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General and Dictator! My Friend! A Portfolio of Hungarian Letters

The Smell of Prison

Publishing As It Was

Figuring the History of Hungary

Ernst von Dohnányi A Tribute

Bartók's Writings Volume 3

Edwin Morgan's Attila József

165

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Ádám Bodor

The Smell of Prison

Responses to Zsófia Balla

(Extracts)

Part 1

In the late sixties or early seventies, there were stories about you, rather strange ones, making the rounds. What about that bloody night in the town of Sepsi-szentgyörgy, for instance?

My, that was a long time ago. Almost thirty years. But I'll try to recall it for you. There is no real point to the story, unless I make one up right now; and the only lesson to be drawn from it is that even out there in the marches, in one of the eastern corners of our continent, in grim times, we didn't spend all our days in a state of unrelieved gloom.

Sepsiszentgyörgy—Sfântu Gheorghe—in its heyday was a dangerous place even for a seasoned, happy-go-lucky young man like myself. As soon as you got off the train, at a station visited by parching winds, you entered a strange sphere of existence, the world of the untamed provinces, and exposed yourself to unimaginable risks. It wasn't so much a hostile environment as a quirky one, following its own laws, and thus full of peril. At every street corner the possibility of a quick fall, or an absurd adventure, awaited you. You had to drink an awful lot in this town; alcohol—from the air, it seemed—got under the skin, through your pores, and into your weakened, defenceless system, after which anything could happen. For instance, you walked unsuspectingly into Sugás's in the afternoon for a cup of coffee, only to wake up one stupefying morning

---

Ádám Bodor
is a Transylvanian writer who now lives in Budapest. His collections of highly original short stories have been translated into several languages. One volume of stories, The Euphrates at Babylon, *was published in Edinburgh by Polygon in 1991.* ***Zsófia Balla****, a poet and fellow Transylvanian, interviewed Bodor about his work and his imprisonment in Romania. The interview grew to book length and when published as* A börtön szaga *(The Smell of Prison), it became an instant bestseller. The second and third parts of the extracts will appear in Nos. 166 and 167 of* The Hungarian Quarterly.

in the fish market, shaking with cold. Had you met someone? A man? A woman? A tram conductress perhaps? No man alive could say.

I turned up more than once in this town, and to be honest, I was never bored. The bloody night you alluded to had nothing to do with the Sugás Inn but with an equally legendary place, the Kolcza Gardens. Across the street from the Gardens lived the Strömpel sisters, these wonderful and hospitable young women, whose home was the scene of many a wild party. At the time, a Hungarian weekly was published in the town, so the luster of these get-togethers was enhanced by the presence of well-known literary types, to say nothing of fine fellows of both sexes who hailed from the world of the theatre. That bloody night, if that's what we are to call it, we had a full house. Around midnight, Migdál Strömpel—of the two Strömpel girls, only she was present—drew me aside and asked if I was hungry; because if I was, we could easily kill a chicken. It would cook and be ready by morning. A fresh-killed chicken cooking with fragrant soup greens in a pot till morning—if you are already a little tipsy, nothing could sound more tempting. We marched straight out into the open-air henhouse—the garden. Holding a huge kitchen knife, Migdál began looking over the birds, all of whom seemed possessed of an evil premonition, while I shed light on the proceedings with a flashlight. Before long we had the chosen fowl, and Migdál with a skilled hand slit its neck. While she waited for the blood to drain, holding the slaughtered bird by its legs, I put down the flashlight and asked her to hand me the knife: "Wait here, I'll be right back." Grabbing the knife still dripping with blood, I staggered into the house, switched off the blaring tape recorder, and stopped in the middle of the room. "Listen," I said hoarsely in front of the shocked gathering, "I killed Migdál." The moment was straight out of some dark ballad. Snatches of the abruptly silenced rock music were still floating in the air that was heavy with alcohol fumes and human exhalation. The blood from the knife, which everyone thought was Migdál's, dripped onto the floor with the relentlessness of fate fulfilled. Gasping sighs rose from the women's breasts, men gnashed their teeth. I hadn't worked out the full scenario, though I knew I should quickly put an end to the hoax and think of a hysterically funny resolution, before they all pounced on me. But before I could utter a sound, life itself came to the rescue: the pride and joy of the house, a huge crystal chandelier, at that very moment broke away from the ceiling and with a fearsome crash landed on the floor. Pieces of it fell into the piano, teasing plaintive chords from its strings. A calamity of the first order, a true cataclysm. Thin strips of light seeped in eerily from the kitchen and the neighbouring room; the smell of spilled liquor mingled with swirling dust, the women shrieked, the men yelled. And just then Migdál Strömpel rushed in, holding in her hand the flashlight and the still wriggling, bloody chicken. "Have you gone crazy? What the hell is going on?" In the glare of the flashlight, which illuminated her face from below, she looked ghostly. A murmur, of disappointment, I thought, swept through the crowd: Ah, she's alive. The highlight of the night's

drama may have been the fallen chandelier, but it was my name the event became associated with. Different versions of the story circulated throughout Transylvania, it had the stuff of urban legend. People would stop me on the street, surprised to learn that I was still at large.

I still think it's no accident that something like this happened to you. It seems to fit into your work as a writer.

I was no bookworm, if that's what you mean. To this day I have a penchant for mischief and tomfoolery. I doubt if I'll have time to outgrow it. But my hand is not really stained with much blood.

An interesting name, Migdál Strömpel. Was that her real name? It sounds like the sort of name you might invent.

No, no, her parents came up with it; it is her real name. When Migdál was born, her well-respected parents wanted this to be her duly registered Christian name.

How did your own family name, the real one, make it into The Sinistra District? *And in the form it must have appeared in your Romanian identity papers.*

I can only guess. The unknown relative, Andrej Bodor, appeared out of the blue at my doorstep, banged on the door, wanting to be let in. And just when I needed him most. At the time I had already begun work on *Sinistra,* something in a primordial state was stirring in me, the story was beginning to take shape with this elusive character at its centre, who, oddly enough, did not yet have a name. Then, in a moment of revelation, I identified him with this imaginary relative. And with that he came alive, found his place in the world I created for him, and became so strong, he could hardly bear the subjectivity of the first-person form; I had to dispatch him now and then to the realm of third-person narration.

Your literary works as well as your biography are full of unusual names. What is behind the name of that memorable character, Mukkerman, in The Sinistra District?

To me it sounds as though somebody, at a loss for a name, or in jest, had suddenly hit upon this German-sounding name. I suppose the Hungarian nickname "Muki" or "Muksi" is there in the background, yet it sounds authentic, I think. It has substance, a certain lilt and rhythm. Literature is full of memorable names, proving that what you are called is never really an accident. Sometimes a hero's stature elevates the most pedestrian name, yet I believe the feeling created by a name is part of the story from the start; it is what stirs the imagination. Indeed, a well-contrived name with the right emotional climate has a direct

bearing on the action; it's much easier to work with, for it suggests the personality of an imagined character. A hero with an indifferent-sounding name is usually dull himself, and this dullness limits his power to inspire. Every name has its own character, its secret symbolism and aura, and these qualities ultimately shape a person's fate, even in everyday life. I, for instance, wouldn't like to be called Mukkerman, which probably indicates that I believe anyone with a name like that has to be very different from the image I have of myself. This is especially true in the more stylised world of literature, where every whiff and shade has meaning.

When a writer is compelled for some reason to change the name of his characters, well, that's a pretty terrible thing. Some time ago, when *The Sinistra District* was being translated into German, one of the readers of the translated version mentioned rather critically that we had better be careful here: there is no such name as Mukkerman in German. That's fine, I replied. Now there is. No way would I part with it, if only because the character popped into my head along with the name; and when the chapter was completed, a Mukkermanian world appeared around him, the character Mukkermanised the air, his world became "Mukkerman-dependent". How could I call him something else? When it comes to essentials, a writer must not make concessions. Incidentally, that well-meaning reader was wrong: not long ago I found a Muckermann in the Berlin telephone book. I suddenly became very curious how this man looked. I could have shown up at his door with some excuse, his address was there in the book; but I am not a good actor and don't do well in contrived situations. Perhaps it's better that my own Mukkerman is the only one I know. There is no denying that I got to like Mustafa Mukkerman; with his bizarre name he probably widened the scope of my story.

In another one of your stories, "Back to the Long-Eared Owl," as well as in the Sinistra *stories, important things are associated with names. In general, your characters are often of mixed blood or have more than one nationality. I assume this has something to do with the fact that you come from multiethnic Transylvania. This eight-hundred-pound character, Mukkerman, reminds me of the giant stuffed whales displayed in the big tops of the travelling circuses of my childhood, and it evokes the cinematic world of Fellini. It's also interesting that your characters invariably turn up in border areas.*

I cannot really judge to what extent all this is reminiscent of Fellini. For this Mukkerman fellow, with his name, his incredible poundage and huge trailer truck, is entirely my own invention. As soon as he came alive in my imagination, I saw him turn up periodically in the remote corners of Eastern Europe—a suspicious stranger in a xenophobic world. He'd appear at a border crossing, for example, where something was bound to happen to him. They might strip him and

search for something hidden in the myriad folds of flesh and fat. And this would happen because in the places I write about, such things come naturally. In other words, we are not in the world of circuses and sideshows but in Eastern Europe.

As for borderlands, it is of course no accident that in many of my stories the action is laid in just such regions. The frontier and its immediate environs are always more exciting than the interior of a country. The frontier zone is a strange, magical place, the mysterious centre of risk and adventure, where the landscape itself, and every movement in it, is full of tension. In the eastern end of Europe this generally meant a region sealed off with barriers and barbed wire, with menacing watchtowers looming over water-filled ditches, where even a high-flying bird was seen as a privileged insider. There was no free passage across these borders; ordinary mortals couldn't even go near them. And residents close by were people whose very thoughts were defined to an absurd extent by an awareness of where they lived. For here it often happens that arbitrarily redrawn borders divide settlements so that one can peer into another country from morning to night. At times, a relatively narrow river constitutes the border, like the Tisza in Máramaros (Maramureş), and members of the same family living on opposite banks are able to holler across the river—and they would, too, if they weren't afraid they'd be shot at.

Although these borders separate people—relatives, friends—and cut across historically unified areas, they are also places of subtle emanations and osmosis, where two cultures and mentalities rub against, and also penetrate, each other. To repeat, then: it is surely no accident that the setting of my stories is often an imagined border region, and that I think mostly in terms of living conditions in these areas. A few decades ago, in my youth, Transylvania itself was in a sense a borderland. And this is where I had the good fortune to grow up and spend a large part of my life; it was the scene of all my formative experiences.

Exactly what sort of borderland was the Transylvania of your youth?

The three dominant cultures of Transylvania—Hungarian, Romanian and German—have always existed apart from one another. Different in dress, in the foods they ate and the homes they built, the people belonging to these three cultures were set apart by even deeper, more sensitive divisions. Three completely unrelated nations lived side by side in the same general area, to say nothing of smaller nationalities and denominations, all of which made this land unusually colourful and multifaceted. If you set out from Kolozsvár (Cluj) in almost any direction, you became aware of this variety, were struck by the differences. You had Armenian Szamosújvár (Gherla), Hungarian Kalotaszeg, and the densely Romanian Moţ region. Though geographically and historically not a part of Transylvania, even Nagyvárad (Oradea), the most attractively urban of the Hungarian settlements, could be considered a Transylvanian city. A little farther

away, in the Banat, there was open and cosmopolitan Temesvár (Timişoara), a window to the West; and on the way back, in the crescent of the southern Carpathians, Nagyszeben (Sibiu—Hermannstadt) and Brassó (Braşov—Kronstadt), with their well-ordered, patrician world, brought a great European culture right to our doorstep. In the north, Nagybánya (Baia Mare) still had the air of an old German mining town, while Máramarossziget (Sighet) with its Galician connections and mysterious lights evoked an almost Chagallian world. And in the centre of Transylvania, like a huge enclave, stood the Sziget Mountains, the fairyland-like Moţ region. Whether the different nationalities lived in one solid block or right next to one another, intermingled, the tensions hidden under the surface could hardly be felt in daily life. They coexisted, but as I said, the three major nationalities did not have much to do with one another. All of Transylvania was crisscrossed by walls or invisible demarcation lines. When viewed optimistically, and discounting the imposed communist institutions, the historical reality several decades ago still had something positive to offer. It may seem like mere illusion today, but at the time we thought that this may yet become a land of relative peace and tolerance; that the post-war world may bring some sort of balance and stability to the region. And even if the status quo would not change, our chances for remaining in place would not diminish.

In the nineteen-sixties the young people of Kolozsvár filled the promenade. The four sides of King Matthias Square were frequented by different social groups, and the western and southern sides, along Deák Ferenc Street all the way to the Romanian Opera, belonged to the students. Here you could hear Hungarian, Romanian as well as German being spoken. The same was true of the marketplace, the shops, and the lobbies of concert halls. Depending on their origins, young people spoke a different language, dressed differently, the colour of their hair, even their smell was different. This admixture, aside from being terribly exciting and enriching, was seen as the most natural thing in the world—it didn't seem to bother anyone. It stemmed from the basic character of the place, we thought then; it was part of our identity.

In Transylvania, situated as it is on the fringes of Europe, something else could be felt. At times, the icy winds of the eastern steppes blew through the Carpathian mountain passes, and not infrequently we felt the numbing cold of the realm beyond the Arctic Circle. Each region of the land had its own complexion, and there were places where the dreariest aspects of Eastern Europe, its defencelessness, seediness, and grinding poverty, became ominously visible. They signaled the beginnings of deteriorating conditions which, in a more advanced stage of decline, make a place ripe for dictatorship.

For me, birthplace conjures up the image of a culturally multifarious, physically quite beautiful yet melancholy land. This image dominates my thinking and memory to this day; it remains a model from which I can never break away. I cannot imagine a setting for a story that is not a place inhabited by people of

different origins, where Hungarians are not in the majority. There are those who take this ill of me, saying that I populate Transylvania with every race under the sun. But all I really want to do is get away from an idyllic picture that has precious little to do with what the term native land means to my generation. I feel that even the geographical coordinates are unfavourable here to wisdom and good cheer. Even the configurations of the terrain determine to some extent the inhabitants' temperament and moral bearing. They may sing its praises, but frankly, I think there is something not quite right with this whole Carpathian basin, at least with the flatter stretches of land. The scattered farmsteads dotting the landscape may exude a cozy warmth, but the piercing winds rising from time to time in the plains bring with them a bleakness, an apathy. The poet Petőfi and many others loved the plains, but I don't think they are in the majority. Yet, not a week goes by without some idiot comparing our country's prospects and possibilities to those of Switzerland. A curious point of view, surely. Talk about natural gifts and resources. When I think of my country whose heartland is one endless, hopeless plain afflicted with either rising groundwater or drought; or when I think of the inexhaustible vulgarity of the people, Switzerland is the last place that comes to mind. The real question is how those who settled here could stand it for a thousand years. I guess the answer is that we became a people whose physical and mental condition, according to the surveys, is among the worst in the world.

How did you discover that you wanted to write? When did it happen?

Quite late, actually. Most people in their tender youth begin writing poetry before they feel they are ready for prose. I skipped this stage completely. While my close friends were busy writing poems, and recited them to one another in the dim corners of the school corridor, I, listening to inner voices, chose not to join them. I felt this wasn't for me. But so as not to cut myself off from the group, I told them rather vaguely that when it came to writing, I thought in prose, and it was entirely possible that at some point—I would decide just when—I'd make a name for myself as a prose writer. Until then my preliminary drafts must remain private. Except that there were no drafts. I did sometimes sit before a blank page torn out from my school notebook, waiting solemnly for inspiration to hit, but nothing of the sort happened; not even a sparrow flew past my window. At the same time, since I couldn't think of a single suitable, conventional profession, I was given to fantasising: What if I did become a writer? One thing is certain: it took a great deal of optimism to indulge in such fantasies.

But then my life took a strange turn: from one moment to the next, as if by magic, I turned into a grownup. I found myself in circumstances that even a mature adult would find difficult to cope with. This turn of fate—I was arrested one fine day—wound me up to an unbelievable degree and forced me to reevaluate my life, my prospects, if only because "life" behaved differently toward me from the

way it was supposed to. At the same time, almost as a compensation for the experiences I had to undergo, images of a virtual world began to take shape in me, an imaginary version of the real one with newly conceived modes of behaviour, and I began to feel at home in this world. My fantasies had nothing to do with literature, with books I had read; even in their ideal form, these fantasies were more like rough paraphrases of everyday life. Something rather extraordinary happened: what I had waited for in vain as an adolescent leaning dreamily over a sheet of paper, actually began to stir inside me. At the time I desperately needed something that would sustain and nourish my will to survive. Fiction came to the rescue, a fiction that more or less paralleled my real-life experiences. Because let's face it: if you see yourself as a writer, you need to have ambition and a vision, but it doesn't hurt if something actually happens to you. And to me something did.

I would love to hear more about how you ended up in jail. Let's begin with Kolozsvár. The year is 1952. Or did the whole business begin at an earlier age? You were born in 1936.

Which means I was seventeen years old when I was arrested. Not long ago, I came across my prison discharge papers, and discovered with amazement that my height was five-eight at the time of my arrest. I was amazed, because when I was released I was almost six feet tall, which is still my height. I grew four inches in jail, in other words. But then, I was at the age when a young person is bursting with vitality, burning with a desire to do things. He wants to prove his love for his country, and is even willing to shed his blood for it. Nothing frightens him, not even the power of the state, because he has little knowledge of what that's like. This is the age when young people start clubs and associations, when future hikers, lepidopterists and pigeon breeders get together, when brass bands and street gangs and literary societies are formed. My circumstances were such that at this time I became a founding member of the IACL, the Illegal Anti-Communist League. Our aim was to overthrow the existing political order. Almost all of us were students at the former Calvinist Kollégium. The historical backdrop against which the events unfolded are fairly familiar. The Communist takeover had occurred a few years earlier, and the settling of scores was still in progress. The new rulers were intent on demonstrating their power, their aggressiveness and sternness with every means at their disposal. They did this by sending large numbers of mostly innocent people, without trial, to prisons, mines, labour camps—to join work gangs breaking stones for a new Danube canal, for instance. Although they could just as easily stage political trials beforehand—if the trials fitted their needs. My father, for example, was accused of high treason on the basis of a statute that at the time of the alleged offense wasn't even on the books. This should make it clear that I had the right family background and moral impulse to become involved in anti-government activi-

ties. At home one couldn't detect the slightest enthusiasm or even sympathy for the promises of the new socialist state. Instead, we watched with mild disgust and growing anxiety what was taking place around us. Most of my friends and classmates also came from middle-class homes, and though every means was used to intimidate us, we spoke quite openly about political events. And knew instinctively where it was inadvisable to do so. Before long we came to the conclusion that things would surely get worse, and we had to somehow hinder the process; we had to act. With two other school friends, future poets, both of them, I became the founding member of this illegal organisation. And when others joined the group, we three aspired to leadership roles in it. In confidential discussions we let in others on the big secret, and our membership grew. We admitted girls, too, and we did not pick them wholly on the basis of their looks. Of course, we ran background checks on all prospective members. In the meantime, whenever we felt like it, we attended classes.

How did you gather information about the applicants?

By learning from the real personnel managers. We looked into their family backgrounds. Naturally, we didn't accept just anybody. But let's remember that while we took great risks embracing a set of beliefs considered dangerous and subversive, another group of youngsters during the same period, the more pragmatic members of our generation, including quite a few future writers, found a home for their ideals in the Communist movement; or what seemed even more repugnant, they joined up with phony enthusiasm. Several of them made it all the way to the Central Committee of the Communist Party. I may have made a big mistake when I heeded the call of youth and in my rashness exposed myself and my family to danger, becoming responsible indirectly for the fact that the authorities turned their anger on the Transylvanian Hungarian community as a whole. But let it be said in my defence that I did risk my neck, I didn't sell out to the enemy, but opposed him. If nothing else, I took a stand openly at a time when such things had serious consequences. The fact is I am paying the price for it to this day. I repeat, to this day. And these things don't seem that different even from a distance of several decades. While some members of my generation summed up the bright prospects of a socialist future in the kinds of platitudes that are stitched on samplers and hung on kitchen walls, my friends and I were busy preparing anti-government leaflets.

What other path could you have chosen?

I doubt if things could have happened differently. Soon after the Communist takeover, my prospective career got derailed; it entered a forced orbit, as they say today. My father, at one time an economist of considerable repute, a bank

manager, an elder of his church, who played a role in the post-war Association of Hungarian Nationals, in short, a prominent personality in Transylvanian public life, could hardly make it through the political transformation unscathed—even though he had no ties, political or emotional, to the previous regime. If anything, he might have expected recognition, or at least some sympathy, for his courageous stand on the Jewish issue or on social matters. Instead, in 1950, he was arrested, and, as I already mentioned, tried and convicted of high treason. He and the other defendants in the Bishop Áron Márton case had submitted a memorandum to the Paris Peace Conference concerning the future status of Transylvania. For this, before I had a chance to complete my secondary education, I was barred from every high school in the country. Thus, it didn't take great political acumen on my part, or an inner crisis and disillusionment, to develop subversive views. The fact is I had no opportunity to break out of the situation I was in. So I accepted my condition as one dealt by fate, and I also accepted the reasons for the raw deal. For I did indeed consider myself a "class enemy" and an enemy of the new social order. The political verdict spared me for a liftetime from having to playact. I didn't have to feign loyalty, because my political stand was out in the open. As a result, I felt tremendously liberated. Even the Securitate henchmen, I felt, showed me a bit of respect. I found that these people had utter contempt for anyone who was in cahoots with them. At least I never had to make a secret of where I belonged.

How exactly did you plan to overthrow the regime and seize power?

We suspected from the beginning that we wouldn't be able to carry this out peacefully. At the start, our arsenal consisted of a razor-sharp bayonet and a small-caliber revolver with six slugs. This seemed alarmingly little, but we thought that sooner or later we'd become stronger, even financially, and then somehow—nothing seemed impossible to us—we would add to our stock of weapons. We couldn't seriously count on the Romanian People's Army, or some crack unit in the armed forces, to join our side, though this would have made things considerably easier. The means of the takeover needed further looking into. One thing was fairly clear: although our organisation was not anti-Romanian per se, we, being Hungarian, did envisage the future of the region in terms of an independent Transylvania with sound, democratic institutions—under our leadership, of course. As for actual positions in the new government, I had my heart set on the post of foreign minister. Even as a novice in these things, I sort of knew that if you are in the foreign service, you get to travel a lot. There'd be exciting, colourful, new places, receptions, romantic adventures... And, of course, the fate of the country to worry about. Since our organization faced an oppressive, despotic regime, we borrowed that regime's strategy in some things, and at first expected to achieve our ultimate goals—such is the nature of revolutions—through dictatorial means. No question about it: the introduction of a long-awaited democra-

tic system would have relied, even in our scenario, on a certain amount of violence. If I remember correctly, when it came to the question of Transylvanian autonomy, it didn't even occur to us to hold a referendum on the issue. So there were, especially in the beginning, a number of unanswered questions, ill-contrived plans—problems, in short, that still needed to be worked out on the practical as well as theoretical end. But before we had a chance to map out our strategy, we were arrested. So later on, on the autonomy question at least, we didn't get into trouble with the majority, Romanian-speaking population.

According to the largest Hungarian encyclopædia, the majority population of Transylvania, already in 1911, was ethnic Romanian.

Actually, this was true as early as 1700. When, later in life, I worked as an archivist, I often came across official figures from that period, according to which the ratio of Romanian inhabitants within the overall population of Transylvania (excluding the Banat and the so-called Partium) surpassed that of the Hungarian and German populations combined. Over the course of time, it might have been a good idea to reflect on this—after all, we are talking about the 1700s; the Treaty of Trianon was still two hundred years away.

