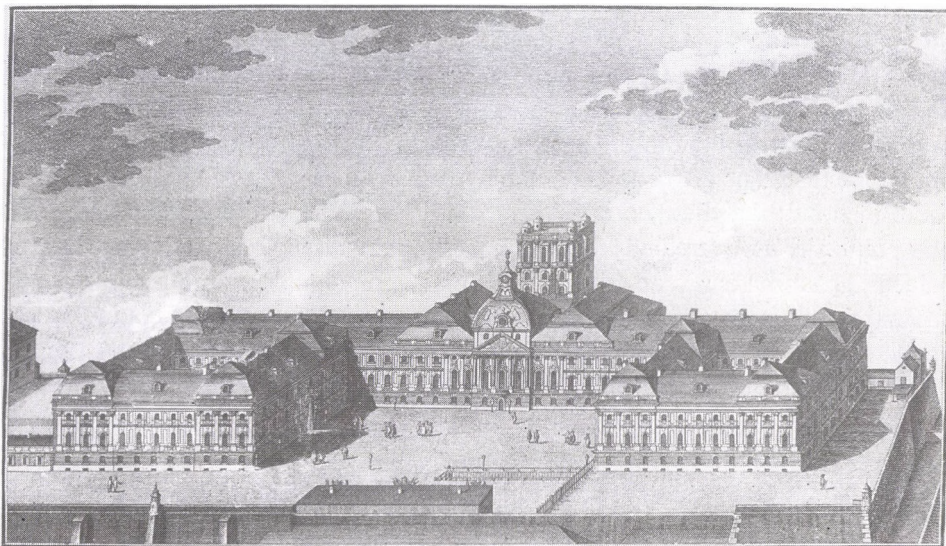
After the 1867 Compromise the building seemed not grand enough for its purposes. Miklós Ybl (1814–1891) started designs for expansion in 1885 and construction began in 1890; the majority of the complex, however, was built according to the plans of Alajos Hauszmann (1847–1926), who took over after the death of Ybl. A new wing was built, resting on a vast substructure, on the side overlooking the Buda Hills, in place of the old walls, while on the Danube side two more blocks were added to the original three, making the river front 300 metres long. Expansion and the historical interior of the rows of imposing halls were finished in 1904.

After the siege of Budapest in the Second World War the palace stood burned out and plundered for years until excavations were begun in 1948, which started to reveal remnants of the medieval palace under the building. Soon the first reconstruction plans were ready and the complex was converted for the use of cultural institutions. The most obvious benefit of the excavations was that decades of scholarly work were initiated with the spectacular remains of the medieval palace now on public display. Similar work, however, was not done on parts of the building built in the 18th and 19th centuries, so much of the information on

Buda Castle when functioning as a university around 1777–1784.

Johann Mansfelt's engraving.

Photo: National Board for the Protection of Historical Monuments.





The Royal Palace in Buda after reconstruction and extension by Alajos Hauszmann, before 1945. The Chain Bridge is in the foreground.

Photo: National Board for the Protection of Historical Monuments.

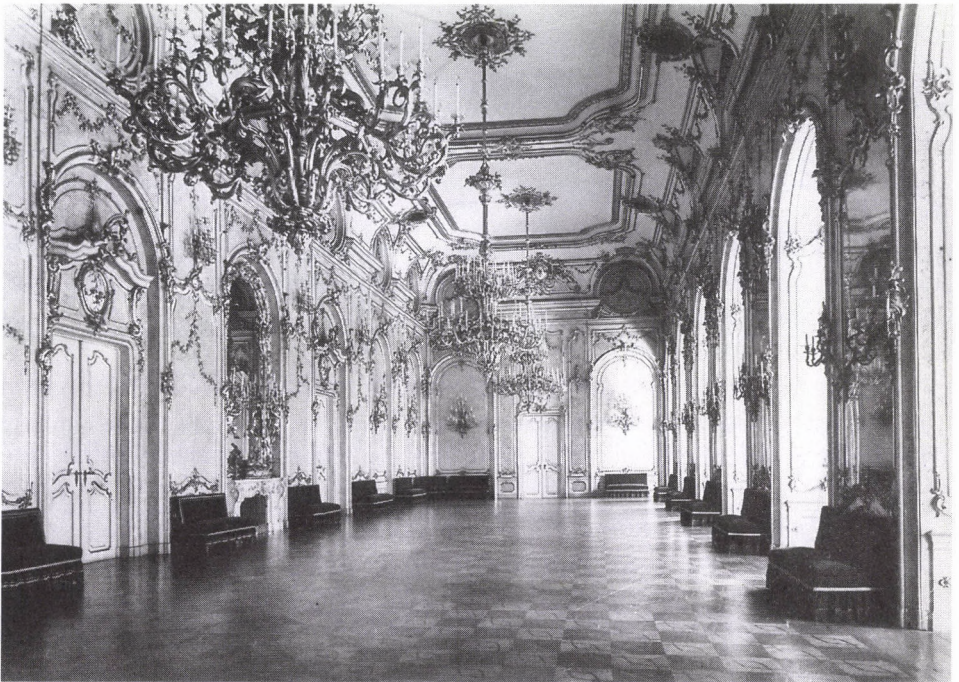
the original ornamentation of the Baroque wings that was at least partly available at the time of Hauszmann's expansion was lost for good. Though certain sources have been discovered and compared with the building, a short report prepared and photographs taken of figural murals found in 1953, the author of the report declared his unwillingness to deal with finds later than the middle of the 19th century. It would of course be unhistorical to demand from designers and decision makers of the time the kind of attention to historic buildings that only became part of the interest of monument conservation from the mid-sixties on. Public taste has also changed, and we are more tolerant of 19th-century historicism now than they were in the sixties. The radical intervention obviously was politically motivated as well, through the painstaking restoration of imperial palaces around Leningrad after war damage, or similar examples in Poland, show that this need not necessarily have happened. There was of course an example of the other extreme as well: out of political considerations, Walter Ulbricht had the Berlin Royal Palace demolished, though it had survived the war in a reasonable state. That decision now causes considerable problems for both supporters and opponents of its reconstruction.

The exhibition presented a world that completely disappeared in the course of the post-war reconstruction. Garden historian Gábor Alföldy used plans from

various periods as well as photographs to give a hint of the parks around the palace which fell victim to the same attitude that rid the building of its ornamentation. In the course of work which changed everything, the surface was lowered, the rocks of the grotto and the rock garden were taken away, as well as the greenhouses, and the lay of the land was completely altered by modern support walls and stairs. It is only to be hoped that in the present climate of renewed interest in the history of Hungarian gardening, the Buda palace gardens will also be the subject of learned books.

Other sections of the exhibition were devoted to persons and events related to the palace: members of the royal family, who had lived there for any length of time, as well as social, historical and political happenings in and around the building. There were pictures and objects related to monarchs marching in, coronations, court balls, events of the 1848–49 Revolution and War of Independence, images of the glorious 1849 siege. Later periods were documented by photographs and original film sequences. One could, however, have seen all that at any conventional historical exhibition—permanent exhibitions at the Hungarian National or the Budapest Historical Museums treat these events

A hall in the Royal Palace in Buda. Photo: National Board for the Protection of Historical Monuments.





Buda Castle from the south, with Alajos Hauszmann's ceremonial steps and the "peasant cottage", before 1945.

Photo: National Board for the Protection of Historical Monuments.

and personalities in detail—with the exception of the evocation of contemporary interiors of the palace. Furniture and paintings were found, and wall decor was temporarily reconstructed, to recreate, at least partly, the feel of the rooms. The splendour of some of the most important halls was successfully evoked by original works of art and photographs, plans and interior design sketches. One such room was the St Stephen Hall, the Neo-Romanesque interior designs of which (together with some of the arts and crafts objects) earned Alajos Hauszmann a Grand Prix at the 1900 Paris World Fair.

Some of the paintings that originally hung in the palace were also on loan from museums. Portraits of the royal gallery, the former "Hungarian Painting Collection" and foreign paintings once kept in the palace were lent by the Portrait Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum, the Hungarian National Gallery and the Museum of Fine Arts.

The exhibition was a genuine team effort: historians, garden historians, historians of architecture, fashion and the arts, were involved and the staff of the institutions lending works of art also contributed original research to this successful venture. ☛

Assimilation and Identity

François Fejtő on the Singular Marriage between Hungarians and Jews

CLOSE-UP

Your book *Hongrois et Juifs—Histoire millénaire d'un couple singulier (1000–1997)*, en collaboration avec Gyula Zeke, was commissioned and published in 1997 by Editions Ballands, in France. A Hungarian translation has just appeared, *Magyarság, zsidóság (Budapest, História—MTA Történettudományi Intézet)*. The French subtitle was left out in the Hungarian edition. The title itself was also somewhat altered in meaning. The Hungarian version is more abstract than the original—“Magyardom, Jewry” would be its precise translation. The French subtitle is telling, however, as there is no doubt that the nexus between Hungarians and Jews deserves a special chapter in the general history of Jews.

Perhaps they cautiously toned down the original. In Hungary, anything concerning Jews is still more sensitive than in France. They may have felt that outspokenness might tread on some toes. The French has another dangerous subtitle: *Addenda to Studies in Exclusion and Acceptance*.

The idea of the “odd couple” was inspired by an article by Endre Ady, “Korrobóri”. Ady described the relationship of Hun-

garians and Jews as a love relationship, and compared it to an African myth. [A Corroboree is in fact an Australian aboriginal dance ritual.—Ed’s note.] Ady, at the turn of the last century, was the first to think that the wavering relation of Hungarians and Jews is like a love affair with its ups and downs. Let me add, this love at times seemed completely one-sided. That’s exactly why I call it odd, since real love is always mutual.

You talked about caution and sensitivity, but one has to take a stand. If you’re afraid of offending sensitivities you shouldn’t write on Jewish topics, as you are bound to end up offending someone. I don’t dispute that it’s a sensitive issue. It’s like prying into the relationship between two people, their private life. As if we wanted to study the phases of a marriage, and at the same time to comment. Obviously, neither party will welcome publicity. What they’re especially irritated by in Hungary is the possibility of foreigners looking into Hungarian-Jewish relations. But I’ve never wished in my writings to consider others’ sensitivity, I only think of my own. I consequently always write what I think is true.

This is the edited transcript of an interview broadcast by Magyar Rádió on 18 February, 2001. Endre T. Rózsa has been a senior editor at Magyar Rádió since 1978.

In the 19th century, Jews in the Kingdom of Hungary wanted to be like Hungarians not because of outside pressure, but as a consequence of a particular, inner resolution.

Much had to be sacrificed for the sake of assimilation, since it meant a switching of culture for Jews. The change was radical, and in its course not only religious and communal identity fell apart, but ethnic identity as well. Jews fitted themselves out with Hungarian culture after they had wiped out their own. I want to emphasize that this special process was induced by the extraordinary talent of Hungarians in assimilating others. The strength of Hungarians in ethnic and cultural assimilation is attested by a thousand years of history, and is unequalled in Europe. Germans, for instance, settled outside the Carpathian basin, in the Balkans, and in Russia they got as far as the Volga. Wherever they settled they kept their language and ethnic-cultural separateness. Saxons were able to maintain their identity even in multicultural Transylvania. Ninety per cent of the Germans in Hungary, on the other hand, assimilated to Hungarians. Jews, the vast majority of whom were German-speaking, also changed their particular identity in the 19th century. We know that in the age of Maria Theresa, the majority in Pest were still German in language and culture, but by 1900 the bulk had become Hungarian. Jews in Pest were German in culture, as the first great wave of settlers came from Western Europe, from South Germany, Austria, Bohemia, Moravia, and other territories where the Jews had started to assimilate to *hochdeutsch* and German literary culture. As immigrants in Hungary they were markedly German. But the advance of German culture soon slowed down, and went into reverse, allowing a new trend of assimilation to come to the fore in Hungary. Jews

learnt Hungarian at a breathtaking speed, and soon felt at home in Hungarian culture. The avidity with which they adapted to Hungarian ways appeared excessive at times.

The concept of voluntary assimilation must, however, be handled with care. Assimilation was not entirely voluntary; I'd rather call it a mutual contract. The aristocracy and the lesser nobility, the major figures in the Hungarian political elite, Baron József Eötvös and others, spearheaded the movement for Jewish emancipation, incidentally started by Joseph II at the end of the 18th century. Those who claimed to speak for the nation made it a condition of assimilation that Jews give up all those secular and religious features that distinguished them from Hungarians. If they wanted to be citizens with equal rights they had to learn the language of the country, acquire its culture and commit themselves to the pursuit of the nation's aims. No one demanded this explicitly, but it was implied by Ferenc Deák, József Eötvös, Ágoston Trefort, that is, the most prominent emancipationists, and also by Lajos Kossuth. Thus assimilation was not a completely voluntary undertaking, and some Jews rejected it, though they were only a small minority. They were primarily Orthodox Jews from the northeast, especially Galicia, with Yiddish as their vernacular. But even these learned Hungarian to a degree. But they exhibited no readiness to melt into Hungarian culture, would take no part in its organization, and held back from universities when they were opened to Jews. Many assimilated Jews at the time chose those disciplines that fuelled national sentiments most intensely, such as history or Hungarian linguistics. Jews soon made outstanding contributions to these fields, many were elected members of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

My paternal ancestors, the Rossis, went from Italy to Bohemia, and from there to Hungary. The process of assimilation was completed by my paternal grandfather, who converted from Judaism in the interests of his career and social acceptance. The novelty for my father was no longer assimilation but exclusion, the Jewish Laws. As for me, I chose a third option. While retaining my Hungarianness, I returned to the Judaism of my ancestors. Historical experience told me that my grandfather's generation, for understandable reasons, overdid assimilation.

I am of the same opinion. This is something I say on countless occasions in the book, providing various examples. At the time they exaggerated assimilation, completely renounced their past and traditions, though they had no reason to be ashamed of them. They thought that having left the ghetto they had to break away from all Jewish traditions, and on joining Hungarian culture they had to renounce their whole Jewish heritage, even though this heritage meant not only religion but a vast national and cultural inheritance as well. They wanted to be more Hungarian than the Hungarians, and this triggered off dislike and rejection, excessive assimilation was found to be repulsive. On the other hand, it was damaging to the Jewish community. They rejected a vast inheritance which up to that point had been unambiguously theirs, largely thanks to their faith. The renunciation of several thousand years of Jewish history was a hasty decision, which can only be accounted for by the enthusiasm the openness of the liberals induced in Hungarian Jews. The main principle the majority adopted was that Jews had to become Hungarians heart and soul, and this could be best proved by severing all ties with their Jewish past and with other Jews in the present. This caused

immense psychological damage within the Jewish community. It caused many to conceal their origins and always feeling ashamed of being of Jewish descent. All this in spite of its being quite obvious that if there is anybody that can be proud of their history, their past and all the cultural treasures it gave to the world, then they are the Jews.

I completely agree with you that in Hungary assimilation was overdone. In my book I express my satisfaction over the fact that the best in the latest generations of Jews in Hungary artists, writers, intellectuals have chosen a way that differed from their fathers'. Though they don't want to terminate the assimilation contract, they are proudly reviving and maintaining their Jewish culture. Indeed, they continue the process, once aborted, of Hungarian-Jewish culture.

Here in France I have many friends of Armenian origin. They are completely French: so much so, that recently they gave a prime minister to the country; Balladur's father was still called Balladurian. Armenians in France never denied their ancestors, they maintain and develop their cultural links with all parts of the world. All this in no way prevents them from seeing themselves as French with all the rights of citizens, just as the French consider them true compatriots.

The enthusiasm for assimilation first became apparent at the time of the 1848-49 Revolution. In the spring of 1848 there were serious anti-Semitic riots in many towns and embittered Jews opened an emigration bureau, but they did not go to America, and the bureau was transformed into a recruiting office. According to Lajos Kossuth's data, in an army of 180,000, there were 20,000 Jews fighting for the independence of Hungary.

In this case, I do not consider the role of Jews in 1848 as excessive. Let me add that

Hungarian Jews were by no means of one mind in their attitude towards this conflict. Just as there were pro-Austrian Hungarian noblemen, aristocrats and others, so too there were pro-Austrian Jews. There were Hungarian Jews fighting on the other side, too, in the Austrian army, though certainly considerably fewer in number. The Hungarian political elite and intelligentsia emphatically condemned the 1848 spring pogroms. It is common knowledge how sharply Petőfi denounced anti-Semitic riots in Pest. These were instigated primarily by German artisans, journeymen and apprentices, who had an interest in maintaining the feudal guild system, but when the Hungarian political elite expressed its approval of Jewish emancipation anew, and thus gave fresh support to Jews, it is no wonder Hungarian Jews reacted in solidarity when the conflict with the Habsburgs started, or that they were pro-Hungarian in the War of Independence. So I think the involvement of Jews in 1848 cannot be considered excessive.

Jews took an active part in the War out of proportion to their numbers, and a beneficial reaction was felt in public discourse; from 1875 on, however, Győző Istóczy spoke in Parliament in an openly anti-Semitic tone, and anti-Semitic propaganda reached its height with the 1882 Tiszaeszlár blood libel.

Developments in Hungarian history took on a greater pace after the defeat of 1849. Istóczy's generation appeared two decades later, and these two decades were immensely important in the history of the Hungarian economy. The country was being radically transformed at a rapid pace. This period is often called the *Gründerzeit*, the period of foundings. The foundations of modern Hungary were laid down during these decades. Today we're probably in a similar foundation-building phase, preparing for globalization. Preparations for

socio-economic change always produce great disturbances, as every form of change has its winners and losers. Jews had an important role, even before emancipation, in the changes that started in the 1860's. The establishment of various industries, banking, home and international trade required new professionals, and Jews were quick to answer this demand. They acquired Hungarian quickly and successfully, as well as a Hungarian mentality. Consequently they took important steps in culture as well, with considerable success. This process had its losers, and the fact that winners included not a few Jews—while most of those who lost out were the old lesser nobility, those who could not adapt to modernization—became one of the main reasons why anti-Semitism revived. In addition, the importance of the church was lessened by secularization, and the growing importance of the central state administration. This was the first time church leaders of the old guard saw a chance to retaliate, as they thought Jews were responsible for secularization, and considered them its beneficiaries. This was the time when obligatory civil marriage reduced the importance of church weddings. That the retaliation by the forces of the past had no deep effects, and that the majority of Hungarians aligned themselves with liberalism, and not conservatism and political reaction, became apparent in the outcome of the Tiszaeszlár blood libel case. In that affair liberalism gained an important victory in modernizing Hungary. This is to the credit not only of the Upper House, the aristocracy, but also of the Independence Party and other liberals. The fight against anti-Semitism, which meant waging war on an anachronism which endangered the progress of the country, became of public concern at the time of Tiszaeszlár, and the majority of the elite could be mobilized in this cause.

Let me return to the problem of overdoing things. Excessive commitment to the Hungarian cause by Hungarian Jews in relation to ethnic minorities was later of vital importance: whenever Hungarians, after 1870, decided to radically negate the liberal ethnic policy championed by József Eötvös, and force assimilation within what is now Slovakia and in Transylvania, Jews gave their unconditional support to Hungarians, against the minorities. They ignored the fact that these "minorities" in these territories constituted the majority, which foreshadowed the possibility of their forming, sooner or later, their own nation state. History later failed to underwrite the uncompromising backing of Hungarian nationalism and the refusal to show solidarity with ethnic minorities who suffered many wrongs—the occasion for frequent protests in Parliament and elsewhere. Such Hungarian jingoism on the part of Jews must be considered excessive. The "reward" was odd, since the Hungarian authorities played the dominant role in the deportation of Hungarian Jews from Transylvania: they did not even wait for the intervention of the Germans.

That Jews found themselves on shaky ground as a result of this exaggerated assimilation is shown by the fact that by the end of the 1860's Jews were divided between two opposed camps, who stopped communicating with each other. The Orthodox and Reform Jews mutually anathematized each other, and severed practically all links, something which had not occurred anywhere else. Such a deep disagreement, such institutionalized discord has never happened since. You mention all this without trying to varnish the facts.

I tried to describe how it was, a cardinal rule of writing history. You have to insist on setting down all the relevant facts, regardless of any one wanting to make

things appear in the way that fits their interests. The orthodox-reform split had a long cultural prehistory. It happened largely thanks to the fact that Jews in cities and towns, most of whom had settled in the 18th and 19th centuries, had come from Western Europe. When assimilation to Hungarians was in progress, they no longer possessed a Jewish culture, their traditions had weakened. In sharp contrast to them, Jews living in the east of Hungary, having come mostly from Galicia, were deeply embedded in Jewish culture, which meant not only religion, but an ethnic-national culture and a language of their own. This made a major contribution to the split. Two cultures clashed, two cultures departed, two cultures started off in different directions. Bear in mind that the Jews of the Diaspora are of almost as many kinds as the territories they inhabited for a longer period. If you walk down a street in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv you will meet almost all human types. The rupture in Hungary proved to be radical. Nevertheless, when Orthodox Jews had to choose between Zionism and the Hungarian nation, only a few chose the former.

The father of Zionism, Theodor Herzl, who spent the first eighteen years of his life in Budapest, wrote that if anyone wanted to import Zionism into Hungary, he would first have to repaint it Red, White and Green.

Herzl was right. Religious communities in Hungary strongly inveighed against Zionism to demonstrate their loyalty to Hungary. Again a sign of excessive devotion.

I may go so far as to say that the overdoing of assimilation resulted in Jews losing the ground beneath their feet, their own past and self-identity and, consequently, their self-respect. That's how a self-hatred emerged, a tendency to neurosis and permanent anxiety. Some of them, in search of certainties, found that

Communism, an ideology full of Messianistic promises, gave them a purchase.

This is a difficult question. Whether you consider Hungary or Western European countries, where a clash between tendencies occurs you will find Jews on both sides. In science, political ideology, even in culture. I'm not certain at all that the number of Hungarian Jewish merchants, lawyers, doctors, bankers, etc., in other words, members of the middle class, did not far exceed the number of those Jews who joined leftist movements, the Galileo Circle or the radicals in the early nineteen hundreds, or who were active in the organization of trade unions or in Socialist-Communist messianism. Why Communists, especially the founders and leaders, included so many men of Jewish origin, needs a separate analysis. Leftist Jews broke with their own Judaism even more radically than was the norm, and what was really responsible was not their disillusionment with capitalist societies, but their confidence in various universal ideologies. Equal civil rights, equality before the law, and emancipation had a great appeal. The then emerging working class movements appeared to promise new truths. The masses who joined the Social Democrats or the Communist Party were not Jewish. That Jewish intellectuals should have played such a role on the left can be explained by an attraction in Jews, inherited or ingrained, often unconscious, towards complete redemption and apocalyptic visions. "This fight shall be the last." The idea had immense attraction for Jews. Christianity was born of this same Jewish messianism. The complete story, however, includes that those dissatisfied with, and critical of, Communism later included at least as many of the former Jewish Communists, as there had been amongst those gathering around Lenin.

You said Ady was the first to call the Jewish-Hungarian nexus a love affair. As if

a woman sang to a man "I'll love you even if you give me a hiding".

There is some truth in it. She would still be running after the cart when it's already obvious that it won't pick her up. It's tragicomical. But this is only one side of the coin. Talking about relationships: many mixed marriages worked perfectly. It is also interesting that great figures in Hungarian culture, from Endre Ady to Béla Bartók, found many of their audience and patrons among Jews. It was also characteristic that countless leading Hungarian intellectuals had Jewish spouses. Jewish-Hungarian coexistence has not only a past but a future as well, many things go smoothly. This is partly personal experience, as I spent my childhood not amongst Jews but amongst Christians—Catholic, Protestant or even Greek Orthodox. It is also important and promising for the future that anti-Semitism does not spring from the character of Hungarians. It's an inorganic social phenomenon. Hungarians are not xenophobic or racist. You couldn't say the same about the Poles or the Ukrainians. On the contrary, patience, sobriety and wisdom are also parts of the national character of Hungarians. Anti-Semitism in Hungary is solely the work of an active, hateful and frustrated minority.

A different factor is that Jews make easy scapegoats. This goes back two thousand years in Europe, not only Hungarians need scapegoats. Those in power resort to anti-Semitism at times of great social or economic upheaval even in countries where there are no longer any, or hardly any, Jews. So people can't really know what Jews are like. In accordance with a certain anti-Judaic tradition, "the Jew" has become a mythic concept, and has been invested with diabolical characteristics.

Village people traditionally keep a safe distance from Jews.

That's true, though this is a typical attitude towards all kinds of strangers. And everyone's a stranger who is not quite like them, who goes to a different church, or does not go to church at all, or whose ancestors do not rest in the same village church-yard. You can say the same about village people in any country. They're cautious even towards their own kind. People have often complained to me that Hungarians do not treat Hungarian refugees from Transylvania too kindly. The ancestors of Transylvanians are not buried in the cemeteries of Transdanubia or the Great Plain. They come from somewhere else, their native land is somewhere else, and wariness of difference is an everyday psychological phenomenon you couldn't call anti-Semitism. Real anti-Semitism starts when those in power and the public look for a legitimate way of persecuting Jews.

As a young man in the thirties, you were an active Westernizer in the clash between westernizing and populist intellectuals.

It wasn't such a bloody conflict as it was later represented. I lived in the thick of those controversies, and I find it strange how later the intensity of the conflict was exaggerated.

Új Szellemi Front, which took the populist line, was founded in 1934. It was promoted by Gyula Gömbös, a former member of the General Staff, later Prime Minister, whose enthusiasm for Mussolini earned him the nickname "Gömbölini." At that time even the essayist László Cs. Szabó, a highly cultivated contributor to the most highly esteemed literary review, Nyugat, no populist at all, hoped to find the foundations of Hungary's future on "the broad shoulders of Gyula Gömbös."

The populist writers and their sympathizers were deceived. At that time they were far from being the accomplices of those in power. The populist-Westernizer controversy started in 1934, but it was

concerned with only one question. The populist writers felt they had an interest only in a national agrarian reform. The break between the two camps, however, never became complete. Until the literary journal *Szép Szó* was founded, I regularly published in *Válasz*, a journal on the populist side. At that time a volume of verse by Gyula Illyés appeared and he asked me to review it for *Válasz*. The controversy had started when I still wrote for *Válasz*, and it did not upset either of the parties.

The populist writers' belief, or illusion, was that with an appeal to national sentiment and patriotism, the Hungarian ruling class could be won over to the cause of a serious national agrarian reform. They insisted on one thing, that the reform be demanded not by the left wing, but by populist-nationalist intellectuals. This was because demands by Social Democrats were at that time dismissed as being the work of Jews. This was in spite of the fact that agrarian reform had been demanded by the Social Democrats for far longer and more insistently than by the populists.

The point was that the populists wanted to stick to their strategy of agrarian reform through thick and thin, while we Westernizers were convinced that what Hungary first needed was democracy, and that the land issue could only be solved when the Hungarian people were mature enough for democracy. We laid the emphasis on liberties, democracy and the fullness of human rights. But ideological differences meant little to the populists, what counted were successful tactics. Because of their indifference to ideology, the poets József Erdélyi and István Sinka easily found their way to the Arrow Cross Party, and writers such as Péter Veres and József Darvas later collaborated with the Communists. On the other hand, no one among the Westernizers joined these extremes, it would have been unthinkable for us. ■

Endre T. Rózsa

Jack Thompson

They Never Used The 'C' Word

I look round the room—the retired journalist's office. A desk. A chair. A sofa. Bookshelves, files and computer. But most of all, the pictures—photographs, posters, prints and maps. In particular, a cartoon of myself as newsreader for BBC World in its very early days. It was sent to me by a viewer in Romania, clearly enjoying the first fruits of freedom and access to relatively objective information and comment after the collapse of Communism and the grisly demise of that ghastly duo, Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu.

Yes, I remember him well, Comrade Ceaușescu. I saw him at Bucharest airport in July 1989 as on a balmy summer's evening he welcomed the leaders of the Soviet Union and its satellites for what was to be the very last Warsaw Pact summit. They were all there—that arch reformer, Mikhail Gorbachev, coping patiently with the hardliners—Zhivkov of Bulgaria, Husak of Czechoslovakia, Honecker of East Germany, and Jaruzelski of Poland. Ceaușescu, a silly little man with a Liberace coiffure, who nevertheless inspired fear among his entourage, greeted them all with kisses on both cheeks, except for the wayward men from Hungary, led, if memory serves me well, by Miklós Németh. They were already regarded as beyond the pale, tainted by the adoption of qualified market forces. The Romanian dictator held a similarly hostile view of Gorbachev, who had launched his country on to the flood tide of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, concepts that were to spark much painful and bitter debate during this meeting of the officially dubbed Warsaw Treaty Political Consultative Committee.

For this was showcase time for Ceaușescu, his first chance in seven years to host such a summit and the first opportunity he'd had to receive Gorbachev in his own capital. He was worried stiff that something would go wrong because he

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was in an economic mess and he wanted help from Big Brother. Hitherto he had enthusiastically suppressed and jailed his dissidents, bulldozed ancient churches and whole villages to make way for grandiose projects, the like of which might have made even Albert Speer blush to his roots, and pursued a relatively independent line within the Communist bloc, certainly as far as foreign policy was concerned. He'd done his own deals with the West, to the economic detriment of his people, and played the middleman in attempts to get Israel and the Palestinians to talk to each other. The British had even thought him worth a state visit. He and Elena had stayed the night in Buckingham Palace after a bizarre dinner with the Queen and Philip. As such he had been kept at arm's length by Moscow and its allies who viewed him rather as NATO had considered De Gaulle's France, an ally of sorts but also a troublesome maverick, to be kept in the fold, mistrusted and unloved. But the day of reckoning was at hand. It was of course to come the following December when a surly population revolted. Ceaușescu's minders turned on him and had him and Elena shot in cold blood.

The night before the summit began, I'd been invited to visit the British embassy in Bucharest, an ugly villa down a dark side street off the main drag. A group of young, hardworking and evidently harassed diplomats offered a courteous welcome but insisted we had to descend to the basement, the only certain "unbugged" room in the whole building. It became clear that, if we were to talk of dissidents and name the names of people the embassy staff were trying to help and protect from the predatory conduct of the Securitate, Ceaușescu's vicious secret police, then we must do it in this dismal cellar, reeking of damp and disinfectant. A glass of wine, French rather than the local variety, helped to mitigate the discomfort. At least it brought home to me the hell that was Romania. But times were changing. Ceaușescu knew that his careworn citizens were only too well aware of the relative improvements to life in Hungary, in Poland, even in the Soviet Union itself.

It was a development an oily Romanian government spokesman did his best to explain to me in language George Orwell might have used in *1984* and *Animal Farm*. I retain a verbatim note of this "apologia pro vita Marxista", this desperate attempt to explain the burgeoning policy differences within the Warsaw Pact.

The essential thing, as the documents of the Warsaw Treaty say, is that all Socialist countries, and party members within those countries, start from the same premise—the need to IMPROVE Socialism. But there are different ways of doing this and it is up to the Soviet Union and the other countries to say what is good for them and what can bring results. At the same time, we have our own opinion about how to achieve this. We can discuss internal developments in one Socialist country while at the same time discussing problems of principle, philosophical and ideological questions, in short, asking ourselves, where is Socialism going?

Not a mention of "Communism". Always "Socialism", as if the renaming of parts had already started, to make it all more palatable to the people of central, eastern and southern Europe and the West. Without wishing to labour this "post hoc" analysis of dogma long dead and buried, I still find it interesting that, only a few days before the 1989 Bucharest summit, Ceaușescu had indeed said each party was free to adapt Socialism to its own conditions but no party could isolate itself from the Socialist community and the "problems" of reform in Hungary for example were not merely an internal affair. If this wasn't the Brezhnev doctrine restated—that distastefully specious argument used to justify the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and, under Khrushchev, the rape of Hungary in 1956—then, as Gorbachev well recognized at the time, it was at best a crude attempt to disguise it in new clothes.

But as a Soviet journalist told me in Bucharest at the time, Gorbachev had made it absolutely clear that it was no longer possible to interfere in the domestic affairs of other countries. He knew full well that intervention in Hungary or Poland would spell disaster for his own attempts to reform Communism at home and improve relations with the West through the medium of nuclear disarmament.

Which was probably why the communiqué that emerged from the Bucharest meeting made copious references to doing away with nuclear weapons and collaboration with NATO. My Romanian spokesman exerted a lot of energy spinning this into Ceaușescu-speak, provoking ribald laughter among both Western and Soviet journalists, who'd already wised up to what was happening to their world. Presumably unused to irony, he ploughed on undaunted if a mite irritated.

A certain satisfaction can be derived from this document. It confirms our position, our call for speedier and wider nuclear disarmament. It condemns attempts by the United States to modernize its tactical nuclear weapons and the concept of the 'deterrent'.

No reference there to Soviet satellites squabbling like ferrets in a sack. Gorbachev breathed a sigh of relief that for the time being he had avoided schism. The cracks had been papered over. Everyone was free to choose their own path to Socialism but not free enough to opt for a different system.

The Russian journalists in Bucharest were embarrassed by this. They were an interesting lot. They wanted to be accepted by us degenerates from the West as real journalists pursuing real stories. They plied us with such booze as they could lay their hands on in a town where there wasn't much booze to be had. They fed us reasonably accurate stories about rows between Ceaușescu and the delegation from Budapest over the treatment of the Hungarians in Transylvania, with Gorbachev acting as referee, and about the East Germans going home early, ostensibly because Erich Honecker had tummy trouble (we now know he was furious with the Soviet leader over the way the whole pack of cards was collapsing). But they'd swallowed the Gorbachev line; that "renovation" was happening in the

Soviet empire but these reforms didn't undermine the stability of the Warsaw Pact which Moscow still needed if it was to negotiate a disarmament package with NATO. Yet they certainly went up in our estimation when the hard-line Soviet ambassador in Bucharest wanted to exclude "capitalist" reporters from a Gorbachev news conference. The Russians threatened to boycott it. He backed off under pressure from Gennady Gerasimov, the Soviet foreign ministry spokesman, who had acquired a sort of fan club among Western reporters for making himself so readily available in English. (When I approached him for an interview, he agreed, provided I could point him in the direction of the hotel Duty Free shops.)

It all seems so much old hat now. But it was vital news at the time. For few of us thought the Soviet system would implode so rapidly. We would not have predicted the fall of the Berlin Wall or the imminent reunification of Germany. In July 1989, they were frankly unimaginable. In such an atmosphere, where the Communist hacks were doing their best to be nice to us (except for one Romanian who tried to frame me on a charge of petty theft when he lost one of the headsets belonging to the simultaneous interpretation system!), it was easy to accommodate Ceaușescu's plausible spokesman.

Of course I do not deny that you in the West have your values and you should defend them. But let us talk in a respectful way, taking for granted that as long as you fight for the legitimacy of your values, we can do the same for ours. I think if we do talk, if we get to know one another, things can improve.

The siren call of the enemy who wants to make peace. I reminded him that it had not been Britain or any other Western country that had cut off dialogue with Romania; that it had been the Romanians who had isolated themselves internationally; that it was, for example, the Ceaușescu regime which had signed solemn undertakings in Helsinki to respect human rights; and that when we criticized his treatment of dissident writers and villagers who wanted to live in the homes they already possessed, we had been told to mind our own business, and worse.

He shuffled off, only too happy to take the half bottle of Scotch I'd offered him as the price for including him in a BBC World Service report on the Bucharest meeting.

On December 10th 2000, post-Communist Romania went to the polls in a second round of presidential elections. The voters' choice was between a former Ceaușescu apparatchik, Ion Iliescu, turned "Social Democrat", who made a mess of his first attempt to run the country up to 1996 and promised to be pragmatic this time, and Corneliu Vadim Tudor, one-time official poet who wrote reams of rubbish extolling the non-existent intellect of Elena. Tudor runs the Greater Romania Party, which now has a quarter of the seats in parliament. He is an unashamed nationalist and has said some very nasty things about Hungarians, Jews and the Roma. But in the end, Iliescu won on a low turnout. He said the

result was a "categorical rejection of extremism, xenophobia and totalitarian temptations, a victory for the maturity and responsibility of the Romanian people".

It would be nice to think he was right for the sake of relations with Hungary. As I ponder the events of 1989 and recall the faces in the Bucharest streets that wouldn't or couldn't meet my eyes out of sheer terror, of the literally dilapidating churches and other buildings making way for the ugly *folies de grandeur* of a maniac, of the uncomprehending taxi driver accepting ten packs of "555" cigarettes for the fare to the airport, I wonder how far the Romanians have come, if at all, to the promised land of freedom and prosperity held out by Stability Pacts for the Balkans and eventual European Union membership. ■

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Sir,

I respect the editor's right to select his reviewers and I recognize that the reviewer is entitled to his likes and dislikes as regards rhyme and metre. My purpose is to correct a *factual* error in Bruce Berlind's review of my Kányádi translations, *There is a Land* (No. 159). The error is central to his argument. He singles out one poem, "After Midnight Dialect" (the only example chosen from 58 translations), trying to show that I have misread and thereby trivialised Kányádi's poetry. I trust that his glib "one example will suffice" approach is not likely to persuade any discerning reader, but it does reveal his complete misunderstanding of (at least) this poem.

Berlind wants the English title to be "After Midnight Language". He writes: "Zolman's choice of the word dialect misses a major import of the poem: it is not a dialect, but a whole language (surely Hungarian, endangered and spoken surreptitiously)".

Kányádi cannot be misheard, not even by someone with "tin ears" (Berlind's phrase), when he speaks of "this half-nomadic sect" whose "belly-laugh and groans and blasphemies for fun / tumble out of gold teeth or a knocked-out one". Clearly, these people are *not Hungarians but the*

Gypsies of Cluj-Kolozsvár. There are obvious references to this in the text, such as the "campfire", the "shaggy-curled" hair of the "voracious infant", but most explicitly: "drink up my Gypsy brothers, bottoms up". Kányádi's apocalyptic vision is "a premonition of the shape / of things to come in two three hundred years" when Gypsies will dominate the local scene. (Out of courtesy I checked these points with Sándor Kányádi, before posting this letter.)

Kányádi, a poet of fine stylistic sensibility, begins this poem, and seven further poems with the evocative words: "Vannak vidékek..." (There is a Land...). He also published a volume of poetry under this title, in 1992. The meanings of the Hungarian word *vidék* encompass "country", "countryside", "land", "region", "provinces", "district", "place", "neighbourhood", "tract", "environs", and more. Berlind's version is: "There are regions..." A suitable phrase for a weatherman, a government official or a scientist, but hardly in register with the original phrase, repeated eight times as prominent first lines of powerful, fine poems. This example will suffice.

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László Medgyessy
At the Great Divide

The Subcarpathian Reformed Church

When the Emperor Diocletian (284–305 A.D.) bisected the vast Roman Empire into two parts: Imperium Occidental and Imperium Oriental, he certainly did not realize that his action would draw a Continental Divide through the centre of Europe that would survive to the 3rd Millenium. During subsequent centuries, on both sides of this line, divergent forms of Christianity evolved resulting in profoundly opposed social, cultural, political, intellectual even economic developments.

Over a thousand years, around the thrones of the Byzantine Emperors and the Patriarchs of Constantinople, Greek Orthodox Christianity and culture had flourished, attracting into its orbit all Slav and non-Slav nations living East of the Diocletian Divide. During the same period, in the Occident, the popes of Rome sitting on the chair of Saint Peter represented Western or Latin Christianity.

Today, the Great Divide runs from the north between Russia and Finland, then between Russia and the Baltic states.

Further south, it separates Poland from Belarus and the Ukraine, then swoops across the ridges of the eastern and southern Carpathian mountains through the heart of present-day Romania. It then follows the Danube and the Sava rivers. Turning south, the line cuts off the Croatian parts of Bosnia, before reaching the Adriatic Sea north of Montenegro.

It is a remarkable fact that any intrusion in history across this separation, from either direction, has been perceived as hostile, resulting in, up to the present day, painful upheavals to the ill-fated populations living along it. It is not coincidental that the two bloodiest human encounters in history, the First and the Second World War, started near this ancient demarcation.

The impact of the 16th Century Reformation is a good illustration of the unfortunate effectiveness of the Divide. It started in the Occident, in the Holy Roman Empire, as a movement of renewal of the Medieval Latin Church. It soon spread, with ferocious speed, especially toward

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northern and eastern Europe. The Reformation soon reached the divided Hungarian Kingdom and received wide acceptance in her disunited parts: the Habsburg ruled western portion, in the Turkish occupied mid-section and, especially, in the semi-independent Transylvanian Principality. This western religious process created the Lutheran and the Reformed Churches, with profound benefits to Hungary. The Reformation meant not only a renewed religious practice but also a new national consciousness. Via Bible translations, it was instrumental in creating Hungarian as a literary language. By approving the individual study of the Holy Scriptures it fostered general secondary and post-secondary education. The new form of Church government, where ordinary laymen served as presbyters, encouraged democratization. Through the following centuries the Reformed Church bolstered the idea that Hungary, though situated at the edge of the Great Divide, was and is firmly embedded in the western half of Europe. By the end of the 16th century around 90 per cent of Hungarians had converted to Protestantism. As a consequence of the Counter-Reformation this proportion was changed to two thirds Roman Catholic and one third Protestant by the 18th century. This ratio has been maintained to the present day.

The closer we get to Vienna, the more Catholics there are; further east, the number of Protestants increases. This explains the large number of Calvinists in geographically remote Subcarpathia.

However potent the Reformation was in revitalizing Western Christianity, paving the way to new social, political and economic structures which led to the modern age, it could not penetrate across the ancient Diocletian line. It was stopped at the Carpathian mountains. Those great intellectual and social endeavours that created the contemporary Western world, like

Humanism, the Renaissance, Baroque architecture, the Enlightenment and industrialization, also found it most difficult to reach eastwards. The result today is an unevenly developed Europe.

Through the long history of the Divide periodic breaches have occurred, the line even moved. After the conclusion of the Second World War, with tacit Western approval, the Soviet Union was allowed to cross the line by cutting off part of Finland, taking in the Baltic states and East Prussia. She was permitted to incorporate part of Poland and, for the first time in history, to cross the Carpathians into Subcarpathia, reaching the strategic Great Hungarian Plain. The short saga of this act and the fate of the Reformed Church there is the theme of what follows.

Subcarpathia or Transcarpathia, also called Ruthenia¹ and Carpatho-Ukraine,² was the westernmost territory acquired by the Soviet Union at the end of the Second World War.³ The name Transcarpathia was introduced only in the Soviet period. It reflects the view from Moscow, since this land lies beyond (trans) the Carpathian mountains. The indigenous populace consider themselves living inside the Danubian Basin, under the Carpathians, hence Subcarpathia. This self-designation of being Subcarpathians reflects a political stance on the part of the indigenous population against the Soviet annexation. The location of this small land (4,886 square miles) was of unique strategic importance in providing not only easy access to the former satellite states of the now defunct Soviet Empire (bordering with Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Romania), but it was also a potential spearhead toward the NATO countries.⁴

Following the First World War, the Kingdom of Hungary was dismembered by the Trianon Peace Treaty in 1920, and the

northeastern arch of the Carpathian mountains was given to the newly created Czechoslovak Republic. This included the lands populated by Slovaks and Ruthenians, along with approximately one million Hungarians.⁵ Available population figures show that in 1930 in Subcarpathia, then the easternmost province of inter-war Czechoslovakia, out of 740,000 inhabitants 61 per cent were Ruthenians, 17 per cent Hungarians, and the others Jews, Germans and Slovaks.⁶ Presently the number of Hungarians are estimated to be over 200,000. The Hungarians inhabit the fertile flat land along the Tisza river on the present Hungarian border, while the Ruthenians live on the mountainous rugged eastern areas.

Subcarpathia had little value to the Soviet Union other than being a strategic outpost, but its location made it one of the most desired pieces of real estate in Eastern Europe. For a thousand years, up to the end of the First World War, it was an integral part of the Kingdom of Hungary; in the past seventy years it was declared an independent republic twice, an autonomous territory three times, lost and gained land on numerous occasions, and it changed sovereignty four times. Today, under the name of Carpatho-Ukraine, it is a district of the free and sovereign Ukrainian Republic. There is one profound difference between how Subcarpathia and other territories of the Soviet Union were acquired by Stalin. From the North Sea to the Black Sea lands were taken by military power against the will of sovereign neighbours, this territory, however, was an exception. In December, 1941, Eduard Beneš, prime minister of Czechoslovakia in exile, visited Moscow and voluntarily offered Subcarpathia to Stalin after the successful conclusion of the war, to demonstrate traditional Czech friendship for the Russians, and to fulfill longstanding pan-Slavic aspirations which had assigned this area to

Russia since the middle of the 19th century.⁷ A fact of the political life of Eastern Europe is that territorial changes have occurred frequently without any consultation with the population involved, and the people of Subcarpathia, too, were no exception.⁸

Historically in this part of the world, national identity and religious affiliation are very strongly linked. The fusion of these two powerful forces has helped even small ethnic groups to survive centuries of minority status, including periodic persecution. In multi-ethnic, heterogeneous Subcarpathia, the Slavic Ruthenes belong to the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Slovaks are Roman Catholics. The Germans, and especially the Hungarians, live in the Reformation tradition. Due to the strong influence of the Reformation in this area, the majority of Hungarians here today belong to the Transcarpathian Reformed Church, which, according to the statistics of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, had 80,000 members in 1980, in 86 congregations, under the ministrations of some 30 pastors.⁹ Since the liberal new political climate in Ukraine, however, the latest estimated number for the Hungarian Reformed congregation has grown suddenly to 140,000.

In 1920, when Czechoslovakia was drawn onto the map of Europe, it became impossible for the Reformed congregations, both in Slovakia and in Subcarpathia, to continue their centuries-old uninterrupted membership in the Hungarian Reformed Church. They were forced, by historic circumstances, either to create an independent collective life or to suffer fragmentation. With the help of Reformed Churches in Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Scotland, the Hungarian Reformed congregations were able to form a new Church, the Reformed Church of Slovakia; they not only maintained a fully accredited Theological Seminary in Losonc, but

numerous schools, a rest home and an orphanage.¹⁰ The upheavals caused by the length and attrition of the First World War, the new political and territorial arrangements, the pauperization of the populations by skyrocketing inflation, led to a deep spiritual crisis which facilitated the spread of sects and pseudo-religions at the expense of the traditional Churches. In order to neutralize such negative forces in the Reformed Churches of Subcarpathia (then still part of Czechoslovakia) a spiritual revival movement emerged among the ministers, the Sunrise Fellowship Circle. This group, with its unconventional methods not only vitalized church life but also polarized some theologically conservative congregations.¹¹

In 1938 the first Vienna Award returned the Hungarian inhabited regions of Czechoslovakia to Hungary, and the Reformed congregations of Subcarpathia immediately re-joined the Hungarian Reformed Church. In 1939 the entire region reverted to Hungarian sovereignty, which lasted until the conclusion of the Second World War. At the Paris Peace Conference in 1946 both the Ruthenian and Hungarian inhabited lands of Subcarpathia were transferred to the Soviet Union, under the 1941 agreement between Prime Minister Eduard Beneš and Stalin. As the Hungarian Army was forced to retreat before the irresistible westward movement of the Red Army into Eastern Europe, the ensuing panic among the civilian population decimated the membership of the Reformed congregations. In Subcarpathia some 40 ministers out of 100 abandoned their flocks and fled to the West.

It was in the autumn of 1944 that the Soviet Army invaded Subcarpathia. Immediately, the iron fist of the Communist-atheistic regime of Stalin descended on the hapless land. The entire male population, between the ages of 18 and 50, was taken

off for "*malenky robot*" ("little work", promised to last only three days); they were transported to the infamous Siberian labour camps, known in the West, since Solzhenitsyn, as the Gulag Archipelago. The journey itself, and the subsequent years in these death camps, caused staggering losses in human life as the result of starvation, cold, neglect, illness, and overwork. Those who returned have been marked for life by this experience. (Only recently, in the era of *perestroika*, has the Soviet leadership published estimates that some 40,000 persons from Subcarpathia perished in the ordeal.) Those who were left behind also experienced the inhumanity of the Soviet system. In the process of socializing all productive private assets, according to the blueprints of Marxist theory, an entire class of people called *kulaks* had to be eliminated. Daily life turned into an unbearable burden for most. Fear, cruelty, a false politization of life, poverty, and state sponsored terrorism became the way of life in Subcarpathia.

The Reformed Church had three ministers who fell victim to this early period of Soviet rule. Of the much reduced active pastoral roll, Imre Narancsik from Nagymuzsaj, Sándor Balogh from Eszény, and Jenő Szutor from Beregszász were arrested and transported to labour camps, from where they never returned. Amid fear and trepidation, the Sunrise Fellowship Circle was still active among ministers. It was this group that tried to restart congregational life, youth work, Bible schools, and home worship services, to counter the newly evolving atheistic system, which tried early (1945) to enlist the tacit assistance of ministers in handicapping church life. In these critical times a major administrative handicap also affected the life of the congregations. Their bishop, who administered them from Debrecen, was separated by the new Hungarian and Soviet border and was

unable to provide any sort of leadership. Only three deans were available, (Gyula Bari, Béla Gencsi and Sándor Lajos) and it was they who made the first official contacts with the Soviet administration.

The original intention of Soviet religious policy had been to eradicate the Hungarian Reformed Churches by merging them with the loyal, time-tested, and officially registered Moscow Baptist Alliance. All reformed ministers were called together to Bályu, where a meeting was arranged with the Baptist leadership. The rejection of this plan by the ministers was near unanimous. They were afraid that such a union would give legal access to their congregations, not only to the Baptists, but to all other minor and extremist sects which were forced into this alliance by the state. They decided that they would register with the Soviet officials as an independent denomination and would assume full responsibility for their own life.¹² They had to accept the new name of Transcarpathia in the designation of the their Church so as not to offend Soviet sensibilities and to avoid accusations that they fostered separatism. The new body, the Transcarpathian Reformed Church, also elected its first bishop, The Rev. Béla Gencsi, who governed the Church between 1945–1977. Like other Hungarian Reformed Churches, this too was organized as a synod-presbytery system, but here the Episcopal Council held the highest authority, since the Church was unable to hold meetings of the synod. The “Episcopal Council thus represents both the presbytery and the synod”.¹³ It has six members and is chaired by the bishop.