In any case, there may have been some friction with the Romanian elite over the actual running of the government and the distribution of posts. Nevertheless, we were of the opinion then that a genuine partnership was no illusion; in the interest of common goals, we would not have been ungenerous, and would have been perfectly willing to accept ministerial posts and other high offices in proportion to our numbers.

I should add that we also had more attainable, immediate objectives. For example, we wanted to blow up the electric power lines running through the Bükk Forest. Come to think of it, this was no mere fantasy. Had we succeeded, you and I would probably never have met, and my unmarked grave could never be located. As it happened, we got only as far as producing incendiary leaflets—if we disregard minor operations and exercises. One of these occurred one dark night when, in preparation for the plot I mentioned to blow up power lines, we broke into the chemistry lab of our beloved school, the erstwhile Calvinist Kollégium. We needed a small amount of nitroglycerin, which we were going to mix with silicon. But unfortunately, we didn't find a drop of the indispensable fluid. Not wanting to leave empty-handed, we borrowed some sulphuric acid and poured it on the statue of Lenin that stood near the main entrance. We didn't get much sleep that night; early next morning we had to be back in school, in time for class.

The police didn't find out?

The security police appeared on the scene that very day, and began a feverish investigation. I must say there was a great flurry of activity. But we weren't all that

worried, since we had carried out the break-in very carefully. In accordance with the rules of a clandestine operation, we left no fingerprints—we had been careful enough to wear gloves. There were no footprints either, because old man David, the school janitor, woke up very early, as always, and cleaned the floor with sawdust soaked in kerosene. The police dogs had to slink away with downcast eyes and tails between their legs. So, though we found no nitroglycerin, we could proudly consider the operation a successful trial run.

Getting even with certain individuals was part of our ambitious plans. From the inception of our conspiracy, we kept a blacklist, which got longer and longer. It would be useful, we decided, to get rid of a few potential enemies and other unsavoury characters. We had a particularly low opinion of activists in the Communist youth organisation; we wanted to eliminate a certain Comrade Nagy and a Comrade Barkas even before seizing the reins of power. With snake poison, no less. I don't know if a refined literary type like yourself is familiar with the name of Edgar Wallace; if you have ever read any of his crime stories. He is an excellent writer; we got the idea from him. If I remember correctly, *Four Just Men* is the title of the Wallace novel that served as the inspiration. Not long ago, I was on a train travelling from Brussels to Cologne, and an attractive young lady sat across the aisle in the compartment. I was quite pleased—my heart gave a leap, in fact—when I noticed that she was reading this excellent work. Apparently, in that part of the world, Wallace has not gone out of fashion. Anyhow, the procedure was as follows: the venom was frozen into a tiny rod, inserted into a cigarette holder with a spring inside, and released toward the victim at the right moment. It had to be aimed at a body part where the skin was the thinnest: the neck area, the eyelids, the open mouth, et cetera. The murder weapon itself dissolved and vanished, leaving only two tiny, unnoticeable pinpricks on the skin. Assembling such a weapon no doubt took a certain amount of technical sophistication. For one thing, household freezers were not yet in use in those days—in Kolozsvár, icemen still made their rounds. But we had faith in our resourcefulness, and figured that with a little diligence and perhaps an engineer's help, the lethal weapon could be produced. One bright, sunny day, I proposed that we take a hike to Saint John's Well and have a good look around. I had the boys believe that the place was swarming with vipers.

We used to have our Sunday afternoon outings there.

Then you must know that the Valley of Saint John's Well is a picturesque, subalpine spot, with beautiful, purple-blue woodland and a bare hillside at the narrow valley entrance. We learned in natural science class that vipers love these dry, rocky, loose-soiled, sun-drenched slopes. And sure enough, we found numerous little holes, which could very well have been vipers' nests, but unfortunately, we didn't come upon a single viper. Although we kept stumbling around

on that slope till sunset, holding forked branches in our hands, the kind used to catch snakes, which you did by pinning their heads to the ground. But this didn't happen. Comrade Barkas could count his blessings. He didn't get off that easily, though. Once he put in an appearance at a "comradely get-together," as the semi-annual school dances, these stuffy, biscuits-and-raspberry-soda affairs were called. While a smugly smiling Barkas—surrounded by a bevy of young pioneer girls—kept urging them to work even harder in the future, I poured the contents of an entire jar of mustard into the pocket of his overcoat that hung on the rack, and where he kept his keys. Comrade Barkas—who knows if he is still alive?—may have long forgotten this episode. Anyone in his position would probably not want to remember such a humiliating experience. But in the years since, I pictured a thousand times the moment he reached into his pocket for his keys. Making the powerful look weak was, naturally, among our main goals. To demoralise them every way we could, to inspire fear in enemy ranks—all this was part of the grand design. Brown mustard seemed like the right substance to make an ambitious, cocky, go-getter of a functionary feel suddenly less sure of himself.

Although it later met with approval, even admiration from all sides, this little operation was a completely spontaneous, improvised action on my part; no one assigned me to the job, and it wasn't preceded by preliminary discussions by the leadership. Moreover, the act itself was inspired, indirectly, to be sure, by purely subjective feelings. I had a crush on one of the Pancratius girls, who was then seeing a large, oafish-looking boy from Arad, Egon Capitan by name. The mustard was originally meant for him. Miss Pancratius lived in the suburbs, in a tidy one-family house, and I would often walk the length of Rákóczi Avenue, and then along interminable Dónát Road, hoping to run into her. Sometimes I did, but she was always with this sluggish, pudgy-faced fellow. Being busy with each other, they would nod in my direction, barely noticing me, which annoyed me to no end. Mustard at that time was ridiculously inexpensive. Although we lived in genteel poverty then, I could well afford a large jar. But as soon as I spotted the Pancratius girl at that afternoon dance, with Egon Capitan at her side, I had second thoughts. Did I really want to do this? Painful though it was to behold, she gave every indication that she preferred this sluggard to me. No amount of mustard would change that. What's more, she'd probably draw the wrong conclusion from my punishment. Such a mean and cowardly revenge was not worthy of me, I decided; I wouldn't want to have it on my conscience. Shaken by this realisation, I just stood there, embarrassed and ashamed. That's when I saw Comrade Barkas walk in and look for a place on the rack to hang his coat. Pretty soon he was mingling with the young pioneer girls. A second later I made my decision: "You're getting the mustard, Barkas."

Perhaps I've dwelled a bit too long on this little episode. But I had to; it was so nice to relive it. I had an eventful youth, full of fun and mischief. But I also

did it to indicate how our earnest, organized activities got mixed together with adolescent prankishness. But what's still important is that very early in the morning on May 1, 1952, we left subversive leaflets all over town.

What did the leaflet say?

Considering that among the people who came up with it there were several whose names today are entries in standard literary encyclopædias, the final text turned out to be pretty wretched—trite in content, glaringly imprecise in language, ideologically vacuous, and not very rousing, either. When I think about it, we couldn't expect anyone to take up arms after reading it. This is what it said: "People of Kolozsvár! Fight against the tyranny of the Red Dogs, who dragged away your fathers and sons, and ruined your families. The Leadership." What leadership? We left that to the imagination of the lucky finder of the flyer. Later, in prison, they called us "the Red Dog kids." The only thing that can be said in our defence is that we ourselves realized pretty soon how inane these words were. In jail, we often cited the bit about the sons being dragged away as the prophetic highlight of our collective masterpiece. Weren't we right? We got dragged away, all right. Now and then, we had a good laugh in there, though there wasn't much to laugh about.

Where did you have the leaflets printed?

Well, we didn't go to the printers'. Until May 2, 1952, you could buy in the local toy shops a small print set—it came with large, crudely cut rubber letters and an inkpad. Two such sets were owned by our organization; we used them to produce the leaflets. By cutting regular-sized sheets of paper into four, we could just about fit the four- or five-line text on each slip. When we ran out of these sheets, we didn't despair but cleverly resorted to bathroom tissue, also known as toilet paper. This innovation resulted in a change in production technology. Now one of us pulled the paper, another pressed the words on it, and a third conspirator held the broomstick on which we had slipped the roll of toilet paper. On May 2, the sale of these children's print sets was banned, perhaps not just in the country but presumably in the entire "peace camp," from theHungarian– Austrian border all the way to Kamchatka, from Erevan to Murmansk. A little too late, as it happened, because by then we had inundated the city with leaflets. We deposited them mainly in people's mailboxes, and where there weren't any, we slipped them under doors. I and three other plotters were assigned the Dónát section. This large residential neighbourhood of attractive cottages and villas in early May was by far the most pleasant part of the city, with the swift-flowing Szamos swelling with freshly melted snow on one side and the already fragrant hills of the Hója Woods on the other. It was only right that this should be my territory; a leading member of the group was entitled to this much. My partners in crime

were Zoltán Veress, the future poet and our organisation's resident ideologist, and, serving as bodyguard, our classmate Attila Szabó, the boxer in our class. A beautiful night fell on the city, with heady fragrances, nightingales' songs, and in the distance, the strains of a sad if off-key violin. The season of serenades.

Around one o'clock in the morning, we were still pounding the pavement. Then, all of a sudden, there was unusual traffic on the streets. Military vehicles moved along the Szamos, led by a black Tatra automobile with a Clj-20 license plate. Everyone in town who knew anything could recognise this car as belonging to the security police, the Securitate. My father had been taken away in just such a car. The police had apparently been alerted; we had to get rid of the leaflets, and fast. We abandoned bundles of them along fences, in courtyards, under bushes. One could only wonder: Did a group of slightly drunk, serenading revellers come upon one of these bundles and pick it up? And did security agents later find the leaflets in their possession? In any case, as soon as we relieved ourselves of the remaining sheaves, we headed back to Main Square, anxious to get home. We saw security people everywhere; dark shadows flitted across the square, among trees. Soon, inevitably, our first encounter with our future interrogators came to pass.

An identity check, I assume.

Naturally, combined with a thorough body search. The special unit that stopped us was headed by Captain Gruia, who was in charge of all interrogations, and whom we knew by sight. Our first meeting with the dreaded Securitate was taking place. Up to this point we were children enjoying the adventure, happy to know that we were involved in a far loftier cause than our other classmates—we moved among them with secret pride. But now the game was over. On this night, one of the two weapons owned by our group, the razor-sharp bayonet, was with me—to defend myself in case somebody stopped us and with ill intentions interfered with our work. The unwanted situation was now at hand. When I noticed that we were being surrounded, I took my sweater, which I'd been swinging in my hand, and quickly wrapped the bayonet in it, to keep the weapon from reflecting the dim lights of the square. I realized right away that I wouldn't have a chance to use it. For if I were to stab Captain Gruia in the stomach, and did it properly, twisting the blade inside before pulling it out, the others would immediately grab me and hold me down. If, on the other hand, they found the bayonet on me, we were all finished. First they looked into our empty backpacks, which had contained the leaflets, and followed up with a body search. They turned my pockets inside out, while I kept waving the sweater in my right hand so as to indicate it was only a sweater. They didn't think of feeling it with their fingers. While Captain Gruia threw questions at us, wanting to know why we were wandering around in the dead of night, and why the back-packs, another officer began to copy information from our identity papers

into a little notebook. Just then the breeze wafted the sound of a violin, so we said that we had presented a little night music to some girls we knew, and had brought along a midnight snack in the backpacks, but had eaten it already. Really? And where were our instruments? Whereupon Zoltán Veress, whose Romanian was better than ours, explained that we had hired Gypsy musicians for the occasion, but they had further engagements and had left. The police let us go. There we were, almost caught, though in a jam all the same, up to our necks.

Were you scared?

I was, terribly. But at moments like this, you pull yourself together—although from such a tight corner, there's rarely a way out. I still had to sneak back into our house, and as quietly as possible, since I had neglected to announce that due to a conspiracy in progress, I wouldn't spend the first half of the night in my bed. I didn't get much sleep that night.

I usually stayed away from official May Day parades, but in the morning I ran to the schoolyard, where we were supposed to assemble. My class was abuzz with the news that during the night leaflets had been found all over town. We enjoyed the situation, behind a mask of caution, of course. We knew only too well that the police took down every piece of personal information, and would surely keep an eye on us from now on. For days my heart kept racing; the bayonet business took a lot out of me. After our arrest, we learned that the little interlude remained memorable even for the Securitate agents.

During his interrogation, one of our friends gave away this, too; and from that point on, the interrogating officers began calling me "the bayonet kid." Years after my release from jail, while taking an evening stroll in the city, I would sometimes hear a familiar voice: "Look, there goes the bayonet kid." It was *Colonel* Gruia (in recognition of his fine work exposing our plot, he was promoted), and when I turned around, he grinned at me. I'll never know for sure, but I had the impression that there was a hint of complicity in that grin. It alluded both to his failure to discover the bayonet and to my youthful folly, for which I spent several years behind bars. These men were thugs, hatchet men, and worse, yet there were moments when, removed from the forbidding atmosphere of their domain, they turned human. I still can't decide whether they really hated us, or in their heart of hearts understood and even respected us. Colonel Gruia was anything but a tender soul; in fact he was among the worst of his kind. It would have been normal for him to have his little revenge and make up for his earlier blunder by beating me to a pulp. Maybe because he was busy with other things, he forgot to do it.

Were you beaten or tortured in prison?

I wasn't. Even though a sound beating was almost impossible to avoid. It was the first thing those under arrest were subjected to, almost as an introduction to

the place. But when I appeared before my interrogators, they already knew everything; there was nothing they could squeeze out of me. Even so, I was due for an educational, demonstration beating at least. It didn't happen. The afternoon of the great bust I was away, so I was detained a few days after my friends' arrest, and ended up in a Securitate cell later still. By then everything had come out into the open; my testimony would not have yielded new information. Several hours after the general arrest, one member of our group, who had in his hands every piece of evidence related to the work of our organisation, made a full confession, shedding light on every aspect of our activities. The rest of us simply had to corroborate the evidence. But I had no way of knowing this when I was taken to Securitate headquarters. I also don't know, to this day, how I would behave if subjected to the kind of questioning that employs every available means, including physical and mental torture. This crucial detail is missing from my store of self-knowledge.

How come it took them so long to capture you? You were one of the leaders of the group, after all.

As I said, on the day of the arrests I was out of town. That summer, the summer of '52, I got a job for a month at the Technofrig Machine Works. I was going to use my earnings to spend the rest of the school vacation in the Radna Mountains. A summer cottage in the wild and beautiful mountain village of Radnaborberek belonged to the Bodor family since the late nineteenth century, and I couldn't imagine a summer without roaming those mountains for a few weeks. I sometimes made friends there, but with or without a traveling companion, I would head for the dense forests and the craggy heights. I would buy goat cheese from the peasants in the highland. I already knew enough then to make a decent potato soup with sour cream and celery top or a spicy mushroom stew, so I could more or less take care of myself. The day before I left for the mountains, I received the notice from my school, in which I was informed that due to political considerations—my father had already been sentenced—I'd been barred from every school in the country. The news depressed me, of course, because it meant that after returning from my retreat, I and my friends would have to part ways, as I would be going back not to school but to the machine works. In other words, no final exam. I told my friends what happened and suggested—the authorities were surely watching us very closely—that we reduce the level of our activities, and rethink our future plans as well. For example, I vigorously opposed surprising the city's population, as well as the security police, with new leaflets on August 23, the anniversary of Romania's liberation. After our first encounter with Gruia and his men, this new move, I argued, was just too risky. The group nodded in agreement, but this was mere show. After I left, the boys rejected my realism, and while I listened every night, half asleep, to the rushing

streams up in the mountains, they, fully awake but not alert enough, began their eager preparations for the August anniversary. They set about producing the new leaflets in the basement of a classmate's house, and kept at it until the boy's father walked into their den of conspiracy and caught them red-handed. Realizing what was going on under his roof, he became very agitated. A hastily convened family council decided that due to the delicate nature of the matter, they would consult a relative well placed in the party (an in-law or a second cousin, I believe it was), who, after thanking them for their trust, chose to fulfil his professional obligation and promptly reported them to his superiors. Within hours the plot was discovered and exposed. Not including the nominal members and applicants for membership whose turn came in a second raid, the whole group was arrested. Except me, of course, who wasn't at home.

How did they finally arrest you?

It happened two days later. In the morning of the August 23 national holiday, a detachment of rangers caught up with me in the Radna Mountains. I still can't decide if two days under such circumstances is an awfully long or terribly short time. Anyhow, with only a shirt on my back, and summer shorts, I was taken to Naszód, a small Romanian market town at the foot of the mountain, and there handed over to the Securitate. When I asked what this was all about, my captors simply shrugged: I'd find out soon enough. I spent the entire day in the pitch-dark cellar of the local Securitate station house, sitting on the cold steps. A tiny bit of light filtered through the cracks in the door. But I couldn't stand looking at the light, I closed my eyes, pretending still that this wasn't happening to me.

But it was. Toward evening, an officer appeared and informed me that I was under arrest. He took me up to a smallish room and, somewhat later, he brought me a dinner of sorts: a piece of bread and a cube of mixed-fruit jelly, which I didn't touch. I couldn't swallow the tea I was given, either. I could hardly imagine how in my former life, or even the previous day, I was able to get anything to go down. The only sound I heard was the patter of the guard's footsteps in the yard. For what seemed like a very long time, I leaned my elbow on the table and waited for morning to come. At one point, I turned off the light in the room. But then the guard came rushing in and told me that the light must be on at all times. This small conference room, for that's what it was, had a long table with a red tablecloth, a bench on either side, and a coat tree on which hung an officer's coat. I climbed on the table and, overcoming a slight nausea, covered myself with the tablecloth. It was cold in the room, and my anxiety, too, made me shiver, so I took down the officer's coat from the coat tree and wrapped that around me as well. I lay there all night with my eyes open, listening to the dogs barking outside. It was starting to get light when I finally dozed off. A couple of hours later, I woke up to loud giggling. A group of security officers were stand-

ing around me and kept calling me *domnu maior*. I didn't know what to make of this; at the time, I knew very little Romanian. I thought maybe all this *was* a mistake—these people appeared to be looking for somebody named Maior, and my name is Bodor. It began to dawn on me what really was going on when they removed the stripes from the coat, as if I had desecrated the uniform. *Maior* is the Romanian word for major. I had spent the night under the coat of a major in the Romanian security police. I still remember what it smelled like. At noon they served up a holiday meal: beef stew with macaroni. I am sure it was tasty, but once again, I couldn't bring myself to touch it. During my imprisonment I often thought how foolish that was of me. In general, I was nostalgic for the lovely, carefree days I had spent in Naszód.

When were you taken back to Kolozsvár?

On the first workday after the holiday, and just a few days after my friends' capture. Once they had me inside Securitate headquarters, they weren't in any hurry to question me. By then, just about everything had come to light; I wasn't very important to them. All the same, at the "front desk," they again took down personal information, and before I could occupy the quarters assigned to me, I was blindfolded and led before an examining judge. When the blindfold was removed, I saw about ten uniformed men standing around the judge, and they began screaming at me all at once. Lucky for me, my Romanian, as I already mentioned, was so poor, I understood almost nothing of the harangue. I don't remember how long it lasted, but I felt already then that it had no real significance, and was only a kind of ritual, part of the intimidation process. After it was over, I was blindfolded again and led to a cell. There the guard removed the blindfold and opened the door wide.

Inside, a fifteen-watt or perhaps weaker bulb gave very little light, and even that bulb was painted gray to cut down on the light there was. After my eyes got accustomed to this semi-darkness, I took a closer look at the furnishings. There was a cast-iron bunk bed and next to it, a small table poured from concrete. In the top bunk, something stirred—a man. He had long, shaggy hair, a sallow complexion, and he stared at me with a terrified look in his eyes. From the bottom bed, another man was scrutinising me searchingly. The prison guard snapped at me as he pointed to the top bunk: "Why don't you say hello to him?" "I don't know him," I answered. I really didn't. Then the guard showed me my place in the top bed, and with that he left, locking the door behind him. The man occupying the bottom bunk now became more animated. I later learned that his job was to observe how the meeting went between me and my other bunkmate, and to find out if it was really true that we didn't know each other.

A couple of hours passed before my top bunkmate said something, in Hungarian. Attila Kovács was his name, he began, and he was a math teacher.

That is, he had been one when he was still a free man. In a voice filled with anticipation and hope, he inquired why I was here. "I've no idea," I answered. "Not the slightest. Must be a mistake." He was brought in, he continued, because on May 1, very early in the morning, on their way home—he and his friends had serenaded a lady on Dónát Road—they found a bundle of leaflets. Something about red dogs. Strange, wasn't it? They picked up the bundle, and thought they'd look at it closer when they got home. Soon after, they were stopped, searched, and of course, the leaflets were discovered. Since then, these people here have been beating them mercilessly, trying to get them to admit where and how they had this stuff printed. One of his friends—oh, it was terrible—snapped under torture, became unhinged even, and took sole responsibility for making those leaflets. Meantime, they had no evidence, no *corpus delicti,* no witness to corroborate all this. Right now they were trying to beat out of him the exact location of their hiding place. "Awful." This was all I could bring myself to say, and even this in a tiny whisper. What I had just heard was indeed awful. And equally terrible was the fact that he was telling *me* all this. In that dark cell he couldn't see that as he was talking, I turned white first and then crimson. Earlier, the examining judge and his pack of underlings could go on screaming, I understood very little of what they said. Now I understood, but still couldn't be certain if our entire group had been caught. The honourable thing to do would have been to make a full confession at the earliest opportunity, to ensure that my innocent cellmate was promptly released. I listened in a state of shock as he wrapped up his little speech, reminding me that he was going to devote the rest of his life to a single worthy endeavour: to hunt down the real perpetrators. But, he added sadly, this was an idle dream, since he was the one rotting in jail, and as long as the real criminals were at large, they would never let him out. The next day, as a first step toward restoring his freedom, he was removed from the cell. Innocent victims of prison torture were never immediately released. First they had to undergo dental and other cosmetic rehabilitation, to remove the physical traces of their prison stay. Only after they had more or less regained their original appearance, were they allowed to face the outside world.

A few more days passed before I had my first hearing. This time they gave me non-transparent goggles to wear. Leading me by the arm, a guard walked me down the corridor and then the stairs. Now I had a chance to get better acquainted with the Securitate interrogators, Captain Gruia in particular, who not so gently poked me in the rib and brought up the subject of the bayonet, reminding me in this way of our fleeting encounter on the promenade. Speaking more slowly and clearly this time, they informed me that after a lengthy investigation they liquidated our secret organisation (actually, it wasn't their doing, but I didn't know this at the time), and I stood accused of engaging in anti-state activities. During the course of the proceedings, a few rather heavy flying objects, an empty ink-bottle, a blotter and the like whizzed past me, but I wasn't really

hurt. (I should note that confessions and records of hearings were still written the old-fashioned way, using pen and ink; ballpoints were just then coming into use. A document signed with a ballpoint pen was not considered valid.) I got the feeling, though, that they weren't in top form. Or I must have looked so pitiful standing there in the corner that even these hard-hearted men felt sorry for me. Finally, a meek-looking, sad-faced officer, Lieutenant Jusca, who had been silent until now, stepped up to me and asked me to follow him. He'll be conducting my interrogation, he said. Once we were in his office, he invited me to sit down. It was clear that he felt funny about going through with this; he couldn't act the part of the stern interrogator. What made him most uncomfortable, I thought, was that he had to communicate just how formidable the power he represented was. He wasn't rattled when in answer to his question, did I know why I was here, I said I hadn't the foggiest, and added that for days I'd been searching for an answer to this question myself. Instead of literally turning the table on me at this point, which I might have expected him to do, he repeated, rather sadly, what I had already been told by the others: that I was accused of being part of an anti-state conspiracy, and it was time to tell him more about the activities of the organisation known as the Illegal Anti-Communist League, IACL for short.