In 1947, due to the worsening situation, members of the Sunrise Fellowship Circle felt compelled to petition Generalissimo Stalin for relief and understanding. Today, the content of the petition can be discerned with accuracy from those who

signed the letter and are still alive. It tried to appeal to the conscience of the Soviet leader, reminding him that he was only a tool in the hands of God and warned him that he was responsible for what happened to the people. Such a letter to the Communist dictator was not inappropriate, he was well able to understand the content, given that he had once wished to become an Eastern Orthodox priest and had attended the Theological Seminary of Tiflis in Georgia. The reaction of the authorities was swift. In this second wave of arrest ten ministers were taken to labour camps. After two months of interrogation, Barna Horkay, József Zimányi, Zsigmond Simon, Gyula Fekete, József Pázsit, István Györke, István Asszonyi, Béla Huszti, Zoltán Kovács and Lajos Gulácsy were charged with undermining Soviet authority, misleading people, spreading anti-Soviet propaganda among the young, obstructing the building of Socialism, and being the enemies of the great Soviet people. Freedom to the victims of this wave of arrest came only in 1956. There was a third wave of arrests when Reformed pastors were accused of sabotaging the establishments of agricultural communes (the *kolhkozés*). In 1950 Pál Forgón, Pál Gönczi, József Zsurki, József Vass and Dániel Tarczai were sent to Siberia for three to five years and at home, István Papp and József Csik were suspended from the ministry.

To understand Soviet behaviour one must turn to Marxist-Leninist ideology, which provided the philosophical foundation of the Soviet Union. One of the assumptions of this ideology is the superiority of matter over other aspects of reality. Faith in a transcendent God could not be permitted, since it was considered to be the creation of previous, primitive social conditions. Discarded as inappropriate in the higher level of social consciousness, it had to be abandoned in building the

perfect egalitarian society, Communism. Churches, therefore, were very high on the list of enemies of the atheistic state, and an ideological war was declared against them, and this was often waged with administrative means. Marxism-Leninism in the Soviet Union turned into a pseudo-religion, eventually trying to replace all God-centred religions with its own atheistic history, dogmas, rituals and customs. Militant atheism permeated Soviet policy decisions, which tried to suffocate religious activities.

In Subcarpathia, among the very first victims were Church-related educational institutions. This was particularly painful for the Reformed Church, whose elementary schools taught not only religious instruction but also Hungarian language and culture. Soviet educators discouraged ethnic identity since the Marxian blueprint called for the creation of a Russian speaking Communist, international, "New Type of Man". This was the *homo sovieticus*, whose value system was expected to be undividedly Marxist-Leninist.¹⁴ In this environment of forced Russification, it was only in the church where Hungarian could be heard and practised by those who were brave enough to attend divine service. Until recently, legal restrictions had forbidden children in churches, except at funerals, and an extensive network of spies, maintained by the KGB, assured constant surveillance of pastors and congregations.

Although all the neighbours were friendly Socialist states, Subcarpathia's new boundaries with the outside world provided impenetrable barriers. For decades no contacts with foreigners were permitted, causing particular hardship to the Reformed Church. It became apparent soon that the Church, now separated from the Theological Seminaries of Hungary or even Czechoslovakia, was not able to train new

pastors as age and attrition took their toll. Since sending students to foreign lands was not permitted, the ministers were forced to train bright young candidates using whatever resources they had. In 1974 the Soviet authorities first gave permission for the training of two persons.

The first openings for ecumenical contacts came in the late 1970s. When the first Bishop, the Rt. Rev. Béla Gencsi, resigned in 1977, Bishop Pál Forgon was elected. He was born in 1913 in Szernye, and spent four years in the Gulag. His consecration was a solemn occasion in Beregszász on May 21, 1978, assisted by two Bishops from Hungary, Bishops Károly Tóth and Tibor Bartha. Due to the close alliance of these two Hungarian individuals with official Soviet and East European religious and political objectives, particularly in the now discredited Prague Christian Peace Conference, their preferential position then permitted positive ministrations in the sensitive area of Subcarpathia. Because of them, during the next decade the Hungarian Reformed Church in Hungary was able to send thousands of copies of much needed Bibles, hymn books, confirmation materials and catechisms for youth work. By the end of the 1980s, in the new spirit of *perestroika*, four students from Subcarpathia were allowed to attend seminaries in Debrecen and Budapest. Presently ten students are being trained for the ministry. In 1989 five previously nationalized church buildings were returned to their congregations. There is today a profound interest and revival in all segments of church life, especially in work with children. As Lajos Gulácsy writes in his history of the Subcarpathian Reformed Church:

We believe that the years of the Babylonian captivity are now over, but the challenge of rebuilding is before us. The impact of long empty decades must be made good in the life of large numbers of young people and

this is a hard task. This work appears larger than surviving the testing times. Then we had to suffer patiently in resignation, to endure and hope, now we have to act even when the results are uncertain. We are asking and expecting help from on high.¹⁵

It will not do to interpret the struggles and victories of the Transcarpathian Reformed Church only in terms of the accomplishments of the leadership. The survival of this Church has largely been the result of the faith and loyalty of the congregations. In the most difficult decades, dedicated lay persons, especially women, kept the flame of faith alive both in the homes and in the churches. It was they who instructed the young to pray, brought them to baptism, and helped them in preparation for confirmation.¹⁶ One moving story will illustrate the silent struggle of the people under the most trying times. One of the five churches recently returned

is the building in the village of Kajdanó. Communist officials had nationalized it in the early 1950's, and for the next sixteen years it was closed and divine service was barred. The faithful people, however, gathered inside the dark church secretly at night to sing and pray even without a pastor. Finally someone reported them to the authorities and the building was severely damaged. The pulpit, pews, and the Lord's table were broken up, the steeple pulled down and the empty sanctuary was sealed. In February 1990, the doors were reopened, the people scrubbed the building clean, and brought chairs from home to furnish their church. Once again the 105th Psalm was intoned as the celebrants entered:

O Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name,
 Make known his deeds among the peoples!
 Sing to him, sing praises to him,
 Tell of all his wondrous works! ❧

NOTES

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2 ■ Stefan, Augustine: *From Carpatho-Ruthenia to Carpatho-Ukraine*. New York, Carpathian Star Pub. 1954.

3 ■ Markus, Vasy: *L'Incorporation de l'Ukraine Subcarpathique a l'Ukraine Sovietique 1944-1945*. Louvain, Centre Ukrainien d'Etudes en Belgique, 1956.

4 ■ Hokky, J. Charles: *Ruthenia: Spearhead Toward the West*. Gainesville, Florida. Danubian Research Center, 1966.

5 ■ Deak, Francis: *Hungary at the Paris Peace Conference*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1942.

6 ■ See, Aldo Dami, op.cit. p. 75.

7 ■ Medyesy, Laslo, Morency: *Soviet Territorial Expansion in Eastern Europe 1945. A Case Study on Ruthenia*. Unpublished M.A. Dissertation in International Relations. Chicago, The University of Chicago, 1970.

8 ■ Ripka, Hubert: *Czechoslovakia Enslaved: The*

Study of the Communist Coup d'Etat. London, Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1950, pp. 11-21.

9 ■ *Handbook of Member Churches, World Alliance of Reformed Churches*, Geneva, 1989, p. 90.

10 ■ Gulácsy, Lajos: *A Kárpátaljai Egyház Története* (History of the Subcarpathian Church) Unpublished, Munkács, 1990.

11 ■ loc.cit. p. 1.

12 ■ loc.cit. p. 3.

13 ■ Bishop Pál Forgón: The Subcarpathian Reformed Church. Conference of the Minority Central and East European Churches of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. Kecskemét, 1986, p. 89.

14 ■ Medyesi, M. Laslo: *Die Entwicklung des "Neuen Menschen" im Sozialistischen Ungarn*. Wien, UZ.K.I., 1981.

15 ■ See Gulácsy, op.cit. 5.

16 ■ Horkay, László: "Az ifjúság vallásos nevelése a szovjet hatalom alatt Kárpátalján." (The Religious Education of Youth during the Soviet Rule in Subcarpathia.) Budapest, Confessio, 1990. p. 93.

Miklós Györffy

Hungarian Doves and Yugoslav Hawks

Lajos Parti Nagy: *Hősöm tere* (My Hero's Square). Budapest, Magvető, 2000, 284 pp. • László Darvasi: *Szerezni egy nőt* (Getting a Woman). Pécs, Jelenkor, 2000, 157 pp.

Over the past decade Hungarian fiction has uneasily been avoiding the subject of current politics and, by and large, even any direct portrayal of contemporary conflicts in society. The politically slanted literature that predominated before was mostly pushed into the background during the 1980s by a self-reflective language- and text-centred prose; then along came the 1989–90 change in régime. Its attendant drastic switches in political orientation, and the partisanship of public discourse and journalism, brought literary representation of dirty and chaotic public life into discredit, making it an unfit subject for polite society. At most, a self-respecting writer might nowadays make use of the columns of the press to take a stand on party-political issues, or to add a critical voice on some phenomenon he or she deems disquieting. Lajos Parti Nagy is one such writer—at least to the extent that the diaristic musings and grotesque columns he publishes can be ranked as belonging in any sense to journalistic traditions rather than to his more strictly literary output, which is exceptional in its own right in its resort to distorting, satiri-

cal linguistic stylisation to capture salient aspects of contemporary Hungarian life. The novel that Parti Nagy has now published, whilst it draws on the same devices of absurd and fantastic stylisation that we have come to associate with him, is nevertheless startlingly direct in its political targeting. Just how unsettling this is for literary critical discourse in the Hungary of today is attested by the voluminous reviews it has received in literary journals, which have devoted page after page to considering the poetic qualities that are imbedded in the novel, immensely over-exaggerating their significance, whilst according nary a word to *My Hero's Square's* unmistakable, almost intrusive political message.

My Hero's Square is a satirical dystopia about the threat of dictatorship by right-wing extremists or perhaps even, in a somewhat looser sense, any authoritarian law-and-order party. On the one hand, plain and intelligible as could be, the novel is replete with references, albeit without explicitly naming any names, to the sinister slogans of István Csurka's Hungarian Truth and Life Party (MIÉP) and to the headway that the far-right movement is

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reviews new fiction for this journal.

making in the country; on the other hand is its highly metaphorical and subversive device of having the ranks of pigeonhood organize an anti-human racist movement.

The point of this satirical ploy is presumably, in part, the very fact that here the forces of aggression and barbarism are not "hawks" but doves—the dove normally being thought of as a symbol of peace. Evil erupts where one least expects it and is least able to defend oneself against it. Yet Parti Nagy imputes a further sense, which derives from the ring-dove or wood pigeon (*Columba palumbus*) being the Columbidae species that, having adapted to the nuisances of our civilization, now infests so many cities: they are the lumpenproletariat, the urban scum who, in no time at all, proliferate everywhere and befoul everything. It is pigeons of this sort that the novel's main protagonist and first-person narrator—a writer who bears a more than passing resemblance to the author—comes up against as he drifts from one rented apartment to another. On account of a bizarre short story that the writer has published, he is sought out by Caesar Tubica (Squab), a ringleader and Top Breed Vice-President in the Palumbist Life Movement, whose loft dwelling upstairs in the same building serves as a meeting-place for pigeon activists. The story, which the writer himself had supposed to be an innocuous product of his imagination, turns out to contain information that the movement deems important for its concerns with growth hormones, genetic manipulation, organ transplantation, and the production of racial hybrids—all aimed at pumping up the pigeons to a size bigger than they actually are. Slight in external appearance he may be, but otherwise bestowed—in a Swiftian or Orwellian manner—with human attributes, and thus speaking in a human voice and generally behaving in a thoroughly human or, to be

more precise, Aryan and top-breed-brotherly fashion, the menacing figure of Tubica is certain that the writer, however much he may deny it, is one and the same as the short-story hero from whom the movement wish to learn certain key facts that have a major bearing on the secrets of growth. Tubica proposes a voluntary collaboration, otherwise "the organization has its interrogation officers trained in Uganda, if I catch his drift, and they don't exactly use gloved hands to get someone to spill the beans, no sirree!"

Thoroughly intimidated, the writer moves to another apartment, however, just when he thinks he has shaken off his nightmarish visitor, he receives an e-mail message, which proves to be the first in a regular succession of such missives. He himself is sending the communications to himself, or in other words—to use the conventional literary term—to his alter ego or, from yet another viewpoint, his hero. He had taken this hero to be a mere literary fiction, but—lo and behold!—he is a live and kicking being whom the Palumbists have abducted and surgically reassigned to their race, because they identify with him and wish to incorporate him, literally, into their movement. Through the e-mails, the writer follows and comments with growing horror on what proves to be an all-too-real schizophrenic hallucination of the mental and physical metamorphosis undergone by his alter ego as—initially under protest and at the cost of no little pain, but in time increasingly compliantly and eventually turning it actively to his own careerist advantage—he is fitted with wings and gradually shrunk in size. For the time being the writer himself, insofar as he is capable of distinguishing himself from the alter ego, is safe, but the moment soon arrives when he comprehends that his hero, now a Palumbist activist and the only one who

knows his whereabouts, is the very person who will bring about his destruction.

The backbone of the novel is formed by the e-mail messages, which supply a diary-style record of a hero let loose in the movement. To begin with he is a sick prisoner, strapped to his bed and totally at the mercy of his new environs and, above all, the suspicions of Top-Breed Brother Tubica; he dispatches the messages surreptitiously and then immediately deletes them from his hard disc. As he convalesces, however, he is taught how to fly with his implanted wings and is initiated into the movement's operations. In no time at all he becomes Tubica's assistant and constant companion, taking part in actions, familiarizing himself with the Palumbist slogans and ideology, and witnessing the power struggle within the movement, in which Tubica makes short work of eliminating his rivals. Tubica's aggressive demeanour hints at terrorist detachments, muscle-bound thugs, leather-jacketed skinheads and cold-blooded gangsters, whilst his idiom and line of reasoning parody the opaque racist rhetoric of Hungary's neo-Nazis, with references to "evolution sweated out from the inside", "an ethnically homogeneous community of cooers", "alien hearts", "humanoplutocratic hawk capital" and, in one harangue, about how "a Palumbist dance is a good occasion for welding our blood-soaked racial community together from the brighter side, too, on the forge of the tasks that stand before the awakening nation of pigeonhood". In another speech, the Top Breed Brother "mentioned the importance of shelter and social responsibility, as well as solidarity, but not the way that the smart alecs of big business and foreign parts imagine it", whilst there is a green pamphlet which contains "all the essentials one needs to know on the matter of

racial pride: The Undying Cultural Bond of Breed—that's its title". In his parenthetical commentaries, the increasingly terrified writer, who is at the receiving end of the e-mail messages, notes signs of an aggressive expansion of the "Palumbist Life Movement" in the city: "It became a matter of course, for instance, for Palumbist songs to be played on state radio every Sunday, before the morning mass"—a reference to the right-extremist tone of the current "Sunday Magazine" programme that is broadcast by Hungarian public-service radio. The difference between pigeonhood and man is posed as a racial issue, and the artificial removal of the biological differences is to be understood as a race-preserving intervention designed to acquire desirable traits.

In the end, after writer and hero have split up, the time comes for the Palumbists to hold a grand, euphoric, carnival celebration of "Pure Wheat Eve" in Heroes' Square—the location in Budapest that MIÉP is wont to use for its real-life mass rallies. During this ceremony Tubica is assassinated and my hero assumes power (whence, of course, the novel's punning title). The following morning, the writer, having worked at his computer overnight in order to compile an account of the events and place it on the Internet for posterity, resigns himself to be picked up by his hero, the New Breed Führer—the alter ego who has now become familiar to him from the television screen.

All along, the story is tied very precisely to specific dates in the year of 1999, so one may conjecture that the e-mail messages comprising the account broadly coincide with the actual composition of the novel's individual segments. In other words, Parti Nagy translates, on a more or less daily basis, the profoundly disturbing political threat that he perceives to be taking shape before his eyes into images of fantasy.

How real the danger of a far-right putsch might actually be in the Hungary of today is a political question that lies outside the scope of this review. For what it is worth, though, in my opinion Parti Nagy is overstating the risk and projecting onto his Palumbist movement of wood pigeons and their belligerent racist slogans a satirical vision that is not merely, and perhaps not even primarily, motivated by the real-life political movement which fuels his phantasmagoria. One sign of this is possibly the way in which Tubica and his spouse, the two figures in the novel who are most often quoted in reported speech, talk in an idiom that, besides its murky flights of racist gibberish, replicates the mangled, clapped-out turns of speech of the uneducated, and the vulgar nouveau-riche, or to put it another way, who have barely no existence beyond the satirically heightened stylization of that vernacular. Thus, in *My Hero's Square* the threat to the social and political fabric is evidenced, first and foremost, by its alarmingly distorted language, by the deformed parlance of the loutish, lumpen masses. Parti Nagy has already shown himself to be a past master at this, his earlier short stories and plays drawing their main expressive impact from the virtuosic variations and, at times, grotesque poeticizing that he wrings from the typical cadences of this idiom. The fashion accessories of the nouveau-riche lifestyle (sauna, solarium, squash, safari holidays, dances, sexual dissipation, etc.) likewise assume due place in the Tubicas' pigeon-centric ideas of luxury. As a symbol of his integration and, so to speak, a precondition of his Palumbist career, the "hero" progressively adopts Tubica's "loutish" manner of speaking as his own. The reader may therefore ultimately gain the impression that far-right rhetoric and incitement go hand in hand with the vulgarity and gungnacious boorishness of yuppie upstarts.

Things are not quite so in reality, and it is due to the muddling of these two distinct registers that Parti Nagy's creepy satire, for all its brilliant passages, falls wide of the mark. The author, I fear, simply could not refrain from the idea of having the Tubicas speak in the tried-and-tested bravura style of the hybrid, chaotic, stripped-down figures of his earlier works; this alone has led his novel somewhat astray, irrespective of how convincing, or otherwise, one might feel its sinister political thrust to be. It is a sign of this confusion that, towards the end of the novel, the "hero", through his metamorphosis, completely loses sight of any real motive for sending the e-mail messages. What earthly reason would "my hero" have for keeping his "maker" informed, even if by then he believes, "You are a stupid, cynical gob of snot. Your sort should be stuffed with guano and exhibited in the Museum of Racial Dodoism." Confused and inane as the racist rhetoric is, this is garbage of a type that differs from the linguistic detritus of a complete jumbling of life styles and cultures, which—as Parti Nagy's prose shows—might well be a mine of originality and even poetry.

Allusions to contemporary historical events are also to be found in *Getting a Woman*, László Darvasi's latest volume of short stories, but here they appear in a metaphor so to speak transferred to what the prevailing discourse might be said to "prescribe", or at any rate in the multiple manner in which Darvasi has always refashioned it. In his works to date, he confronts the world of his stories, which he has extracted from some kind of identifiable, commonly agreed reality, with other strata and registers. The familiar, primary stratum of reality in this case is the Yugoslav civil war, and the volume accordingly bears the subtitle "War Novellas".

Yet insofar as the stories conjure up certain stereotypes of that war, and indeed of Yugoslav conditions and mentalities, they do so chiefly in the mythologized form that the Serbs, Croats and Bosnians propagate about themselves, much to the delight of foreign audiences, with their proclivities for simplification and scaring themselves (the cult status enjoyed by Kusturica's films is just one example)—so densely does the author overwrite them with his own mythopoetic techniques.

The strange, fable-like stories of *Getting a Woman* are constructed on the same basic principle as that adopted by Darvasi in his previous large-scale work, *The Legend of the Tear-Artists*. As I wrote in my review at the time (*HQ*, No. 157), that novel, which might better be styled a legendry, is set in Central and South-Eastern Europe at a time in history, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when its various populaces—Hungarian, German, Jewish, Serb, Turkish, Italian, and so on, conquerors and conquered alike—were inextricably intermixed, all suffered equally, and nothing could have been further from their minds than to become the subjects of edifying historical discourses and novelistic stories. As a story, if any at all, there was the legend of the tear-artists, "their wailing [is] one long story, alpha and omega, without a moment's respite", an endless succession of legends and miracle-tales that play out in a different dimension from that of the history we learn from textbooks.

Likewise, the short stories which comprise *Getting a Woman* play out in another dimension relative to the politically loaded, media-propagated image of the Yugoslav civil war of the 1990s—a dimension in which fixity in time and space is of no consequence and only the man counts, as he is at any particular time. "I supposed," says the writer Schreiber in a preamble,

my sole concern was not to look out from man. Man is made of thick, dismal, sticky matter, a nice and juicy sort of stew that was concocted in heaven but then, for want of better, cooked from the mud of the Earth. Blindness, blind and wild acts, a heart beats then beats no longer; yesterday it was still alive, tomorrow it will rot under the ground. The moment some thinker bestows attributives, qualified senses, on a war, that thinker, be he writer, poet, musician or actor, loses track of mankind. It's like leaving the story out of a story and only publishing the commentary...

As before, Darvasi is searching for stories that have not, as yet, been falsified by commentary, not been stripped from ordinary people's grasp. Thus the *War Novellas* no more speak about war than a historical novel does about history; instead they are about people, about the desires and passions around which a war, tribal in character and waged by guerrilla bands fuelled by passions that, to all intents and purposes, are arbitrary but at any rate southern Slav and thus archaic, is raging—but then these too are qualifying terms. To resort to a literary definition (and thus, inevitably, a falsifying commentary) of their status, these stories are grotesque legends. All that rubs along well with the living dead, beliefs and miracles, though, are buried corpses, the mass graves uncovered by international inspection teams, smugglers, idiots, traders in artificial limbs, white-slaving, bar brawls. Anything might happen, above all linguistically and in the association of ideas:

Melinda Pipo stood before me, her head cocked to one side, her brow glistening, but she was not smiling, as she was quite incapable of smiling. I saw the light of Allah's sweet breath on her chin. Jesus himself once polished her ankle to shiny brightness with a cheap sponge from Dubrovnik. She must have been wounded by some Serb chant because a petal-shaped bruise loured on her

shoulder. I could also see that at some point during her childhood she must have become jammed amidst the rock-shaped screams of Romanian Baptists, and in liberating her somebody, perhaps a confusedly mumbling Hungarian, had left a sticky pustule in her hair.

Malinka Carica's intimation that she is in trouble is described as follows:

A bloody-rooted mountain flower was planted in a split loaf of spittle-leavened bread... Our part of the world is such that if someone in a distant valley should heave a gratifying sigh of oh Bog, oh God, the leaves on the trees and the strawberry fields, the primrosy meadows, will pass on the sounds from petal to petal until finally the lines of a veritable horror story lap their way to your ears.

Or how about:

In that early spring Milenka Carica's men strayed onto our fields, spilled blood and vomit over a number of our footpaths, wept for a number of flatlands, willows and navvies' ditches, then finally sniffed the bitersweet scent of Baba Franciska's armpit.

Baba Franciska was the prettiest woman in the district, and she also had a gold tooth.

Baba Franciska was my love.

I longed for Baba Franciska, I dreamt about her, I burnished her very shadow, I counted her footprints before falling asleep, I relieved myself by imagining her smell, and if I came down with and was plagued by some bodily ailment, then I nursed myself back to health with her name, yet she only laughed at me. I wept when I learned that Milenka Carica's men had slobbered all over her belly. It was Sipoška Sipos who found the girl. She was hastily and carelessly buried in a sand-pit near Berevac, the way Milenka Carica's men do it nowadays. Sipoška Sipos, who often took walks out that way, related how, all of a sudden, he had been blinded by a dazzling light. It was as if someone were flashing a pocket mirror in his eyes. He thought at first that he was having a vision. He had edged his way, blinking, towards the source of the light,

praying meanwhile that he would not come across a piece of God, because he had no use for small pieces of God, Sipoška Sipos said, what he needed was God as a whole. Well anyway, that is how he spotted Baba Franciska's slimily glistening ankle sticking out of the ground and her toenails were glinting.

Sipoška Sipos dislodges the girl's gold tooth, then goes on to celebrate his discovery in the tavern, when,

after who knows how many crates of beer, Baba Franciska burst into the tavern. She was more than a little dishevelled, her clothes were ripped, her fine alabaster neck was covered in dust, her face mud and sand.

Screeching at the top of her voice, she demands the gold tooth be returned to her.

Each of the stories is arranged around a different female figure. Their names supply the chapter headings (Pamela Krv, Veronika Schwarz, Rozália Fugger-Schmidt, Emilia Kastyá, Anna-Mária Mohács, Bababa Pisk, and some ten others) and are emblematic of the babel of confusion and intermingling that characterize this region and amplify the validity of the war, without respect for the restricted historical truth, beyond frontiers that have no reality either ethnically or in the domain of folklore and belief. The bizarre names, redolent as they are of the world evoked in the writings of Transylvanian-born Ádám Bodor, at the same time stand for a tendency towards the grotesque displayed by Darvasi's novellas that sometimes verge on straight parody:

I saw, with a sense of relief, that the Greek, Montenegrin and Belgrade gutter press were writing that the path of the blood streak that was threatening from the south, splitting into three branches in its efforts to enter the country [viz. Hungary], will be prevailed upon to see more reason... Unable though

Milenka Carica's blood might have been to set up home in the country, fresh blood-stains nevertheless cropped up one after another in the oddest of places: on the walls of hospitals and government offices, factory yards and simple doorways. There was often blood down by the doorway of our place, causing the tenants no little bother. I had just come to the end of a piece of news from Belgrade,

says the historical blood-humorist in one of the stories,

when I saw the advertisement: Anna-Mária Mohács announces that her execution consulting office is now open for business.

Professionalism and discretion. Fully in line with the client's wishes. Execution and creativity!

This and other passages of the same kind prompt a suspicion that the novellas, with their exaggeratedly poetic, fabulistic and surrealistically visionary feel, are likewise parodies—parodies of an East European folklore that has been emptied of content and garbled by wars and modernity. The fashioning of legends still functioned back in the seventeenth century; in our present age, it seems, at most only parodies of legends have any validity. ♣

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Tim Wilkinson

'The Fowles of Heauen'— Transylvanian Style

Zsolt Láng: *Bestiárium Transylvaniæ. Az ég madarai* (A Transylvanian Bestiary. Birds of the Air). Pécs, Jelenkor, 1997, 240 pp.

Our encounters with the books that we take to our hearts are often as haphazard—but, fortunately, not quite so fateful—as the mosquito's meeting with an ancient tome described in the first sentences of this book. Whatever caught my eye, the title or the dust-jacket, when I first saw this particular work in the summer of 1998, I soon found myself under the spell of its language—recognizably modern and yet with heady whiffs of a singular, richly allusive idiom that predates the language reform of Kazinczy and Co. Being able to respond to the book's language, and to the equally extravagant figures and plot lines that it carries, and being able to convey those pleasures are two quite different matters. Confirmation that this is, indeed, a special work came just as fortuitously, a year or so later, on browsing through another work, *Az áhítatos embergép* (The Pious Mechanical Man), László Marton's illuminating collection of essays and reviews on a range of literary figures, both Hungarian (from István Gyöngyösi onwards) and German (Goethe

and Kleist). In ordering my own responses, I have leant heavily from the crucial insights supplied by his discussion of Láng's book (pp. 223–27) and, perhaps, borrowed more of his wording than is proper. However much the ideas may have been embroidered, that fundamental debt has to be acknowledged. Responsibility for the end result is, of course, entirely my own.

The Birds of the Air is the first volume in a planned trilogy under the umbrella title of *A Transylvanian Bestiary*, the remaining parts of which are currently expected to be published in early 2002. Though Láng was nearly 40 when it was published, I suspect that for most Hungarian readers his book came just as much out of thin air as he did for me, since with the exception of an earlier full-length novel, *Perényi szabadulása* (Perényi's Liberation), published in 1993, his other, shorter works—*Fuccsregény* (Dud Novel, 1987), *Csendes napok* (Quiet Days, 1991) and the quirky short story, *A Pálcikaember élete* (The Life of the Matchstick Man, 1994)—were all published in his native

Tim Wilkinson

is an editor and translator who spent three years in Hungary in the seventies, subediting academic journals. He has translated a number of Hungarian scholarly books (mainly on history) into English for Corvina, CEU Press and Akadémiai Kiadó.

Transylvania. Like a bolt from the blue, however, the novel attracted considerable critical attention within Hungary—perhaps, as Márton suggests, for reasons which had as much to do with its success in opening up a dialogue with ‘old Hungarian texts’ as with its novelistic virtues. Clearly, for non-Hungarian readers that specific context is virtually inaccessible. Still, the book offers a sufficient diversity of other levels (and hence approaches) to work for a wide variety of readers, including those who are simply looking for highly imaginative writing on a ‘fantastical’ theme.

The text is modest in size, of average paperback length, yet it manages both to be sweeping in scope and to pack in an astonishing amount of detail within its twelve chapters. Put very simply, it is a novel about the unrequited, and ultimately tragic, love of two men—the ‘evilly’ gifted, Mephisto-like Baron Sapré and the ‘innocent’ Friar Peter—for an adolescent girl, Xenia Vidrányi, set in Transylvania during the century and a half, roughly from 1540 to 1690, when it enjoyed a precarious autonomy from Hungary proper, which was then divided up between the Habsburg and Ottoman empires. This is linked, through the figure of Sapré, to a story of a struggle for control of the country, with associated religious strife between Catholics and Protestants, over a timescale that runs from the death of one ruler, Prince Sigismund (or ‘Siggie Snail’ as he is referred to), the assumption of power by the timorous and selectively deaf Count István, through to his own death as Prince. The action takes place within a span of several years, or at most a decade or two, but cannot be tied down more exactly because it is actually a masterly conflation of ‘real’ (i.e. historically attested) events and anecdotes from throughout the whole century and a half.

The two plot lines are articulated within chapters that are titled after twelve fantastic bird figures, each with its own characteristics and playing a role within one or both plots, whether operating as spies for Sapré (the grey raven and its replacement, the barking bee-eater), as malignant destructive agents in their own right (the roc bird, cave peacock and snake-bird), or as involuntary carriers of various misfortunes (dust-sparrows, fly-ash birds, the hush-bird), through to the seemingly harmless (phosphor birds, pelican) or grotesquely comical (the voluble, soothsaying human-headed parrot or his dumb opposite, the toad-bird). A few of these—the roc, pelican and several other avian and non-avian species that are also encountered in the book, such as the dragon mentioned in the introduction—are the creatures of traditional bestiaries, as featured, for instance, in the inventory of imaginary beings compiled by the Argentinian *maestro* Jorge Luis Borges, or the scholarly translation of a twelfth-century Latin bestiary, *The Book of Beasts*, made by T.H. White (he of the Arthurian-style epic quartet, *The Once and Future King*, in his academic hat), but the rest are of Láng’s own invention.

The plots are separately built up in an episodic and non-synchronous but generally linear fashion, with a sprinkling of jumps and flashbacks, in an intercut, ‘jigsaw’-type approach, which might be likened to the reconstruction of the pelican mosaic by Xenia that features in the book’s final chapter. The resulting flexibility of the narrative space not only allows the insertion of numerous short scenes, in the form of anecdotes, parables, jokes and other digressions, that add to the diversity of the picture without disrupting the basic flow of the plot, but also makes it possible for the author to adopt and play around with the conventions of a wide range of

contemporary literary genres: autobiographies and chronicles, scientific treatises, didactic works, travel novels, children's nonsense books, bestiaries, religious homilies, etc. The fantastic bird stories and the main plots, in their historical settings, always meet in an anecdotal episode. Thus the book is re-charged time and time again with subsidiary motifs, acquiring its richness from these and not from the main current of the plot. Furthermore, the reader, however he may decide to interpret the main plot, is made to view the work from two perspectives at once: from that of the main plot and from that of the anecdote. The common characteristics of the texts that are evoked and cited—what, in the end, endow the novel with its most striking feature—are a high degree of spontaneity of language and vivid descriptiveness. The *Bestiary* is thus a rediscovery and, at the same time, re-creation of a historically documented (known) world in which Láng plays about with historical figures and the events with which they are associated, constructing and simultaneously dismantling the familiar sign-systems.

It follows that in its aims and construction this is not a 'realistic' novel, nor is it even the 'historical novel' that it may seem to be on the surface. As Láng specifically warns in his introduction: "In this book reference will be made to a known country... to its history..., and yet its Readers do not hold a historical novel in their hand...". As to the book's general stance, he notes:

...people of old too... explored the boundaries of their world; if they lighted on the incredible, they did not reject it in favour of quick answers... but rather attempted to make it credible, with the aid of imaginations nourished by legends and fables. If their imagination proved too slight, they bridged the chasm that had opened up into the unknown with their literary talent, by

means of poetry and language. The natural history of bygone times is a peculiar mixture of reality and dream paraded as reality.

Like any 'realistic' novel, however, the *Bestiary* deals with birth and death, love and hatred, grace and damnation, and an astonishing amount in between. Despite the chapter titles, the book's real concern is with the beasts of the human world in a time when life was particularly nasty, brutish and short, though having its compensatory pleasures. The opening sentences hint as much:

On one page of a scaly-bound ancient tome in the Biblioteca Teleki at Marosvásárhely I came across the characteristically pressed corpse of a mosquito: it looked bigger than those of today, bloodthirstier too on the evidence of a blood stain, large as a carnation, that had seeped into the yellow, parchment-like paper. I could see before my eyes, bending over the table by the light of a candle, a figure, his moustaches glistening from the fats of his supper and the drops of heavy Küküllő Valley wine, who, before retiring to bed, already in his night-shirt, is immersed in the heady delights of reading and for a goodly time does not even notice the pestering mosquito. Then suddenly, with a slap, he smites it mercilessly. Harkening to the echoes of that blow, filtering down through the centuries, imperceptibly, in reconstructing a story from the past, bit by bit, I began to assemble the visages, habits and motivations of its personæ in their fullness.

The episodic, highly anecdotal structure makes it hard to do justice to the many strands that are woven into the main plots. At a more general level, there is a depressing succession of violent deaths, starting in Chapter 1 with the poisoning of Prince Sigismund through the Andalusian beaker and the subsequent beheading of the supposed culprit, George Vidrányi (Xenia's father), nominally on Count

István's say-so though actually due to Sapré's skill at ventriloquy. Subsequently we are regaled—to give just a small sample of the less indelicate examples—with the hacking to pieces of Michael Kótai, Kata Sidonia's reminiscence of her father's gruesome death, Gabriel Barcsai's beheading in a rose bower outside the tent of the Turkish sirdar, a flaying alive, and the obscene double crucifixion of Sapré and Xenia at the end of the book. Against that background, the revenge gained by Mansfeld, one of Sapré's men, in return for a crack on the head—he slips a strong purgative into the drink of the architect Master Melchior, who has become obsessed with the task he is set by Xenia of copying the strange hieroglyphics on the leaves of a bush—counts as pure comedy.

Interlaced with the blood, vomit, faeces and body lice, however, is an equally exuberant celebration of eating, drinking, sexual pleasure, and so forth, even if this is rarely unalloyed, more often than not degenerating into grim farce. Some figures and motifs appear briefly, to vanish for ever, others submerge only to re-appear several chapters later, still hard at work at their usually nefarious activities. There are recurrent references to a "vagrant Tartar horde", who first sow mayhem and slaughter amongst the opposed armies of István and Balthasar, which turn out to be on opposite banks of the River Maros. The horde goes on to wipe out the armed Székely escort chosen to conduct the human-headed parrot, elected as king, to his new nation, though we only learn later on, in Chapter 10, that they kidnapped the parrot itself (and incidentally that they also used the hush-bird to cover their own movements). Meanwhile, the Tartars provoke an ill-tempered encounter with the handsome Count Bazsányi, and there are several other casual mentions of them,

with a last sighting in the final lines of the book ("the vagrant Tartar horde tamely processed in Indian file across the market square at Kolozsvár"). The boy whom Xenia witnesses being born to the tree-dwelling woman in Chapter 7 springs from the woodwork in Chapter 12 to save her from being stabbed to death by Friar Peter. In addition to the ill-fated Gabriel Barcsai, several of his descendants also pop up, such as a Michael Barcsai, who in Chapter 5 hunts for the roc bird all his life before stabbing himself to death when it finally appears in his house, and a modern-day Nicholas Barcsai, who in Chapter 10 paints a scene of Xenia emerging from underground as Sapré looks towards the roc bird, and in Chapter 11 passes off 'reconstructions' (i.e. forgeries) of the vanished tableaux of Szeben town, originally painted by Johann Lues, the pastor whom the Saxons elect as Prince as a challenge to István.

At a more mundane level, unusual weather conditions (severe rains, snow, fogs, heat-waves) are invoked as factors that influence the direction of the plots or as allegorical accompaniments to events on Earth. Foodstuffs are often lovingly detailed, as in the feast put on by Kamuti at Kata Sidonia's expense in Chapter 4 or, in Chapter 9, the 'anti-banquet' of the cave-dwellers ("the real delicacies were the meats of animals that tumbled in from above, most notably the softer parts of bears, the heart and liver of bison calves, and badger brain"), and, not least, the sampling of a cabbage stew that Barcsai cooked shortly prior to his capture and execution in Chapter 5. Even academic life receives attention, as in the account of how Milotai, Piscator and old Gelei (all based on historical personages) try to identify the wryneck or jynx; Gelei's theories about the proliferation of the fly-ash birds in cheese and human bones; and

Friar Peter's efforts, in Chapter 7, to conduct what are recognisably rural equivalents of Galileo's experiments on falling bodies at the Leaning Tower of Pisa, not to omit the alchemy and the strange story of the Bolognese double-bowl used by Sapré to give life to the silver bee-eater in Chapter 6.

The fantastic strands include not only dreams, hallucinations and soothsaying episodes—a Gypsy woman's prophesy of George Vidrányi's death, most of the utterances of the human-headed parrot, the wise-woman of Görgény's reassurances to Kata Sidonia about Sigismund's fidelity—but also a range of 'miraculous' cures: the apparent resuscitation of the poisoned Sigismund, the healing of Father John's gout by a touch from Xenia, or István's recovery from dropsy when the affected parts are licked by the greyhound Snowdrop. The intertwining of history and fantasy also permits a few discreet time-shifts to the present day, such as an almost imperceptible shift towards the description of modern Nagyvárad (Oradea) in Chapter 3 or Sapré's hallucinatory vision of what may be a helicopter, though these are conspicuously written from the point of view of a 16th or 17th century observer.

Much of the detail and anecdotal content of the *Bestiary* can be shown to be based on specific old Hungarian texts, but the reader (even a Hungarian reader) is not required to have any knowledge of these sources to enjoy and understand the book. As a small example, Chapter 8 (fly-ash birds) includes: an anecdote about a bleary-eyed stable-boy failing to take the hobble off Prince István's horse in the morning, so the horse stumbles all day, giving István a most uncomfortable ride; a reference to a Hieronymus Caraffa, Count of Monte Negro; a paragraph of analysis of the reasons for the failure of István's campaign in Moravia ("For one thing, the

weather turned cold..."); a brief description of the outfit in which Sapré clothes the foundling Bramleberry ("a floral tunic of ruby velvet...") and an anecdote about Bramleberry's disgust at having to empty the baron's chamber-pots ("he vomited all over himself")—all of which are derived directly from an authentic memoir, *An Autobiographical Description of My Descent to a World Full of Unhappiness*, that János Kemény wrote in 1657–58, shortly before becoming Prince of Transylvania. Likewise, the idyllic incident of Prince István catching a trout with his own hands (Chapter 11) follows almost word-for-word a colourful, realistic report about Prince George I Rákóczi which appears in the mid-17th-century *Piteous Magyar Chronicle* of János Szalárdi, whilst the continuation of that scene (vengeful Székelys hunt and then encircle the fleeing prince) is a persiflage of an early 17th-century report by István Szamosközy (Zamosius) on the death in 1599 of another Transylvanian prince, András Báthory. As these few examples may suggest, the more fantastic a given episode, the more certain it is that some documentable references for it exists. Láng's skill, and modestly concealed erudition, lies in dissecting out what he needs from the old texts and knitting them into his own construction, and the real pleasure is the seamlessness of the resulting fabric. The reader is given access to a densely populated fictional world on its own terms, without needing a privileged body of information in order to explore it.

Láng is scrupulous about leaving the reader to make his/her interpretations. If one may hazard a guess at his ultimate aim, it is to persuade us, by a mixture of guile and genuine shock tactics, into thinking harder about the miseries that we routinely visit upon one another—and, perhaps, into doing something to curb

those reflexes. Or is that just wishful thinking? After all, our interpretation of the "Fowles of Heauen"—borrowed as it is from the title that Edward Topsell gave to his manuscript of a translation he made, between around 1610 and his death in 1625, of substantial chunks from Ulysse Aldrovandi's *Ornithologia*—depends on which of the two homophones springs to mind. As Topsell himself notes in his introduction:

in Philosophie that which is simple goeth first to generation, and that which is compounded goeth foremost to Corruption. Therefore the waters more simple than the earthe do first bringe forth fowles and fishes... and these corrupt sooner then the waters.

Tempting as it may be to read the book as an allegory on the precariousness of life within Transylvania and, perhaps, Romania more generally (bearing in mind that what most people would view as the Ceaușescu deserved execution a decade ago by no means brought that country's miseries to an end), it does have a wider import. The *Bestiary* can be seen as a sort of field report of a novelist-as-anthropologist, in the sense of detached, impartial observer of the world, past or present. The conclusions we draw from it as readers are up to us individually, but the following passage from Lévi-Strauss offers some pertinent thoughts:

Biographical and anecdotal history... is low-powered history, which is not intelligible in itself and only becomes so when it is transferred en bloc to form a history of a higher power than itself... It would, however, be a mistake to think that we progressively re-

constitute a total history by dint of these dovetailings. For any gain on one side is offset by a loss on the other. Biographical and anecdotal history is the least explanatory; but it is the richest in point of information, for it considers individuals in their particularity and details for each of them the shades of character, the twists and turns of their motives, the phases of their deliberations. This information is schematized, put into the background and finally done away with as one passes to histories of progressively greater 'power'... In fact history is tied neither to man nor to any particular object. It consists entirely in its method, which experience proves to be indispensable for cataloguing the elements of any structure whatever, human or non-human, in their entirety. It is therefore far from being the case that the search for intelligibility comes to an end in history as though this were its terminus. Rather, it is history that serves as the point of departure in any quest for intelligibility. As we say of certain careers, history may lead to anything, provided you get out of it.*

This certainly seems consonant with the closing words of the *Bestiary*:

All of them were there, in a hundred kinds of garment, interminably repeating the same things over and over again, sheer incomprehension written across their faces, as if they had strayed from an unknown world into a country that they had formerly inhabited.

The waysides of the text not only conceal the eyes of the snake-bird but also scattered, ostensibly throw-away scraps of that kind, which are what Láng surely wants us to spot. For all its linguistic and literary bravura, this is a more deeply felt and thought-through book than is evident on first sight. ■

* *The Savage Mind*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1966, pp. 261–262).

István D. Rácz

What Is Inside?

George F. Cushing: *The Passionate Outsider. Studies on Hungarian Literature.*

Selected and edited by Lóránt Czigány. Corvina, 2000, 316 pp.

The first thing the reader notices on opening this well designed book is a photograph striking for a pair of large ears, heavy spectacles and a friendly smile. Interpreting all this symbolically (and why not?), the reader is faced with a portrait of a good listener, a perceptive critic and, especially, of someone likely to encourage you. This was George Cushing, Professor of Hungarian at the University of London. He was a scholar who mastered very different languages as a young man, which offered him a variety of prospects. We can only be grateful to a series of circumstances that eventually caused him to end up in Hungarian studies. As Lóránt Czigány's introduction relates, he started learning Hungarian in the services during the Second World War. After the war he first obtained a B.A. in Classics, soon turned to Hungarian again and, after studies in London and the Eötvös College in Budapest, he completed a thesis on Széchenyi, Kossuth and National Classicism in Hungarian Literature in 1952. As Lóránt Czigány puts it, "in 1953 Dr Cushing became the first full-fledged

British-born teacher of Hungarian at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, or indeed, at any other establishment of higher education in the British Isles." His was the lion's share in making international literary criticism engage itself in Hungarian literature, through his testifying that there was more to it than the private concerns of a small, frustrated nation. His work as a teacher, a critic and a translator was of inestimable help in making Hungarian literature known outside the country.

This collection of George Cushing's studies on Hungarian literature is chronologically arranged by topic. The opening essay is a fascinating discussion of 18th-century travellers' accounts of Hungary in English, which shows not only carefully selected examples, but also points out the features of their development. The overt conclusion is that the British image of Hungary in the 1790s was much more firmly grounded than earlier in the century. There is, however, an implied covert message too, whether intentional or not, and this will make it even more interesting

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to both British and Hungarian readers today. The way the English saw Hungary more than two centuries ago is strikingly echoed in present-day critical voices (and not only in literary studies). Eighteenth-century travellers noticed the contrast between the friendliness of the common people and the irresponsibility of the nobles; today they are impressed by Hungarian hospitality, the high standards of education, the rapid progress in science—and they criticize the corruption, irresponsibility, the low standards of hygiene, just to mention a few unattractive features. Many readers of the essay will feel challenged to ask themselves if anything has changed.

I am fully aware that the approach I have used is very far from the way Cushing himself approached literature. Authorial intention is a cornerstone of his analysis. Although Roland Barthes buried the author in 1968 (in the first half of Cushing's scholarly career extending over more than forty years) the author is still alive in these essays. Cushing most of all respected the author's own opinion; as a result, the self-reflection found in interviews, diaries and private letters is for him the most important source. What he wanted to avoid is misinterpretation, deviation from the author's way of thinking. To take a random example: when formulating his own reading of the much-debated last line of Imre Madách's *The Tragedy of Man*, he used the author's own interpretation as stated in a letter to János Erdélyi, suggesting that this reading is the most relevant (and authentic). On the other hand, he did not hesitate to remark ironically that Madách himself misinterpreted Fourier's text in his *Tragedy*. Being an author means having authority.

However this does not mean that he only listened to the authors. One of the major principles of this book is that critics should not discuss literature in isolation.

What he was interested in is the social function of literature and, therefore, he discussed texts within their context. The essay "Endre Ady as Journalist" is a case in point. The title is slightly misleading: it is not about Ady the journalist, but Ady as a central figure in modern Hungarian literature. Cushing's opinion is that Ady's oeuvre forms an organic whole; consequently, his poetry cannot be understood in isolation from his newspaper articles. This is open to doubt, and many critics would probably make a sharp distinction between Ady the poet of exceptional genius and Ady the journalist. Still, Cushing's point that reading Ady's poems and articles together is a fruitful approach can hardly be questioned. (Of course, this made the foreign critic's task even more difficult in that he had to study the social and cultural context of another country as well as the texts themselves.)

In the central essay of the book, "Problems of Hungarian Literary Criticism", he positioned himself and justified the significance of a "foreigner's" view of Hungarian literature and literary life. Although it was first published in 1962, and in a historical context its main function might be seen as a polemic attacking Marxist dogma, today it is even more interesting. This is because it points out the continuity between the nationalist vein in Hungarian literary criticism and the Communist era. If one wishes to translate this into political terms: the institutionalization of literary life in a divided society was continued under a totalitarian regime. Its most thought-provoking sentence is: "Hungarian literature today is just as centralized as it was a century ago" (p. 108). Again I must say that this text has in a way become independent of Professor Cushing's authorial intention. The meaning of the above-quoted sentence today is: Hungarian literary life was as centralized in its often idealized golden age as it was

in the 1950s. In the 1960s this text was a refutation of the Marxist doctrine about a "highly developed socialist society"; today it offers evidence that the cultural dictatorship of the Communist regime was anticipated by other forms of cultural dictatorship. An outsider's unbiased and unmanipulated view can often help.

It did help in other respects, too. "Books and Readers in 18th-century Hungary" is a particularly important article. It must have been one of the first studies in the late 1960s challenging an outdated view of 18th-century Hungarian culture. Textbooks used in Hungarian secondary schools up to the mid-1970s still contained the view that cultural life in 18th-century Hungary was practically non-existent. Cushing provides a convincing refutation (textbooks today, of course, are different). Both with its starting point and in its conclusion, this essay foreshadows the growing importance cultural studies were to take, as opposed to "pure" literary criticism.

The virtues and the (few) limitations of the book both derive from the strong emphasis put on literature as a social product. One of the recurrent thoughts is that Hungarian literature is a literature of commitment, in Cushing's French term, *littérature engagée*. Here he seizes what is different about Hungarian literature. This easily accepted axiom is true in part. It is almost a commonplace today: to quote Gyula Illyés's words to the effect that Hungarian writers have had to take it upon themselves to solve all sorts of problems, even those of water conservation. Hungarian literature is often seen as a literature of self-sacrifice and of suffering for the nation. The title of a poem by Illyés himself is revealing: "Doleo ergo sum", I suffer, therefore I am. Individual suffering, however, becomes a metonymy for self-sacrifice, living, dying and writing for your nation.

Most of the writers Cushing discusses seem to justify this view of Hungarian literary history. Kazinczy, Bajza, Petőfi, Ady, Móricz and many more belong to this mainstream. The advantage of accepting this consensus on Hungarian literature without reservations is that it makes it easier to point out all deviations from the centre: Babits's cosmopolitan *homo moralis*, or Kosztolányi's *homo aestheticus* (also aimed against Babits). The problem is that all efforts to form a canon are arbitrary, and there is no reason why a different canon should not be formed in the future. There are signs right now of various writers being rediscovered (Péter Esterházy's essays, for example, provide ample evidence). This is not to say that seeing the *homo politicus* ideal as a fundamental vision in Hungarian literature is false, but claiming that this is the unquestionable centre may prevent us from noticing the pluralism in Hungarian literature and from discovering the roots of some of the most recent developments.

But this volume, even with the controversy it may provoke, will surely prove to be one of the best and most readable books on Hungarian literature for those who do not know Hungarian. (In later editions—without the plethora of misprints, please!) All the essays in it are characterized by a broad horizon. Most of them (eight out of fourteen) are on individual writers, but even those tell the reader a great deal about other authors, the social context and the general issues in Hungarian literature. What Cushing was interested in is the otherness of Hungarian culture: a peculiar combination of similarities and differences in comparison with his own. These two kinds of relationship were equally strong attractions for him: he was obviously attracted to Ady because of his difference, and to Babits because of his similarity to the English literary tradition.

Whereas in Ady he appreciated an unparalleled original talent, in Babits he celebrated a representative of modernist traditionalism; Cushing himself mentioned Robert Browning and T.S. Eliot, but Nietzsche in philosophy and Louis MacNeice in poetry (and many more) could also be named, for their rejection of "lyricism" and "subjective poetry". This is also true of his essay on Kosztolányi: there are a number of briefly mentioned comparisons with English writers, but even more would be possible and fruitful. Comparing English and Hungarian poetry about the war (Owen, Sassoon, Blunden, etc.—Ady, Babits and others), or the role of agnosticism in modernist poetry could result in stimulating analyses.