It was the first time I heard an outsider use the acronym. I was crushed and just stared blankly ahead. Seeing my helplessness, he asked: could he help perhaps? Oh, yes, I said eagerly, as I didn't think I could express what was on my mind in proper Romanian. Now he opened his desk drawer, pulled out a sheaf of documents, put it down before me, and told me to study it carefully. Afterward we could talk about it. What lay before me were papers that contained a detailed account of the history of our secret organization, from its inception through the leaflet campaign to its inglorious end—our arrest. Nothing seemed to be missing; still, leafing through it brought me no relief. The only time I perked up was when I came across my name, which was rather often. At the end of the report, which reflected the state of affairs at the time of its composition, it was noted that I was a fugitive, hiding somewhere in the Radna Mountains. In the line below, the exact location of my hiding place was given, as well as orders that a special unit find me and deliver me to the police. Well, that had already been done. All in all, it was a thorough, well-put-together piece of work, and everything in it was absolutely true. By the time I got to the end of the narrative, I had begun to understand Romanian.

But how, from whom, could they extract such a detailed confession?

What happened was that one of our friends, who had at his disposal every piece of evidence connected to the work of our organisation and complete knowledge of every facet of its operation, made a full, sweeping confession a few hours after his capture, revealing everything, but everything he knew. Like a man suffering from a dangerous distension, he relieved himself, just let it all out. After that,

the questioning of the others was a mere formality, a confirmation of the detailed confession already in hand. Now we may ponder how this kind of full disclosure can be reconciled with the image of the ideal hero, the courageous resistance fighter; and we may also reflect on the ethical ramifications of such a compliant self-revelation. But the fact is that the boy not only made the investigators' job much easier, but he also helped his friends in a way. It's true that anyone among us who longed to be tortured, to have bones broken, so that he could fulfil the fate of the heroic resister, may have been terribly annoyed, if only because his plans were thwarted, the drama was scrapped. But keeping in mind our physical and mental condition, I hate to think what would have happened if any of us had resisted. In any event, a stubborn denial of facts, of what were after all punishable offenses, would have made no sense at all. Without prior consultation, we couldn't possibly have counted on all eighteen of us to reveal, or keep silent about, the same details. Still and all, I believe the confession was a little more detailed than necessary.

Do you now know who this talkative fellow was?

Sure; that became obvious soon enough. We couldn't very well respect him for it, and in the beginning, it caused tension between us, but then we eased up on him. It was a touchy moment when we did, dramatic even, not without tragic overtones. On the one hand, we knew that basically he did the right thing; thanks to his confession, we got off without a serious beating. For this reason alone, we didn't make him feel the brunt of our anger. But we no longer considered him our friend. Let's face it: his conduct, from a moral standpoint, was seriously flawed. For one thing, he divulged details about events and incidents for which no physical evidence existed, and which therefore were not present in our collective memory. They were things only he and one or two others knew about, and he could have counted on them to remain silent. But because he blabbed so volubly, a few people who were completely innocent also ended up in prison, including our beloved literature teacher.

Once, on a school outing, we were collecting acorns in the woods. Our teacher led the expedition. During a lull in the activities, he sat down to rest under a tree. After a brief deliberation, two of us approached him and tried to engage him in conversation. "The situation is critical," we said, "something must be done. We've already started an organisation. Could you give us a few words of advice?" Without hesitation but sounding quite concerned, he told us to get the idea of forming a secret organisation out of our heads and the sooner the better. We wouldn't get anywhere with it, and would only cause pain and suffering to ourselves and our families. At the moment, this was not the way to demonstrate courage. For his wise counsel, our teacher was sentenced to a year and a half in prison.

How would you describe the atmosphere of that first long interrogation?

Well, it wasn't exactly a cozy tea party, but I didn't feel I was in the hands of a ferocious examiner, who turned hours of relentless questioning into a bitter experience just for the hell of it, simply because he detested his victim. In fact, there were moments when I felt warm currents of pity, compassion, even understanding coming my way from the other side of the desk. To put it more succinctly, my interrogation took place under completely civilized conditions.

My well-meaning interrogator, Lieutenant Jusca, selected from the available material before him the sections relating to me, and he prepared a record of the hearing. Carefully enunciating his words, he read what he wrote down, and when necessary, offered brief explanations, referring to relevant clauses of the criminal code and trying to describe in simple terms the legal expressions he thought I wouldn't grasp. It was an act of almost unimaginable politeness by a state security insider toward an enemy of the people. While he was talking, I, like a good student, kept nodding in agreement.

Now and then, he leaned back in his chair and out of simple curiosity lingered over a detail, quizzing me informally as though trying to penetrate the world of childish conspiracies. But he made sure not to include these asides in the text of my confession. At one point, he asked me to describe a typical secret meeting. I tried to make him understand in my best Romanian that he'd better ask somebody else, because I hated all meetings with a passion. If he really wanted to know, I dozed off during an important consultation. This happened to be true. To this day, I am overcome with irresistible glumness and torpor at any sort of meeting or assembly. My eyes get droopy, I feel I am about to faint, my end is near. During one of our executive sessions, I did actually doze off, and was severely reprimanded by the executive council, a body, I should note, of which I was a voting member. However, my knowledge of Romanian at the time did not make it possible to express myself subtly enough, so I stuck to the simplest synonym of doze. "You really fell asleep?" asked Lieutenant Jusca, suddenly looking up. "I'll put that down." I wasn't going to interfere with the unusual way he was conducting the hearing, but I was a bit surprised when he included the following: "He did not demonstrate much interest in the work of the organisation. On one occasion he fell asleep during an executive meeting."

Unfortunately, the remark, in that precise form, was included in my case file as well, and therefore made available to my court-appointed attorney, a silly old man, who quoted it verbatim at the trial. "Honoured Members of the Court," he began grandly, "nothing proves more conclusively that children stand before this high court, who still needed a good night's sleep. This poor child—here he pointed at me—fell asleep during a meeting he himself organised." Fell asleep my ass, I muttered; I only dozed off. I was so angry, I almost broke into tears. That old fuddy-duddy spoiled everything. For once, I could appear as a heroic

freedom fighter before a real Romanian tribunal, and it turns out that not only was I asleep while decisions were made about the fate of the nation; I also tried to find excuses for my conduct like a coward. The old fart came to see me spit on myself. But I felt like spitting on him, too. For a long time afterward, it seemed that this was the moment when my life hit rock bottom. My loyal friends tried to console me as we returned to the station house. To our great joy, we were all put in a common cell; with the trial behind us, we could freely communicate with one another. The first thing we did was to go over the details of the proceedings. Outdoing one another in our performances, we reenacted the highlights, imitating the main players in the courtroom drama. We also held a quick trial of our own. Our court rendered summary justice: the prosecutor, the presiding judge, and the two lay judges were sentenced to fifteen years each. I moved to have my lawyer debarred and his license revoked forever.

As for Lieutenant Jusca, he carried out his assignment with patience and understanding. At the end of the hearing, he had me read and sign the official record he prepared. "How many years do you think I will get?" I asked him modestly. "Five," he said firmly. "But you might get away with three." That's just what happened. First I was sentenced to five years, on appeal it was reduced to three, of which I served a little over two—honourably and in good health. ❧

Translated by Ivan Sanders

(To be continued)

Krisztina Tóth

Poems

Translated by David Hill

On the Nature of Love

A szeretet természetéről

Harbour suspicions as you watch closed eyes.
The water glugs beneath the ice, extras
act out the dream, and through the mouth's entrance/
exit an aerial procession slides;

recurring words, years reckoned in street signs,
buses that go zigzagging eastwards-westwards
across the nights, and on disordered bedclothes
the blinding signals drawn by motorist's lights …

… You've not been here. You lie here now, but that is
soon to be just a recollection. Therefore
intensively interrogate the hand which

recently moved as yours: you cannot ever
be sure who owns the body lying latticed
by shadows from the drapes, the stranger.

Krisztina Tóth
has published four volumes of poems and edited an anthology of contemporary French poetry in translation. She has won numerous prizes and awards for her poetry.

David Hill
is the author of two poetry collections and publishes a free quarterly leaflet of his poems. His website is www.LYRIKLIFE.com.

On the Nature of Pain,

A fájdalom természetéről

which, fundamentally, cannot be fathomed.
Some don't say anything, but—in a bad case—
just stare dementedly while rocking that way
and this way to an inner rhythm;

while others stand up, knock a chair, and leave un-
steadily, they don't turn around (in fact they
do, but not physically), and just their back stays,
caught in the picture frame, long after quivering;

they don't ask for a light, ignite themselves, nor plan
some daring feat involving rope and rails;
they walk across the bridge and just look down ...

... How should I have reacted? Glacially still,
reached down into my bag and drawn
a gun on you, like in the films?

New Year's Eve

Szilveszter

Well, there's another year I've chased away.
It's dressed in snow and just on its way out.
I know you're somewhere: not here, not with me;
still, you exist, so everything's all right.

Tangible and imagined places
border upon another evening,
where you have come, but after some time gazing,
all that I saw was foreign in it.

Conversely, too, if I unpacked my handbag,
just foreign things is what you'd see there.
A handkerchief, spare keys, a soggy namecard—
nothing from which you'd recognize me, is there?

From just one shoe could you proclaim on sight
that it was mine? Or know me (I'd be able)
from glancing at a hung-up coat?
could you predict my imminent arrival?

And so I watch the room as in a mirror:
so spacious and familiar is this foreignness,
my unreal other life—I really
should spend this night asleep in bed;

long, heavy years, I should sleep through them all.
Sink, sink, don't surface in my forebrain:
when people ask me what I'm called,
I shouldn't start to think of your name.

Metro Trains in Contrary Directions

Ellentétes irányú metrók

You've got a good life now:
no more looking suspicious, rolling me round
inside your mouth, an unchewed morsel,
while all the grown-ups eat: now you're an angel.
The telephone won't interrupt you just when you're
giving your child an evening bath,
or any time, though you'll of course call me—
those steadily repeating stabs round midnight.
Nor will we meet by chance on buses:
the lovely serendipity
of strange occurrences is past, behind the smog-
filled sky the split-seconds will just move on;
you wont have extinguished the morning if
you don't go to the everyday bother of
draping the dark-red quilt over the glass door.
(I've left it there, it's pitch dark.)
Oh yeah—thanks for the title to the verse:
I'll be in touch as well, I will be there
in your engagement book, an eighth day with no name,
no business there and nowhere much to go.

File

Dosszié

"Hey, did it hurt? Hey, did you hear?"
I didn't. Lying back upon the couch, I gazed at
the colored circles gleaming with the back-light:
like a church window, yellow, blue and red
stained glass: something I'd never seen in an apartment.
We had to rush—by five his mom was coming.
He hopped behind me, pants around his ankles.
I squatted in the bath; he stood at the tap.
Yeah, I love it too. The morning's when it's nicest.

I was just sixteen, sixteen more years elapsed,
Then, on bus seven one day, there he was.
"The stained glass thing between the dining room and
the sitting room, you know? I guess you guys kept that up?"
"Be serious. That was just something Dad made.
He brought some coloured files home from the office
and put them in between the double windows ...
... I get off here and take the metro. Cheers!"

Why do all wonders have to be exploded?
Santa Claus. Storks. And now comes this.

I'll Bet You

Fogadjunk

I'll bet you he's a traveller too
his eyebrows show it his peculiar
face is full of forests wheeltracks
autumn burnt leaves he could've

arrived by water who knows yes
he steered in viking-yellow glory
there in his eyes you still can see
the sway of sailcloth mornings

and on his arms rough shrubbery
a rowboat's slimy bottom
or rather of course southern land
a window holds him hostage

foreign locations foreign sounds
years locked inside aromas
he leans forward to mingle in an
electric lamp's extinguishing's enigma

Sends a Smile

Küld egy mosolyt

I

The other day I looked into your eyes in a stranger's face on the metro.
Thee are days like this when everything somehow jogs my memory.
Someone's a bit like someone you get off look at them and then no.
But this is another year past things can't be never-ending.

In the same way an old classmate walked toward me just like she was in childhood.
I never though it would happen to us too incidentally.
Oh god how much I would have liked to be beside you.
You're standing there in the metro and bang you grow old suddenly.

I often wonder how they'd react to each other these two bodies.
What your smell would be like I'm sure it must be different now.
If they even could react to each other these two bodies.
There's a thin scar where I gave birth to my little son.

Somehow my hips are getting wider as well I don't know the reason.
For all this I find it really neither pleases nor tires out.
Looking into that other face it was so confusing.
There you were with your stranger's eyes looking at my stranger's mouth.

II

Sometimes I get frightened I seem to hear my mother when I'm speaking.
At the cinema recently she almost talked to me from a mirror.
The way she held the soap suddenly I was struck by the feeling.
All those shitty years what a pointless waste they were.

Not to mention the man I live with in certain familiar intonations.
Our dog also reminds me a lot when it looks at me that way.
About my mother just now I wasn't exaggerating.
Mind you why I'm talking about all this stuff I can't say.

It was the last Christmas when I was still a child I got a kitten.
We lived next to a food store the busy road was snow-covered.
It saw me ran to me crossed the road in that instant.
How many times must I learn these things all over.

Prior to let's say a pebble a chestnut a tree leaf.
You'd answer that's exactly why and actually it could be.
A thing that I know as well and I who had seen it.
Nonsense I say I've become creation's keenest student.

III

Last year at the beginning of autumn when we first moved into this house.
Nothing but dust paint everywhere nothing but thinner.
We hoped perhaps our breathing would change it chase the whiff out.
Then it got gradually cooler after that I can't remember.

Suddenly in the mornings we couldn't go out on the terrace.
You sat out with a coffee and started to get cold with your coat.
Off with your coat off try to settle in the empty places.
Somehow you sort things out you manage to fall on your feet.

Like some far-off season this light of today it's so unhomely.
It's like I'm somebody else or it's more like I'm elsewhere.
I went inside for a cardigan even though it's still only.
Not so much the colours it's more the quality of today's air.

To know it's not summer sketching itself but the face of autumn.
See that leaf a mouth-shaped rust patch silently stains it.
My little son stares from the past a baby-eyed kitten.
Still air's thin smoke signal I gaze at gaze at.

Ágnes Széchenyi

General and Dictator! My Friend!

A Portfolio of Hungarian Letters

The beautifully produced *Magyar Leveleskönyv** is the reprint of a volume that never actually appeared as such. It is a book whose history is as exciting as its content. It was first scheduled for publication in 1944—an intention aborted by the war; the material survived only thanks to one of its editors. Long thought of as lost, the thick folders of manuscripts and proof sheets, which were in the keeping of Éva H. Balázs, came to light again in the summer of 2000, in her basement. József Balogh, the father of the idea and one of the editors, never saw the book; when and where he died is not clear. All that is known is that on March 20, 1944, the day after Hungary was occupied by the Germans, he said goodbye to a few friends, saying he had to disappear for some time; given his Jewish origins, hardly anyone was surprised. He was one of thousands to flee that day, among them ex-prime minister Count István Bethlen, whose policies József Balogh had served as a grey eminence. Seeking refuge the same day was Balogh's champion, the banker Baron Móric Kornfeld, a supporter of Bethlen's policy and self-effacing benefactor of two of the greatest poets of the time, Endre Ady and Mihály Babits, as well as sponsor of the reform-minded conservative periodical, *Magyar Szemle.* Kornfeld was one of the patrons of the foreign-language periodicals which pursued Bethlen's European-minded policy, *Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie* and *The Hungarian Quarterly,* (predecessor of this journal). He also had a hand in the 1938 launching of the anti-German daily *Magyar Nemzet.*

József Balogh's career has been studied by only one historian to date. Tibor Frank has published his findings mainly in English, appropriately, since Balogh

* Balogh József—Tóth László (eds.): *Magyar Leveleskönyv I–II.* (The Book of Hungarian Letters). Arranged for publication by Éva H. Balázs, Budapest, Corvina, 2001, 636 and 526 pp.

Ágnes Széchenyi,
a historian of literature, teaches and studies 20th-century Hungarian culture and journalism.

had been outstanding as the editor of *The Hungarian Quarterly,* addressed to the English speaking world and hence with no real need to hide its anti-German feelings. He managed to bring out the journal, even if only in the form of a yearbook, as late as early 1944.[1] Balogh's highly important work is practically unknown even in Hungary, and Frank's English-language publication has of course helped little in this respect. Balogh was a brilliant classical scholar, the Hungarian translator of the *Confessions* of St Augustine, and an authority on Medieval Latin. He had no academic career, for which Jewish origins and homosexuality were to blame. He never published his writings in book form. His last months cannot be reconstructed with absolute certainty. He is known to have been sent or taken by his patrons to the Jesuits in Szeged. There he found relative security; he was not fitted out with clerical garb, but was allowed to use the library and teach. He was betrayed, unwittingly, by one of his pupils, who boasted of his teacher's extraordinary knowledge to a German collaborator. His last personal message originated in Sárvár. Lieutenant-Colonel Toszt, Regent Horthy's aide-de-camp, is said to have motored through Western Hungary in pursuit of him, always arriving too late at successive lock-ups and camps, Balogh having been moved on. He was most probably murdered in the Sopronkőhida prison.

The other editor of *The Book of Hungarian Letters* was László Tóth, professor of history at the universities of Pécs, Kolozsvár (Cluj) and Szeged, whose career soared in the postwar years, when he became a university rector and a member of parliament, only to be displaced as suddenly when, in 1950, his son, in diplomatic service, was executed, and he himself was forced to resign.[2] Tóth was a student of Bishop Vilmos Fraknói. He later wrote a book on the historiographer and church historian, who published a number of important documents, which had great value for students of diplomatic history. Tóth, it seems, had an excellent teacher, and he himself started his career as assistant keeper of the National Museum and Széchényi Library (the national library); he thus was able to call on the help of friends on the staff of libraries and archives throughout the country when Balogh invited him to cooperate in the project.

Thirty thousand letters survived amongst József Balogh's papers. Assuming he wrote as many as he received, he was certainly one to know what a letter means, what it records. Short or formal exchanges apart, this vast quantity indicates a huge intellectual network at home and abroad. Even letters containing little more than polite formulæ often pointed to important arrangements.

1 ■ Tibor Frank, *Ethnicity, Propaganda, Myth-Making. Studies on Hungarian Connections to Britain and America,* Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1999, p. 391.

2 ■ The son's story was related by his step-brother, Géza Herczeg, a judge at the International Court of Justice, the Hague, in *Magyar Szemle*, which was restarted after the end of Communism. Cf. Herczeg Géza: "Hármas szaltó," (Triple Somersault, *Magyar Szemle,* 1996:1.

He was in touch with practically all scholarly and government institutions in Hungary, and knew key members of the aristocracy and the establishment. The clue was his reliability, thanks to which many non-public and family archives were happy to lend him letters to be copied for future publication. The thank-you letters bear witness to these arrangements. Balogh could have used the telephone but he preferred to keep a record of his activities.

When József Balogh disappeared, the manuscript of the two volumes was complete, setting up in type had reached the first third of the second volume. The material was in the safekeeping of a young, recent graduate, who eventually became the third editor. Balogh met Éva Balázs at Móric Kornfeld's Ireg estate. (Éva H. Balázs, now 87, a student of the Age of the Enlightenment, is Professor Emeritus of Eötvös Lóránd University in Budapest, Eötvös Wreath Doctor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, member of the Legion d'Honeur and of the Portuguese Historical Academy.) Kornfeld's daughter, Mária, was a fellow student and friend of Éva Balázs, whom they invited to spend some weeks of the summer holiday in their Tolna County manor. József Balogh made her acquaintance there and suggested that she help in the editing work, as well as make translations of letters in Latin, French and German and copy-edit the introductions to the letters.

Publication was further delayed by the acute shortage of paper immediately after the war. When the economy began to get back on its feet and the new currency (the forint) was introduced in 1946, the Révai publishing house, aware of the collection, wanted to publish it. Its manager, the writer Endre Illés, contacted Éva H. Balázs, and they started work on the volumes anew, joined by László Tóth. They were finished by late 1948, but in early 1949, the publishing house was nationalized and the newly set up first volume pulped. Different books were in demand. In 1949 the only books and periodicals to appear popularised the party, reconstruction, socialist "achievements", Soviet science and art, with compulsory quotes from the classics of Marxism and the writings of Communist leaders. The journal *Embernevelés* (roughly: Human Education) came out in the month Révai was nationalized, with an oversized photograph of First Secretary Mátyás Rákosi on the cover. A special meeting of Parliament had already ordained the erection of the giant Stalin statue, which would be demolished during the 1956 Revolution. The editorial idea of *The Book of Hungarian Letters,* selecting from all ages and walks of Hungarian life, history, politics and art, was incompatible with the official attitude. Endre Illés himself was demoted and appointed production manager in a house in which he once reigned supreme.

What was it that the common reader was deprived of for over half a century? Some of the letters were meant for posterity, some for the moment they were written, some were confessions of ideals and emotions, often enlarged into mini-autobiographies, others plans for work. There are diplomatic statements,

life projects, pleas concerning private and public affairs, enquiries concerning points of the law, jokes in prose and verse, explanations and apologies, rapturous reports, challenges to public debate, royal announcements, landscape descriptions, and the *ars poetica* of composers and writers. In a word, everything. The pieces in this vast selection, the epistolaries of successive ages inevitably become guides to Hungarian history.

The principles of selection were delightfully idiosyncratic. They reflect the taste of the owners of family archives, the interests of the librarians and archivists, who actually made the selection. Which of course does not prevent certain letters from reflecting the notions, phrases or positions of the inter-war period. They bear witness to the anxiety of the forties, and the hope that it is possible to recover from war and social catastrophe. The selection may lack a central editorial idea, the two volumes nevertheless reflect the values of national liberal conservatism.

The Book of Hungarian Letters is organized chronologically, and the available material suggested natural sections, with titles that effortlessly guide the reader. To mention but a few: *Aristocratic Idyll* (the correspondence of Tamás Nádasdy and Orsolya Kanizsay from the middle of the 16th century), *Acquiring Nobility* (1590–1607); *Aristocratic Marriage—Aristocratic Funeral* (early 17th c.); *Illness—Remedies; The Life of a Hungarian Aristocratic Family* (the correspondence of the Baroness Batthyány and her son, Ádám Batthyány from the middle of the 17th century); *A Hungarian Jesuit Missionary in South America* (1753), *Crowning a Queen in 1825; Disclaimers; Hungarian Biedermeier; National Theatre; Hungarians in Paris; Before Trianon.*

The book, especially the first volume, is often bilingual: letters appear in their original language—Latin in the Middle Ages, later occasionally in German—and in translation. The first letter included was written around 1090 by St Ladislaus the king to Oderisus, abbot of Monte Cassino. Beyond its content, it is made important by its date, less than a century after Hungary became a Christian state in 1000. The historian Henrik Marczali is fully justified in calling the second letter one of the most important documents of Hungarian diplomatic history. It was written by King Béla IV to Pope Innocent IV in 1254, in the period of reconstruction roughly a decade after the 1241/42 Tatar invasion. This letter offers the first clear formulation of the idea of Hungary as the bulwark of Europe and Christendom, a notion confirmed in the 16th and 17th centuries, when the greater part of Hungary was under Turkish occupation. This is a key element of national identity, recurring throughout the centuries often as an interest in the genetic, spiritual and linguistic relatives of Hungarians. Ignoring the fact that the question of belonging was once and for all settled by the adoption of Latin Chistianity, that Hungarians had thereby chosen their history, politics, system of government, literature, art, religion and morality, the early 20th century saw the rise of dangerous delusions. Hazy notions, such as "the rider of the Volga", "Turanism" and

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"Japanese cousinhood," backed by German racist ideology, bore horrible fruit at the time these volumes were compiled. In this letter, two and a half centuries after his nation had converted to Christianity, King Béla demands that the head of the Church do his duty in support of Hungary. The rich and fascinating medieval section contains, among other things, a letter of blackmail, sent by Czech bandits to the town of Bártfa, in the 1450's. Their literate leader drew, for added emphasis, three hanged men, a gun and a sword on his letter.