Cushing's insight is admirable, and so is his command of Hungarian. It is seldom apparent that Hungarian is not his native language (perhaps the only obvious example is his remark about Petőfi's characters speaking "naturally" in his parody of the heroic poem (*The Hammer of the Village*) *A helység kalapácsa*; in fact, their diction is highly artificial and intended as a source of comic effects).

The *Passionate Outsider* is also a book for Hungarian readers. What is usually sacrosanct in Hungarian criticism can be desecrated in Cushing: Kazinczy is a "literary dictator" (p. 85), Széchenyi is "acti-

vated... by personal ambition" (p. 99), Kölcsey's "abrupt manner and limited vision succeeded in robbing Hungarian literature at one blow of a great poet and a promising critic" (p. 128, the poet being Dániel Berzsenyi). This "outsider's" point of view did not prevent Cushing from respecting Hungarian national heroes, far from it: his reverence is the greater as he was able to see and show these men of letters and politicians as creatures of flesh-and-blood rather than as divine. This is one reason why his essays are thought-provoking.

The essays are in dialogue with one another. The central idea of "Books and Readers in 18th-century Hungary", for example, is continued in "The Birth of National Literature in Hungary" (although it was written earlier): the first argues that there was a reading public in 18th-century Hungary, the second offers a detailed characterization of these readers. This too is evidence that the book can be read as a whole.

The most obvious merit of this outstanding volume is the balance between sympathy and judgement, between stepping in and staying outside. But the last essay speaks of "hopes for the future" as far as the publication of Hungarian literature in Britain is concerned. Only an insider would say that. We feel honoured, Professor Cushing. ■

George Gömöri

Exiled into Existence

Susanna Fahlström: *Form and Philosophy in Sándor Weöres's Poetry*

Uppsala, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Studia Uralica Upsaliensa 32, 1999, 244 pp. ISBN 91-554-4614-0

The Hungarian-born Swedish scholar, Susanna Fahlström, has submitted an ambitious doctoral dissertation to Uppsala University. She chose a subject which nobody had tackled before in English: the ways in which philosophy is manifest in the poetry of Sándor Weöres. One of the most accomplished Hungarian poets of the twentieth century, he could well have won the Nobel Prize had the representative English selection of his poems been published not in 1988 but a few years sooner. At the same time, Weöres is not an easy poet to subdue critically—he has an astounding thematic range, a rich poetic language and a genuine knack for donning different masks and personalities. Mrs Fahlström had to be selective in her material and she chose six poems by Sándor Weöres which “most completely reflect a philosophy involved with poetic(al) form” (p. 228), while adopting a framework within which she analyses the poems in question. Reproducing the chosen piece first in Hungarian, then in a literal English

version, she goes on to discuss the poem in nine sub-chapters organized in severely scholarly categories such as “The Structure and Shape of the Writing”, “The Represented Elements of Reality”, the rhetorical, metrical and grammatical structure, and of course, the theme of the poem.

One has the impression that such an organizational framework is not uncommon at Swedish universities. In Great Britain*there is perhaps less emphasis on formal categories and more on critical textual analysis. Still, Mrs Fahlström can hardly be blamed for conforming to an approved scholarly format (which, none the less, I would not dare to call “scientific”). Within the constraints of this chosen format, her work is quite successful, even if the literal translations of Weöres's poems do not really give an idea of their intrinsic poetic value.

The problem lies in the eternal dilemma of the scholar. On the one hand, the scholar can describe how a poem is organized and what kind of formal patterns

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and elements make it work. On the other hand, the poetic text and the detailed demonstration of its rich layers and fascinating intertextuality stand curiously apart. This is why in some cases I would have been happier to read some good English versions alongside the literal translations. What is worse, none of the existing good translations into English are even mentioned in an otherwise voluminous bibliography. For example, the collection *Eternal Moment* (edited by Miklós Vajda, Anvil/Corvina, 1988) contains some first-class translations by Edwin Morgan, Hugh Maxton, William Jay Smith, George Szirtes and others. Perhaps a scholarly work of this kind does not want to get embroiled in the problem of "good" versus "faithful" translations.

The book begins with a short biography of the poet. Though discussing Weöres's philosophy, the author has to consider the poet's religious belief; yet the fact that his family and he himself were Lutherans is not mentioned, only later (on page 209) one comes across the mistaken assertion that he is "a Presbyterian". It is alleged that Weöres "stayed a long time" in the Far East in 1936–37; in fact, this journey took place on a slow passenger boat, which visited various Asian countries in the course of less than two months. Though this journey certainly added "local colour" to Weöres's poetry and imagination, it is not personal experience that reigns supreme in his poetic world. Weöres was a brilliant translator and in discussing this aspect of his work, the Ukrainian Shevchenko—whom he also translated—is described as "Russian" (p. 19). Moreover, in her account of the 1964 collection *Tűzkút*, Mrs Fahlström fails to mention the controversy over the publication of the book: it was in fact first published in Paris by young Hungarian exiles and the Budapest publication only followed after that—a fact

which could be significant for the history of the reception of Weöres's oeuvre.

As for the "Philosophy of Poetics" sections of the book, they are generally well-researched and it is not hard to agree with the attribution of dominant influences on Weöres to cultural historian Nándor Várkonyi and to the polymath/critic Béla Hamvas.

"Mystical intuition" (a phrase coined by Hamvas) is clearly present in numerous poems by Weöres, who regards life on earth as an "exile", that is as alienation from the Supreme Creative Force. Belief in the supernatural goes hand in hand with deep skepticism concerning reason: "Any reason in this world is a poor by-blow of Reason scrabbling at the mere shell of things, seizing nothing near the bone", claims the poet in "De Profundis" (Edwin Morgan's translation). There is also more than just an intimation of Buddhism in poems such as "Magna Meretrix" and metaphysical yearning in the "Third Symphony", a yearning which (as we know from other poems such as "De Profundis") cannot be satisfied in one's "active" (read unmeditative) life. It is also true that in Weöres's poetic practice, rhythm often came first and philosophy second and, indeed, the melody of his poems were often more important than a "message" translatable into prose.

While the translation of the original texts is, on the whole, satisfactory, there are still some occasional mistranslations. Let me mention a few: in "*A fogak tornáca*" (The Portico of Teeth) the final line "*mert minden összeér*" does not mean "for all things move around" but "everything moves in a circle" (p. 41). In "Magna Meretrix" "*máglya*" should be translated as a "stake" rather than a "bonfire" (Weöres is aiming here at a bizarre effect), "*csak pólyásként berezelve*" is not "only like a babe in a funk" but "just like a baby who

crapped in his pants" (p. 106) and "*mindazt ami hol-nincs hol-van*" I would surely translate differently than "everything exists now and then" (p. 106). "*Bujdosás*" in the Hungarian folk-song quoted on p. 114 is a much more emotive word than just "emigration", "*világ-ölű mennyei kútnál*" is correctly "at the well with a world-wide lap" (p. 121), the "case" on p. 126 is clearly a misprint for "cage", and the line "*Csak játék, mondja dalomra a kortárs*" is rather inadequately translated as "Its only a joke, say my contemporaries" where the object (the song) is omitted and "a plaything" would be more appropriate than "a joke" (p. 204). Finally, I rather doubt that the English or American reader would know what a "vice-house-porter" is (p. 223), if a "*viceházmes-*

ter" exists in New York he might be called an "Assistant Janitor" in the best of cases.

In the "Bibliography" Charles Baudelaire's name is twice misspelt, but what is worse, Mrs Fahlström does not list any publication in English on Weöres printed outside Hungary. Not even William Jay Smith's "Foreword" or Miklós Vajda's "Introduction" to *Eternal Moment*; even the English version of László Cs. Szabó's 1963 radio interview with Weöres, printed in the collection *New Writing of East Europe* (Chicago, Quadrangle Books, 1968) is omitted. All in all, students of modern European poetry will find useful this handsomely produced paperback on a truly great modern Hungarian poet, who has few works translated into English. ♣

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"It's Not My Ears That Do My Hearing"

György Kurtág Interviewed by Bálint András Varga

We met late in 1971 or early in 1972 when I joined the staff of Editio Musica Budapest to promote its catalogue of contemporary Hungarian music. There was not much to promote as far as Kurtág was concerned—apart from his huge and hugely difficult 'Concerto' for soprano and piano, The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza, there were a number of miniatures, many of them featuring the cimbalom, an instrument that had not yet found adequate interpreters in new music ensembles outside Hungary.

He was not easy to come close to and it took me some time to gain his confidence. Nor was it easy to find a key to his personality, combining sensitivity, pride, vulnerability but also demanding unquestioning loyalty. I think I eventually did manage to become part of his outer circle of, well, "friends" would certainly be wrong, "allies" might do better.

In the late 70s and early 80s, when I embarked on a project which led to the book *3 kérdés—82 zeneszerző* (3 Questions—82 Composers), published in 1986, I naturally approached Kurtág with a request for an interview. He hated interviews and never gave any; he felt inhibited by the presence of the microphone which he probably feared was an added, inquisitive listener noting his struggle with words, the long pauses between sentences.

Then, one day, he suddenly turned up in my office and declared he was willing to talk to me. The result was an interview which was to be for many years to come the only one he had ever given.

Of course, it was not as simple as that. I prepared a version for the book and submitted the text to him and his wife Márta.

Bálint András Varga

has spent most of the past thirty years in music publishing, first in Budapest, then, since 1992, in Vienna where he works for Universal Edition. He has published a number of books, all of them interviews with musicians. His conversations with Lutoslawski, Berio and Xenakis have been published in English and German as well as Hungarian.

There followed agonizing months with revisions and re-revisions and re-re-revisions, words, sentences and their order changed again and again. It only stopped when I showed signs of a nervous breakdown. So, if there is such a thing as an "authorized text", then this surely is.

It has been translated into German, French, Italian and, I think, Finnish. For some reason, this seems to be the first attempt to render the interview into English.

When Kurtág did eventually relent and he decided to face my microphone he said it was his "Hommage à Bálint" (in reference to his many hommages in the piano series Plays and Games). May this English version be an "Hommage à Gyuri" in honour of his 75th birthday. He has now been recognized as one of the few great masters in the second half of the 20th century and his birthday is being celebrated all the world over. This interview is a candle on the cake.

Bálint András Varga

I was eleven or twelve years old when the experience that turned me into a musician occurred. Schubert's 'Unfinished' Symphony was playing on the radio, and when my parents told me what it was we were listening to, I was amazed that adults can recognize classical music! Some time after that, I was alone at home and again listening to music on the radio. I realized that they were playing the 'Unfinished' Symphony. I asked for and I was given the score, and I learned the two-hand arrangement of the piece. That is what decided that music would become highly important in my life.

Between the ages of five and seven I had piano lessons, and I was fond of serious music. At the age of seven I stopped the lessons and I lost all interest in music. I sabotaged my piano lessons, practising only five or ten minutes a week, because I derived no enjoyment at all from my own playing. The return to music was through dance music, tangos, waltzes—and marches. I must have been around ten when I started dancing lessons, and later, when I went with my parents on our summer holiday to Herkulesfürdő [now Băile Herculane], I danced every evening with my mother in the public rooms at the spa. She was very young and very pretty at that time...

Dancing, then, was one of mother's pleasures in the summer months, in winter it was playing four-handed. We played brief, crude transcriptions of passages from operas. It was fun dancing with her (and for me every tango and every waltz had its own individual character), and it was also fun playing four-handers. Once, all of a sudden, we had a go at the first movement of the 'Eroica'. This was far beyond me—perhaps both of us—but we read right through to the end of the symphony, then went on to the First and later the Fifth. (Mother was never willing to play the Funeral March. At the time that seemed superstitious, but it may have been a presentiment: she died at the age of 40.) Between the

ages of five and six, incidentally, I also composed—two little piano pieces, I believe—and the Schubert symphony also led me back to composition. I wanted to write a Jewish symphony in E minor with the title 'Eternal Hope'. But I also wrote a lot of other things too at that time.

Foreign music had a big influence on me, though in general few compositions affected me at first hearing. For instance, I had read a lot about Beethoven's Ninth, but I was hugely disappointed when I first heard it because my picture of it from what I had read had led me to expect something quite different. On that basis I had imagined a Ninth Symphony for myself, and the reality was so totally different in comparison that I was simply unable to find my place in it.

Bartók's *Cantata profana* and *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* were elemental influences, though that does not mean that the influence came through in my own compositions. The Violin Concerto, which I heard once in a BBC broadcast from London during the war, had just as much of an impact on me. Mátyás Seiber gave the introductory talk and analysed the piece, but even then I wasn't really able to follow it. Having said that, the Violin Concerto was to become one of the decisive experiences in my life later on, in the second or third month after I got to Budapest. I sat through all the rehearsals held by Doráti and Menuhin, and later on learned the répétiteur part myself (for years I was maybe the only one who knew it) and played it for years with Ede Zathureczky. Whichever other violinists learned the part, I had the chance to go through the piece with them.

That had a direct influence on the composition of my Viola Concerto. I even incorporated some musical materials, though the influence of the Concerto and other Bartók compositions is more obvious. The process of getting to know a work gradually has proved more important than the first encounter. On the whole, I have rarely heard something and instantly realized its importance.

One other piece of music that had a big impact on me: *Az embernek halála* (The Death of Man) section of *The Sayings of Peter Bornemisza* is a direct response to Penderecki's *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima*. The memory of the performance of the *Hiroshima* piece directly influenced the structure of the piano part of that section.

Even Webern did not influence me through listening but through study, the 'interrogation' of small details. But with Bartók too the encounter was such that I began to practise... The first piece—around the age of fourteen, when I was preparing to become a musician and studying at Temesvár (Timișoara)—was the second of the Bagatelles. I didn't make much sense of it. After that came 'Song' from the *9 Little Pieces* of 1926. I was boarding with the family of a grammar-school boy of my own age. He was a good musician; he played the classical repertoire on the piano and also, I think, sang in the choir when Kodály's *Psalmus hungaricus* was performed in Timișoara. My practising so infuriated him that, as I recall, he even beat me up to stop me playing Bartók.

Bartók didn't appeal to me either; he was somehow so *abominably* good. Erich Kästner, in his children's book *May 35th*,¹ writes about a bachelor uncle who invites his nephew round to the house every Thursday, and they lunch together on meat salad with raspberry syrup and similarly absurd dishes. Meanwhile they keep on saying, "Abominably good, isn't it?" To me, Bartók's music was abominably good in that same way. *Bluebeard* was also distinctly ugly to my ears, but it still excited me—and the fact that it met with resistance from the people around me, of course, only added to its attraction. I somehow discovered a taste for Bartók's music *beyond* my own taste and consciousness.

The first of my compositions, to which I am now more willing to admit, was the Suite for Piano. I myself don't know exactly when I wrote it, I must have been sixteen or seventeen. The first movement—*Mintha valaki jönne* (As if someone were coming)—is a response to my composition teacher Max Eisikovits' setting of a poem by Endre Ady. Its basic experience—I am waiting and they are not coming—was painfully familiar to me, and that became the first movement of the Suite. (I didn't quite get as far as composition with Eisikovits; we only went through harmony and counterpoint, with much sweat and tears. In point of fact, I never was able to acquire a proper foundation in compositional technique. My instrumentalist fellow pupils, a cellist and the violinist Stefan Romascanu, completed our assignments much more adroitly.)

Interestingly enough, it so happened that I gave programmes to the first movement in some of my later works as well. That was the case with my Op. 1 String Quartet.² I'm not sure whether I read the programme into the work retrospectively or was already conscious of it during the composition process. I was living in Paris, in a crisis that made it impossible for me to compose, as in 1956 the world literally collapsed around me—not just the external world but my inner world too. Numerous moral questions had also arisen in relation to the work I was doing with Marianne Stein; my entire conduct as a human being had become highly questionable. I sank to terrible depths of despair. Previously I had shunted responsibility for many things onto others, but now, all at once, I was obliged to recognize that I had become disillusioned with my own self, my own character. I have only ever been able to compose when I was on fairly good terms with myself, when I was able to accept myself for what I am—when I was able to discern some sort of unity in my view of the world. In Paris I felt, to the point of desperation, that nothing in the world is true, that I had no grip on reality.

I was living at the place of another of Marianne Stein's pupils, an American actress, and in exchange for my room I would take her two children for walks in the park. That was the Parc de Montsouris, a marvellous wilderness with fantastic trees. The experience of trees in winter was perhaps the first reality. That carried

1 ■ *Der 35. Mai oder Konrad reitet in die Südsee* has a widely read Hungarian translation.

2 ■ String Quartet Op. 1 was completed in 1959, after a stay in Paris (1957–58), in which Kurtág's encounter with the psychiatrist Marianne Stein was of decisive influence.

on almost until spring, when birds appeared as a second reality. Only later did I establish that the blackbird was the 'fundamental bird', but the argumentative chattering of sparrows makes an appearance in the quartet's fourth movement, the 'bird scherzo'. One night I was startled out of my sleep by bird song I had never heard before. I later identified it as a nightingale. A very special marvel...

The year in Paris and the work with Marianne Stein virtually split my life in two. I lost twenty kilos in weight. I once accompanied the singer Pali Déry, who had heard during a visit to China that a person can get by on a bit under twenty grammes of rice a day. From then on I, too, lived effectively on rice, half of it with a stock cube, the other half with something sweet, and I began to do regular physical training. I had always been terribly clumsy at gymnastics. At first I repeated some exercises that I had seen my mother do (she had been dead for more than ten years by then), but later on I developed the thing in my own way. I made angular movements, almost like playing a pantomime. I even tried to alter my writing to an angular, crabbed style.

The next stage of that was my starting to make angular forms from matches. A whole symbolic world evolved. I perceived myself as in a worm-like state, totally diminished in humanity. The matchstick forms and balls of dust (I didn't clean my room every day), along with black stubs (I also smoked) represented me. I gave this matchstick composition the title 'The cockroach seeks a way to the light' (I stuck a lamp shape made from silver foil at the end of the composition). That was also supposed to become the programme for the string quartet's first movement. The overtone chord symbolized the light, and in between the dirt... I almost inscribed as an epigraph at the start of the movement two lines by Tudor Arghezi:

Din mucegaiuri, bube și noroi / Iscat-am frumuseți și prețuri noi.

(From mildew, suppurating wounds and ordure / I generated new beauties and values.)

That was already going through my head at the time I was making the matchstick composition.

That quotation is associated with Felician Brînzeu, a teacher at the *lycée* in Lugos—the teacher in my life (Magda Kardos in Timișoara was later to signify for me that same primitive experience in music). During my second year at grammar school, in three months he taught Romanian grammar to a class of fifty, mostly children from peasant families, never handing out marks and making us continually discuss the material; the whole thing was almost a collective game. We had great fun, and for me it brought alive, once and for all, what the structure of a language is.

Besides that, he was a very strict form-master with a mildly sadistic streak; he was quite capable of clouting you with all his strength. It's with him that I associate that Arghezi quotation, though it's quite possible that it stuck in my head much later, during the Romanian lessons at the Piarist Fathers' *lycée* in Timișoara.

I failed in drawing at school. I didn't have any talent for it then and don't now: I can't draw the simplest of objects even today. But during my year in Paris (and again at the end of the period of paralysis which preceded *Plays and Games*—roughly a year beforehand) for months on end I only sketched, set down signs. In Paris I made the drawings from matches to start with: the room became simply full of matches; I had to get rid of them when I wanted to tidy up. As a reminder, I therefore tried to make drawings of them, but all that emerged from that was nonsensical jumbles. After that I drew something: there were stars at the edges and in the middle something wriggling. I still have it to the present day, and that's what I attempted to set to music in the seventh of those piano pieces. In my 1973 period I used notebooks, putting only signs on each page by pressing the pencil or pen against the paper and shaking my hand. There wasn't much difference between the signs, but it's as if a bit of them passed over into *Plays and Games*...

Childhood again... Slow processes... During my time in Timișoara, when I was seriously learning the piano, I had a rather dim opinion of my mother's playing. In my childhood, however, those pieces of music had a very special truth for some reason. She played quite a lot of the Beethoven sonatas—the 'Appassionata', the 'Pathétique', Op. 26 in A flat 'Les adieux', and Op. 2 No. 1 in F minor. The last is a particularly important memory. For me, the second subject in the first movement, or that in the last movement, stands for a primal musical comportment. Later on, in my teenage consciousness, music like that became indistinguishably uniform, but it seems that in my childhood I was good at identifying it.

All in all, I had much better hearing when I was a child than I do now. Then I could mimic everything in singing, every external noise. I don't remember when—it may have been when my voice broke, or perhaps even earlier—but there was a time when I was singing in the choir and was told to shut up because I was putting everyone else off. Ever since then, and maybe it is related to that, my sense of absolute pitch for the singing voice has gone—right up to the present day. And my acuity for other sounds too has rather tended to deteriorate.

When it comes down to it, I have the feeling that it's not necessarily my ears that do my hearing, or my eyes that do my seeing.

During my grammar-school years, the time when I was becoming conscious of my self, I read in Lützeller's history of art that architecture, to all intents and purposes, is the experiencing of space—something that envelops a person, like music, which also envelops. That experience came again in my own experiences of cathedrals, Rheims or Chartres. Chartres Cathedral, for instance, is wonderfully human in scale, of precisely the size that a person can take in, and there I had the experience that when I was not looking I could sense the space with my skin, my very spine itself. For me, it's very often like that with music too: it somehow comes across from sensibility to sensibility, I both hear and don't hear the thing. I have also come across something of that kind with people who have an extraordinarily finely developed sense of hearing: in searching for a quality,

they fail at times to notice even inaccuracies of intonation. In the recordings of rehearsals by Toscanini and Casals it is noticeable that if something is of paramount importance to them, they let other, quite significant errors go by. Toscanini runs through the second act of *Traviata*, for example, and he is so delighted to be able to sing even the part of Violetta that he isn't in the least bothered by the fact that meanwhile the orchestra is all over the place.

I had a similar experience once during the recording of the Viola Concerto. I considered that the strings were not airy enough. András Simor, the leader of the orchestra, told me afterwards that I was only satisfied with the recording when they weren't playing at all.

How important are natural sounds to you?

We've already talked about that: bird song—blackbirds above all. In Berlin, a blackbird would regularly sing on the roof of the house where I was living—a truly great artist. I was living near the botanical gardens, and the neighbourhood was simply full of birds. The blackbirds would wake up at dawn, getting on for three o'clock, and respond to one another in chorus from far and wide. I'll never forget once, after a discussion with Péter Eötvös that had stretched long into the night, we went out into the garden to listen to this concert. Birds and trees—they both remained important for a long time.

And forms?

Forms—I have such an odd relationship to them, because I'm not at all sure that... I don't see forms, or even recollect them, but I feel secure in proximity to them. I can cling to the twists of gnarled boughs without being able to reproduce them. The twists also give a necessity for structure to the music.

Yes, a necessity... That's a recurrent motif in Thomas Mann's work. In his short story about Schiller, "Schwere Stunde" (An Hour of Trial) and in one of his letters to his wife Katia he writes that talent is little more than a necessity, *Bedürfnis*, and that talent is a very heavy burden on a person. That is what the tightness of the twists in a bough means to me. For me, a line from Attila József is both reality and a programme:

Távol tar ágak szerkezetei / tartják az üres levegőt

(Far off, bare branches construct / delicate support for empty air—trans. John Bákfi).

One of my elemental musical experiences was again not purely musical: László Vidovszky's Auto-Concerto. From the very first moment, I underwent something of a Beckettian tragedy. I was deeply shaken by the tragedy and poetry of the objects that kept falling and emitting sounds every thirty seconds on the empty stage, and the extreme economy by which all this became strict musical form. The then evolving language of the New Musical Studio had an enormous role at the start of Plays and Games: daring to work with even less sound.

What about individual style and self-repetition?

My fundamental reflection here is how, at any given moment, I experience Bach. With him one is in the presence of a brain that functions like a computer, which quite simply, starting from one and the same point, runs through, over and over again, the entire range of variational possibilities of the given piece of material. If we listen to Bach compositions in poor performances, if the sound material is not perfectly articulated, interpreted, we say that one is just like another. What I mean by all that is that one has to be very careful about saying of someone, whether fifty or even a hundred years later, that he is doing the same thing, or that he went down certain avenues in the same manner.

There was a time when people were very inclined to think that Stravinsky created a neo-Classical something or other and churned out pieces in that style. From today's perspective it now looks completely different. The intervening period has demonstrated that they are 'uniform' only to a superficial listener: the pieces have become individual.

Even of Bartók, people sometimes tend to say that he repeats things that he had already made use of, and that in *Contrasts*, even at times in the Concerto, signs of a certain weariness can be discerned—that it is not pristinely new. I myself am not so fond of *Contrasts*, but I'm not sure that I am right, because it may also depend on whether I learned it thoroughly enough, whether I can judge it from the inside. At the same time, how glowingly the C major in Bartók's Rondo can round out from the very fact that I am hearing *that* C major, and not the C major of the Sonata for 2 Pianos and Percussion, or the C major of *For Children*.

How important is the problem of self-repetition for you in your own works?

It's important, important. I often forget about pieces that have already been written, and it does happen that I discover the same thing all over again. When I look back after a longer interval, the moments of weariness also stand out more; it is clear to me today which elements in my Viola Concerto have worn thinnest. At the time, interestingly, those elements struck me as specifically new or bold, perhaps because the pieces around them were even wearier or had recourse to other sources.

To stay with a recent experience: the Attila József—Fragments say many new things even in juxtaposition to Messages of the Late R.V. Trousova.

I don't know how true that is. According to András Wilhelm, for example, I am negotiating avenues that have already been negotiated. That is something that I, at the present moment, am unable to experience; maybe I will later. Undoubtedly, there is a bunch of things that, one way or another, negotiate avenues with excessive regularity that were, indeed, familiar to me long ago. It's terribly important for me, and that is how it had to be, but that might change in me.

Nevertheless, the piece is full of gestures where I am simply uninterested in whether, or not I am familiar with them. The *Lesz lágy hús mellé ifjú kalarábé* (There'll be tender meat with young kohlrabi) section [no. 15 from *Attila József Fragments*] is the same do-re-mi material, note for note, as that of the penultimate song of *S.K. Remembrance Noise*, but it finds a new voice from the very fact that in the second half it emerges from a Gregorian or folk-song-like recitative (where the text too changes: *De ez már a mi porunkból fakad* [But all this grows from our dust now]).

With the *Attila József Fragments* what I somehow wanted was for something to exist, that I can distribute like a pamphlet. For instance, *Irgalom, édesanyám...* (Mercy, mother...) [No. 18].

One is always coming back to certain problems. Right now, for instance, I feel like going back and 'placing' a major chord there over and over again. Like the F major chord in the *Twelve Microludes* for String Quartet, which always sounds on the other three strings of the two violins—and what I confront this chord with in other materials also excites me. Or there it is in the mouth-organ-like third piece (*Hommage à Borsody*) of *Plays and Games*. So one keeps on returning, from time to time, to an identical piece of material in order to map out new possibilities inherent in it. As to the point at which that wanders off into self-repetition... Certain major-chord pieces did not come off and have remained in the drawer; others I have let out of my hands, but they are not amongst the works recommended for concert performance.

We are innocents when something succeeds, as we are when it doesn't. I sometimes return home from Budaliget with the experience that I have found something quite marvellous—and it isn't. At other times, something is born within two minutes that never needs to be altered: 'Mercy, mother...', for instance. I wrote that down in pencil, and not a note has changed since then. There are numerous versions of the other pieces, and I had to return to them many times over.

In other words, what is good I receive as a gift: I am innocent in the matter. When I am as if paralysed for months or years on end, the very fact that I can write anything at all is, in itself, a great joy. That alone is a gift. I am also quite aware that the first pair of pieces are generally just a warming up, and they are discarded. Sometimes, I manage to make something good out of nothing quite by accident. But more often than not I don't. ♣

[1982–85]

Géza Fodor

Hungaroton's Verdi Recordings— A Decade and a Half On

Ernani – Kováts, Lamberti, Sass, Miller, State Opera Chorus and Orchestra, Gardelli, Philips 446 669-2, 2 CDs; • *Simon Boccanegra* – Miller, Kincses, Gregor, B. Nagy, State Opera Chorus and Orchestra, Patané, Hungaroton 512522-23, 2 CDs • *I Lombardi* – Lamberti, Sass, Kováts, Cesare, State Opera Orchestra, Chorus of the Hungarian Radio and Television, Gardelli, Hungaroton 512498/500-2, 3 CDs • *Macbeth* – Cappuccilli, Kováts, Sass, Péter Kelen, Budapest Symphony Orchestra, Chorus of the Hungarian Radio and Television, Gardelli, Hungaroton 512738-40, 3 CDs • *Attila* – Nesterenko, Sass, Miller, B. Nagy, Hungarian State Symphony Orchestra, Chorus of the Hungarian Radio and Television, Gardelli, Hungaroton 512934-35, 2 CDs

Between 1981 and 1987, the Hungaroton label produced recordings of five operas by Giuseppe Verdi: *Ernani* (1981), *Simon Boccanegra* (1983), *I Lombardi* (1984), *Macbeth* (1986), and *Attila* (1987). Apart from Hungary, the only other Socialist countries to produce sets of complete operas from the international core repertoire were the Soviet Union and Romania; in all other cases the genre was made accessible to the public through licensing deals. A number of popular works had been recorded in Hungary before then (*La Traviata*, *Rigoletto*, *Cavalleria rusticana* and *Pagliacci*, *Die Fledermaus*), but those were with performances sung in Hungarian. Thus it was only in the eighties that Hungaroton ventured into original-language recordings that could lay any claim on interest in the West, and then not

with entirely home-grown forces. Not that this was anything to be ashamed of, since in the wider world most opera recordings are made with international casts.

The programming policy adopted by Hungaroton, since Italian works predominated, was primarily built around two Italian conductors who were frequent guests in Hungary's musical life at the time: Lamberto Gardelli and Giuseppe Patané. The engagement of Italian *maestros* by Budapest's Opera already looked back on a long tradition. Since Italian works loom so large in the standard repertoire, the advantage of being able to exemplify Italian performance traditions, formal discipline, accuracy and intensity as a native was seen as practically a guarantee of interpretational authenticity. First Egisto Tango, during the second decade of the

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twentieth century, then Sergio Failoni, during the 1930s and 40s, was almost permanently active in Budapest. Both conducted a wide range of works, with Verdi naturally playing a big part. Tango both coached and conducted the company's performances of *Aida* and *Un Ballo in maschera*, whilst Failoni did the same for *La Forza del destino*, *Otello*, *Rigoletto*, *Ballo*, *Don Carlos*, *Simon Boccanegra* and *Falstaff*. Mario Rossi conducted *Il Trovatore* and *Falstaff* in the early 1940s, later returning in 1950, when Francesco Molinari-Pradelli likewise guested at the State Opera (with Otto Klemperer incidentally also doing his bit for the Verdi cult that same season in charge of *La Traviata*). Molinari-Pradelli made a return appearance in 1955, and in 1968 Gianandrea Gavazzeni rehearsed that year's production of *Don Carlos*. Lamberto Gardelli first visited Budapest in 1960, when he introduced Rossini's *Le comte Ory*, and over the next five seasons up to 1965 he brought on a long string of productions (*Macbeth*, *Manon Lescaut*, *Tosca*, *William Tell*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *La Forza del destino*, *Aida*, and *Carmen*). The State Opera was obliged to do without Gardelli's services over the following eight years—a period in which he was the linchpin for Philips' notable series of early Verdi recordings—but from 1974 he was again a relatively constant presence in Budapest, at the helm of *I Lombardi*, *La Traviata*, *Rigoletto*, *La Bohème*, *Falstaff*, *Norma*, *Ernani*, again *Manon Lescaut*, Respighi's *La fiamma* (The Flame), Ponchielli's *La Gioconda*, again *Forza*, and *Otello*. Giuseppe Patané worked in Budapest from 1979 onwards, conducting new productions of *Manon Lescaut*, *Simon Boccanegra*, *Lohengrin* and *La Traviata*.

By the time of the Hungaroton recordings, of the two, Gardelli was the more profound, the more inspired, and by then,

in older age, the more lyrical artist, whereas Patané was the more accomplished, more predictable, and more dramatic. In each recording one of the singers cast as a principal was also a foreigner, for the Verdi operas these being Giorgio Lamberti in two tenor roles, and Piero Cappuccilli and Evgeni Nesterenko in the bass-baritone eponymous roles of *Macbeth* and *Attila* respectively. At the time, with the 'Three Tenors' at the pinnacle of their success, Lamberti was rated a second- or even third-rank voice, but listening to him now, when the likes of Andrea Bocelli and José Cura are touted as stars, proves him to have been a tenor of superior class. By 1986 Cappuccilli was past the zenith of his career, but even in his decline was able to turn in an impeccable performance, whereas Nesterenko was still in the prime of his voice and artistry when he committed the part of Attila to record. The basic common ground for all three is perfect voice production. The instrument has been developed harmoniously, with due respect for its original natural endowments and capabilities, without the least sign of pushing, tightening, darkening, thinning or masking—those all too frequent flaws of voice production. The voice is perfectly homogenous, sounds with a unity of quality in all its registers and has body; it covers the entire range of the part. On this sure foundation-stone artistry and clarity of musical phrasing is built. With all three of these outstanding singers, expressiveness derives primarily from the form, the architectonics of the part, not from any adventitious, unmusical effects—the characterizing function of the vocal colouring is asserted within an overall structuring of the part. The high order of vocality, the amalgamation of natural intonation and musical phrasing, yields an optimal voice: the instrument deploys the requisite qualities of volume and local

colour in every register, over the whole compass of a part.

All the remaining forces in these five Verdi operas—orchestras, choruses and singers—were Hungarian. One question to be addressed, then, is of Hungarian contributions to these recordings, and how they relate to the guest performances. On the first three recordings the Hungarian State Opera's orchestra is playing. That was a natural choice as the records were made in conjunction with stage productions of *Ernani*, *Simon Boccanegra* and *I Lombardi* that were mounted at the Erkel Theatre under the selfsame conductors. (For those who are unfamiliar with its set-up, since 1951 the Hungarian State Opera has been able to split its operations between two quite separate buildings: the imposing, now splendidly restored nineteenth-century Opera House, located in the centre of Pest on what is again called Andrásy út, and a much larger theatre—named after Ferenc Erkel, the pioneer of Hungarian opera—which is located just off the main artery of Rákóczi út as it nears Keleti Station, where productions of the more popular, crowd-pulling opera repertoire tend to be put on.) It speaks highly for the State Opera Orchestra that it is able to convey the spirit of the works and the conductors' vision; the practice gained in live performance is palpable in an intimate familiarity with the score; on the negative side, the phrasing is skimpy and the sound a trifle pedestrian. Patané makes a better go at approaching the stringency and intensity of his stage performances of *Boccanegra*, whereas Gardelli's recorded interpretations only faintly echo the exquisite poetry of his live performances. For *Macbeth* and *Attila* Hungaroton engaged the respective services of the Hungarian Radio & TV Symphony Orchestra—they are known in English as the Budapest Symphony Orchestra—and the Hungarian

State Symphony Orchestra (now known as the National Philharmonic Orchestra). Though they rarely venture into the operatic field, they surpass the State Opera Orchestra in the punctiliousness, consistency and bloom of their sound. Much the same can be said of the choruses. In *Ernani* the State Opera Chorus is significantly boosted in important passages by the Hungarian People's Army Male Choir, whilst it competently handles the less exposed choral parts of *Boccanegra*. In *I Lombardi*, however, where the chorus has a conspicuously prominent role, the splendid Hungarian Radio & TV Chorus contributes at a standard worthy of those weighty demands, whilst in *Macbeth* the same chorus, or more specifically its female section, renders the witches' grotesque lines with supple characterizing brio. The Radio & TV Chorus likewise features most professionally in *Attila*.

Amongst the Hungarian principals, only Lajos Miller, in the roles of Don Carlos, Simone and Ezio, proves a worthy match in every respect for the magnificent foreign colleagues. Miller's voice was then in its full bloom and his international career at its peak. His lithe, clear but finely honed and subtly inflected baritone, perfectly shaped to his build, carried the day with its sure pitch and sonorously bright high notes coupled to impeccable musical phrasing. Besides him, the vocal grace displayed by Veronika Kincses in *Boccanegra* upholds the blend of naturalness and artistry that Lamberti, Cappuccilli and Nesterenko set as the norm. During the eighties few others shaped their parts with such clean, classical contours as she did. In all the other four recordings the principal female role is sung by Sylvia Sass—not, it has to be said, with uniform success. Her voice, despite its originally dark tone, is that of a lyric soprano, which is at odds with the singer's dramatic tempera-

ment and aspirations. Sass worked at resculpting her voice into a dramatic soprano, as a result of which the instrument in general only just manages to rise to the required tessitura but is not fully in command of it, whilst it leads to a distinctive flaw in vocal technique—a dominance of nasal twang in the lower and lower-middle registers, which strongly distorts the voice. Though one could carry on listing the vocal deficiencies, one cannot escape falling under the spell of her artistic suggestiveness; for all the problems, hers is a mighty talent and personality.

Similarly, the splendid bass of Kolos Kováts, also featured on four of the recordings, couples splendid, rich tone and effortlessness in both upper and lower notes with superb breath management, but is not without problems in the way it is projected. All too often, almost as if he distrusted the true quality of his marvellous instrument, he resorts to unnatural intonation, darkening and pinching, crudely explosive attacks. All the same, Kováts is highly responsive to Verdi's music and the conductors' intentions, and, for all the flaws, his vocal interpretations are inspired and thrilling. Of the two Hungarian tenors, János B. Nagy sings with a not entirely equalized but at times finely lustrous voice and with a slightly forced Italianateness, teetering between mannerism and profoundly affecting expressiveness, whereas Péter Kelen, though having only a small role in *Macbeth*, demonstrates with his one very tricky aria that Hungaroton discovered him too late—just when the company was about to discontinue its sequence of Verdi recordings. (The tenor did, however, also feature in Hungaroton recordings of Mascagni's *Lodoletta* and Respighi's *La fiamma*.)

All in all, the Hungarian contribution to the operatic refinement brought by the foreign artists is uneven. For all the abun-

dance of talent, a certain "indiscipline", deficiencies of singing technique in the vocal finish, and uncertainty of artistic self-knowledge are strikingly evident. In respect of the overall impact and final impression, however, this is all compensated, to some degree, by strength of personality and artistic presence—even more apparent on rehearing the recordings today than when they first came out. The fact is that international standards too have slipped since then, and new recordings of the core repertoire that are brought out nowadays rarely attain the standards of those from the eighties.

Of the five Verdi recordings, it is *Ernani*, the first in the series, which lives up most closely to the popular image of a Verdi opera: a big drama of passion based on the encounter and conflict of four strong, determined characters. Lamberto Gardelli accurately located and captured the opera within both the Verdi *œuvre* and operatic history. The work's glue is still the treasury of musical idiom that Verdi found ready to hand in Italy's harvest of Romantic opera, but a new, passionate, punchy melodic strand that was the young genius's own emotional temperature, intensity and style takes fire within that setting. With the old idiom in his blood like a mother tongue, and articulating it spiritedly and ardently, Gardelli sensitively reinterprets *Ernani* in its precise historical proportions, not as a historical document but as a living drama. However resolute and strong the characters of the piece, they are not lacking in surprising idiosyncracies. The eponymous bandit, for one—in reality a ruined aristocrat who pathetically chooses life as an outlaw from society. Giorgio Lamberti, through his stylish vocal refinement and his shaping of the part, makes that original nobility shine through from first to last. Don Roy Gomez de Silva is a

proud, stony-hearted Spanish grandee, but in two instances betrays his vulnerability to love, his emotional defencelessness. Kolos Kováts movingly discloses that hidden dimension both in the first part of his Act 1 aria and in the Act 2 passage beginning "Ah! io l'amo..." The biggest psychological trajectory in the piece is that undertaken by Don Carlos, the later Charles V: from the singular passion of love through royal authority and a mature man eschewing all other human vanity for the sake of imperial power to the apotheosis of conferring clemency. Lajos Miller deftly and fully essays this huge journey every step of the way, offering the highest calibre of vocal interpretation in the whole production. Elvira is the simplest of the four principal roles, which may be why it seems to have been less than inspiring for Sylvia Sass, her appearance here being the most sketchy and least personal of her four recordings. There are few recordings of *Ernani*, but the Hungaroton one—currently reissued on CD by Philips—can be regarded as very fine and authentic.

Simon *Boccanegra* does not enjoy the popularity that it deserves on its merits. The main reason for that may be because, at its heart, it offers no big love story but a reflective male hero. Yet, in its revised 1881 version (as performed here), this is one of Verdi's most profound operas. It deals with the vanity of human designs and endeavours, the fact that life does not proceed as one intends but is arranged and ordered, wisely and disturbingly, behind one's back, so to speak. The episodes that display the most profundity are the dénouements of three Recognition scenes. Simone, Doge of Genoa, recognizes his daughter Maria, whom he lost when she was a child, in Amelia Grimaldi; Gabriele Adorno recognizes the father of his beloved in his political oppo-

nent, the Doge, whom he considers his rival in love and wishes to kill; whilst when the moment for revenge arrives Jacopo Fiesco is forced to recognize Amelia as his granddaughter. Everything is transformed in meaning and significance in the light of these thunderbolt-like recognitions. The first two of these scenes deflect the plot in a positive direction, and only the third suddenly deepens the sense of tragedy (by then *Boccanegra* is fatally dwindling from poison), common to all three scenes is a resigned experience of fate that is finally declaimed by Fiesco: "*Perchè mi splende il ver sì tardi?*"—Why does the truth become clear so late? These scenes are purely lyrical, and that lyricism culminates in the final scene, when the music opens out towards transcendence as the expiring Doge's soul aspires to heaven.

The authenticity of any performance of *Boccanegra* hinges, in point of fact, on whether it can rise to these scenes. It is greatly to Giuseppe Patané's credit that he, though more in his element when character and high drama are being forged, responded to those regions of the music with great sensitivity, and was able to lead both orchestra and singers into elevated spheres of transfigured lyricism. Lajos Miller is a hero of this recording too, evoking in *Boccanegra*, with equal authenticity, the resolute and—if one can say such a thing—inspired politician as well as the father who finds himself ranged against the politician. His vocal expressiveness springs from especial depth in Act 3, when the soul, sensing the ebbing bodily strength and turning within itself, is transformed into music. Next to Miller, it is Veronika Kincses who delivers the most. In conformity with her disposition, she mainly asserts the lyrical aspect of the role, the barcarole-like poetry that so frequently dominates the part, conveying at once a sea-shimmering proximity and a profoundly

tender inner life, a female sensibility which can harness the inner and the outer, soul and landscape, in harmony. Yet there is nothing impressionistic about the manner in which she does this; Kincses shapes Verdi's lines with a legato and plasticity of Mozartian limpidity—exemplarily.

The pleasant surprise of this recording at the time it appeared was the Fiasco of József Gregor, and that is even truer today. The voice sounds unified, equalized and ample in all registers, and if it has to be admitted that the toughness of the figure—another man, like the Don Silva of *Ernani*, who is hewn from rock—is occasionally conveyed with some rawness of singing, it is still a matter of regret that this superbly gifted singer should have become typecast as a *buffo* bass and that a more serious dimension of his art was not manifested as strongly as his capabilities would have permitted. One of the recording's values, then, lies in its documenting Gregor's lesser known artistic persona, and most impressively at that. János B. Nagy's "*concitato*" singing style fortunately tallies with the embittered, hot-headed, rebellious figure of Gabriele Adorno, and the singer is able to convey the young man's naiveté, his well-intentioned fits of temper and noble pathos. The best moment of characterization, however, is how he captures Adorno's mortification after realizing that the Doge is not his beloved's seducer but her father—a moment where B. Nagy's portrayal is profoundly suggestive and affecting. By demonstrating an ability to meet the demands of this masterpiece, perhaps the least readily approachable, most contemplative and most lyrical of all Verdi's operas, this recording of *Simon Boccanegra* stands as one of Hungaroton's finest achievements.

I *Lombardi* is one of Verdi's works that was soon forgotten and long consigned to oblivion. Its rediscovery in more recent

times stems from revivals in Rome in 1970, in 1974 in Budapest and, hot on its heels, the following year at London's Covent Garden, as well as a first recording under Lamberto Gardelli in 1972 (for Philips). It would be fair to say that the real breakthrough came with the Budapest production, which—over and beyond Gardelli's key role—redounds greatly to the credit of Hungary's operatic culture, as it rehabilitated a true masterpiece. The basic quandary on which the opera is predicated is the Dantean one of man's unquenchable desire for goodness and for love, "which moves heaven and every star". Nowhere else in the Italian operatic literature is this voiced so fervently and so forcefully as in this piece. The three principals in *I Lombardi* were conceived in precisely the spirit of this dilemma: the angelic figure of Giselda is none other than a personification of goodness, love and forgiveness, whilst Pagano, by the dramatic route of crime and punishment, and Oronte, by the good offices of love, come into fateful, mystic contact with her in order that both of them should, through her, participate in that total conversion in which earthly goodness and love and heavenly goodness and love become reflections of one another. *I Lombardi* is thus the most transcendental of Verdi's operas alongside *La Forza del destino*. It is a piece that perfectly suited the spirituality of Gardelli's latter years, arguably becoming, with the Requiem, the greatest achievement of his final period.

If the illumination and rapt exaltation of the Erkel Theatre performances did not quite transfer to the goldfish bowl of the studio, the transcendental dimension still comes across in the recording, thanks not only to the conductor, orchestra and chorus but also to three of the singers. Sylvia Sass, whose portrayal of Giselda earned great acclaim in Budapest and Covent Garden alike, is in inspired form in this

recording. It is an extraordinarily taxing role, combining as it does the demands of a lyric soprano, a dramatic soprano and a coloratura soprano. Sass was able to identify with the role to the point of expanding her vocal capabilities. She has the right voice for every facet of the role, from the lyricism of the Act 1 "Salve Maria" through the tremendous pathos of the Act 2 Finale to the other-worldly ethereality of her Act 4 aria. Even if there may sometimes be a forcedness to the singing, as during the young woman's dramatic challenge when she is seeking to stay the world's madness in the Act 2 Finale, one does not necessarily feel that this is due to the singer's vocal limitation: it can be interpreted as a constraint of the role, for what we have here is a gentle soul taking upon herself a task that demands real heroism.

The figure of Pagano, great villain and great penitent, is perhaps the most rounded interpretation that Kolos Kováts delivered in his singing career. The sheer complexity of the part—the initial despicable behaviour and blind, murderous passion later being overtaken by a desire for purification, a yearning for redemption out of faith, evangelical rapture and, finally, relief in salvation—brought the full scale of the singer's creative capabilities and reserves into play, and Kováts scaled exceptional heights of characterization. In this role his dark but richly nuanced, warm and homogeneous instrument achieved a consummation of its values, and it is a part which the singer's marvellous breath control, his ability to husband his breath to give a continuous flow of sound through to the end of the long melodic lines, acquires artistic significance: in the monologue at the start of Act 2 and in the finale of Act 3, the Hermit's long phrases soar up to God in one unbroken sweep. It is gratifying that this first-rate but not always consistent singer's most complete interpretation

should be preserved in its entirety on record.

The third outstanding individual achievement is that of Giorgio Lamberti. Admittedly, the voice evinces a more mature figure than the naive Oronte, youthful both in his love and in his longing for conversion (a role that Péter Kelen sang supremely well in the stage production), but the tonal and formal purity of his singing convey the nobility of soul which will be fulfilled in the baptism of the Muslim-born boy and Giselda's vision of heavenly apotheosis. The part of Arvino, Giselda's father and Pagano's brother, is likewise sung by an Italian, Ezio di Cesare, with a well-trained heroic tenor voice but with a younger bloom than is appropriate to a father role.

This recording of *I Lombardi* contributed back then, and still contributes, to the apprehension that this piece is not one of Verdi's "minor" works but has a rightful place amongst his masterpieces. Signs that this has finally been taken on board, after a long delay, include its subsequent mounting in Verona's Arena and a more recent Decca recording, brought out in 1997, though that—for all its stellar casting—does not begin to approach the spirit of the Hungaroton recording.

Macbeth was Verdi's first great creative encounter with Shakespeare, the dramatist he esteemed above all others. What is usually accentuated is the huge distance that separates this work, written as a young man (though Verdi did partially revise it later on), from the late Shakespeare-inspired masterpieces of *Otello* and *Falstaff*. What ought to be underscored just as much is that several of the work's passages—notably Macbeth's Act 1 scenes, both alone and with Lady Macbeth, and the Sleepwalking scene in Act 4—fully measure up to those later standards. For Gardelli this recording was

not his first encounter with the work: he had already performed it at the Erkel Theatre in the early 1960s and even recorded it for Decca in 1971. The 1986 Hungaroton sessions show that the dramatic flair of his younger years lived on in, and could still be drawn on by, the more lyrical, serene Gardelli. Under him *Macbeth* does not have the feel of an elderly Maestro's performance: it is a tautly shaped, fiery, shattering drama.

A decisive hand in making it so, apart from the Hungarian State Orchestra's contribution, is played by the two principals, Piero Cappuccilli and Sylvia Sass. Cappuccilli had already recorded the part ten years previously under Abbado (for Deutsche Grammophon), and huskier though the voice may be in occasional passages, its expressive power is more intense, more extreme and more profound in the later production. The strength of this great baritone's portrayal is drawn from the rigour and self-containedness with which it is shaped, the solidity of the part's structure, with the singer breaking through that pure form towards prosodic *verismo* only now and again in a borderline situation, where a cry, an inarticulate outburst, reinforces the effect. It reinforces where a less discriminating application of this risky approach would have discredited both singer and role, for one of Cappuccilli's greatest artistic virtues lies in his infallible sense of proportion. Not that the primacy given to shaping means that all we get is sketchiness and structure: within the character sketch and structure, the singer precisely calibrates the inflection of every phrase and word, which greatly contributes to the plasticity of the interpretation. Cappuccilli's *Macbeth* is a large-scale, evocative figure both in his frenzies of activity and his slumps, poignant first in his intimation and later his recognition of his fate.