The letters abound in revealing aspects of the writers' personality. General Artúr Görgey, a brilliant strategist, who in 1849 surrendered to superior Russian forces that had been called in to help the beaten Austrian forces, acknowledging that revolutionary Hungary had failed in its attempt to rid itself of the Habsburgs, died in 1916, at the age of ninety-eight. Often accused of being a traitor, the commander-in-chief of the Hungarian forces remained a controversial figure long after his death. He inspired several plays. The book contains an 1832 letter by the young Görgey, who relates his plans of study to his father, and a letter dated 1902, in which the octogenarian broods on an episode in 1849, still hurt by Kossuth's (by then ten years dead) accusation of treachery. Sándor Petőfi, the emblematic poet of the 1848 Revolution and War of Independence, appears here as feverishly ambitious: in a letter, dated a month before the Revolution, he tells his friend and fellow-poet János Arany of his plans to translate in quick succession seven plays by Shakespeare. Only *Coriolanus* was completed; he was killed in battle in July 1849, at the age of 26. The great conservative statesman, Count István Széchenyi is also represented in two guises. In a letter he wrote on the day he took up residence in the Döbling asylum (September 7, 1850)—"today is the day I set off for Hell!"—he accepts responsibility for the "ruin" of Hungary, the crushed war of liberation. He feels he sold Hungarians to the "god of perdition." In another letter, however, dated shortly before his suicide (1860), he looks ahead into the future with a clear mind, and though declared mentally unfit, he manages his family's finances with maximum prudence and financial shrewdness.

The book is also a treasury for the linguist. The great humanist king, Matthias Corvinus (ruling 1458-90) had little time to perfect his Latin, given that he became king so young. The idiom of his letters is a mixture of bad Latin and *bona fide* "Magyarisms." Whether he himself held the quill or dictated, these letters represent a truly commanding character, now offensive, now offended; now temperately polite, now imperiously assertive. It is interesting that the Hungarian of Baroness Batthyány, née Éva Lobkowitz Poppel, in a letter to her son from 1631, is fresher and more enjoyable to the modern reader than that of the early-nineteenth-century language reformer, Ferenc Kazinczy. The two great poets, János Arany and Sándor Petőfi, sometimes wrote to each other, in jest, in English.

An amusing chapter includes excerpts from 18th and 19th century correspondence handbooks. The letter is one of the few intellectual products whose roots do not go back to Greek antiquity. We know of hardly any Greek letters actually sent *(missilis),* what we have are "stylized letters," fictional orations put into the mouths of famous personalities. The letter was a Roman invention; the evidence came when around 1900 thousands of papyrus letters were found in Hellenistic period tombs in Egypt. Erasmus also made a large collection of sample letters, feeling it his painful duty to regularly update it, to preserve his reputation against the "evidence" of pirated, distorted editions. There was a great demand for these samplers. As we learn from the book under review, Gábor Bethlen (Prince of Transylvania, ruling 1613–1629) bound his nephew to write a letter a day while travelling abroad. The editors of *The Book of Hungarian Letters* are probably right in thinking the nephew's tutors kept a copy of Erasmus's guide handy. The volumes contain important information for comparatists too, offering valuable clues to the international relations of earlier ages. The letter by the Archbishop Miklós Oláh (relative of Matthias) to Erasmus speaks of a close friendship between the two humanists. The letter samplers published here give practical advice, such as on how to write letters "to the great and to one's superiors", or how to make a polite reply to a challenge to a duel. These manuals gave guidelines not only regarding content but lay-out; advice of the latter type includes a suggestion to make the size of the margins correspond to the sender's respect for the addressee. It is also suggested that a bold line be inserted between the end of the letter and the signature, to prevent the misuse of the signature.

The Book of Hungarian Letters also provides a rich selection of letters by women, which show that women made their mark in history much earlier than is commonly thought. Examples include the extensive correspondence of the Batthyány family, or the eighteen pairs of letters exchanged between Tamás Nádasdy and his wife, Orsolya Kanizsay. Unsurprisingly, the chapter *Illness—Remedies* contains mostly letters by women, as they seemed more versed in the subject than men. Letters by famous actresses were provided for publication by a private collector. The great minister of education of the inter-war period, Count Kunó Klebelsberg also turns out to be indebted to a number of women, who provided inspiration and support for his work. These educated, active upper-class women were directly responsible for the success of his endeavour to establish Hungarian institutions abroad (the network of Collegium Hungaricums), some of them functioning to this day.

The size of *The Hungarian Book of Letters* reflects the standing of the editors, who were inundated with letters. Unfortunately, not all contributors or collectors could be identified. Those who are known to have enriched the selection, to have copied letters in Budapest, Kolozsvár (Cluj), Kassa (Košice), Vienna and a

number of provincial aristocratic archives, were and often still are the best representatives of their profession.

The last event in the sequence of accidents to save this book from destruction was a simple mistake: Éva H. Balázs herself, afraid of harrassment for this "politically incorrect" compilation, charged her husband in 1949 with the task of destroying the material. Unwittingly, he burned another set of folders, and *The Hungarian Book of Letters* lay ignored and unknown in a basement for over fifty years, to be discovered in the summer of 2000, when work was being done on the basement itself. The proofs and manuscript pages contained copies of letters the originals of which had long disappeared: they were either destroyed during the late phase of the war, lost by their fleeing owners, or were got rid of out of fear during the decades of terror. An invaluable collection, indeed.

Éva H. Balázs is entitled to be described as "editor" on the title page of the volumes issued by Corvina. She modestly distinguishes herself from the actual editors, claiming no more recognition than the work she once did deserves. This modesty conceals the immense amount of work that had to be done before publication could take place. She had to rearrange a heap of material in disorder, check sources and prepare indexes; she had to engage her students in the enormous task.

What the book needs is a sequel, a similar selection of letters from the second half of the 20th century, to give a sense of the peculiarly East European coexistence of politics and scholarship, of politics and literature, the changes in trends and styles—life itself in an age of wars, autocracies and changes of regimes. And a start should also be made on the processing and publication of József Balogh's own surviving correspondence, a monument of behind-the-scenes diplomacy in inter-war Hungary. ❧

The Hungarian Book of Letters

(Extracts)

Medieval Hungary

More than a hundred thousand Mongol horsemen seeking plunder invaded Europe. In 1242 they annihilated the King of Hungary's army at the battle of Muhi, devastated town and village as they advanced, crossed the frozen Danube, and threatened Western Hungary. King Béla IV (1206–1270) fled to Dalmatia. On receiving news of the death of their Khan, the raiders returned to Asia. King Béla returned to Hungary and set to reconstruction with great zest. He offered privileges to fortified towns and castles. At his command, work was started on the construction of thirty new castles. Having settled things at home, the King started to mend his fences abroad. The letter here published is the earliest surviving formulation of the notion of Hungary as a bastion of the West and Christendom.

KING BÉLA IV TO POPE INNOCENT IV
1254

To our most Holy Father and Lord, Innocent, by the Grace of God Supreme Pontiff of the Holy Roman Church, Béla, equally by the Grace of God King of Hungary, with all due reverence and devotion. Since the Realm of Hungary has been largely turned into a desert by the Tatar plague, and since it is surrounded by diverse infidel tribes as the sheepfold is by hurdles, to wit Ruthenes and Brodniks in the East, and Bulgarian and Bosniak heretics to the South, with whom our hosts are even now engaged in battle. Germans live to the West and North, whose help our realm ought to enjoy because of their like religion, but instead of the fruits of help we are compelled to feel the thorns of war, as they plunder the goods of this country in their pillaging raids. For these reasons, but chiefly because of the Tatars, the fear of which was taught to this realm by the experience of war, as it was to other nations whom the Tatars overran, having taken counsel with the prelates and peers of the realm, we have seen fit to turn to the Vicar of Christ and his brethren as the only and chief help in the ultimate

peril of the Christian faith, so that what we fear shall not befall us, and even less so you or other Christians. Day after day rumours of Tatars reach us, that they are making ready not only against us—against whom their anger is the greatest since, after so many blows we were still reluctant to subject ourselves to them, when all the other nations who experienced their strength became their tributaries, and especially the regions which march on our realm in the East, Russia, Cumania, Brodnici and Bulgaria, which were earlier largely under our dominion, indeed it is bruited that they are conspiring against the whole of Christendom. A number of true men firmly assert that they have made their decision and that their innumerable host will shortly be turned against the whole of Europe. We fear that, if this people should come here, our own, being unable and unwilling to oppose and hold up bloodthirsty Tatar cruelty, will accept the Tatar yoke against their will, moved by fear, as the neighbours, as mentioned, have already done, unless the circumspection of the Apostolic See provides better and firmer defences for this realm, offering solace to the people who dwell in it. We write this to save ourselves from accusations regarding the manner of our governance or possible negligence. As regards our manner of governance it suffices to say that what could be done, given familiarity with the situation, we did, so exposing ourselves and our own to as yet unknown Tatar strength and savagery. As regards negligence, we can in no way be accused of that. In this cause we turned to the three principal courts in Christendom while the Tatar was still ravaging our realm, and that is yours, which Christians hold to be that of the highest authority, the Emperor's, to whom we were ready to pledge our fealty, if he had been ready to provide help and support at a time of peril. We also turned to the French court, but all we received from any of them in the way of support or solace was words. We therefore had recourse to what was in our power, humbling our royal standing we married two of our daughters to a Ruthenian and a third to a Polish prince, in order to obtain through them and their friends in the East secret intelligence about the Tatars, putting ourselves in a better position to resist their intents and cunning tricks. We allowed the Cumans to enter our realm and—woe to us!—we now employ heathens in the defence of our royal power and heathens disloyal to our Church trample on us. Furthermore, in defence of the Christian faith, we married our first-born son to a Cuman woman, to avoid greater troubles and to find a way in which we could prompt them to adopt Christianity, as we had previously done with others. We hope that this and much else will make clear to Your Pontifical Holiness that, in our anxious situation we received help from none of the princes or nations of Europe, but for the Knights Templar whose members, at my request, recently took up arms against the heathens and schismatics, in defence of our realm and the Christian faith. We have settled some of them in a highly endangered place, in the Cuman and Bulgarian marches beyond the Danube, at a point where the Tatar host had invaded at the time when they overran our realm. It was our intention and hope

that, if God helped our and the knights' endeavours, and the Apostolic See would graciously grant its approval, we could, through them, further spread the shoots of the Catholic faith, since the Danube flows all the way to the Constantinopolitan Sea, so that in this way we would offer appropriate assistance to both the Roman Empire and the Holy Land. Some of them we mean to settle in the heart of the country, in defence of the castles we had built on the banks of the Danube, since our people are not accustomed to such tasks. After repeated deliberations, my council has agreed that it would be more salutary for us as well, and also for the whole of Europe, if the Danube is fortified by castles. It was there that Heraclius confronted Chosroe in defence of the Roman Empire, and it was there too that we resisted the Tatars for ten months, albeit we were not prepared and were extraordinarily weakened and our realm was not really defended by a single castle or fortification. If the Tatar would occupy the country—from which the Lord may preserve us!—the road to other Catholic kingdoms would be wide open to the enemy. On the one hand, because no sea would stand in their way going on from us to other Christians, and secondly, because this would be a better place than elsewhere for them to settle their large families. Let Attila serve as an example. Coming from the East to subjugate the West, he established his princely court right in the middle of our country. The emperors, on the other hand, who fought their way from the West to subjugate the East, placed whatever they needed to equip their armies within the borders of our country. Let Your Pontiffical Holiness give careful thought to this, graciously offering a healing balm before the wound suppurates. Wise men are astonished indeed that at a time when the situation is what it is, Your Holiness allows the King of France, that noble son of the Church, to dwell beyond the confines of Europe. They are astonished and do not cease in their astonishment that Your Apostolic Holiness has a care of many things, such as the Constantinopolitan Empire and the parts *outre-mère,* which, if they were lost—which God forbid!—would not injure those who dwell in Europe as much as the occupation of our realm by the Tatars. May God and man be our witness that need and anxiety are so great, that if it were not for the dangers of the road, we would not merely send the envoys whom we are sending, but we would appear at your feet in person, speaking eye to eye to the Church, making excuses for ourselves, asking for permission to come to an agreement with the Tartar, albeit we have no mind whatever to do that, but we must if the Holy Father delays help, since need urges. We pray therefore that the Mother Church should consider if not our merits, then those of our saintly royal predecessors. In the midst of the other princes of this world, they humbly and respectfully maintained themselves and the people they converted in the purity of faith and obedience. Because of this the Holy Apostolic See promised them and their successors—as long as they kept on their way—that support and grace would be theirs unasked, whenever the need arose. Now, no doubt that serious danger threatens, therefore lay bare your fatherly heart, offering a helping hand

in the hour of persecution, in support of faith and the common good. Should, however, this our supplication, deserving consideration and of universal importance to all the faithful members of the Roman Church meet with rejection, which we cannot believe, we will be forced to beg for help, not as your sons but as step-children, driven by need, excluded from our Father's fold.

Patak, the 11th of November, the day of Saint Martin, Bishop and Confessor.

Aristocratic Idyll—The Correspondence between Tamás Nádasdy and his wife Orsolya Kanizsay

The powerful magnate Tamás Nádasdy was one of the outstanding figures in Hungary in the period that followed the catastrophic Battle of Mohács (1526) and the subsequent Turkish occupation. He and his wife—the daughter of the rich and influential noble Kanizsay family—were generous patrons of literature and zealously supported the Reformation. Nádasdy took the side of King Ferdinand of Habsburg (who succeeded his brother Charles V as Holy Roman Emperor). In 1554 Ferdinand appointed Nádasdy Palatine, an office which implied ever longer absences from his estates to attend the King. In Nádasdy's absence, his wife watched over his castles and the huge estates attached to them. Both Nádasdy and his wife wrote most of their letters in their own hand, which stands as evidence for the high level of their education and the equality in their relationship.

ORSOLYA KANIZSAY TO TAMÁS NÁDASDY

1554

My admirable, honourable, estimable and beloved lord. After offering my duty I give hearty thanks to the Lord God for all His many favours to us, and for this present one too which His Divine Majesty has bestowed upon Your Honour and myself together, and I greet Your Honour firstly in spirit and then as the world does, that the eternal, almighty Lord may first strengthen us in the true religion by His holy faithfulness and promise, that all error be kept far from us, that we may be at one with the poor little Christian Holy Mother Church in soul and body, and that we may walk in the true faith and in mutual love;—and that He may cause you, Your Honour, my beloved lord Palatine, to prosper greatly and keep you before my solitary eyes, for which I hope, and trust and believe that it will be so, and I believe of a certainty that He will wish to raise you up for trust in Him alone, amen.

Further, my loving lord, I have indeed sinned greatly before you in that I have not made reply to Your Honour's so many letters: but of a truth this has been through neither anger nor forgetfulness, but because I have been daily expecting

Your Honour. I cannot now answer concerning everything in the letter which Csáfordy has brought. Where Your Honour writes that I should receive Your Honour differently, that is so, because I will receive you as my dear lord Palatine; and let my lord Palatine see it when he comes home, because clearly he will find only a proud Palatine's wife. Further, one of your four honours is sufficient for me, and I wish to be judge of the Cumans, because Your Honour knows that I do not drink wine; the doctor says, however, that it is unseemly for the Palatine's wife to drink water; nevertheless, some small beer will be fitting in the office of judge, and I shall not die of thirst. May the mighty Lord God preserve Your Honour. Given at Your Honour's Leoka, 23 April 1554.

Your Honour's Orsolya

Further, I may write to Your Honour concerning the proud Palatine's wife that she has not a skirt to put on; that which she had is no longer fit because it is worn. Let it have a waistband of pink, and be of satin; the Palatine's wife commands my lord Palatine to send it by István Kocsis together with her furs and dyed cambric; from this my lord Palatine may opine that clearly he has to do with so proud a person.

TAMÁS NÁDASDY TO HIS WIFE

1555

My beloved lieutenant. I have learned from Zsennyei of your missive, to which I reply briefly. First, may the enemy not discover your secret, second, do not completely abandon your own God-given wits out of regard for anyone, third, have in secret a vice-lieutenant, in order that should anything befall your chief lieutenant you may not be left lacking, fourth, be not fearful, but trust in God and use your God-given wits. Finally, I pray you forgive me that I cannot come to you, there is a reason and you shall learn it from Zsennyei. The common nobility have come to me over a dispute of theirs. May God instruct you, guard and preserve you. Given at Vasvár 26 September 1555.

Your Nádasdy etc.

TAMÁS NÁDASDY TO HIS WIFE

1556

My beloved Nestling. Tomorrow I shall send you a horse and carriage, and as soon as I write, come straight to Keresztur, and I will write again where you are to come thence. God keep you in peace. If it is possible I will not tarry. Given at Vienna 29 April 1556.

Your grandpa etc.

My distress is allayed on reading your letter.

Ferkó must be brought most gradually to look on strong sunlight, else it is to be feared that his eyes may be weakened, because if God preserves his life he must needs look on the points of spears more than on either his father or mother, and for that weak eyes are not good. Certainly it is time, says my lady Széchy, to accustom him to brightness.

TAMÁS NÁDASDY TO HIS WIFE
1556

Splendid and magnificent etc. After this salutation I can write that by the goodness of the Lord God we are all in good health. I can also write that Ali, pasha of Buda, Hassan, pasha of Temesvár, and the pasha of Bosnia are together at Pécs and await the beylerbey. We are here, we watch them and they us, and either we shall drive them off or they us. Our plan is that if they fall upon us we shall fight with them, although the king's son being with us we shall act prudently, and if we perceive the Turk coming upon us in greater force than our own then we shall go over into the Muraköz and there be as in a castle. But this I write to you alone. We must await from the Lord God whatsoever His Majesty gives, but do you with all the people of your household beseech God to grant victory to the Christians. May the same be healthy and prosper. From Csorgó on the last day of September 1556. Forgive me, my dear, for causing another to write this. I would fain know how Ferkó fares with the new nursemaid and the boil. Do not await my homecoming, if you are wretched so.

TAMÁS NÁDASDY TO HIS WIFE
1558

My beloved Orsika, You have done very well indeed to send my belt after me; but even so I have left behind a taffeta belt and a glove; send those too.

You have won the day in the queen's eyes with the muscat pears, so go to for the melon also. If Ferkó is better lead the round dance; and I will catch you up in it.

Yesterday at noon the Emperor asked whether I had come; on learning that, I attended upon the Czech king, who saw that I had come with great pleasure, because he was surety to me. May God preserve you. Given at Vienna 22 June 1558. If you made haste to send more muscat pears you would again win the day, as they are not even heard of here. I pray you, go to.

Your old Palatine etc.

Pears are to be found also at Sitke, Halolti, Iváncsi. Loós, Föles and up at Szent Miklós.

Kelemen Mikes's Letters from Turkey

Kelemen Mikes (1690–1762) was seventeen when entering the service of Prince Francis II Rákóczi, the leader of an unsuccessful War of Independence against Austria (1704–11). Mikes stayed on in the exiled Prince's service until his death in 1735. He ended his life in exile as the last of the former followers of Rákóczi. His fictitious letters to a fictitious aunt are of high literary merit and serve as a memorial to the life of the exiled Prince and his fellow fugitives in Turkey.

Yeniköy, 4. Martii 1720*

Now, dear Aunt, let us take out the quill and clean the mouldy inkhorn; for now we must to writing, to the sending of mail, the awakening of news. Today is the eighth day since, winter being over, you left us as St Paul did the Wallachians, and resumed your seat in the imperial city. And there you must not be allowed to lie in idleness, but be made to write. And I will send you such news over the foam of the sea at which both your ears will ring—it is well that you have no more than two. But first I will write finely tinted and sweet-scented news, then toll the bell. Yesterday the Aga of Janissaries ceremoniously sent our lord a gift. This consisted of many lovely flowers and much fruit. I know beforehand what you will say—that was certainly an unworthy gift—one should present ladies with flowers, and if the Aga of Janissaries had sent flowers to a lady I would praise him for it; but for a General to send flowers to a Prince I can never regard as fitting. If that is what you say, I say: that may well be a ridiculous gift in another country, but here one cannot send a gift to a woman, and it would be an even more deadly sin for a woman to send a gift to a man, even if it were only a single rose.

It is true that such a gift displeases us, and we consider it suitable for a woman, but we must consider that here it is customary, and that what is customary somewhere is fitting in that country. If in England women go into inns, no one censures them for it; because it is customary. In Spain women have little pigs in their laps, as elsewhere they carry little dogs. In France and elsewhere a lady of quality will take her seat in her carriage and go where she wishes until evening; here, however, the wife of a Turkish gentleman will not go out of the house all year. In Poland the priests place bottles of eau-de-vie in the holy water in the vestry, to keep it cool until Mass is over; would we permit that? Among us a lady of quality would be ashamed to smoke; but here they all smoke. In China the girl that marries soonest is the one with the longest ears, even if they reach her shoulders; among us, men would abhor such a thing. Here they eat only with the fingers, but we use knife and fork. And is it a good custom that the Tatar noblewomen pierce their noses and insert large silver rings such as they put in their ears? So we have to learn about the customs of a country if we wish

*Reprinted by permission from *Letters from Turkey by Kelemen Mikes,* translated by Bernard Adams, London, Kegan Paul, 2000.

to pass comment on them. Perhaps you are unacquainted with the Turkish custom that if a Turk omits two Thursdays, his wife may bring plaint before the judge? So then the Aga of Janissaries could send flowers; it is the local custom.

But, my dear Aunt, prepare yourself for bad news. True, it could have been foreseen, but one really could not have contemplated it. Our well-wishers have so striven against us that they have won the case, and they wish us hence, as if we were a burden to them. This morning the Vizier summoned Ferenc Horváth and through him informed the Prince that the Porte wished to arrange a better and more suitable place than Yeniköy for the Hungarians. Our lord, as a true Christian Prince, received this intelligence with a calm mind, and in this the change could provoke no change. He might have quoted David: *Usque quo exaltabitur inimicus meus super me?* and 'Let them be ashamed that rejoice at mine hurt'. But following the teachings of Christ he prayed for blessing on his persecutors, and laid the blame not on the Porte but on that ambassador that has been striving to do us injury. If God is with us, who is against us? I cannot yet know to what place they mean to send us. But the departure will not come so soon, and I deeply regret that we shall be farther apart. I will inform you of all this at the earliest opportunity. I wish you good health. Amen.

Sándor Petőfi and János Arany

Sándor Petőfi (1823–1849) was a rebellious, passionately personal, romantic poet, a radical republican and revolutionary. His father was a village innkeeper and butcher by the name of Petrovics, which the son changed to Petőfi. He and his friend, the somewhat older poet János Arany—a man of reticent, contemplative nature—both made their appearance on the literary scene not long before the 1848 Revolution. Both poets came from poor families and village backgrounds, and voiced the thinking, outlook, aspirations and imagery of simple village people, drawing on folk poetry and tradition, thereby giving Hungarian poetry an entirely new turn. After a youth of poverty and deprivation, and stints as an actor, during his six years of literary activity Petőfi managed to produce a large oeuvre of highly original lyrical poetry, some epics, a novel, translations, a travelogue, and a great deal of correspondence. He was killed in battle when 26, in 1849, much as he had predicted in one of his poems. János Arany (1817–1881) produced a huge oeuvre, great historical epics, ballads of extraordinary dramatic power, and lyrical poems that foreshadowed the psychological depths and complexities of twentieth century poetry. A great master of language and poetic form, he was also an important literary scholar and translator. For many years he was secretary of the Academy of Sciences, and as editor he discovered Imre Madách's philosophical verse-drama, The Tragedy of Man, *which became a Hungarian classic. Petőfi and Arany were great friends, their correspondence fills a small volume. Sometimes, jokingly, they wrote one another in English—a language neither of them spoke but both translated from.*

SÁNDOR PETŐFI TO LAJOS SZEBERÉNYI

1842

My dear friend!