It is gratifying to be able to say that the great guest has a worthy partner in Sylvia Sass. The complexity and inner grandeur of the Lady Macbeth role inspired the singer to the utmost, pushing her to a peak of her artistry. We know that in this role Verdi considered accuracy and suggestiveness of diction, a speech-like shading of articulation and differentiated expression, more important than sheer vocal beauty. Sass is unrivalled in the thoroughness with which she worked out the role. She mixes the inflections of words and phrases with astounding subtlety and calculatedness, without letting the vocal characterization slip into mere details, because the individual points are held together in a tight line by the unity of a significant personality of major stature. The big, dark figure that is Sass's Lady Macbeth casts a tragic shadow on the entire performance, veritably radiating her will, yet she is not the entirely monstrous figure of so many other recordings but also a living, flesh-and-blood figure, which implies weakness and fragility as well, and this is revealed in the Sleepwalking scene. In Sass's performance this grows more organically out of the figure than is usually the case. Rather than try to take the likes of Leonie Rysanek, Birgit Nilsson, Fiorenza Cossotto or Shirley Verrett as models, she remains true here, as in other roles, to her longtime inspiration, Maria Callas, in her emulation of the responsiveness and inflection of the diva's Lady Macbeth portrayal. In the figure that she created strength and overweening will, human *grandeur* and *human scale*, fuse in a complex totality. Sass takes the principal female role on four of Hungaroton's Verdi recordings, and there is no doubt that she is at her best in the hardest of these, that of Lady Macbeth, with an achievement that measures up to the world class of the foreign artists. We can also hear great artistry in two smaller

but still important roles: Kolos Kováts is quite superb as Banquo, whilst in the role of Macduff, which amounts to little more than a single, albeit fiendishly difficult, aria, Péter Kelen gives moving voice to his grief over the death of his children and the plight of the Scottish refugees suffering under despotism. This is a *Macbeth* that stands comparison with other sets, of which there are no few.

The last of Hungaroton's Verdi projects was *Attila*. This is one of the composer's early patriotic operas, inspired by his longing for a liberated Italy, but equally a product of the creative period that Verdi was to call his "years in the galley", when the Italian public was continually demanding one new work after another and he was unable to free his composing energies from external shackles. *Attila* is not, it has to be conceded, one of his great operas: much of the time it brings no more than the workaday musical idiom of Italian Romantic opera and, by then, of Verdi's own works; only in the occasional passage does it truly acquire substance and inspiration. Yet it still deserves some attention, if only on account of the title-role. *Attila* is one of the heroic monster figures of Italian opera, an heir of the title-part of Rossini's *Maometto Secondo* and the Henry VIII of Donizetti's *Anna Bolena*. His figure towers oppressively above the other roles and settles on them. He alone has any real character; the other figures are little more than silhouettes, with any psychology there is being invested in Odabella, daughter of the ruler of Aquileia, concealing her vengeance as she lives in Attila's entourage and almost wedding the Hun leader before she ultimately murders him.

With this recording of the opera Gardelli was, as it were, revisiting the Seventies, when he laid down a whole series of early Verdi operas, including *Attila*, for Philips.

The by now ageing conductor reignites within himself the flames of Verdi's Risorgimento and manages to evoke this one more time with conviction. The singing laurels go unequivocally to Evgeni Nesterenko in the title-role. His perfectly trained, completely homogeneous and nobly toned bass succeeds in creating the monster without the least hint of coarseness in the vocal characterization. The perfection of the moulding and structuring, the evenness and fluency of the vocal delivery, evoke the powerful ruler because the singer's huge personality radiates out of the vocal presence at all times. A subtle part in this derives from Nesterenko being a Slavonic bass, without the voice being dominated by that guttural timbre which gives the great Russian and Bulgarian basses their special piquancy and impact; it is a timbre that is nevertheless present in the voice as a barely detectable inflection that unobtrusively reinforces its effect. But the grandeur of the figure is created by the combined suggestiveness of the significance of the singer's personality and the high degree of musicality of his shaping of the part—a reliance on purely musical means that Nesterenko abandons at only one point, the very end, when Odabella stabs Attila and in dying he groans "*Et tu pure, Odabella?...*" Yet even at this moment it is not so much the naturalism of the death that dominates as Attila's surprise, which gains weight from this exceptional effect.

Interestingly, Sylvia Sass sings with much more personal expressiveness in the rather simple and seemingly not overly inspiring role of Odabella than she did as the Elvira of *Ernani*. Her scene and love-song at the opening of Act 1, after the Prologue, is the finest passage of the entire record: here Gardelli and Sass, perfectly attuned and inspiring one another to music-making of an exalted order, scale true heights of operatic poetry. The sketchy role of Ezio, the Roman

legionary commander, gives Lajos Miller no opportunity for rich or profound character portrayal, but all the more for a spirited and brilliant display of his flawless instrument. By comparison, on the set that EMI recorded two years later, Giorgio Zancanaro, regarded as the leading baritone of the day, struggles painfully to match up to this same role. Foresto, the knight from Aquileia, is sung by János B. Nagy, but this totally schematic figure truly offers the singer nothing more than a test of his general intonation, which the tenor is able to fulfil at a creditable standard. It is hardly likely that *Attila* will ever become a popular Verdi opera, but it is a work not entirely lacking in merit, so it is no bad thing that Hungaroton should have made it available in a world-class recording.

Prior to 1990, Hungaroton was a state-owned company and had the inestimable benefit of generous state subsidies. This put it in a position where it could not only set up recordings of such large-scale works as the Verdi operas but also invite participation from singers of international rank. With the divestment of

state assets that followed the country's change in régime, Hungaroton became a privately owned company and in the process lost its subsidies. The profit-driven considerations of an exclusively market economy, however, mean that it has become commercially unviable to record major opera productions in Hungary, and this has obliged Hungaroton to retreat from its former commitment to the genre.

The five Verdi pieces that Hungaroton recorded over the course of the Eighties form a spiritual unity. In their spirit and, for all their unevennesses, in their quality too, they are worthy of the works, holding their own, and at times even surpassing, the Verdi recordings of the present day. If we look back at them from the standpoint of Hungary's domestic recording industry today, we can regard them as documents of a Golden Age. They stand not merely as artistically impressive achievements in their own right, but also as feats of publishing policy. Whilst this in no way defines their value, a part in the emotional slant with which they are appraised is that we know that the venture has no continuation—nor will it have. ♣

Paul Griffiths

Shadowplay

New Recordings by Péter Eötvös

Atlantis. Budapest Music Center Records BMC 007 • Vocal Works. Budapest Music Center Records BMC 038 • *Three Sisters*. DG 459 694 • *Psalm 151, Psy, Triangel*. BIS 948 • *Chinese Opera, Shadows, Steine*. Kairos 0012982 • Bartók/Kurtág/Eötvös—Kim Kashkasian. ECM 1711 • Donaueschinger Musiktage 1999, *col legno* WWE 2CD 20075

Péter Eötvös, born in Transylvania in 1944, has probably heard more music of the last fifty years than anyone else in the world. After going through the thorough schooling of the Budapest Academy of Music he moved to Cologne, where he joined Karlheinz Stockhausen's electronic ensemble. In the late seventies he transferred from playing to conducting, and since then, as one of the foremost conductors of contemporary music, he has been performing works by John Cage, Harrison Birtwistle, Pierre Boulez, György Ligeti, György Kurtág and many others.

His own music—for he has gone on composing all this while—shows the marks of experience. It has a virtuoso performer's technical brilliance. It also has traces of the tangy folk-tune style of Ligeti and Kurtág, of Boulez's scintillations and of Stockhausen's ambient, ambiotic harmony. But increasingly Eötvös has been going off at high speed on his own spectacular tangent, which recent recordings have started to scan. Just within the last year or so have come his opera *Three Sisters*, seven orchestral works and a couple of smaller pieces, all composed between 1993 and 1999.

One recurring interest of his is in new orchestral layouts, and hence in new aural perspectives and new relationships between soloists and groups. In *Shadows*, for example, the stage is occupied by two soloists, on flute and clarinet, standing in front of two string quintets and modest percussion, while quintets of woodwinds and brass play unobserved. Relationships of object and shadow abound. At the start, and again in the slow, sinuous double cadenza that forms most of the third, last and longest movement, the flute seems to be the extension, or shadow, of the clarinet. The two solo instruments also throw shadows within the woodwind and brass groups, and there is, too, shadowing that can only be imagined in listening to a recording, between visible and invisible music: the musicians on stage and those unseen, whether they are being heard from offstage and via amplification.

Shadows is an appealing and fascinating piece, and duly appears on two of the new records, played by Klangforum Wien in their Eötvös collection (Kairos 0012982 KAI) and by the South West Radio Symphony Orchestra in an anthology of

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German radio recordings (Budapest Music Center Records BMC CD 007), in both cases with the composer conducting. The Klangforum version is to be preferred for its incisiveness and beautiful depth of sound, so important to this three-dimensional music. Also, the main companion piece is the bright *Chinese Opera*, also for chamber orchestra, in which Eötvös seems to have been stimulated not so much by the music of Chinese theatre (except where its quickly stopped crashes of gongs are concerned) as by the vibrant colours of the costumes and the language of gesture. The BMC programme offers a much more spaced-out score—*Atlantis* for orchestra with intermittent solo voices, written towards, or perhaps instead of, an opera dealing with the doomed civilization—as well as *Psychokosmos*, a piece for cimbalom and orchestra, in which the soloist appears to be telling a story, illustrated or frustrated by orchestral groupings.

This same concerto style operates in *Replica* for viola and orchestra, which is marvelously performed by Kim Kashkashian with the Netherlands Radio Chamber Orchestra under the composer on a record (ECM 1711) that also includes two other Hungarian works for viola and orchestra: the Bartók Concerto, in the version by Tibor Serly, and the first movement of Kurtág's early concerto, a movement the composer describes as 'a romantical ballad' and which he now wants heard alone. Like *Shadows*, *Replica* remakes orchestral geography: the wind move to the front, with the violins, cellos and basses behind, hiding the five subsidiary violas that most strongly compete with the soloist. Eötvös describes the work as an aria, and relates it to his Chekhov opera, each act of which takes the viewpoint of one of the sisters and culminates in a feeling of farewell that is protracted and stifled, the farewell of someone who is not going anywhere.

Replica is a song of departure throughout, delivered by a soloist entrapped in the harmonies of the orchestra and in its beguiling sonorities: luminous wind chords, solemn invocations and more peremptory summonses from the brass, high distant skies of string harmonics, the folksy wheeze of the accordion.

Replica and *Shadows*, which stand among Eötvös's strongest pieces, both take place in shadow lands where musical ideas are at once strongly expressive and overcast by an aura of doubt and the possibility of misapprehension. They share also a sense of the orchestra, newly arranged, as a group of people conveying information not only to an audience but to one another, and in other pieces—*Steine*, which is on the Klangforum album, or *Triangel*, a percussion concerto recorded by Zoltán Rácz with the UMZE Chamber Ensemble, once more with the composer conducting (BIS CD 948)—players are brought into situations where they can make creative decisions. (Also on this record is a percussion solo, *Psalms 151*, played by Rácz, and a short, very appealing offshoot from *Psychokosmos*—*Psy*—performed by Rácz on marimba with Gergely Ittész on flute and Miklós Perényi on cello.)

In one of the ten aural pictures that make up *Triangel*, for instance, the soloist chooses chords to play on glass bells and those same chords are imitated by orchestral musicians blowing on tuned bottles. The other movements feature similarly close interplays between soloist and members of the ensemble, as when steeldrums and strings chase after each other in toccata-like motion or brass and gongs call back and forth. The result is more a set of energetic images than a unified composition, but equally the work is part of that larger composition that is Eötvös's whole expressed musical world. *Triangel*, *Replica*,

Psychokosmos and *Shadows* belong together in general aspects of style, such as their use of space and their engaging atmosphere of musical story-telling, and also in such particularities as their use of percussion white noise to create backgrounds—backgrounds out of which music emerges and into which it disappears.

Two other recordings present vocal works. *Two Monologues* for baritone and orchestra, an offshoot from *Three Sisters*, is combined with pieces Eötvös wrote in his twenties on a second album from Budapest Music Center Records (BMC 038), and *As I Crossed a Bridge of Dreams* for female narrator with voices, solo instruments and ensemble, features in a double album of recordings from the 1999 Donaueschingen Festival (*col legno* WWE 2CD 20075). In these works the narrative impulse in Eötvös's music-making can be more overt. *As I Crossed* sets entries from the diary of a Japanese gentlewoman of almost a thousand years ago: anecdotes that come from a distant world, but one that touches ours closely in the directness and intimacy of the telling. The narrating voice (Claire Bloom's) is, in typical Eötvös fashion, shadowed with sympathy, poetry and sometimes humour, all in several dimensions: by three other speaking, whispering voices, by solo instruments that suggest a masculine presence alongside or even within the lady narrator (trombone, tuba, sousaphone), by an orchestra that sometimes imitates the narrator's rhythms, and finally by a computer-tuned piano, whose

bell-like chords and splashy figures conclude the work.

Two Monologues is a fine, tight condensation of some aspects of *Three Sisters*. The work brings together arias for the lyrical Tuzenbach and the more solemn Andrey, accompanied by an orchestra liberally spiked with tuned percussion, and closed by a viola solo that ties a link also to the opera's other pendant, *Replica*. It is strongly delivered here by Wojtek Drabowicz, with the composer again conducting the South West Radio Symphony Orchestra.

The earlier pieces—presented in period recordings—come from a more experimental phase in Eötvös's creative life, around the time he was working with Stockhausen. Their means are very different: *Tale* and *Cricketmusic* are tape compositions, made from recordings of a Hungarian storyteller and of crickets, while *Insetti galanti*, another insect piece, resets a Gesualdo madrigal text for twelve voices, and *Harakiri* is for Japanese female vocalist with two shakuhachi and the ominous sounds of someone chopping wood. Even so, they share a lot with the composer's later music, including an unsettling uncertainty of viewpoint contributed by layers of irony and outright comedy, a precision of compositional technique, a fascination with folk and exotic music. Moreover, *Tale*, *Insetti galanti* and, in a way, *Cricketmusic* are all as deeply dependent on the sounds of voices and languages as are *Three Sisters* and *As I Crossed*, while the interweaving shakuhachi of *Harakiri* provide an early intimation of Eötvös's shadowplay. ■

Tamás Koltai

Hungarian Ritual

Mihály Vörösmarty: *Csongor és Tünde* (Csongor and Tünde) • Pongrác Kacsóh – Jenő Heltai – Yvette Bozsik: *János vitéz* (John the Valiant) • László Németh: *Bodnárné* (Mrs Bodnár) • Béla Pintér: *Népi rablét* (A People in Prison); *Kórház – Bakony* (Hospital – Bakony); *A sehova kapuja* (The Gate to Nowhere)

Ritual is definitely in short supply in Hungarian drama. In earlier periods this was not so, but this certainly holds true for most of the 20th century. One reason is that *fin-de-siècle* naturalist influences lingered on too long, eradicating all traces of abstraction, stylizing and the poetic. Hungarian drama greatly suffered from this dominance of Naturalism; bound to everyday life, playwrights usually set their stories in working class districts or in bourgeois salons and showed little interest in the fantastic.

Yet abstract plays based on ritual were not all that rare in Hungary. The great Romantic poet Mihály Vörösmarty (the bicentenary of his birth was celebrated recently) wrote a philosophical tale *Csongor and Tünde*. A poet with a distinctly modern voice, he was much given to contemplating the human condition (his translations of *Julius Caesar* and *King Lear* are still being performed). Vörösmarty coincidentally completed his work more or less at the same time as Goethe finished his *Faust*, in 1831. One cannot, of course, compare Goethe's pivotal work, which he had continued to polish all his life, with the poetic

tale of a thirty-year-old Hungarian poet. Still, both plays share the same inspiration, the same intellectual élan, and the same drive to understand the world in its totality. Csongor, the hero, who chases an elusive mirage not meant for mortals to behold, is of a Faustian constitution. Chasing Tünde, the ideal fairy, he keeps bungling his chances and he only catches up with her in the kingdom of the fairies. According to Friedrich Gundolf's analysis of *Faust*, the high stakes pack life into a single "timeless moment." Vörösmarty divides the entire range of human attitudes into three groups, allotting each to three symbolic figures: the Merchant, the Prince and the Scholar. Twice the possessors of money, power and knowledge cross Csongor's path. First when they set out to conquer the world, and next when they return empty-handed. None of them has discovered any meaning to the world. Only other-worldly existence can offer redemption. "Love alone is awake"—this is the concluding line of Vörösmarty's play. This conclusion is in harmony with the end of Faust's second part, when Pater Ecstaticus, a spiritual soarer himself, says

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"...so that what's trivial may evanesce / and love's lasting core shine as a constant star." (Trans. by Stuart Atkins)

Although Vörösmarty could not have read *Faust* in 1831, his romantic play was in line with the fundamental dramatic and philosophical trends of the age. This is why György Lukács could say of *Csongor és Tünde*: "...of all the Hungarian dramas, this one is the liveliest, and perhaps the only truly organic creation." While this conclusion is debatable (especially the "only"), the reception of the play was all the more depressing in the light of such a claim. In 1844, when Vörösmarty anonymously submitted it to a panel of judges, of which he was, incidentally, a member, the eminent members of the panel flatly rejected it; worse than that, they had no recollection of the piece that had appeared in print thirteen years earlier. In comparison, *Faust* had, by then, been firmly established in the German theatrical tradition. It was not until 1879, twenty-four years after Vörösmarty's death, that the eminent director, Ede Paulay decided to stage the play in the National Theatre. By that time *Faust* had had more than five hundred performances in Henry Irving's Lyceum Theatre in London.

Like *Faust*, Vörösmarty's play poses a challenge to any production, and flawless productions are rare. The play follows the pattern of folk tales, and for that reason it is often mistaken for a children's play, regardless of its heavy pessimism about the human condition. It is, of course, much easier to perform the ritual folktale, with the young hero's wanderings in search of happiness, his adventures shared with his peasant servant, and the hustle and bustle of the underage devils, which is the play's recurring "comic element", than it is to render the play's intellectual message. This production by the

Pesti Magyar Színház leaves much to be desired. (This is the old National Theatre company under a new name. The company was deprived of its original name on the grounds that the new National Theatre has been legally established, and once the construction of the new theatre building is complete, a new company will presumably be engaged.) István Iglódi's direction abandons the folk tale traditions; it employs neither the customary folk ornaments for the costumes and the set nor the ritual theatrical gags associated with them. Visually, the production has been conceived in the spirit of modern design, which is incidentally its strongest point. The apple tree, central to the dramatic plot, is an artefact of metal and textile; the symbolic female character of the Night wears a train that spreads to the entire width of the stage. A bright curtain of light dazzles the audience to create the illusion of a fairy tale. The actors' performances are no match for the special effects, and so the message doesn't come across.

One of its critics described *John the Valiant* as the greatest Hungarian success of the 20th century. In a sense this is true, considering that ever since its premiere in 1904, the various productions of the musical have never failed to draw large audiences. But unlike Viennese operettas by Hungarian authors, such as Emeric Kálmán's *Gypsy Princess* or Franz Lehár's *The Merry Widow*, it never quite captured an audience abroad. And yet, its sentimental musical score, charmingly naïve story line and romantic appeal dressed in the "folk costumes of the Hungarian *puszta*", should have destined it for international popularity. Many critics believe that the reason for this is that, unlike its rivals with their librettos following the Viennese recipe, *John the Valiant* was an adaptation of the time-honoured genre of the popular

play. One of the eminent directors of the early 20th century, Sándor Hevesi, pointed this out when he wrote that "here the employment of the old popular plays' folk tale nature and playful character is deliberate." This was the "ritual" source that might have been able to sustain the Hungarian theatre, had it not dried up too soon.

Naturally, *John the Valiant* is not hundred per cent authentic folk art—regardless of the fact that it was based on the great 19th-century poet, Sándor Petőfi's narrative poem of the same title;¹ it is more a product of urban folklore, of Budapest show biz. It offers an idealized representation of the most Hungarian of all Hungarian soldiers, the hussars. The play's main character, who is still called Johnny Grain o'Corn in the first part, earns the name of John the Valiant when he, as captain of hussars, drives the Turkish invaders out of France. A poor orphan employed as the village's shepherd, he was forced to enlist as a hussar by the evil machinations of his beloved Juliska's stepmother. John the Valiant becomes France's celebrated national hero, but he accepts neither the kingdom nor the princess as a reward. On learning of the death of Juliska, he takes to the road in search of her, in the manner of Orpheus. He discovers her in the kingdom of the fairies, the same place where Csongor discovered his Tünde. But in sharp contrast with Petőfi's poem where János vitéz stays on as "the merry prince of the beautiful land of the fairies", the play's hero returns to the mirage haunted Hungarian village in the *puszta*.

Jenő Heltai wrote lyrics in an ironic vein to accompany the somewhat sentimental story, and a young composer, Pongrácz Kacsóh, provided the charming musical

score. The title role went to the era's celebrated prima donna and female idol, Sári Fedák. Much has been said about the eroticism of the breeches part, when in fact there is a simple explanation for it: Fedák wanted to be in the play even though she was unable to sing the coloraturas of the French princess. This was how the run of several hundreds (or thousands) of *John the Valiant* performances began. The devastating success of the musical is evidenced in the fact that the Hungarian State Opera has plans to stage a production in its subsidiary venue designed to cater to "popular" tastes.

Recently there has been a tendency to produce "variations" of the piece, two of which are currently running: the Csiky Gergely Színház of Kaposvár sets the scene of the first part in a flood situation. The sky with a rainbow looks down on people piling sandbags on the riverbank. One man uses his own body to plug a hole in the dam. John Grain o'Corn is throwing stones across the river before starting his first aria. The hussars' banner must be recovered from the flood. First the current national flag, with the crown and the coat-of-arms, is floating down the river; then comes the 1956 flag with a hole in the centre (the revolutionaries cut out the Communist emblem), and finally the banner of the 1848 Revolution. People argue about the propriety of using a broom handle instead of the flag's original staff, and whether the silk could be substituted with something else, considering that this is an official symbol of the Hungarian Republic. A current political blasphemy is a parody on the patriotism of popular plays. In a state of emergency anything goes; for example, a woman in the crowd gives birth

1 ■ The latest English translation of Petőfi's poem, completed in 1844, was made by the American poet John Ridland under the title *John the Valiant*. It was published in 1999 in Budapest by Corvina. For a review, see No. 160 of *The Hungarian Quarterly* – Ed.

to a healthy baby. The tableau of the flag's consecration is followed by the lively, and rather surrealistic, scene of John leaving the stage through a gap in the sky that splits right next to the rainbow.

The young director Attila Réthly undermines all three "Hungarian rites": those of the popular play, of the idyllic folk tale, and of the operetta. Abounding in mirrors and staircases, the stage suddenly splits when the hussars march in. Firing guns appear on the barbican covered with aluminium foil, while on both sides we see corpses lying on wagons, arranged in an aesthetical manner. An interpreter fluent in Turkish, French and Hungarian ensures communication. The victorious Hungarian flag replaces the EU flag with a circle of stars on a black field. But it is Fairyland that gets the worst treatment from the director. Dressed in black and wearing bowler hats, the orchestra is seated on the empty stage, behind a curtain of tulle. A choir in funeral dress stands on the first floor of the auditorium. Jancsi and Juliska, the latter also wearing black, meet in the door of the fire curtain, which shuts on them. Only the choir remains, singing their unaccompanied lament on the first floor. Apparently, Fairyland is where we are.

The internationally acclaimed dancer and choreographer Yvette Bozsik produced a peculiar version of *John the Valiant* for the Budapest Katona József Theatre. She has categorically cast aside the operetta tradition, complementing Pongrácz Kacsóh's score with some playback music, ranging from Brahms to Kodály, from Liszt to György Ligeti, and from the Finnish Toivo Karki to Gilbert Bécaud. She goes back to Petőfi's original text, while also borrowing elements from the myths of commercial culture (for example, Superman), but above all building her production on the tradition of the dance theatre. She seems

to be bound up in the endless surrealist possibilities offered by the uninhibited eclecticism of Kacsóh's operetta.

The story's myth is of the essence here. In the role of the narrator we see the director herself, wearing a knitted cap and gllasses. She is reading Petőfi's poem from a pop-up book. The cover page shows the sky with a fleece of clouds and some domestic animals flying in true Chagallian manner, and the same motifs are repeated on a large scale on the backdrop. And there are further associated fables. We get Grimm's hag and Superman. The latter is the oppressed hero's role model, appearing on stage in his familiar costume, with the initials JV (János vitéz) across his chest. Therefore, Johnny Grain o' Corn the shepherd boy and John the Valiant the hero appear as two different characters. One is the clown and the other is the leading man of the operetta. The former pulls faces and moves like a puppet on strings, the latter is an idolized man, a hero and a movie star, and even an aerial acrobat and a pleasant baritone, thanks to the playback technique.

Frolicsome fantasy operates the eclecticism of music, dance and choreography. The characters ride on pommel horses to Brahms' *Hungarian Dances*. The French Royal court gives a revue performance in the contemporary style of the Folies Bergères. This cheeky production finishes almost in the same vein as the Kaposvár version. A choir dressed in uniform comes on stage to sing a piece by Kodály, in the manner of the televised talent shows popular in the 1970s and 1980s. Finally the director/narrator shuts the fairy tale book and closes the performance.

László Németh, whose achievements as a novelist and an essayist are also considerable, wrote plays between the 1930s and the 1960s. His slow-moving historical and

social dramas—the distinction was made by himself—were once frequently staged but, somewhat outmoded, they hardly ever get a showing now. The 100th anniversary of his birth inspired revivals of a couple of his plays, including the social drama *Mrs Bodnár*. A tragedy set in peasant surroundings, the play has the character of an ancient Greek tragedy, in harmony with the author's intentions; in actual fact, it is a socially motivated crime story. Mrs Bodnár, a well-to-do peasant woman, has two sons. She raises her favourite, Péter, as a gentleman, giving him a good education and spoiling him rotten, while working the other one, János, to death as an unpaid farmhand, and treating him as a "savage peasant". Péter takes a bride from town: a haughty coquettish woman, who openly flirts with the despised, ridiculed and infatuated brother at a ball. The two men get into a fight and János, the short-tempered and humiliated "savage peasant", kills his brother. In order to save her only surviving son, the mother makes desperate attempts to present the murder as an accident, defending to the last minute her cheated, despised and murderous son against the other one, her favourite.