I received your letter a short while before the examination; that is why I did not wish to write before coming back to Pápa, for I had a terrible foreboding that a great change was to come upon me. Nor did my presentiment deceive me. I have come up to Pápa, my friend, come up to leave it and school for ever. Destiny presses me remorselessly. I stand before a dreadful abyss over which I must step, and by taking that step I shall perchance break two hearts, those of my parents. And yet I cannot do otherwise. See, my friend, I must become an actor, and there is nothing for it; my parents cannot help me, and in Pápa I have no prospect of obtaining a wretched *fillér* to keep body and soul together. Now, for the third time, to be an actor! Let us see what destiny brings. Shall I say that my goal is not the earning of my daily bread (for in that case I would become a wagonner or a farm-hand, and would eat with greater certainty), but that I aim higher, and shall never lose sight of the goal? My artistic, poetic friend, how I burn. But it has long been decreed that I am not to be an ordinary man: *aut Caesar aut nihil.* Do not mock me, my friend, if I speak folly.

I do not know whether you have yet heard that last year I won a prize of the Pápa Art Society for a ballad; further, my second ballad and two lyrics (I submitted no more) gained distinction. That is enough for a superannuated logician.

You write that we should exchange with one another the further products of our minds. That I shall do most gladly, readily and joyfully. And I beg you, do send your opinion of my verses (if they merit that attention), though I am by no means so assured as to venture to pass judgement on your work. I am aware of my shortcomings in that respect. I am writing this letter at the home of my friend Domanovszky. I leave Pápa this very day. When I am settled in a place I will inform you. Live happily and love

your friend
Sándor Petrovics

SÁNDOR PETŐFI TO SÁNDOR TELEKI

1846

Pest, 29 December 1846

My dear namesake!

A great sorrow is about to befall you, therefore I counsel you to prepare for it. But inevitable as is death, so inevitable is it that you should give me (or let me have, as you please) six hundred forints; but in such a way that you send off two hundred forints directly, before you finish reading this letter; and send four

hundred by the time of the March market in Pest. As for repayment, I will give you two hundred forints at every year's end, so that in three years' time we shall be quits. I speak seriously, my dear friend, and now you may show if there is any human kindness in you. I turn for the first time in my life to a rich man, and so spare me the embarrassment and blushing which will eat away my face worse than an ulcer if you refuse me. Furthermore, I have turned to you as to my friend and not as a rich man. You may say that you have no money, and but if you wish you will; he that will toss a thousand forints to a Gipsy for nothing can always lend me six hundred, for I would not take it in return for nothing, I am too proud for that, praise be. I do not doubt that you will gladly fulfil my request, and send two hundred forints this minute, for were I not in immense need I would not have contemplated this action. Send your letter with the money by the express coach. My address: Hatvani utca, Jankovics house no. 585, 2nd floor. My greetings to Viktor. Your sincere friend

Petőfi

SÁNDOR PETŐFI TO JÁNOS ARANY

1847

Pest, 4 February 1847

I salute you! Today I have read *Toldi,* today I have written this poem, and this very day I shall send it off. It will appear in *Életképek,* but I will brook no delay in making you aware of the surprise, the pleasure, the delight that your work has aroused in me. Whatever they may say, folk-poetry is the true poetry. Let us set about making it the master! If the people is master in poetry they will stand near to mastery in politics too, and that is the purpose of the age, the aim of every noble breast that is weary of seeing millions suffer martyrdom in order that a couple of thousand may be able to live a life of ease and luxury. To Heaven with the people, to Hell with the aristocracy!

Write to me, if it will not burden you: write about yourself, anything, everything, how old you are, whether you are single or married, fair- or dark-haired, tall or short... it will all interest me. God be with you, God be with you. Ab invisis your sincere friend

Sándor Petőfi

JÁNOS ARANY TO SÁNDOR PETŐFI

1847

Szalonta-Bury, 9. Dec. 1847.

Mylord!* I have read your letter and I am forced to confess that you are the greatest under all the asses I have ever seen or been aquainted with. Were you not, what you are, and not so mighty one, I would beat your hogshead and

* The letter was written in English.

oxhead to dung and dirt: but while I am no more than John, I must be silent and weep for anger. I am your most faithful friend and most humble servant;

John Stibli

shoe-maker and poet

P.S. When you will write not so rascally and godless things, then I shall answer more

J. S.

P.S. The anecdot can I not remember.

On the envelope: To the right honourable Lord Arthur Krumply* devotely London.

SÁNDOR PETŐFI TO LAJOS KOSSUTH

1848

Debreczen, 24 December 1848

Honoured fellow-citizen!

I make no apology for this my importunity, for I write this letter not for my own benefit, but for the sake of the country. Everyone can see, and you best of all, that we are one in our greatest lack, that of leaders. If my intuition is correct—and my intuitions do not usually deceive me—there is in me the strength, if the way is open to me, to become one of those leaders whom Hungary will thank for her liberty. I therefore request you to appoint me, or have me appointed, to the rank of major, that I may as soon as possible be enabled to play my part in the great drama of the salvation of the Fatherland. Let me be appointed to that place in the army in which duties are hardest and most perilous, for my powers and courage there reach their zenith where others despair. In the worst case, if it be written in the book of Fate otherwise than in my heart, I shall add to the number of those who, if by their lives they could not profit the Fatherland, have brought it honour by their deaths. I repeat: no self-interest drives me to make this request, but love of Hungary alone. Were I to do it out of ambition, what a paltry ambition it would be for one to seek a majority who elsewhere has been a general, as I have in poetry. That very thing too, the reputation that I have won hitherto, stands surety that I cannot lightly and without serious consideration wish to occupy a place in which misfortune would ruin my previous good name. I have expressed myself unreservedly, as if conversing with myself, convinced as I am that, if you do nothing else, at least you will not take my words amiss. If you think it better to decline my request I shall serve the Fatherland as a captain, or, if that too is taken from me, in the ranks. If, however, you appoint me major (and in the army, not the militia), I beg that

* "krumpli" in Hungarian means potatoes.

this should occur on the 1st of January. I can only take up my duties on the first of February, but I desire that my appointment should date from the first day of the year, as that is my birthday. I attach great importance to such minutiae. God be with you! Your respectful fellow-citizen

Sándor Petőfi
captain in the 28th battalion of the army

JÁNOS ARANY TO MIHÁLY TOMPA

1861

Pest, 25 August 1861

My dear friend, the time has come for me to lay aside the editor's pen for a while and take up another, that with which I once wrote my letters more diligently; dull and complaining though they perhaps were, they stemmed from an affectionate heart. If this new position had no other curse than to compel us to a less frequent and more fleeting correspondence, that would suffice to disabuse me of its splendours. But its end will come—all things come at some time to an end.

I will begin as another would close—first I will tell you of our circumstances. Our situation is tolerable, if we regard the present, and as for the future—but we do not think even two months ahead. I still have my ringing in the head—perhaps it will be with me for the rest of my life—but apart from its casting a deepening shadow, as it were, over my hearing I detect no other, worse, effect. I am able to work, if not quite as previously, or I would be able to if I did not have to improvise. I am not so much tormented by frequent depression when I can be at least calm, if not in good humour, and that, if not happiness, is peace.

In material terms, God only knows how we shall be off. In Pest it is no easy task for even a completely healthy man to rely on that which is uncertain—but God is good and is kind to us. This much is beyond doubt in my eyes, that at all events I *had* to leave schoolmastering, so that I do not regret; for the rest—*Deus providebit.*

I am still living at the Three Pipes; send your letters here until the spring. This is a good apartment of four rooms, but the trouble is that it is rather far from the centre of town, on the second floor, there is no proper attic and no larder, but the main thing is that the people living here are, for the most part, the sort that settle their differences with their fists. In a word, this is the sort of house where we are told to our faces, or constantly given to understand, that all who live here are respectable, and only we are not. Therefore, although the rooms here are good and we have now made them very comfortable, and the rent is modest—in spring we shall have to move.

I mention the uncertainty of my situation. That I must explain. The Kisfaludy Society has guaranteed an annual salary of 800 forints; its capital, however, has thus far increased so slightly that if I am to have 800 forints it would be paid

from the capital, and thus the whole capital would be exhausted in five or six years. Could I wish for that? Shall I not be morally obliged, sooner or later, to declare that if that is the case I shall decline my salary and work gratis, as do the other officials? My income is therefore far from assured. The journal? As far as that is concerned, the arrangement with Heckenast is that if in the first year the number of subscribers does not reach 750 he may withdraw from publication and thus from the payment of my salary as editor. He has said nothing yet, but I know that the number of subscribers will not reach 750; it will be good if it comes to *half* that number. Such are my prospects!

Beside all that, the great dejection to which I was prey in Kőrös no longer torments me so. I was convinced that I had to live in Pest for Laczi's sake, and one way or another to devise a means of subsistence. I await times and circumstances. Every day while the weather has been warm inexpensive excursions into the countryside with my family and a good friend or two have spiced life in Pest; so much so that I can tell you that in eight years in Kőrös we had not so much enjoyment as we have had in one year in Pest. Even if we are not well off there is no need to give lavish meals and waste money to pass an afternoon pleasantly. Perhaps it is to this that I owe a certain brightening of my mood, an increase of my self-confidence.

I am, however, writing poetry very seldom. The work of editor, especially when it is, like mine, a constant struggle with shortage of manuscripts, does not permit the production of anything worthwhile. Sometimes one column is missing, sometimes another, and then I have to write a leading article or a review, produce foreign literature, *translate* a short story, then compile the gossip of the week, read the proofs, read bad verse that has been submitted etc., and such an irksome situation is not conducive to poetic composition. I had begun a humoristice-didacticus piece—quasi ars poetica—and quickly turned out a few hundred lines, but in these conditions, troublesome within and without, I have had to leave it. I shall, however, take it up again when I find a breathing-space, as I like the subject.

Speaking of poetry, I have at long last discovered a real *talent*. I have a manuscript here entitled THE TRAGEDY OF MAN. It is a drama similar to Faust, but quite independent. It is full of powerful thought. It is the first talent since Petőfi to go completely its own way. It is a pity that the author cannot write good verse, and his language is not without faults, but perhaps something can be done to help; the work is eminently worthy of attention. The author is a young Member of Parliament, and you will learn who he is if he resolves himself to the publication of his poetry and the making known of his name. How pleasant after this everlasting imitation is a truly original voice!

You were expecting from me, were you not, some political news: a forecast of the future, what is to be and how etc., and instead I have fed you with my little domestic troubles. No one knows the future, not even Mr Schmerling. We trust

in mutability: the mood is solemn indeed, but not downcast. You too can find out from the papers as much as I, because it is from them that I too form all my political suppositions.

Will you not be coming up in autumn? We are always at home. I cannot be away from the journal until it leaves me—and my family do not want to leave me by myself. Accept our warmest greetings! Your true friend

János Arany

LAJOS KOSSUTH'S LETTERS TO GARIBALDI

Lajos Kossuth (1802–1894) embodied the idea of 19th century Hungarian political freedom. Imprisoned by the Vienna government as a leader of the liberal opposition, on his release from prison in 1841, he founded a liberal political daily, in which he introduced the leading editorial to Hungary. The 1848 Revolution and War of Independence placed Kossuth at the head of the Hungarian nation. In exile, he remained true to his principles which were rooted in the libertarian ideas of the French Revolution. To him, world freedom was the best guarantee of the future of Hungary. He put his faith in Garibaldi as someone whose struggles could improve Hungary's lot. At the age of 92, Kossuth died an exile in Italy and his funeral in Budapest turned into a gigantic political demonstration, though by then the nation had, for decades, been enjoying the boom brought about by the 1867 Compromise with Austria.

LAJOS KOSSUTH TO GIUSEPPE GARIBALDI

Turin, 14th September, 1860

General and dictator! My dear friend,

Allow me to adjoin my debt of sincere admiration to the raptures of joy with which You are ringed by the gratitude of millions whom You, snatching them from the yoke of demeaning despotism, have returned to themselves, to civil democracy, to freedom, and are annexing to a visibly growing Italian state. Oh, how sublime the work that You are undertaking, and the manner by which you are undertaking it. May You be blessed!

It seems to me, dear friend, that this is the time to take stock of the portion of the work that Hungary must contribute to the ultimate struggle against the common enemy, Austria, and to reach agreement on the concerted action by which success is to be secured.

This is all the more necessary in that not only Russia and Prussia but England too (I say again: England, and I can say that on the basis of official facts now in my hand) is conspiring with Austria to rescue her, or at least to multiply our difficulties and diminish our prospects.

Certainly neither I nor my friends are about to let ourselves be deterred by these difficulties, nor do we entertain any doubt of success, assuming we harmonize our plans of operation, unite the strength of the two nations, and (we place the highest weight on this) You, on the one hand, do not withdraw from us your immense assistance, whilst on the other, by your assent support the preparations that are necessary for us to be able to deploy the entire—most assuredly substantial—force of our nation in the order of battle.

For my part, I freely confess that Hungary has great need of Italy in order that she may be liberated from the Austrians; but I dare declare that Italy herself has great need of Hungary's collaboration, for after all, it cannot be disputed that not merely to remove from Austria a populace of fifteen millions, and with it all the resources of a large country, but furthermore add it to Italy's strength is a matter that will make a difference of thirty million to the reckoning of prospects and the elements of ultimate victory.

I have formed the conviction, from Your own words and actions, that you have always regarded the independence of my homeland as an indispensable prerequisite for the solution of the Italian question; thus, taking the community of interests of the two nations as a starting-point, allow me to set out how I perceive the situation.

Venice must be liberated and annexed to a unified and independent Italy. That goes without saying. There will be war against the Austrians then. But what sort of war shall it be? The things You have achieved are such that You undoubtedly have the right to believe Italy is sufficient on its own, and for that reason alone I place no weight on the lesson of the recent past, which, in face of the failure of centuries-old aspirations, led many to the opposite point of view. Italy is sufficient on its own to liberate Venice. So be it. But, I ask, is that enough? Will Italy's future be secured if you restrict yourselves to driving the Austrians out of Venice without Austria's power being broken? It is not given to man to foretell the vagaries of the future, yet if reasoning based on fact has any value, one may declare that if You rest content with only that, there will be merely a cease-fire in Italy but no lasting peace.

Austria will seek pretexts, will bring coalitions into existence, will find means, will take advantage of any chance favours to regain what she has lost.

She must be broken, once and for all time.

But she can be broken only in Hungary, because that is the axis of her power.

Thus, if there is to be war, then it must be unleashed from two sides at once: attack in Italy, attack in Hungary.

Attack, I say, not a diversion.

Your sentiments are much too noble, your purview of your country's interests much too wide-ranging, for You not to concede I am right, when I say it cannot be wished that Hungary destroy herself merely to serve as a diversion. For even were she to do this, that would not be able to serve lastingly to Italy's advan-

tage; on the contrary, Austria, freed of all worries on that front, would be a far more formidable enemy for Italy than she had been previously.

So, war on the Austrians from two sides; a major war and not minor disturbances or riots (émeutes), no diversions.

Have I caught your line of thinking well?

If I have, then I must consider the positions of Austria, on the one hand, and Hungary, on the other, in order to justify my opinion on the demands of the situation.

I do not believe that if war were to break out that will bring in its train foreign intervention against Italy within Italy herself, assuming Italians will take care not to provoke a clash with France—at least not until they have dealt with Austria. The unconditional necessity for such restraint is patently obvious. If there were to be any, who, failing to consider the consequences of their enthusiasm, were imprudent enough to swell the number of Italy's enemies, You, with your authority, will always be able to save renascent Italy from that misfortune.

I may also assert as sure fact that in Vienna, Berlin, Saint Petersburg, London (at the Foreign Office)—in short, everywhere that desires to sustain Austria—they want nothing more than to see You grappling with the French, because then Austria would be saved. They even write to me from Vienna that secret agents are at work to goad You into attacking either the French or what goes by the name of the "territory of the German Confederation". Success with these intrigues is practically Austria's sole remaining hope. Dear God, how little are they acquainted with You! How little do they realize that You will never allow yourself to be prodded on, or held back, by any one in the world! How little do they realize that no one appreciates better than You the adage, "sufficient unto each day is the evil thereof". I am acquainted with You, I remember the lofty manifestations of your self-sacrifice, so I am unperturbed. The time will come when the French will either leave Rome or be driven from it, and if You believe there are other scores to be settled with the French government—then the time will come for that too. First, though, Austria must be dealt with. Let us not breed our enemies. Is that not also the way You are thinking?

I said that there will be no direct intervention in Italy; yes, but in all probability there will be indirect intervention: the Tyrol, occupied by 60,000 Bavarians, Silesia and, perhaps, Bohemia too by Prussia, in order that Austria may have all her forces freely at her disposal. Accordingly, Austria will have the means to deploy six army corps in Italy and set up another two in reserve. That comes to 320,000 men on paper, of which 240,000 effectives can be turned out, so the greatest number that can be brought together on any one battlefield will be some 150,000 men—a force which, as any one knows, carries very potent strategic weight.

The material of Austria's army, in view of its jumbled heterogeneity, is such as can scarcely be congenial to her; in other words, reckon on a certain degree of demoralization. There are just two things which can give hope for this: 1. in

regard to the Hungarian regiments, a serious general uprising in Hungary; 2. in regard to the whole army, if Italy were to win in the first two big clashes. Everything hinges on initial success.

From that it follows that Italy has need of a very substantial force for the purposes of this war. I hold an army of 200,000 actual effectives, with 50,000 men in reserve, to be indispensable. That cannot be difficult since, thanks to your glorious successes, 21 million Italians are now rallying to the flag of *il re galantuomo,** which You chose with such wise foresight as the symbol of Italian unity, and support with loyalty as well as with heroism. But in the end, to reach the numbers of the army that you will need, the ten million populace of the South must contribute in due proportion, and it therefore seems to me that organization of the splendid lands that have been liberated by You is a very urgent necessity.

As far as Hungary's peculiar situation is concerned: although in 1848-49 we defeated Austria, we defeated her to the point where she felt impelled to beg the assistance of the Russian Tsar, thereby proclaiming to the world that she was incapable of carrying the fight against us any further on her own; although public opinion in Hungary at present is much more progressive than it was then, and although there is now harmony amongst the various races, whereas then there was hatred, repudiation and hostility—nevertheless, it would be imprudent of us to conceal the difficulties of our situation.

The country's resources, the fortresses, the arsenals are not in our hands; the nation is entirely disarmed. Austria is not going to send into battle against us Hungarian regiments, on which we can exert an influence from the very outset: we are going to have to fight foreign regiments, and going to have to defeat them in pitched battles *(batailles rangées),* before we have a chance to shake their discipline, which carries a great weight in the Austrian army. Then, Austria has great advantages in her strategic preparations, whereas our geographic position is highly disadvantageous; in the end, Austria can count on allies, whereas we are threatened by the possibility of Russian, Prussian and Bavarian intervention. Once our nation is drawn up in battle order, that prospect will not scare us, but how will it get to the point of drawing up in battle order?—that is the crux of it.

We are not in a position where we can hope that if we were to organize a few partial uprisings, the movement would grow like wildfire. They would not leave time for that. Austria would either crush a partial uprising or bring down the Russians, Prussians or Bavarians on our necks before we were able to exert the nation's strength. In Hungary it is imperative that we open the struggle with a major blow that will raise the entire nation to its feet as one man.

I know my native land. Nothing would better secure this goal than if an Italian auxiliary army were to appear on Hungarian soil; by palpably demonstrating the Italian government's allegiance, this would produce incalculable results. A disembarkation of 30–40,000 men for this purpose somewhere on the

* Victor Emanuel II.

Dalmatian coast, simultaneously with the commencement of military operations in Italy, would not only not diminish Italy's forces but would double them, at least. Because those 30 to 40 thousand men, if deployed in Italy, are worth just 30 to 40 thousand; but if dispatched to Hungary, their value is a nation of fifteen million and an army of 200,000, which, under those circumstances, it would not be hard to muster for battle within a few weeks.

Besides that, it is also necessary for us to make provision that our nation has weapons and munitions near to hand at the given moment.

On these two foundations we have established a concerted plan of operation that promises a ten to one chance of working in our favour.

I, Count László Teleki and General Klapka continue to function as an organized committee in harmony with those who are leading the movement back at home.

We have entered into relations with the royal government. We found them to be resolute, decisive; we satisfied ourselves that they have the best of intentions and grasp the situation perfectly. In other words, we have reason for supposing ourselves to be sure that, provided You do not deny us your influence and support, everything that needs to be done to ensure that the triumph of our common cause may be regarded as certain will be carried into effect.

General Klapka is going to Naples in order to communicate to You, on behalf of the Hungarian National Directorate, the details of our preparations and relations, as well as of our operational plan. You are not going to deprive us of your genius, tact and experiences, but permit me to hope, in the interests of the common goal, that you will not deny us your support and assistance either.

I affectionately extend my hand to You on behalf of my heroic nation, which is so deserving of your friendship. Give me the right to console my nation with the news that You fraternally accepted the hand that I have extended to you on my nation's behalf. May we reach accord in perceiving the demands of the situation; may we unite in removing the difficulties; may You keep an eye on those who, partial rather than patriotic, do not reckon with the possibility that they can compromise the happy conclusion of what You have promoted so gloriously, not just through your heroic arm but also by your civil virtues and lofty self-sacrifice.

Oh, how sacred that word *patria* must be to you! It is sacred to me, too, dearer than anything in the world. Dwarfed by you in every other respect, on this one point I hold myself to be Your equal; and if my people's trust and my unswerving fidelity can render me able to toss a slight weight into the scale of events, then allow the small bit that I can do to be added to the lot that you can do; may You attach to the wreath of glory for establishing Italy's unity a rosette of satisfaction from having contributed to the liberation of my homeland!

Yours in heart and soul,

Kossuth

Impressions of England

In the fifteen years in which he held office as Minister of Education, until his death in August 1888, Ágoston Trefort saw through the Secondary Education Act, the foundation of the University of Kolozsvár (Cluj-Klausenburg), the growth of the University of Budapest and of the Budapest University of Technology, the organisation of state primary education, the setting on its feet of the Academy of Music and the Academy of Fine Arts, the establishment and construction of the Opera House. He travelled abroad frequently, ever on the lookout for new impressions and ideas.

ÁGOSTON TREFORT TO IMRE SZALAY

Paris, 2 September 1884

My Dear Imre!

According to the letters from Mariska and Anna which we found here on our arrival, you will all be in Pest when this letter reaches Hungary, which is why I am addressing these lines there, to inform you first of all that we are in good health and have no trouble. We spent seventeen or eighteen days in England, and left Dover yesterday morning, arriving here at six in the evening via Calais after as rough a crossing as may be, but without being in the least seasick. Radisics was waiting for us at the Gare du Nord. Our travels in England took us as far as Bristol, and from there by way of Gloucester, Cheltenham and Oxford, back to London, where we stayed for another two days. We inspected closely and with rare delight the splendid cathedral in Canterbury and brought our English journey to an end, pleased to be once more on the Continent.

I saw many splendid things and learnt much in England, but it is not a pleasant country. For my own part England is doubly interesting since I was there forty-eight years ago and was able at every step to study the changes, and I could tell that although in small things she has maintained many foolish customs, in big things she has changed greatly, and principally notable is the extent to which America influences England. Democracy is extraordinarily esteemed and the very great progress is impressive, but the aura of the aristocracy is at an end and reform of the House of Lords is on the agenda. England is as beautiful as a park, extraordinarily rich, and therefore does everything splendidly on a colossal scale. In great things she has many practical ideas, but in much is very narrow-minded, stupid and lacking in taste. The food is bad and very expensive, the language is spoken hideously and badly, the women are not beautiful, their legs are like those of elephants, their toilette is like that of monkeys, the climate is not good, and in short: the English are the world's leading nation and in many respects are barbarians.

I kiss you all, Your loving

AT

We shall stay here three days and then go via Metz to Frankfurt. Write to Cassel poste restante.

Will You Remarry Me?

Alongside Mór (Maurus) Jókai, Kálmán Mikszáth (1847–1910) was the best and most widely read Hungarian novelist in the second half of the 19th century. He married Ilona Mauks in 1873, contrary to her family's wishes, only to send her back to her parents' home and then divorce her amidst the mounting financial difficulties at the outset of his career as a writer. Following the immense success of his first volumes of short stories, he proposed to and remarried Ilona Mauks in 1882: many years after Mikszáth's death, she published a fascinating memoir documenting Mikszáth's life and their very happy second marriage.

KÁLMÁN MIKSZÁTH TO HIS WIFE
1882

Dear Ilonka!

When, all those years ago, we divorced, one of the grounds was that I was financially embarrassed and did not know how to arrest my downward slide. It was fitting (although I loved you) for your fate to be severed from mine.

Even then, however, I proposed inwardly that if ever I was able to amount to anything and the opportunity arose I would atone for my failure.

God has permitted me to live to see my former bright dreams realised.

(At the age of 34 I have my seat in the academy), corrected every error, my name is extolled at home and abroad, affection surrounds me wherever I go, and my income is six times what I ever could have dreamed of.

It is probable that I am too late as far as you are concerned. Fate has long caused me to procrastinate (until the eighth of this month) in resolving to present myself before you with these lines. If I am correctly informed, you are either married by now, or about to become so.

But because I do not know for certain, I owe you the consideration that if you have not yet married I shall now *marry you once again.* Obtain for yourself thorough assurance on all points, speak to Pál Szontágh and let me know.

You shared my hard times, the worst I lived through by myself, and I will with pleasure share again my improved fortune.

I do not know whether I still love you, but I promise that I undertake always to esteem you.

If, however, I am too late (or) you have already married, I shall rejoice if you are happy, or if for some other reason you are reluctant once more to put your fate in the hands of one who has already treated you badly through no fault of his own, I shall make no complaint.

For it is no longer love that speaks from me (though were I to see you again the flame might flicker into life) but honour.

But honour is sufficiently demonstrated by this my action.

If you are biassed against me, and will not, out of anger or hatred (and perhaps with reason), think well of my action, literary history will take note of this my sincere decision and, when the time comes to write of the untoward side of my character, will weigh this in the balance against it.

The high estate to which my contemporaries have raised me makes it incumbent upon me to redress my past as best I may.

Therefore, Ilonka, I request you not to decide in this matter lightly. You will not have read the papers and will not be aware of the situation. First, therefore, learn for yourself of the brilliant and outstanding position that awaits you in Hungarian society. I have no wish to tempt you with this, for you were courageous enough to marry a "nonentity", and certainly you must have the courage to reject me even were I a minister. But enquire of your heart and inclination, and reach a decision on those grounds, and if your reply is favourable, write to me if possible before a month has elapsed.

(I write this my letter on the advice of men of consequence and shall read it to them. This is my inalienable wish.)

In other matters I remain under all circumstances

Respectfully yours,

Budapest, 16 February 1882 *Kálmán Mikszáth*

Before Trianon

Count Gyula Andrássy the Younger (1860–1929) held office for one week as the last joint Foreign Minister of the Austrian Empire and the Kingdom of Hungary before the dissolution of the Dual Monarchy at the end of the First World War. Andrássy left Vienna for Switzerland where he tried to establish contact with the leaders of the Allies, hoping to convince them of the error of their views on Central European policy and the situation of Hungary. He and Count Albert Apponyi (1846–1933) had been political opponents earlier, but defeat and its consequences obliterated their differences.

FROM COUNT GYULA ANDRÁSSY THE YOUNGER TO COUNT ALBERT APPONYI

Berne, 10th of February 1919

Dear Albert,

I did not come here with a worked out programme, nor with the aim of supporting a programme, except, of course, the integrity of the country, but in order to seek information concerning the possibilities.

The situation is sad but not altogether hopeless, England has recognised that from her point of view there is no advantage in a Slav advance in Eastern Europe. As I see it, she wishes to place the Straits and Turkey under her tutelage, and this

would be facilitated by a viable Hungary breaking the Slav stranglehold. Wilson is coming back to his senses, he can see that it is more difficult to do justice in concrete cases than to speak in generalities and slogans, what is thought of as dispensing justice can simply mean the murder of a nation. So far he has only listened to our enemies, now he has listened to us too, and this has confused him. He is sorry now that he has interfered with things he does not understand. He is beginning to recognise that European imperialism used his beautiful theories as weapons. Italy is afraid of the South Slavs and would like to play us off against them.

The awareness is gaining ground everywhere that carving us up may well lead to anarchy in Eastern Europe and to the victory of Bolshevism. That France carries the greatest weight in continental questions however counterbalances these advantageous circumstances, as does the fact that we have many enemies in those nations that are beginning to realise that there are clear disadvantages in sacrificing us, and that what happens to small and weak Hungary is not of outstanding interest to anyone.

The Austro-Hungarian Empire was a European Great Power. We in our present state, lacking an army, are as nothing in the eyes of statesmen preoccupied by the major issues of world policy. France, consumed by hatred for the Germans, is the only country which brings a powerful will and considerable interest to bear in the handling of our question. The danger is that those powers which are not hostile to us may make concessions to France at our expense, in this way getting France to give way on other issues.

Italy has no weight whatever. Her allies hold her in contempt, France mistrusts her. They think in France that, in alliance with Germany, Italy is now making a bid for Italian-inhabited French regions.

Total chaos prevails among the Allies. No clear and final agreement exists on any question. Our hostile neighbours are in possession of promises, but the Congress has a free hand and could well decide against them. Given a little luck and skill, success is still possible. So far mistake has been heaped on mistake. As I see it, our policy has relied on two instruments: Wilson and the world revolution. To count on Wilson makes sense, but he does not suffice on his own. I am afraid that he is not a man of action and that he will be unable to exploit his influence. Reckoning with a revolution—which happened chiefly in Diener-Dénes's and Rózsi Schwimmer's heyday—is pure madness. This attempt was repulsive in the eyes of every government. Because of it, it proved impossible to restore the thread to the European powers which had been violently snapped by the Michaelmas daisy revolution. Our diplomatic personnel made us look ridiculous. We completely lost three months and our enemies exploited this time. We could only be despised for this fawning servile tone, for the constant reiteration that the Germans had forced the war on us, and that we always helped the Allies. More self-respect and less international Jewry would be preferable. Patriotism has not gone out of fashion elsewhere, only in our country, therefore all revolutionary and ultra-modern ways must be abandoned. The sine qua non of our success is

that the at present all powerful bourgeois governments should not think of us as Bolsheviks, or even as such as make the way straight for Bolshevik rule.

The principal emphasis must be placed on England. England will be the leading power in Europe. She will also have most influence on the peace treaty. It will be easiest to obtain the support of England. But we must not abandon the hope of getting France on our side too. If we succeed in that, we're on a winner. Many say that Clemenceau is just hanging on and that he will be succeeded by Briand. Lloyd George's and Wilson's victory in the Russian question and in details of the colonial question damaged Clemenceau's position. From our point of view Briand in power would be better than the present regime. We can only reach the heart of France via a Danubian confederation which would hold back the Austrian Germans from Germany. That is why I am also in favour of it. Of course only in a form that would maintain a separate army, and separate representative institutions, being confined, on the one hand, to economic agreements and, on the other, to the understanding that the allied states would not engage in war with each other, and that they could only enter into such alliances with third countries which did not oblige the members of the Confederation to take action against each other. The minimum obligation towards other member states would be benevolent neutrality. Complete isolation is not in our interest, since that would mean being surrounded by enemies, with the exception of the new neighbour, the Germans, distrusted by the world and much more powerful than we are. They, however, would probably seek a Slav orientation, in the interests of a more effective easterly defence than we could provide. Their sad experience with us, the Mackensen case, may well make them unreliable too.

The justice of mankind, the League of Nations, does not in itself offer sufficient security. I am a royalist in domestic politics. I would prefer King Otto, with a regency elected by parliament. Naturally, only if King Charles voluntarily abdicated. But I would leave this question to a time after the frontiers of Hungary have been drawn and the sort of free decision is possible which we can rightly demand that everyone accept as finally and totally binding. The greatest evil would be the ongoing incitement of the conflict between monarchism and republicanism until a final decision is possible. A provisional republic would be best meanwhile, but not a republic created ad hoc and by the street, not an absolutism behind closed doors, applying the methods of the Bach system, not the rule of a clique which wishes to exploit the misery of the nation to ensure the permanence of its own excess power, as is the case at present.

But my letter has become too long. I will soon return. With warm friendly greetings

Gyula Andrássy

P.S. A one-armed ex-officer by the name of Wellner is taking this letter to Budapest.

FROM COUNT ALBERT APPONYI TO COUNT GYULA ANDRASSY THE YOUNGER

Eberhard, the 21st of May 1919

My dear friend,

Thank you for your kind lines. Going to Vienna depends on whether I get full assurances from the government there that I will be allowed to return here. Negotiations in that respect are going on right now. If things are right, I will come up for two days next week, if not then this is also something I must do without.

What I am asking from the present provisional government is not a detailed programme but a declaration which—on its part and that of those who back it—excludes every suspicion of a reactionary attempt, and assures the forceful continuation of the welfare trend, albeit using rational methods. If that does not happen, the Communists will always succeed in recruiting support amongst people who do not sympathise with them, but to whom the thought of a return of what was horrifes even more.

What I expect from the present (Count Gyula Károlyi) government is not only that they should drive out the Communists and occupy Budapest (if the Allies keep on with their hesitant and incomprehensibly inane policy, even this—that would still have been easy a month ago—is hardly likely to succeed) but also arrange for the election of a National Assembly on the widest possible basis. I consider a government made up of representatives of the "old parties" minus the Socialists, to be unsuitable for the purpose. I am compelled to maintain what I have written about their political unsuitability. Allowing them to play a part before the National Assembly had granted them absolution would be to provoke the masses, whose dominant feeling is bitterness because of the long war. Abroad we can be of use if the Allies accept us, but at home only if the nation calls. The trouble is that we must make a start with untried forces (politically neutral experts can be obtained for the economic portfolios), but this is a lesser evil than any sort of claim by the earlier representatives of a people that failed catastrophically. I have not found anyone yet who would deny this proposition even out of a wish to be polite to my person, with the exception of the circle of one's closest friends whose mood so often misleads those who put their trust in it. If you look carefully, new men of integrity can be found. While in hiding, I spent a day and a half with a tenant farmer. The government must not be a Jewish government, it need not be anti-Semitic but at least a-Semitic, since the antipathy felt for Jews is one of the most effective antidotes to Communism. The people will not believe that Jew rule could possibly be good... whom I would immediately appoint as Minister of Agriculture. He is not only a real authority on his subject, he also shows sympathy for the welfare of the people and a true understanding of the times. Such men ought to be recruited and provided with political advice. If the freely elected National Assembly wants personalities who belong to our circle, we will naturally be ready to serve, but we cannot make claims based on the past.

I hope anyway that we will get a chance to exchange views in person.

With heartfelt friendly greetings,

Apponyi

László Lator

My Life as Editor

In 1955, at the years of teaching school in a small town, two years after Stalin's death and one year before the Hungarian Revolution, I got a job at the New Hungarian Publishing House (Új Magyar Könyvkiadó, renamed Európa Könyvkiadó one and a half years later) with the help of friends. Of the several specialized state publishing houses, this was the only one authorized to publish foreign literature in Hungarian. Since my knowledge of Russian left much to be desired, I have no idea why I was placed in the Russian section; perhaps they thought I'd learn the ropes in time. There were first-class editors working there, English, French, German language editors, all kinds, the poet István Vas for example, and many other persons of note, several of whom were recently released political prisoners, like Béla Szász, a key figure in the notorious Rajk trial, who later wrote a brilliant book about his years in prison, subsequently translated into several languages. Our manager, Ferenc Rákos, a loyal apparatchik recently returned from exile in Moscow and the Gulag, was a lawyer by profession, who had been known to write Geothe instead of Goethe, and believed him to be a native of Weimar. Once, in an address to a conference or meeting, he began: "Dear comrades, dear Comrade Rákos" (this last being himself). That became a legend. But there was not an ounce of malice in him. Whenever we ran into each other in the corridor, he would always ask me very kindly, speaking with a slightly foreign-sounding accent, "Well, and what are you working on now, my friend?", and when I told him what author's book I was working on, he always said the same thing in reply, "Ah, he is a great master of style, that one." In 1956 the revolutionary committee of the publishing house "divested him of his office and power"; and it must be said to his credit

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László Lator
is a poet, translator and broadcaster, who for many years worked as an editor at the Európa publishing house. He now teaches courses in poetry and translation at Eötvös University. His translations include Italian, Spanish, German and Russian poems.

that he did not grasp the opportunity to regain his post after the suppression of the revolution.

Of course, the Russian translations were a constant headache to me, I had to work like a dog, looking up words in the dictionary all day as I tried to correct the mostly trashy Soviet novels. The translators were generally party officials returned from exile in Moscow, politicians' wives; as my co-editor Judit (later to become my wife) used to say, they had forgotten Hungarian, but had not learned Russian. To make matters worse, they were always offended, became indignant, sometimes even complained, when they saw their edited manuscripts. Getting a really good book to edit was always a piece of unexpected good luck, Alexei Tolstoy, for example, or Serafimov; even then my happiness was never complete, since I could not choose my translators, at best I could laugh at their blunders. Yet even then there were three or four really good translators from Russian, among them the writer, poet and philosopher Victor Határ, who left the prison world he had well and truly experienced as soon as he had the chance, that is in 1956, and would not have continued translating for Európa from London—where he lives to this day—even if he had been allowed to do so. And of course there was the wonderful poet Lajos Áprily, excellent, authentic translator of Pushkin's *Onegin,* and of Turgenev. Our manager did accomplish one major feat: in 1953 he launched a Russian Classics series, and in the steady stream of cheerlessly mediocre Soviet Russian books there suddenly surfaced the great 19th century classics and, at long last, in outstandingly good translations. True, due to the Soviet anathema, Dostoevsky had to wait until the revolution of fifty-six to appear again in print. It seems incredible today that Dostoevsky was once a banned writer, who was hardly ever mentioned. You could major in Russian at university without ever hearing his name. Not a word was spoken about the vilified, imprisoned, executed writers of the 20th century either; they could not be published until much later. My wife, Judit Pór (who graduated in Russian) and I edited the first, poorly translated volume of poems by Yesenin, and I was later given the similarly suspect Blok to translate, thanks to our literary manager of that time: Géza Seres, one of the condemned in the Rajk trial and beaten to within an inch of his life. The book came out shortly after the Revolution, in 1959.

By then I was no longer working in the Russian section. I'd been taken by surprise at being made Russian editor; switching over to Italian was just as sudden and unexpected. I don't know who had the idea—nor where they got it from—that I knew Italian. I had studied Italian once, for two years, at secondary school. And I had translated one or two Italian poems, afterwards horrified at my own unsophisticated botchery: I knew nothing about Italian prosody. Seemingly, neither did my learned editors: they published my indifferent efforts without further ado in the huge volume titled *A Reader of World Literature.* In short, in 1955 I was asked to translate Vasco Pratolini's novel, *Il Quartiere.* Feeling some-

what daunted, I refused; up to then, I had translated very little prose, and even that with reluctance. The next day I changed my mind. Who knows when I'd next get the chance to improve my extremely poor knowledge of Italian? I set to work, looking up every word in the dictionary, including all the "and"s, and on the first day produced one short page of translation. Luckily Márta Sárközi, the playwright Ferenc Molnár's daughter, former editor and pillar of the prominent, subsequently banned review *Válasz,* went over my shaky sentences.

In October 1956, the New Hungarian Publishing House became the Európa Publishing House. Of all the proposed names submitted to the editorial staff, it was this one, put forward by István Vas, that was finally accepted—though it may have been the recently released, incredibly cultured and clever György Káldor, or someone else entirely, who first thought of it. For us, Europe was not simply a geographical term but a coveted intellectual domain in which there was room for the Chinese Po Choo Yi as well as for the Sanskrit *Djayadeva.* Someone had to be responsible for Italian literature. "You speak Italian, let it be you," they said. So I accepted. My first editing task was *Master Don Gesualdo,* by Giovanni Verga; difficult enough in itself, doubly difficult as it was in Sicilian vernacular. In addition, the otherwise highly competent translator-writer's handling of the book was in this instance rather slapdash and impetuous, he insouciantly scattered glaring mistakes (easy enough to spot that it must be peaches and not fish that are growing on a tree, but in Italian a single letter differentiates the two words), and more insidious, "camouflaged" misunderstandings right and left. There were books to read and write reports on—some of these I only half understood, so I had to rely on my imagination—for all that, the reports were written in an assured, decisive manner. It was fantastic to see all the most important writers, Moravia, Buzzati, Montale (later to win a Nobel Prize), Italo Calvino, then at the start of his career, published in Hungarian in succession; after them, all the writers who had earlier been banned, not only Pirandello, but also the anathematized, resolutely anti-Soviet Ignazio Silone, and Italo Svevo, recently discovered in Italy as well. Prince Tomasi di Lampedusa's masterpiece, *The Leopard,* such a contrast to the taste of the age, appeared in Hungarian three or four years after its publication in Italy. This sudden spreading of Italian literature in socialist Hungary serves as a good example here. After years of exclusion, world literature in general, modern as well as classic, was once again put within reach of Hungarian readers—with some notable exceptions, of course. Directly after the Revolution, when the publishing house was once more able to reoccupy its offices on the third floor of the ruined, bullet-riddled New York Palace on Lenin Boulevard (until then we used to meet here and there, usually in a flat in the central district, weighing our chances, the possibility of another world war, pondering whether some of the Hungarian intelligentsia would be carried off to Siberia—at that time this did not seem impossible—and sometimes even got paid, though I no longer remember where this happened), ideas just poured out of the experienced editors

of the Európa Publishing House. I'm not sure whether the General Directorate of Publishers, the superior authority brought into existence for this very purpose, was back in operation by then, but at all events the publication of world literature was not considered as crucial as the publication of Hungarian literature. For the time being, in the middle of the reprisals, they did not have the time to pay close attention to what was happening. Every year, the publishing plans, the paper requirements and the printing capacity necessary for the following year were submitted for approval to the Directorate—in reality a bureau of censorship. Every manuscript sent to the printers was accompanied by two detailed, analytical-explanatory reports, and the Directorate permitted or prohibited the publication of the book on the basis of these. The nature of the decision depended on the ideological direction—highly variable—the wind was blowing from. Books that were publishable but still contained some questionable points were read by ideological gurus whose names were printed on the inside title page as "specialist" or "expert" readers. The authors popular between the two World Wars and classified as harmful and dangerous after the year of change were now published in succession, such as Somerset Maugham, Gide, the existentialist, "life-alien" Sartre and Camus (though György Lukács had settled accounts with them in a separate book not long before), the "traitor" Malraux and the "decadent" Alain-Fournier. In the iron-handed fifties, the publication of "products of degradation" of the "putrescent bourgeoisie", such as works by Baudelaire or Rimbaud, the "formalist" Apollinaire, to say nothing of the "darkly reactionary", even "fascist" T.S. Eliot, or Georg Trakl, was unimaginable. What is even more difficult to imagine today is that Flaubert was blacklisted as well (*Madame Bovary* did not reappear until 1958, in the Classics of World Literature series), and even Zola: naturalism, preeminently owing to the good offices of György Lukács, was like a red rag to a bull, just like "mystical German romanticism, forever looking back into the past". A condition for the publication of these works was the addition of an ideologically appropriate foreword or postscript by a Marxist critic—a sort of antitoxin—and if this was the price that had to be paid, it was worth it.

In the meantime, various series of amazing quality and quantity were brought out. I have already spoken of the Classics of World Literature; never in the history of Hungarian publishing had there been such a monumental undertaking as this series, bound in dark green cloth, offering an almost complete panorama of world literature; the translations were first-class, the editing exemplary (each manuscript underwent several processes of editing, revised meticulously, checked and polished by staff and outside editors). Besides this series, there were the Helikon Classics collector's items in limited editions. (The Hungarian Helikon Publishing House was the product of a fortunate interregnum, a transitory state of affairs after the Revolution, when publishing was for a while almost unsupervised or at least not rigorously supervised. It was founded in 1957, published only illustrated, deluxe, limited editions, and in 1965 merged with Európa, main-

taining its independent character.) A more open collection offered readable classics published in a print run of a hundred thousand copies, each on cheaper paper, but still in a cloth binding, The Masterpieces of World Literature, and the Books for Millions, comprising outstanding works of twentieth century literature, including the collected works of authors from Goethe to Chekhov and Hemingway, or the Bibliotheca Classica series, the first comprehensive collection in the history of Hungarian publishing which published the ancients in definitive translations, satisfying aesthetic-literary and scholarly requirements—meticulousness in a binding worthy of the Helikon workshop. (This is the collection that publishing houses still reach for whenever they want to revive a Greek or Latin author.)

I do not wish to paint too rosy a picture of how things were at the time. Nor do I wish to render account of each series intended to meet this or that demand. But four of these series must be mentioned. Two because they are characteristic of the way the house operated, of its stratagems to conquer new territories. And two because they were especially dear to me. After the Revolution, we were lucky in that our literary manager (and later general manager), János Domokos, was a sensible man, a fairly enlightened Communist who had a perceptive mind and was always responsive to the ideas put forward at the Wednesday conferences (it was there that the plans were laid on the table, openly rather than hypocritically), in the editorial office and in conversations in the corridors, and was himself the most ingenious planner. His loyalty to the Party and sense of the political situation was even useful in curbing his energy—for publishing was his lifelong passion. Was the launching of the Modern Library his idea to begin with, or did he simply seize upon it? This paperback series, published in a limited number of copies, was aimed at the literati and university students, to give them a sample of the newest, what was then called experimental literature. Place was given not only to the more or less oppositional Soviet poets (Yevtushenko, Rozdiestvensky, Vinokurov, Vozniesensky), but also to trends, groups and works that only this series legalized. The anthology *Howl* presented the American beat generation, other volumes introduced structuralism, Roland Barthes, the new French novel, Robbe-Grillet or Butor, Nathalie Sarraute, new English drama, mostly in good translations, and almost immediately following their appearance abroad. The already well-known moderns, like Updike, were given a place in the Pocket Library series. As far as I can remember, no one ever objected to the publication of Mauriac. It was his Catholicism that explained and so to say mitigated the tragically sombre portrayal of a world poisoned by vice and suffering.