Németh developed the theme in four long parts, using static and complicated scenes and plenty of dialogue. The Szigligeti Theatre of Szolnok introduced extensive cuts and simplifications, keeping approximately one-third of the text at the most. Aware of the Greek tragedy character of the play, the director István Verebes created a production of rhetorical, ritual simplicity. Instead of the locations designated by the author with naturalistic detail, the stage is a single pulpit, framed with walls made of canvas. A few pieces of peasant Baroque furniture are scattered around, indicating space rather than being of functional use. The characters hardly move; they speak in an economic manner,

with penned-up emotions and terse rhetoric. The story line is interspersed with brief scenes, with the stage darkening in between and the actors assuming new postures, continuing the play from the next "ready" position. In this way the inexorable tragedy is emphasized rather than the social and psychological elements. In theatrical form at least, a Hungarian rite is born.

The production could not have had the same power without the contribution of a great actress, Mari Törőcsik, in the title role. Diminutive in physique, Mari Törőcsik is now the grande dame of the Hungarian stage, internationally acclaimed for her film work (Cannes Film Festival gave her its award for lifetime achievement). Her Mrs Bodnár is like a village Clytemnestra. Regardless of the actress' birdlike features, in Törőcsik's rendering the character becomes truly terrifying at the appropriate moment. Blinded by the desire of social elevation, the completely dehumanized tragic heroine, instead of being struck down by the fatal recognition, meets her fate without so much as a cry, in complete calm and composure.

Béla Pintér, first a folk dancer, a promising young talent, creates ritual in the capacity of writer, actor and director of his own alternative theatre group. Pintér was very likely inspired by folk music and folk dance to create their mythology. In his three directions up to date, both played an essential part.

Népi rablét (as well as being an anagram of Pintér's name, means the people's imprisoned existence) provides an infinite ritual of a village wedding. Alongside the dancing with the bride into the wee hours, the various musical pieces combine folk songs, modern hits, and worthless kitsch. The night of carousing offers a ruthlessly grotesque picture of prejudices, false ideas and primitive traditions all drenched in

alcohol. Pintér's second production entitled *Hospital—Bakony* contrasts everyday life with the legends. This performance is like a surreal dream. The tragicomic events of a hospital ward mix with a genuine Hungarian legend—romanticized highwaymen—in the manner of a montage. The parody is biting, once again using the contrast of typical "ritual" populism.

Last in the line of Pintér productions is *A sehova kapuja* (The Gate to Nowhere). The title is another pun: this time on *Jehova tanuja* (Jehova's Witness). The topic is sectarianism, and not merely in the religious sense of the term. It is about the abuse of religion, faith and love, and about their commercialism. It is about clothes we wear as costumes. About rites that turn hollow at best or quite simply serve as an opportunity to do business. About preaching that conceals weakness and deceit. The sect of the "*Sehova*" sets out to do missionary work among the Hungarian minority of Romania. As before, two worlds are being mingled. The director juxtaposes, in parenthesis, the sickeningly sweet, profaned/Americanized public relations exercise in religion, with all the waves and the hallelujahs, and the rustically simple, even naïve version of the Catholic ceremony. This double vision runs through the entire performance. The disguise of a missionary meets the costume of a fake folknik. On board a train heading for Transylvania, a young man

dressed in a spurious folk costume seems easy prey, too good to miss. There is a hitch, however: the young man comes from a folk dance function, hence the costume. In other respects, he drinks like a fish and swears like a drill sergeant. In the course of the discussion, proselytizer and convert both blow their covers, and do so amidst a great deal of confusion. While the shrewd and cynical chief sectarian is obliged to conceal his "mission", he must do his best to save his recent convert, a neophyte "brother", from instinctively running into the fake folknik's vulgarism. Eventually, the young man in folk costume gives away his latent homosexuality. This is too much for the hypocritical moral preacher. On top of everything, the Transylvanian priest in the middle of confession is all over a lonesome and lovesick nursery school teacher in her early forties, who has fallen in love with a boy from Budapest, not yet corrupted by the sect. The teacher is the only one who still possesses the ability to love. When the missionary activities finally deteriorate into an orgy, she is the only one who is let off the obligation to enter the "Gate to Nowhere". She stands in front of it, singing a beautiful and pure song.

Pintér's malice is targeted at commercial enterprise, both church and secular, which offers us pseudo salvation, the plague of our age. Injected into Hungarian ritual, the effect is even more frenetic. ■

Erzsébet Bori

In the Shadow of a Masterpiece

Film Week 2001

Werckmeister Harmóniák (Werckmeister Harmonies) • *Anarchisták* (Anarchists) • *I Love Budapest* • *Torzók* (Abandoned) • *Vakvagányok* (Blindguys) • *Tündérdomb* (Fairy Hill) • *Üvegtigris* (Glass Tiger) • *Az utolsó vacsora az Arabs Szürkénél* (Last Supper at the Arabian Grey Horse) • *Öcsögök* ('Ickfaces) • *Sohasevolt Glória* (Neverbeen Gloria) • *Moszkva tér* (Moscow Square) • *Macerás ügyek* (Difficult Issues)

This year everything was different. The long battle between the Budapest Conference Centre and the Corvin Cinema as a venue was decided in favour of a third location, a brand new multiplex in the Mammut shopping centre. Although quite a few in the cinema and arts world took offence over the siting of the Film Week in the Mammut, only Béla Tarr was able, and had the courage, to refuse to show his film there. Consequently, his *Werckmeister Harmonies*, the festival's opening film, had its Hungarian première at the Átrium, appointed as the festival's première cinema. Other Budapest cinemas started to screen the film at the same time. This was the Átrium's swan song, a prestigious cinema and an Art Deco gem that deserved a kinder fate, the festival marking its closure. Traditional film theatres are waging a losing battle with multiplex cinemas, and the conflict between the film profession and the government over a draft bill on cinemas seemed to peak during the festival. It was almost as if we had two festivals: there was the official, "millennial", event, and a second one associated with the film profession. The face-off turned out

to be more even than expected, the profession was able to hold out against the official will on several debated points, because they had a trump card—an obvious masterpiece. *Werckmeister Harmonies* had achieved international success and recognition before its Hungarian première, and the film was awarded the festival's main prize. Ever since it premiered in the Directors' Week at Cannes, Béla Tarr's film has toured half the world's major film festivals, and was voted the best film of the last five years (1996–2000) by the most prestigious American critics polled by *The Village Voice*. (A detailed review of the film will appear in our next issue.—Ed's note.)

The situation is brutally simple. The fact that *Werckmeister Harmonies* was actually made is a miracle. The financial and technical conditions under which Hungarian filmmaking has to work are getting worse year by year. Of the impressively large number of films shown annually at this festival (27 movies this year) every second work is either low-budget or non-budget; the work is frequently filmed on video, with every cost-cutting measure imaginable compensated for by human

Erzsébet Bori

is the regular film critic of *The Hungarian Quarterly*.

effort—blood, sweat, sacrifice, and manic devotion. This was how *Werckmeister Harmonies* was completed: it took almost six years to finish, it was put on ice several times, and the possibility of running out of money was constantly on the cards.

Béla Tarr's achievement is so impressive that for a moment I hesitated whether it was fair to let the other entries compete with it. However, they would look better, not worse, and we, too, will be better off, if we have a standard and absolute scale. And vice versa. Masterpieces do not grow on trees, nor do their makers emerge full-fledged from the film college. Filmmaking is a profession in which practice makes perfect, and a director develops his or her creative style in the course of successive films, rather than all at once. There is no better example to demonstrate this than Béla Tarr's career.

Not only the masterpiece, the dynamic start of his own career set the standard high for Tamás Tóth. A Moscow film school graduate, the director made his debut in Hungary at the age of 27 with a film set in a Russian milieu (a Russian-Hungarian co-production, incidentally) *Children of the Iron God* taking the festival's first prize. For his subsequent work, two documentaries and one feature film, he again turned to Russia, the exoticism of which he was able to capture through exciting imagery. His latest film is Hungarian through and through, a grotesque drama about the love between a young social worker and a girl working as gardener. The main character in *Anarchists* is significantly named Gavrilo, but unlike Princep, his famous Serbian namesake, he is not a student but a council employee whose job is to visit lonely elderly people, bring them lunch, help them wash, mend their water taps, etc. All along, he is preparing himself to strike against a rotten world. He

knows what he wants to do—to shoot and bomb—but he has no idea whom he should blow up and why. For this he needs the fatal encounter with a woman who would help him to acquire the weaponry and identify a target for him. Majka is sensitive and young, only leaving the glasshouse where she works to deliver her hand-knitted jumpers to a charity organization. She is greatly upset when she accidentally learns that the organization's managers pick out the best of the donations to sell abroad. Majka obtains some dynamite from her father and gets on her bike to take revenge. Gavrilo drives around at high speed in the night, working up plots to bring down the world. They crash and before long they discover each other's trade marks: Majka has got red dynamite, Gavrilo a red book, probably Bakunin's basic text *The State and Anarchy*. The two rebels find each other and promptly fall in love.

Enter the father at this point, relegating the youngsters to minor roles. Géza is a demonic figure, a pilot and parachutist, keeping a complete arsenal of weapons and explosives. Gavrilo, and the viewers too, who haven't even asked him for weapons, are forced to listen to his manic monologues. Gavrilo even goes to see him at a bacchanalia arranged for the rich and middle-aged in Gellért baths, despite his irritation with Géza's personality, talk and sinister lifestyle. Indeed the viewers too would like to blast him off the screen, but when they see Géza's brains shot out, they realize that they did not mean it literally. However, the sight of the Gellért baths at dawn, fully lit-up, is beautiful.

Ágnes Incze, best known as a maker of documentaries, turned the basic story of a provincial girl moving to the decadent big city into a loveable movie. The central characters of *I Love Budapest* are the

basic types that we are likely to run into on the streets of Budapest, rather than characters created on someone's word-processor.

Anikó arrives in Budapest, the city of opportunities, following up a girlfriend's invitation. For the time being all that Mónika can offer is a place in her dreary flat and a badly-paid job at her dirty factory. But after work the night is theirs, with all the neon and laser lights, the world of discos, clubs and pubs where a poor girl can hit the jackpot by meeting the right man. Mónika has already found hers in the person of Krisztián, who drives an expensive car, has influential friends, and is constantly setting up deals on his cellular phone. Anikó, of course, blows it right away, by falling in love with one of the factory's security guards, a dopey bloke with a heart of gold who thinks he is a big timer because once he was on the security detail for "the three tenors". To set Anikó's mistake right, Mónika suggests that Anikó's boyfriend get involved in Krisztián's dubious deals.

I Love Budapest makes a delightful change, with a clear story line, with its characters and social milieu finely drawn. Too many movies avoid or blur these: somehow a story line is sweated out, with the characters hanging in air, and the audience not knowing, and not really caring, who they are, where they come from and why. This is where Ágnes Incze's professionalism and sensitivity, derived from her documentary work, comes: she effortlessly and with admirable ease draws the background and portrays the people, be it a young girl with her mother and her old suitor from her village, or the dubious characters of the Pest Mafia, the careworn female workers in the factory or the dopey with the golden heart who pretends he is a big timer. Of the four young people, Mónika's is the most complex and most

exciting character, for which a large part is due to Martina Kovács' acting. As to Gabriella Hámori in the role of Anikó, her casting was perhaps an overkill. She is so charming and innocent that we know immediately who she is, without her saying a word or making a gesture.

However, the ending of *I Love Budapest* left me with a strange feeling: the great cliché of movie finales is "then we'll take off" When the car took off with a couple who happened to be on their way to failure, I was somewhat taken aback. Once up in the air, however, I learned to like the idea that miracles still happen, if only in Milan or in the dreams of a young girl or in a movie, where the director has every right to administer justice, not against the justice (or injustice) of the real world, but in awareness of it.

A sad film was received with the greatest joy, *Abandoned*, directed by Árpád Sopsits. The explanation is simple: after a promising start in 1990 Sopsits failed to meet very high expectations.

Abandoned, based on autobiographical elements, is set in a reformatory during the 1950s. (Both time and place make for a sombre movie.) Specifically, it unfolds between the putting down of the 1956 Revolution and the amnesty of 1963, which signalled the beginning of the Kádár consolidation. The prisons are packed, poverty is rampant, the people beaten into silence. In the circumstances, the school might stand for the society of the time, but Sopsits has no intention of making a historical movie, not to mention a parable. He is interested in children. The instructors have about fifty children between the ages of 6 and 11 in hands clad in an iron glove. Among the children is the "gang of seven", including the main character, Áron Soproni, who all follow a direction very different from the official line.

Péter Tímár's *Blindguys* is also set in an educational institution. The director claims that this is "the first ever motion picture made for the blind", a narrator being used to help them understand the story. In the absence of other entries, two second-rate rock musicians win a competition for writing a musical for the blind. When they turn up to collect their prize-money, they learn that rehearsing the musical with the blind students is part of the deal. The blind girls fall in love with one of them, a situation he is unable to handle, and he wants to resign from the job. That is when a ballet dancer, the mother of one of the blind children, appears. She is unable to relate to the unsighted, not even her own son. The story is excellent, rich in dramatic conflicts—none of which is developed in the film. Taken against the authenticity of the blind actors, the fictional characters, crudely drawn, are an eyesore. Tímár, whose contributions to establishing a new Hungarian commercial cinema have been considerable, was unable to repeat his earlier success on this occasion.

András Szőke's *Fairy Hill* features Gypsies and catches a Tartar. The story is captivating: sometime in the 1930s an aeroplane lands at a Gypsy encampment and enchants a Gypsy boy—it is very easy to imagine the story's cinematic rendering *à la Szőke*. I thought of *Orb*, a film associated with Szőke's circles that I loved despite all its faults, with some Gypsies and their music added, and hoped for the best. However, the strategy of adding a little bit of everything has failed this time. The more was crammed into the film, the more the film disintegrated. And cram they did: frolics, dancing, horseplay, gags, animated inserts, scenes from the director and his associate's life with needlework and artistic crisis, music, Jewish fate and Gypsy

romance. The cast is large, featuring Gypsies, non-Gypsies (including Jews and Hungarians) and pretend Gypsies. In the latter category, some virtuoso playing by a popular talkshow host Sándor Fábry in the role of the Gypsy chief stands out. The best scene was that of the horse carriage with the piano: the Jews went on their last tour of the village, taking with them nothing but a fine spinet, with the oldest boy playing Chopin all the way. This conveniently led to the low point of the film: for what else do they meet but a Gypsy wedding procession? This roughly corresponds to the scene in which a family is seeing off a son called up to serve on the front, meeting a group of Jews, all in their finery, heading for the county ball. I rest my case.

Glass *Tiger* is not a film strictly speaking, rather a watered-down and verbalized version of the Hungarian commercial movie as created by Péter Tímár, in the form of a group of loosely connected anecdotes, jokes and wisecracks. The Glass Tiger of the title is a bus converted into a snack bar, frequented by local patrons, all of them great characters and good laughs. Audiences may well like the movie on account of its humour, grateful for the chance to see so many of their favourite actors. Just as the actors are grateful for the rare chance of a part in a movie, and have a thoroughly good time of it. Nothing wrong with that.

The laughter in Miklós Jancsó's *Last Supper at the Arabian Grey Horse* is much more bitter. This is the final part of a trilogy started three years ago, which means that the time has come to say goodbye to Pepe and Kapa. They have been with us for three years now, making fools of us, making us laugh, educating us. There is still the *Last Supper at the Arabian*

Grey Horse, a few more bad jokes and then adieu. We'll probably really start missing them this time.

The title of Miklós Jancsó's film is a reference to the title of a short story by Gyula Krúdy (the latter mentions a cigar, not a supper). In any case, the last cigar usually follows the last supper. What do we have here, I asked myself, not an adaptation of a classic work? But then again, anything is possible with Jancsó. The two earlier parts, *The Lord's Lantern in Budapest* and *Damn You! The Mosquitoes* took us to fantastic locations and amazing vantage points, at one moment pushing up the grass in a cemetery, and viewing the city, a rather boring site by now from the usual angle, from the top of the Liberty Monument and the Széchenyi Chain Bridge in the next, thanks to Ferenc Grunwalsky's camera work. This time we get a bird's-eye view of Heroes' Square—we have already been there once, thanks to Jancsó again—and it is at the top of the scaffolding around the monument where Kapa Mucsi and Pepe Scherer want their first beers brought. The other main location is in a form we have never seen: the burnt-out Budapest Sport Palace. It was ugly as sin when it was whole, now its skeleton reminds us of the Colosseum. This is where our heroes plan to have supper, described by Pepe as "the supper, after which we take no more grub". Nobody says anything about not having any more to drink, though. But before supper they still find time to appoint, bribe, and gun down a minister, while a beautiful yuppie girl tells us all about her bright career in connection with the latest political establishment, while Emese lets out her delightful laugh and no longer wants to have a baby. Kapa seems a little disappointed nobody tries to murder him, so that in the end he has to beg his pal to shoot him in the head, because he has lost

interest in life, and only a mention of the resurrection can get his adrenaline going.

Damn You! The Mosquitoes ended with a celestial spectre on a hot August day, and so does the *Last Supper at the Arabian Grey Horse*; only in the first case the show, i.e. the solar eclipse, came with the compliments of Nature, while the millennial fireworks, the largest ever in the history of Hungary, was provided by earthly powers. And there is musical accompaniment all along, featuring extravagant bands beginning with Besh o droM through Kispál és a Borz (Kispál and the Badger) to the popular band Lyuhász Lyácint Bt and the Burzsoá Nyugdijasok (Bourgeois Pensioners), and no matter what Sub Bass Monster says about this not being America, we can see the Niagara Falls from the Museum of Applied Arts. And while the Niagara Falls, and thunders and swirls, the Danube is quietly flowing past, taking no notice of the crazy cavalcade.

In recent years, new filmmakers have made their presence increasingly felt. This has not always been the case. There used to be several festivals in succession without a single debut film, and quite often entire classes graduated from the University of Drama and Film without any of them producing a diploma film. This year we have seen several noteworthy attempts by young directors (Zsombor Dyga, Zsolt Bernáth, Ferenc Török, Júlia Sára, Szabolcs Hajdú). Zsombor Dyga is the youngest of them all and by all appearances he is unstoppable. At the age of twenty-five he has completed his third feature film, and his film in last year's Film Week, *Killers*, is now being screened nationwide, and on top of his current entry, *Tickfaces*, he even produced a short film. I am willing to regard this 75-minute video film as a technical exercise, which might be important from a young film artist's

viewpoint, but not pertinent to the viewers. *Ickfaces* is a fresh and highly improvisatory movie, stringing together scenes from a gang's life. They share a flat, come and go, hang out together, eat and drink, watch TV and play FIFA 2000, and talk a lot. Video as a genre is extremely useful, cheap, easy and readily accessible, and above all else frivolous. For example, it prompts you to switch it on and swing it around for no particular reason. The fact is that the film abounds in good ideas, questions that should come back in the next, more mature production by Dyga.

All that we were missing in *Ickfaces*, we get back with interest in *Neverbeen Gloria*. Zsolt Bernáth's movie develops several parallel and intertwining stories, moving a large number of characters. In one of the stories two nice blokes meet an angel, spending three days with her. In the course of the three days crucial developments take place: the deaf and dumb painter finds his voice; the neo-Nazi puts away his knife; and Buju, one of the central characters, decides to give up grass (but not yet drink). In the other story a mail robbery is being planned, in the footsteps of Tarantino and Woody Allen. Though this be madness, yet there is method in't. Despite all its good points, *Gloria* is over-written, over-complicated and over-dialogued; anything they show, they describe verbally also. The almost exclusive function of the characters is to speak. This above all else applies to the criminal section, the members of which give us a run down on the past five years' slang and linguistic clichés, some good and some bad. Some of these hip lines are so pseudo that even the excellent cast cannot sell them. The linguistic usage provides no cultural model. Entertaining in places, this is just yapping. The worst comes in the end: after they have shown

everything and explained everything, they give us yet another summary, in which they explain, item by item, all that we had known from the start.

I find the dominance of verbalism in movies frightening. It is a cause for concern when words become the main instruments of story telling, of character portrayal, of humour and of expressing emotions. And it particularly bothers me in Zsolt Bernáth's case.

“Today is April 27, 1989, Petya's birthday. According to the clock in Moscow Square, it is half past eight; young people are hanging around, looking out for addresses of parties to gatecrash. With a pop, Kigler uncorks a bottle of champagne... In view of the recent political developments, the history questions related to Hungarian history after 1945 are cancelled, just one week before the final school-leaving exam... Royal's father somehow has got hold of the question for the written exams...” All this I learned about the film *Moscow Square* from the festival's programme, and I was far from convinced that this film was for me. But then I checked the director's age. Ferenc Török is precisely of that age. Had he been just one year older, then the events recalled from that momentous year would have simply made cheap journalistic effects in the movie. In this way, however, they form part of the director's personal experience and, even more importantly, they come through in the film as fresh memories. This is what makes the heroic attempt to draw a portrait of recent history so easy and simple. Of course, in the background there is history in the making—Imre Nagy's reburial, Kádár's death—but our director has no intention to meddle in things that had failed to touch him back then. “Who the fuck is Imre Nagy?” asks one bloke, who is suddenly struck by the recognition that for weeks there has been a big

fuss about the man on television. And this is fair enough. As at any time before or since, eighteen year olds in 1989 had much more important things to worry about than their parents' and grand-parents' political traumas. There were parties and cars, and then there was sex and, of course, love. Ferenc Török manages to turn the clock back to 1989, and not even in his epilogue does he try to interpret the past in retrospect. And while he is keeping strictly and economically to the point—What was it like to be eighteen back then?—the country's political ferment is captured in his film, as a bonus.

The new generation's most promising talent, Szabolcs Hajdu, presented his first feature film at the festival. The great expectations were based on his flair for cinematic expression as well as his original approach, both qualities strongly present in his short films. On that score, *Difficult Issues* delivered the goods. The story is

simple, almost to the point of being banal, a love triangle; but the portrayal of the characters and the narration in pictures is truly impressive. Cinematic art as such has by now ceased to exist, or exists only as a swearword, with the majority of the films being best described as picture books of stories illustrated with motion pictures and music. Few artists create their own style and individual vocabulary, turning a mass-produced commercial film into a *Gesamtkunstwerk* in the classical sense: a composition in light and motion, words and sounds, which cannot be described and cannot be interpreted by giving a summary outline of the story. We can thank our lucky star that there are such directors living and working in Hungary, from Miklós Jancsó of the great generation to Szabolcs Hajdú, who has just started out in his career. And Béla Tarr's opening masterpiece, *Werckmeister Harmonies*, was a guarantee for getting our money's worth at this festival. ■

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Sir,

This salute comes from the heart of Africa and is addressed to a great journal and its Editors. I have read *The Hungarian Quarterly* for several years now. The journal has become an important source of information and pleasure for me. It pursues the ultimate goal of literature, the search for truth and beauty, admirably. Being an editor, I read many journals and I think I can assess editorial virtues. *The Quarterly* is well endowed with creativity, knowledge, judgement, taste and courage as well as with solid craftsmanship.

I do not wish to be pompous, yet I feel that this congratulatory letter would be incomplete if I did not add two more observations.

Since Mohács the quest of Hungarians has been to belong again and to be re-

garded as belonging to the West and to measure up to "European" standards. *The Hungarian Quarterly* is a publication which ranks among the best in Europe. Its other great accomplishment is that it manifests liberal and progressive attitudes yet, at the same time, it eschews any form of hectoring, belligerence and political correctness.

I hope fellow readers feel similarly about this journal. I also hope that the publisher will match the standards of the editors and adopt Western methods of marketing so that *The Hungarian Quarterly* finds its way into the hands of many more members of the English speaking elite everywhere.

With the very best wishes,

I. J. P. Loeffler, M.D.
Nairobi, Kenya

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A Hungarian Quarterly Reader

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Current Affairs

An MP and his wife were in the group too. I used one of the military mission vehicles with cases and a bag. And it worked. We got to Vienna, from there they went on to the United States... I drove the vehicle.

History

There was a checkpoint halfway between the Austro-Hungarian border and Vienna airport. A sentry at a barrier, I stopped.

Documents

He wanted to see what was in the back of this vehicle, a station wagon kind of thing. An army one. I was wearing an army parka and I did have my diplomatic passport, and I showed that. But you don't talk with a Russian sentry about the fine points of organization within a diplomatic mission.

Fiction

I said I do not know what's in there, they're boxes belonging to some American general, I cannot let you see them. Well, this went on for a long time. I got out, I walked around the car with him, I pulled out a pack of American cigarettes, and

Poetry

I went on like that with the pack of cigarettes. I did not actually offer them, but he just reached and took one. So I did it again, he took another one, he took about ten or twelve cigarettes. That was the end of it. And so when we got to Vienna, the signal was to slap the boxes twice.

Essays

This I did and said, "Bécs". I'd learned that much in Hungarian. That's what the Hungarians call Vienna.

161

Reportage

From: *Their Man in Budapest*. James McCargar and the 1947 Road to Freedom, pp, 38–62.

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