My favourite was the well-presented, paperback White Series which we called Pléiade among ourselves, as it was, in a small way, an imitation of Gallimard's *Pléiade* series. Prose and poetry were published alternately, Turgenev and Gogol, Flaubert and Anatole France, Machiavelli and Boccaccio, Dante and Petrarch. For the most part it was I who edited the volumes of poetry, turning to the best

translators and scholars. Our next brainwave was the launching of national anthologies. Thus, we published the classic French poets in three volumes. The cream of Hungarian poets, young and old, set to work on those poems which had not yet been translated, the unflaggingly industrious László Kálnoky, Sándor Weöres, György Rónay each translated almost an entire volume. Finding translators to do the work was easy, the fifties, the years of enforced silence were still very close: the best Hungarian lyricists, so long without the means of subsistence, were happy and willing to translate foreign poets into Hungarian, especially the great ones, those that were especially dear to them, and thus brought into being a whole new literature of translation, which has since become a matchless treasure of Hungarian literature. Not much earlier they had had to grapple with execrable Soviet poetry, and now they were offered wonderful French, English and German poems to work on. The French anthology ran into three editions in two years and sold in numbers that seem incredibly large today. French writers, poets, publishers turned the pages in wonder: they did not have a complete collection of the kind. But at that time (the first edition of the Classics of World Literature came out in 1962) the publishing house wanted to insure itself against any kind of attack. Every series, every larger undertaking had its own editing committee, in which politically "strong" people were given a place beside the scholars; for example the four-volume complete annotated Hungarian Shakespeare. This was both a necessity, and a precaution. For the most part, the people who provided political security simply pocketed their fees and did not do a stroke of work. But in case of trouble or scandal, the finger could be pointed at them, and they would ward off the thunderbolts. I put together a Russian anthology for our *"Pléiade"* series as well, which came to two volumes. I had no trouble with the nineteenth century, most of the classics had already been translated, but I was on shaky ground when I came to the twentieth. All we knew of the twentieth-century poets were their names, we knew that those who bore them had been imprisoned, taken to camps, obliterated from literary memory. Under Stalin it had been dangerous just to pronounce those names; it was impossible to get hold of their poems. One or two, formerly branded poets did appear in print, for example Pasternak or Zabolotsky; others, like Mandelshtam if I remember right, had a couple of poems published in newspapers, periodicals, but we knew his poems primarily from hearing them recited, especially by Vinokurov, the most important representative of the Soviet new wave, who knew the entire oeuvre of his ill-fated predecessor by heart, and recited the poems everywhere, in the street, in coffee-houses, in our offices (banned poems had been spread this way, from mouth to mouth, in Russia as early as the 19th century) especially to Judit because I, hearing them spoken out loud, only half understood them. But there were some people in the editorial office who knew this underground domain of Russian poetry, and we were able to procure Western, particularly American editions.

Hardly anyone had heard of Mandelshtam here when Judit and I began to translate him. In the editorial offices the suggestion came from Sára Karig, who had spent seven years in a Gulag in Siberia and had "dipped into" this unwritten literary history there, and László Wessely, the "old campaigner of the labour movement", a former Communist refugee in France, Belgium and Moscow, who had also spent time in Siberia, and possibly managed to come home, fairly early on, thanks to the persistent intervention of his good friend, the poet Gyula Illyés. Wessely knew that Illyés was in possession of the great Russian anthology, the *Jezov-Samurin,* published in 1925, in which everyone was still included, from the Symbolists to the later executed Gumilov, the extravagant, avant-garde Hlebnikov, Hodasevich who emigrated to Paris—all those who later disappeared without a trace from the history of Soviet literature. I left the selection of the obligatory poets to my co-editor, and strayed into the off limits zone. However, according to an intergovernmental agreement, we were only permitted to publish those Soviet writers and poets who had recently been published at home. (This was the reason why our volume of Mandelshtam's poems, selected and translated on the basis of the American edition, was not sent to the printers as soon as it was finished: we had to wait until the Soviet edition was published—every year they promised to bring it out, and every year it was dropped from the list. We had to drop four or five poems from the Hungarian edition because they had not been included in the Soviet edition, most likely by chance, because they were in no way more risky than the others. But this large anthology, which was in a way a frontier outrage, seemed to pass unnoticed in 1978. As far as I know no one objected to it, despite the fact that the intergovernmental agreement was so much in evidence that Mayakovsky's volume of Letters to Lili Brik was not published for years. The only explanation I can think of for this is that the playful writer of these enchanting love letters in no way resembled the stentorian agitator-poet. The volume was finally published without Soviet approval, the literary manager of the publishing house, László Antal, just up and sent the manuscript to the printers. But that was during the "soft dictatorship", in 1984. I have László Wessely to thank for being allowed to keep the 1925 Russian anthology. He persuaded Illyés to make me a present of it. On the title page there is Illyés' signature in pencil, and below is written: *"Moscow, 1934."* I have forgotten—if I ever knew—who gave it to him at that writer's congress. Perhaps—and that would make a fine story—Pasternak himself?

Since I have mentioned Wessely, Illyés and interdiction, let me recall two other stories. Bulgakov's novel, *Master and Margarita* (it ran into three editions in three years, though Soviet literature was generally received with suspicion, to say the least) came out on the Hungarian market in 1969. Klára Szőllősy, a wonderfully accomplished translator, translated it from a periodical, as it had not been published in book form in Russian. But Wessely knew, how could he not have known, that it had been cut. He persuaded the author's widow to bring to

Hungary those parts of the manuscript that had been censored. And she brought the manuscript, in full, on a regular Aeroflot flight, if we are to believe Wessely, hidden in her bloomers. At all events, the uncut version of the book appeared in Hungary earlier than in Bulgakov's own country. I heard of and saw another of Wessely's operations. We had signed a preliminary contract with Gyula Illyés for his selected poetry translations. But by the time I finished editing it and passed on the manuscript, I learned that it could not go to press, because Illyés had exceeded the allotted number of pages. It was obvious that the political powers that be were punishing Illyés for his famous anti-dictatorship poem, "One Sentence about Tyranny", written in 1950 and published during the Revolution, and because of his recent poems. "Illyés's name—let us not examine the cause of this now—has to some extent become a stumbling-block. There is no denying that a clandestine opposition, inspired by bourgeois ideals, still trusts him, still sees him as their standard-bearer, " wrote István Király, the Party's fanatic ideologist, a literary historian, professor and academician, and one of the editors of the manuscript of Illyés's *New Poems* in November 1960.

From my office, Wessely phoned Erzsébet Andics, the Muscovite historian, who was at the time the omnipotent mistress of literature in the party leadership. He spoke to her roughly, heatedly. I would have you know, Comrade, that your name will be long forgotten, but Gyula Illyés will always be Gyula Illyés, was the gist of what he said. And I asked Illyés to write me an angry letter, asking me to return the manuscript, as he intends to take it to the other literary publishing house, Magvető, founded in 1956. When I took the letter to our manager, delay and procrastination stopped forthwith. To have Magvető publish Illyés's poems! What an idea! Let us send it to the printers at once. Illyés's selected translations, *Nyitott ajtók* (Open Doors), was published in 1963 after all.

If I remember right, strange as it may seem, directly after the Revolution we did not have much trouble with outside censorship. We did of course have an informer in our midst, a white-faced woman who left the country at a propitious moment. I did not find out she was the informer until twenty years later, from our manager; there were one or two people I would have suspected, but her least of all. Later on there was the Directorate of Publishers, at times attached to the Ministry of Culture or functioning as a separate, supreme authority, and in it there was always a person whose job was to supervise the Európa Publishing House. This meant that we had to submit our plans to them every year, not that they were equipped to judge any scheme upon its merits, it was only later, when a book had already been published, that scandals could erupt. I did not learn till much later that our offices were regularly visited by an officer of "the ideological defence". The way they effectively intervened in our plans was to stipulate what percentage of our publications must come from literature published in the Soviet Union and the People's Democracies. According to István Bart's little book on the publishing politics of the

Pál Békés

Trápa and Tnorfpén

I did not know much about James Thurber until *The White Deer* came into my hands when I was at university. This whimsical, parable-like fairy-tale enchanted me, mainly for the way it used language; a fireworks display of punning was a challenge to a beginner translator. Especially his two scary, but empty and thick-headed sly monsters, who produced all the obstacles in the way of the prince's quest for his princess. *Tarcomed and Nacilbuper.* I did not know what to do with these names, no dictionary could help. Then the light dawned. Mirror writing. Tarcomed = Democrat, Nacilbuper = Republican. It was now all clear. However, a translator has to make a translation work in the context of the target culture. So what could be done with two rival political parties in the context of a one party system?—I'm just reminding myself—all this took place in the early eighties. — Then a phrase I heard dozens of times every day came to mind: *"A Párt és a Népfront"* (The Party and the People's Front). For want of anything better, I used the phrase and empty and thick-headed sly monsters, dumb and slick ended up as *Trápa and Tnorfpén.* I thought this was the least I could do in the cause of translation.

I took the manuscript to the publishers and I was honoured by it being chosen to be included in the James Thurber collection under preparation. I was slightly uneasy about this word play, so during the final stages of editing I confidentially told my editor that there were monsters lurking in the text: *Trápa and Tnorfpén*. He complimented me on my ingenuity and put my mind at rest by saying that if he did not notice it nobody would, adding that we were now living in different times, a stroke like this would cause no problem.

The book was printed but before it was sent to bookshops, I received an alarming phone call. From the director of the publishing house. He had discovered my

Kádár era*, they further intervened by lowering the printed sheet price of so-called socialist literature (Chekhov and Čapek were both included in this category), and thus these books could be sold for less. Though I very much doubt that this was sufficient inducement for readers to buy Nikolaieva rather than Graham Greene or Moravia! There was another, for the most part overt, not hypocritcal "inside" censorship. In the seventies and eighties, the question was not whether a book would be "ideologically and politically" correct or harmful, but rather whether it would "get us into trouble", whether the publishing house could risk publishing a "delicate" book. Of course we had to accept that it was unadvisable to push for say, Koestler or Orwell. (And yet *1984* was published before the change of regime—true, directly before it.) The books considered delicate for political reasons, especially those dealing with most recent history, were edited

* See Ferenc Takács's review on pp.75–78.

monsters and threatened to charge me for the costs of pulping and reprinting the book; he also said I should know that I was finished, he would see to it that I was out of the literary world once and for all. As he put it, "the reader should drink pure water from a fresh spring, and you poison it with cyanide."

Although times had changed and a different wind was blowing, I still couldn't laugh whole-heartedly.

In the end, the book was not pulped, the sheet in question was reprinted with the original English wording, and the book was rebound by blind workers in a social services institution. But they worked very slowly and only managed to rebind 1,200 copies by the publishing deadline. The remainder of the copies, the great majority of the printrun, that is, stayed as they were, unchanged, and reached the shops in their original version. The 1,200 copies painstakingly rebound are now rarities of the order of misprinted postage stamps.

Epilogue. Most of the reprinted but unused sheets were stored at the publishers. One day they disappeared. The next summer a friend of mine bought me a pound of grapes from a greengrocer's in the small town of Érd. The vendor wrapped the grapes in a paper spill, but not in the usual rubbishy paper, this was in high-quality print. And it contained James Thurber's own English words—the corrected version. I never enjoyed grapes so much in my life.

Epilogue again. That is all that happened, nothing more. I was anxious, I laughed, I was relieved. But I know dozens of people who, after the 1989 transition to democracy, turned stories like this, or even less serious ones, (no more than anecdotes of harassment) into epics of anti-Communist resistance and the Passion of their persecution. And that is just as mind-boggling as the story of my favourite monsters, Trápa and Tnorfpén.

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by the political theorist István Bibó and the historian Miklós Vásárhelyi, who had been imprisoned with Imre Nagy. They did not have to dissimulate either. At times Bibó wrote reader's reports that ran to dissertation length.

Censorship manifested itself in absurd forms. Thus, if a questionable expression or sentence had passed unnoticed in a text—and generally when half the stock was already out in the bookshops and had been sold—the other half was still face-lifted, in other words the page in question was torn out, corrected, reprinted and stuck into the books. There were several instances of this. True, this was the way that half the city got to know of something they would never have noticed otherwise. Or: we debated for weeks, for months whether we should risk publishing Curzio Malaparte's *Kaputt.* Our manager was uneasy about it: he said we ought to publish a cut version. It is made quite clear in the

book that the pogrom in Jassy was not carried out by the Germans, but by the Romanians, the Iron Guard. In one place the author "draws an equals sign" between the Francoists and the Communists. And there are many other things. In the end those in favour of the full, uncut text won. I've read it, said our manager. The trouble is not that it brings up delicate questions. The trouble is that it's out-of-date. But I've cut one scene out of it, it can't be left in, where Soviet prisoners of war eat the flesh of a dead comrade. The only thing he did not notice was that the same scene was repeated thirty pages further on. And we had to have a preface written. (The preface or postscript had to be written by someone whose name would serve as a guarantee and political protection.) J. will write it. J. did. I read it, passed it on. The next day our manager said: It's no good. We have to put in that this Malaparte was a Fascist. I said that Mussolini had interned him in the Lipari Islands. Still. J. rewrote it, I read it, passed it on. The next day: the language isn't strong enough, let's again call in J. to rewrite it. J. rewrote, I read it, passed it on. That's it! Let's call in J., tell him this is fine. We called him in, told him. As soon as the door closed behind J. our manager stared after him with barely concealed contempt: what sort of a person is this J., he's ready to write anything! Or: read this, says our director, placing an open book in front of me. I read: "Do not fear the bellowing of the terrible Ytrap, nor the ranting of the surly Tnorfralupop, just carry on riding as the crow flies." Do you not notice anything? No. Read it again. Nothing. Now read the names of the beasts backwards. And indeed, the beasts names are Party, Popular Front. (In the original by James Thurber, they were Democrat and Republican, backwards.) This was in 1982, but they still face-lifted half of the stock.

Graphic description of sexuality caused many problems as well, especially in American novels. We became inured to them in time. Moravia's novel, *The Time of Indifference* did not seem problematic by 1972. The proof sheets arrived. The technical editor came to warn me: Watch out, the manager cut something. (The Italians were very particular about things like that.) I told the translator to keep his eyes open for the cut. Two or three days later he came in and said: nothing. Read it again, I asked. This time, he found it: "the vertical slit of the girl's pudenda was more expressive than the horizontal slit of her mouth". In this sentence the word "vertical" had been cut. Slowly I came to understand why: with this attribute, the image became palpable, more spectacular, one could say more tangible. The ridiculous prudishness of cultural politics produced the odd practice that the publishing house did not illustrate erotic or "bawdy" books. Or if it did, it used the works of Antiquity. A volume of Greek epigrams was illustrated with figures off Grecian urns. If those same scenes had been drawn by a contemporary artist, someone would have cried pornography at once. But who would dare protest against the art of Antiquity? ❧

Ferenc Takács

The Unbought Grace

Literature and Publishing Under Socialism

István Bart: *Világirodalom és könyvkiadás a Kádár-korszakban* (World Literature and Publishing in the Kádár Era). Budapest, Scholastica, 2000, 150 pp.

Most of those who now attempt to describe and assess some aspect or another of the *ancien régime* of Socialism or Communism in Hungary (approximately 1948–1989) find it difficult to avoid the two usual pitfalls that attend this kind of exercise. One of these is the adoption of a high moral tone: after some show of disinterested inquiry and protestations of objectivity, the aspect in question is roundly condemned as some perverted manifestation of an evil and nefarious intention. The other pitfall involves erring on the side of the intellectual attitude: a sense of superiority is assumed on the part of the observer, who then treats his subject in the manner of the ironist or the satirist, that is, he anatomises it as just another moment in the history of perennial human stupidity. The underlying assumption, in both these approaches, is that the aspect in question is some contingent phenomenon, artificially imposed on the "natural" or "organic" processes of social life, and, as such, it does not possess a *raison d'être* and is totally dysfunctional and useless as far as the "normal" workings of the social organism are concerned. Instead of the sociologist's "understanding", we get what is hardly more than an extended rhetorical flourish: "How evil it was!" or, "How stupid it was!".

Refreshingly, István Bart's recent book on "world literature and publishing in the Kádár era" (as its title has it) successfully resists both of these temptations. In his various capacities as writer, translator, editor and publisher, Bart spent decades in the field he now describes with the kind of objectivity and even-handed fairness I thought would be possible only something like fifty years hence.

What he describes, however, needs some explanation, especially for those who were not part of the Kádár era of the title. "World literature and publishing" here refers to what was an important aspect of *kultúrpolitika* or "cultural policy", a somewhat mystifying term used to describe the system of political controls certain institutional authorities of the Soviet-style "party-state" exercised over the production and dissemination of "culture". This included control over the organisational framework of the professional area

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of literary translation as well. Political power, in the form of the "cultural apparatus" of Party and State in Hungary, had the final say in what was translated, published and distributed (and in the print runs allocated) of both the "classics" of the canonical European literary heritage and the works of contemporary "Western" and "Eastern" (that is, Soviet-bloc) authors. Bart's book is partly a chronicle of how this system was originally established (in the early 1950s), how it evolved into the powerful "translation industry" of the Kádár era by the mid-1960s, and how it collapsed, under new kinds of economic pressures and by the urgencies of political change, in the second half of the 1980s.

Throughout, Bart stresses the peculiar nature of this system from the economic point of view. With the nationalisation of all publishing houses in 1949 and the subsequent "reorganisation" of the publishing industry (consolidation and regimentation according to "speciality" publishing, that is, into particular publishers dealing individually in publishing contemporary Hungarian literature, in translating Soviet literature, in bringing out "world classics", etc.) the entire field came under centralised control in the financial sense as well. From then on, funding was entirely divorced from market considerations of profit, efficiency and cost/benefit analysis. Large budgetary sums were earmarked annually for "culture" and preferentially treated publishing projects were lavishly subsidised; print runs and retail prices were tailored to the supposed "ideological importance" and educational usefulness of the book in question. The result was that the more important the book was deemed to be, the more copies were printed and the cheaper the price they were sold at. (As a matter of fact, throughout the period book retail prices were, on the average, kept quite low and this made books affordable for people in lower-income brackets as well.) Accustomed to the book market of their own countries, Western observers were often struck by what they thought were absurdly low book prices in Hungary. I recall how Professor Frank Kermode was visibly startled when he verified, on a visit to Európa Publishers in Budapest in 1973, that a very handsomely produced "luxury" hardback edition of Dante's collected works in Hungarian translation cost a mere 90 forints, the equivalent of little more than £1 at the then current exchange rate. Paperbacks were, of course, much cheaper; for example, the 1973 translation of Philip Roth's *When She was Good* (a contemporary Western or American novel of average length) was priced at 16 Forints.

This was all part of "planning", the overall ideological or mythological motive behind all forms of political control over the institutions and practices of social life under Communist rule. Just as everywhere else, its exercise was based on a dual premise of "Do"-s and "Don't"-s. On the positive side, there were certain things the translation industry was expected, required or, in specific cases, more or less ordered to do: the translation (and publication) of certain authors or certain kinds of books was mandatory and this was, in fact, more than adequately financed. Bart surveys a number of these "musts" out of which two large categories of publishing projects invite reflection. The first was the high-priority area of the "literatures", whether contemporary or classical, of the Soviet Union and the People's Democracies. Here well-funded official demand produced a veritable glut of translations, the range of which included the exotic and interesting (say, high-standard Hungarian versions of 13th-century Georgian heroic poems and suchlike) as well as the trite

and embarrassingly bad products of contemporary true-to-type "Socialist Realism" originating in other countries of the Bloc. Many of these books, low-priced and produced in large numbers, ended up eventually as scrap paper—though, of course, only after a lengthy shelf-life in public libraries (which they spent mostly unread) or after an ideologically decent interval spent in some storehouse of the State Company of Book Distribution (as the operation in charge of this task was called).

Another high-priority area, where money seems to have been more usefully spent, was usually described as the "Classics of World Literature". As one of the ideological tenets that motivated *kultúrpolitika* was the belief in the morally and intellectually educative power of literature, especially of the "progressive literary heritage" of Shakespeare, Goethe, et al., the translation (often re-translation) and publication of this canon was seen as one of the basic tasks of the translation industry. Accordingly, much of what is nowadays described as the Western canon, ranging from Homer to Thomas Mann, was made available in very reasonably priced Hungarian translations of a high standard. Bart singles out the *Bibliotheca Classica* series of Európa Publishers, a house long specialised in translations and still now the most important player in the field. This was a series of classical Greek and Latin texts, including all major authors from Homer to Plutarch, in modern Hungarian translation, carefully checked and, if needed, edited by experts. There is no chance, Bart notes, that the high literary and scholarly standards of these books will be surpassed by new editions within the next fifty years; neither the expertise nor funds will be available in such concentration in the foreseeable future.

Now, if we turn to the other side of the premise and survey what the "Don't"s produced, we have a story which is sometimes sad, occasionally tragic, often downright bizarre and certainly rich in W. B. Yeats's casual comedy. Part of the reason for that consisted in a strange state of affairs: this system of effective controls lacked the most effective form of restricting and curbing what was disseminated as literary product, since there was no legally instituted system of open censorship (say, in the form of the Irish Censorship Board of old times, or of the official list of prohibited and banned books in the South Africa of the *apartheid* period). That is why the exercise of control, as a matter of day-to-day routine, took place through the circulation of technically informal "directives", semi-confidential "position papers", "suggestions" and "proposals" and through confidential phonecalls. The whole system was based on an elaborate ritual of tacit negotiation and the constant testing of limits: people at the professional end, sub-editors, editors and publishers always tried for more, that is, they kept probing the limits of official resistance to publishing authors (mainly contemporary writers from "the capitalist West") cultural officialdom (or some section of it) might or might not consider an ideological security risk. The process involved much give-and-take and, over the years and decades, its workings became less and less restricted. Authors, previously considered taboo, were in time quietly reclassified as more acceptable for translation and publication. Bart quotes a confidential "report" produced for the head of the General Directorate of Publishers (one of the institutionalised controlling authorities) in 1963 which is still very dubious about the advisability of publishing the works of such ideological bogeys of long standing

in Soviet Marxism as Franz Kafka, James Joyce and Robert Musil. In telling contrast to the negative and restrictive tenor of this paper, *The Trial* was published in *Nagyvilág,* a magazine specializing in translations of contemporary work, in the same year, while *Ulysses* and *The Man Without Qualities* appeared in Hungarian translation eventually in 1974 and 1977 respectively. Even Samuel Beckett, the epitome of Western literary "decadence" and "pessimism" for the official cultural line, was translated into Hungarian: *Nagyvilág* published *Waiting for Godot* in 1965, a collection of Beckett's plays appeared in 1970, *Murphy* in 1972, the *Trilogy* in 1987.

There were, however, two taboos that had to be rather rigidly observed: no pornography was allowed to pass into Hungarian and no reference to the Soviet Union or to any of its components and institutions that could be interpreted as "anti-Soviet" could find its way into the translated text. But even with respect to these, editors and publishers sometimes found convenient loopholes. As times changed and public attitudes to sex, nudity, obscenity, four-letter words and the like gradually mellowed in Hungary, "pornography" became an elastic, even evanescent concept. "Anti-Sovietism" remained, of course, a notion much less open to flexible interpretation. Still, if editors or publishers thought the book was important enough, they sometimes excised the "problematic" sentence or passage in the spirit of *fraus pia.* (This happened, famously, to a passage in Günter Grass's *Tin Drum* dealing with the arrival of the Red Army under General Rokossovsky in Danzig and the havoc they wreaked there.)

This is only a sample of what can be gleaned from the large amount of extremely rich documentary material István Bart presses into the service of his coherent and highly instructive narrative about *kultúrpolitika* and the translation industry in Kádár's Hungary. The final sense of all this is, incidentally, of paradox. Deeply committed to the belief, both archaic and "Marxist", of the efficacy of the (printed) Word, the Communist rulers of Hungary were convinced of the absolute necessity of exploiting this efficacy, the precious moral and educational power of literature, in building the Future and creating the New Man of this Future. This was, at best, an exaggerated claim for literature, at worst, a naive and self-delusory myth. But in acting on their myth, they quickly realised that, in their attempt to control culture, there must be something to control in the first place. So they embarked on a policy that controlled what it maintained and maintained what it controlled. In other words: it fed the controllers of culture with something they could control while it also fed those who maintained culture in order for its controllers to have something to control. The equally ironical byproduct, the "unbought grace" (*pace* Edmund Burke) of all this was, Bart wryly notes in his conclusion, easily the greatest and most productive era of literary translation in the history of the country. ❧

ECONOMY

Norbert Izsák

Figuring the History of Hungary

Századok statisztikája (The Statistics of Centuries). Budapest, KSH (Central Bureau of Statistics), 2001, 246 pp.

It makes sense for a—popularising yet scholarly—publication to start off with the history of the agency responsible for itself. Whatever your angle of approach, it is of interest that the Chief Statistician of Hungary, Károly Keleti, was one of the founding members of the International Institute of Statistics (IIS, later ISI) established in 1885, and that there were as many as seven Hungarians amongst the original hundred statistician members. *The Statistics of Centuries* is, it should be said, a somewhat overstated title for a sketchy survey of a millennium followed by an assortment of figures referring to the state of society, the economy and the regions of Hungary in the past hundred years.

With the first Hungarian elections of this century looming as I write, the statistics of voter turnout are of topical interest. Many a political party would no doubt rejoice if turnout—which varied between 72 and 93 per cent of those entitled to vote between 1920 and 1947—was still a feature today. In the last three elections, it did not once exceed 69 per cent. Of course, things look different if we add that in 1926 fewer than 27 per cent of the population were entitled to vote, since 1990, more than 75 per cent have been so entitled. All the same, the figures for the first two post-war elections are note-worthy. In 1945 and 1947, close on 60 per cent of the population were enfranchised and more than nine tenths turned out at the polls. In other words, in 1947 out of five million four hundred and eight thousand on the rolls, five million and thirty-one thousand cast their votes. Forty-three years later, in 1990, at the first post-Communist free elections, there were seven million eight hundred and twenty-four thousand on the rolls, but a "mere" four million nine hundred and eleven thousand voted.

Catastrophic conditions after the Second World War contributed to voting. Casualties of war—including the deportees—could be counted in millions. War damage exceeded 44 per cent of 1944's national wealth (around 22 billion pengő). Half of the country's livestock perished, a quarter of the manufacturing industry was destroyed, and half of the main railway lines were no more. True, close to 90 per cent of rolling stock survived the war but three quarters of it was pillaged. Not only

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did more than one hundred and twenty thousand damaged dwellings have to be repaired, but three hundred million dollars' worth of reparations had to be produced somehow. A fair proportion of economically active males had perished in the fighting, a further step in the direction of an aging poulation (a century-long trend). In 1870, 37 per cent of the population were children, a ratio which has declined to 17 per cent, while the proportion of the aged has quadrupled. This explains why the proportion of dependents has barely changed in the past hundred years. In 1910 too it amounted to 58 per cent. Then they were mainly housewives and children, today the greater proportion of those not in employment are in receipt of some sort of pension.

In a declining population there is also a lesser inclination to get married. A hundred and forty years ago, more than 63 per cent of men or women were married; today the respective figures are 56 per cent for men and 50 for women. The divorce rate has grown forty-fold in that period, going up from 0.07 to close on 3.0. People are also less philoprogenitive: at the end of the 19th century, there were on average five births per family, today the two-child family is the norm. At the same time, of course, the proportion of children born out of wedlock (pups conceived by stealth, in the phrase of the times) which was below eight per cent between 1876 and 1880, had grown to 29 per cent (more or less the EU average) by the year 2000.

There is virtually no sector of the economy in which employment patterns have not changed. The most marked change has been in agriculture. In 1900 more than 60 per cent of income earners derived their living from the land (including forestry). This has declined to 6–7 per cent. Industry and construction have taken up the slack. In a hundred years their share has grown from 12-13 per cent to 32-33 per cent. Telecommunications, commerce and transport have more than trebled, from 6 per cent to 20 per cent. Administration, education and health services have also shown a considerable increase—8 to 9 per cent early in the twentieth century, 26 per cent at its end. The full hundred per cent was made up then, as now, by "other services."

A hundred years ago around a fifth of income earners were women. The post-war "working husband—working wife" socialist family model also helped to put paid to this male preponderance. The ratio of women peaked in 1980, when more than 48 per cent were in employment. At present 44 to 45 per cent of those in employment are women. There have been other changes as well, one of them being as regards the oddity of unemployment figures: 35,000 unemployed were recorded by the trades unions in 1924, but a few years later only fifteen to twenty thousand jobless Hungarians lived in the Carpathian Basin (a figure that includes ethnic Hungarians in Austria, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia); then the Great Depression once again pushed up the number of jobless to above 30,000. This fell to below 18,000 immediately before the Second World War, and briefly rose again after 1945. Since the socialist system did not recognise unemployment—those who preferred to be jobbless in the artificially "overemployed" economy were criminalized as dangerous vagrants—the rate of unemployment that sprang up overnight following the liquidation of enterprises after the collapse of Communism came as a major shock. The number peaked at half a million in 1993. By the year 2000 this figure had declined to 263,000 that is, 6.4 per cent of the active workforce.

But even those who held down a job were not sure they were on a growth path. After the Second World War average wages

and salaries only grew by fits and starts. In 1950 the average monthly take-home pay was 678 forints, though real wages grew until 1978, when the trend changed. They tended to decline until 1996: even the 13 per cent rise in real incomes between 1997 and 2000 did not fully compensate for the earlier dive. In 2000 real incomes were still 20 per cent below those of 1978. It should be said that the 1950 average income more or less corresponds to the take-home monthly pay packet of 55,785 forints in 2000. It would be interesting to know how much more or less that was than actual earnings in 2000.

The real value of pensions dropped even more steeply between the mid-eighties and the second half of the nineties, and though the trend has been reversed, growth has been modest indeed. The changing role of the state is indicated by the 95,000 in receipt of a state pension in 1924 growing to 3,000,000 by the year 2000, as a result of the 1952 pensions reform, subsequent changes in the system and an aging population. Those three million amount to 31 per cent of the population, whereas in 1950 the corresponding ratio was a mere 5.6 per cent.

Consumer habits have also changed. Fifty years ago, 40 per cent of incomes were spent on food, a little more than 10 per cent on clothing and close to a third on other goods and services. In 1998, barely a fifth of incomes were spent on food, a total of 2-3 per cent on clothing, and more than half on other goods and services. In conjunction, dietary habits have also changed. Compared to a hundred years ago, the average Hungarian buys one and half times as much meat and fish, two hundred eggs more a year, twice as much milk and milk products, ten times as much sugar, largely the same quantity of fats, fruit and vegetables, but only two thirds the quantity of cereals and potatoes and a third as much of pulses and oily seeds. The decline in real incomes in the eighties and nineties perhaps explains why the 1987 figures were 10–20 per cent higher than those for 1999.

There were changes in culture too. Between 1920 and 1928, annually between 1500 and 4000 titles were published, of which around a third could be described as literary works. Barring one or two minor fallbacks in the early nineties, this figure has steadily grown since 1950, and moves around nine to ten thousand at present. The size of editions has, however, radically declined. The print run for all books was more than 100 million in 1990, and fewer than 40 million in 2000. The explanation probably lies in the prompt end of direct state support and the resulting price explosion. Taste and demand have also changed. The proportion of scientific and technical books has grown to 40 per cent, literature now accounts for no more than a fifth of the market, and popular science books barely account for 13 per cent. On the other hand, visitors to museums have much greater choice. In 1925 there were only thirty-nine museums for them to visit, in 2000 eight hundred and twelve. The number of visitors reflects the trend. Seventy-five years ago 7 per cent of the population were museum goers, these days 99 per cent are.

It would seem, however, that greater leisure opportunities are not an effective anti-depressant. Suicide rates have grown compared to those of the 19th century. In the 1820s there were 19 suicides per 100,000 inhabitants within the Hungary of those times, in 1920 (in post-Trianon Hungary) there were 24, and this trend peaked in 1983, at 46. The trend then appeared to go into reverse: in 2000, 33 per 100,000 Hungarians committed suicide. Other mortality rates also changed some-

what. In 1948 cardiac complaints and malignant tumours headed the list. These still top the list, but they are no longer followed by tuberculosis, pneumonia and perinatal mortality. Cerebral sclerosis has moved up to third place from sixth. It is followed by non-natural deaths (accidents, suicide and murder) and by liver complaints, bronchitis, asthma, diabetes and kidney complaints, which were not in the top list fifty years ago.

Leisure has grown concurrently with life expectancy. Between 1977 and 1999 income-earning work and household duties diminished more or less by an hour and leisure was extended from 3 hours and 20 minutes to 4 hours and 17 minutes. It fits in with Western trends that people spend more than 60 per cent of the extra time available in front of the television set.

One could argue that there is every justification for relaxation even from the macroeconomic point of view. Although per capita GDP is still well below the EU average, in 2000 it was 13 to 14 times as high as a hundred years earlier. But that is still not enough for first place in the East Central European context. A per capita GDP of $10,870 may be three times that of the Ukraine and close to twice that of Romania, but it is only a few hundred dollars ahead of Slovakia and $5,000 behind Slovenia, not to mention Austria's $24,580, which is higher than the EU average. This historically high figure has had its collateral effects on consumption, and present household consumption is four times that of 1950. (The highest so far measured in Hungary, in 1987, has not so far been successfully equalled, let alone exceeded.)

The tourist industry has considerably contributed to the successes of the economy. It began with the riverboat which began to ply regularly between Pest and Vienna in 1830. In 1896, at the time of the Millenary Celebrations of the Hungarian Conquest, a total of twenty-five hotels and *pensions* were available in the capital. Forty years later their number had grown to 156, with 9,486 beds. Hotel construction accelerated in the eighties and nineties, with the emphasis on the luxury class. By the year 2000, hydro- and spa-hotels alone could cater to more than 9,000, and the total of available beds approached 100,000. There are another 220,000 or so provided by paying guest facilities (in rural areas as well), which used to be fully exploited and are fully exploited once again. Three hundred and eighty-three thousand foreign visitors came to Hungary in 1937. In the fifties this number fell to a few tens of thousands. Even the few who would venture here had obstacles put in their way by the Communist authorities. In the sixties restrictions were relaxed, the number of visitors soon reached the earlier level and, indeed, a dynamic growth ensued. The number of visitors exceeded five million in 1969 and peaked at 40 million in 1993, a few years after the end of communism. The present figure moves around an annual thirty million.

Such growth did not occur in the case of travel abroad by Hungarians. For a long time—because of restrictions on travel—the 1937 figure (220,000) was not exceeded. Numbers went up in the late fifties but —in almost all cases—the destination lay within the Comecon area. The introduction of what was called the world passport in 1988 was a tremendous boost. That year the frontiers were crossed thirteen million times by Hungarians, a record which has stood ever since. Hungarians travelling abroad still do so on more than ten million occasions every year.

Trips abroad have to be paid for out of what is left after you have paid your taxes. Constant changes in an impossibly

complicated taxation system are no help. In 1868, after the Compromise between Austria and Hungary, three fifths of the income of the exchequer derived from direct taxes, which the nobility too had to pay after 1848 (land-, livestock-, house-, income- and personal earnings taxes), one fifth from excise dues (salt and tobacco), a tenth from a sales tax on beer, spirits and meat, and another tenth from various stamp and other dues and charges. In the mid 1870s the income and personal earnings tax were combined as a general income tax. The share of this and other direct taxes diminished, and that of various dues and charges grew. In 1916 a personal income and wealth tax was introduced, which accounted for one third of income in the next budget. Direct taxes, on the other hand, no longer amounted to even 25 per cent, consumer and drink taxes to 17, dues and charges to 15, and excise dues to 11 per cent. Between 1920 and 1924, the monetary unit, the Crown (korona), was devalued to less than a hundredth of its value, sales taxes grew, and there was a gigantic hyperinflation after the Second World War. In August 1946, 400,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 pengő were exchanged for just one forint, the new currency unit. For a short transitional period, when an additional tax on property and property accretion was collected to finance post-war reconstruction, the old items of taxation survived. After the nationalisation of banks and of large firms, these paid around 90 per cent of total taxes. In 1988 a value-added tax was introduced, and a personal income tax was reintroduced. A taxation structure, which continuously changed, undergoing refinement, in 1990 obtained 44-44 per cent of income from payments by enterprises and taxes connected with consumption, but by the year 2000 the contribution from economic organisations had declined to 16 per cent, that of consumption taxes had leapt to 58 per cent and the share of payments by individual taxpayers grew to 20 per cent. ❧

Zoltán Farkas

Two Men, One Case

Tibor Liska and Norman Macrae

"In thirty years state property will have disappeared and the world will have come to realize that only a privatised economy is viable", was what Norman Macrae, at the time deputy editor of *The Economist,* had to say—ten years ago (*The Economist,* December 21st January 3rd 1992). Versed in Hungarian issues, the British economist described and echoed Tibor Liska's ideas, who had been long a controversial figure in the reform of Hungary's socialist economy. Events do not appear to have confirmed his prediction but we mustn't forget that only ten years of Macrae's thirty years have passed.

"By the 2020s it will be recognized as absurd that only the Republican and Democratic parties should field serious candidates for (say) the 2024 election for president of the United States. A competing —'contractual' candidacy—will emerge, a cabinet team who say they will never raise income tax above 10 per cent... but will contract to provide government of the following quality... ", is what Macrae said. By the end of the three decades his vision covered, schools of improving quality competing with each other would have been privatised long ago—as well as prisons and hospitals—and a colourful, quality market of education and correction would have sprung up. And last but not least, the two remaining "public goods", distribution and the military, would have been competitised.

If this sounds like the views of Tibor Liska, considered by economists in Hungary as either a saviour or a bogeyman for over twenty years, you are not wide off the mark. In March 1983, on the centenary of Marx's death, Macrae had already made the point in *The Economist* (March 19, 1983) "The erratic Liska has invented the one sort of socialism which intelligent young people may in future think could bring greater happiness than capitalism. [...] I am not sure that socialist entrepreneuralism will beat the simple private-enterprise sort, but it is the only socialism that will work." Actually, Macrae in the seventies was one of the best-informed doomsayers of the socialist economy. "In the 1980s I was writing that communism would collapse—out of its own economic nonsense. The Berlin Wall came down on Xmas Eve 1989.

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I was six weeks too pessimistic", was his reaction to an interview question recently put to him.

Obviously, he both missed and hit during his long career, but what he published never failed to raise a controversy. Daniel Franklin, publishing director of the Economist Intelligence Unit, remembers Macrae coining the word privatization and thirty years later grumbling that the nationalized coalmines, steel works and telephone industries were not handed over into private ownership.

Norman Macrae, now 78, lives in an exclusive Wimbledon home for the retired. He points out that these have been privatised in a quick account of the first third of the thirty years he outlined, then goes on to recall his vision, half quoting, half reading: "You should have given to you a voucher to spend on any school you want to send your children to. If you live in an area of poor schools, get a higher value voucher." He also made suggestions which no longer sound blasphemous: since prisons are proven to "create recidivists instead of curing criminals," these institutions must be run by entrepreneurs who get their money only if "their inmates do not commit more offences." Or that "multinational corporations will appear on the ballot for local elections. They will say: 'We will charge only this level of poll tax or property tax. We will promise by contract to reach the following targets for reduction in the crime rate, for environmental cleanliness, etc. If—by the judgment of independent auditors—we fail, we will have to remit some of your property tax to you.'"

An even bolder version was the privatization of armies. And if it sounds comic today that, to Norman Macrae, in 1992, NATO and the Warsaw Pact will merge by 2015, we still have to admit that he made a hit, given that just recently Russian tanks in Afghanistan fired away in combination with American rockets and British infantry. To the objection that Britain these days is less a land of privatization than a welfare state, he now speaks in horror of agriculture: "Agriculture should be closed down, we pay 2 per cent of the population huge subsidies when we should buy our food from the cheapest areas. Some farmers were actually giving their cows foot and mouth disease because they got more money from the government to kill them than they would have got rearing them."

Norman Macrae finds it more pleasant to talk about the years when he was only contemplating these ideas. As in 1983, when Tibor Liska invited him to Budapest. "Hungary last week proved to be the only country where I have ever been interviewed for state television, state radio and four newspapers by journalists, who assumed that their prime-time audiences would know what the word 'intrapreneurial' meant. The broadcast programmes went out as recorded, with just one disturbing omission. Last week, there were cuts whenever I mentioned Tibor Liska's name," he wrote in 1983. Incidentally, Liska, who was excluded both from publication and from the University of Economics in Budapest (Karl Marx University, it was then called) started organizing Norman Macrae's visit in October 1982 but was unable in the intervening five months to get a decent lecture hall. The two thousand invitations sent out contained only the date of his lecture and a phone number to inquire after the venue. Eventually Miklós Pulai, Vice-President of the National Planning Office, came to the rescue and provided a room in the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce. A few years later Liska recalled Norman Macrae's 1983 article with a characteristic twist of humour: "Macrae envisioned a heart attack for me, given how I had to live. That proved to be a grave underestimate, I've had two heart attacks. You cannot trust estimates, even by *The Economist.*"

Norman Macrae recalls hair-raising details of meeting and being driven around in Budapest by Liska, who liked to emphasise his points by taking both hands off the steering wheel. Back on the plane of normative economic theories, he points out that Liska was right in many things but wrong in one: "He thought you could totally privatize the money supply... it would have allowed banks to go bust. You need some form of federal reserve."

Which is to show that Macrae and Liska disagreed over many things. Macrae believed in private ownership and competition-based capitalism, Liska dreamed of a society based on personal social ownership. Of a world, where—to quote his favourite example—"the land should not be owned by him who cultivates it, but he who can cultivate it most efficiently should have a chance to do so." Macrae always follow-ed the major economic trends, Liska kept out of them. But with an intimate knowledge of British bureaucracy, grossly inefficient state-owned firms and central redistribution crippling competition, he must have concurred with Tibor Liska, when the latter talked about "state-run redistribution and ransacking", even if he had an altogether different attitude. However, he is unlikely to have felt sympathy for the entrepreneurial world envisaged by Liska, a world without private property, where entrepreneurs make bids for the opportunity to run firms that remain the property of the state.

What he definitely got wrong was his claim that Liska's system was the only kind of socialism that would work. It didn't. To be fair, it was never tried. Norman Macrae concludes that Gorbachev was braver than Liska, he actually abolished the old system. In the event, Norman Macrae is satisfied: the planned economy met the fate he prophesized. And Great Britain has only two decades left to prove him wrong.

"This is an age of state capitalism. Its systems are not the homely mafias of common criminals. Mafiosi were paid to get rid of competitors on the market. We, wretched bureaucrats, are robbed of our money. The modern mafia has us, the state, do this dirty work. Apparently free of charge and 'lawfully.' With taxes, duties, inflation, etc. With protectionism. Or, to make sure, they hold back the better part of our money. Our salaries are pocket money, provided by a paternalist state. [...] One of the main causes of crisis is the general retention of energy, the most common and natural form of protest all regimes of our age provoke with their pillaging of incomes", is what Tibor Liska wrote in 1989, adopting the point of view of a bureaucrat. (He was never one himself, although he was obviously sustained throughout a long career by government pocket-money, treated as an intellectual minor.) At a time when the intellectual elite in Hungary was dazzled by the prospects of a new era, Liska warned that in modern societies excessive state redistribution induces everyone who has a chance to reduce productivity to do so—and this leaves much of the potential of the economy dormant. Liska offered another solution, another transition, from the planned economy: this was not to be venture capitalism but a special entrepreneurial society, which post-Communist countries perhaps had a chance to develop as they reduced state ownership. But the political elite chose what it was familiar with, and what seemed to work impressively better than a planned economy: private-ownership based capitalism. It ignored Liska's ideas just as much as party apparatchiks had in the preceding thirty years.

Tibor Liska was a reform economist, who in the Hungary of the fifties and sixties wrote about the functional inaquedacy and dysfunctions in the way the planned

economy calculated efficiency and in centrally directed price setting; he was the first in the socialist bloc to produce, in 1963, a complete critique of the planned economy, of its impossibility. He was chiefly interested in the conditions of ownership in how the resources of the economy could best be utilized and in how the individual would fare best. He rejected social systems based exclusively on private property or on complete state ownership. If a society, he said, is based on private owership, hundreds of thousands, or millions of people would be without property or an opportunity for enterprise; if the sole owner is the state, all society is cast into the status of salaried slaves, and it is pointless to talk about democracy and free enterprise.

He wrote his opus magnum, *Ökonosztát,* in 1965, a time when, in Hungary, a critique of the Stalinist planned economy first became possible, and when the party bureaucrats of the Kádár regime, realizing that recent bursts of economic growth had petered out, wanted to introduce reforms. Yet its prospective masterminds had to be aware of pressing political taboos: state ownership had to dominate, economic development objectives had to be sanctioned by the Planning Office, and a market for firms had to be such that it did not disintegrate the economy and did not produce unemployment or inflation (hence the survival of governmental control of prices and wages, even if in a somewhat laxer form). The administration only dared to give free reign to certain market mechanisms, not to the market itself; it thus disqualified from the start a thorough reform of the economy. Kádár did not dare to proceed as far as Dubček, and events proved him right in a way: Hungary was not invaded, but was itself one of the invaders who crushed the Prague Spring of 1968. Yet even these limited reforms made Hungary, within a few years, a model country in the region, endearingly dubbed the home of "goulash communism."

Liska ignored these political barriers in his *Ökonosztát.* (It was only 23 years later that it could be published, to become a bestseller in 1988.) His *Ökonosztát* is a planned economic automaton, a system in which anyone can become an entrepreneur—among the spontaneous processes of a market. What needs to be planned is not the economy but property management. To oversimplify: this economy would have worked on the principle—had any regime given it a trial—that banks lease state property to anyone who undertakes to produce the most revenue. Anyone can take part in the tenders and bid with the future proceeds. The bank and the entrepreneur then share the returns, in proportion to the capital increment. Liska turned Lenin's slogan ("He who cultivates the land will own it") on its head, claiming "the land should not be owned by him who cultivates it, but he who can cultivate it most efficiently should have a chance to do so."

After 1968, with the institutionalisation of restricted reforms, Liska became a tolerated, lonely figure as a research economist in state institutions. He was allowed to write but rarely to publish. In a few studies on minor issues that did appear, he tried to surreptitiously include the main ideas of his system; these studies remained incomprehensible to the average reader, heavily dependent as they were on *Ökonosztát*—which of course remained unpublished. Eventually, at the end of the seventies, a new wave of reforms carried him to the Karl Marx University of Economics in Budapest. Its Internal Trade Department was asked by the government to work out a model for the retail and catering trades which would be as appealing to customers as their Western counterparts—yet remain socialist. That is why Liska was needed, who had already in-

vented a method of squaring the circle. He scandalized his new colleagues by seeking the company of semi-private entrepreneurs, peddlers and other specialists in the black market. He even paid them in order to learn the tricks of their trade: how they economize, what to steal from state-owned shops and restaurants. He then developed a system, in which the lease of the management of certain shops or restaurants of a state-owned chain could be bid for, and after the new manager paid in a certain sum to the head office, he was left to his own resources and was allowed to keep whatever profit he made. The administration accepted the model, as the state increased its revenues, and service immediately and dramatically improved. An important element of this "contractual management" arrangement was the fact that the property was not handed over permanently, only until the next auction, which involved competition in the system. (It certainly prepared the ground for the eminently successful and rapid privatization of retailing and catering a decade later.)

Yet Liska was dissatisfied with the new system, since many features he thought important had been removed. "Leasing is only good if I use something. If I lease a rowboat, don't expect me to return a yacht," went his example. What he objected to was that even the most honest entrepreneur, even if he had plans for the not so near future, was interested in accumulating the largest possible amount of private property during the lease, rather than increasing the capital itself. He never fully accepted the working model as his own, though it earned great respect in East Central Europe.

Liska by that time had developed the programme of *Ökonosztát* into an entire social and economic system. A system in which entrepreneurs are fully interested in the growth of the capital which they manage as their personal social property; a system in which it is possible to become an entrepreneur without capital (or private property). He formulated the idea of "social inheritance capital," which means everyone gets the portion of the social capital which is his or her due, at the time of his or her birth or even conception; the interest would pay for one's schooling and would even allow a certain standard of living, but if one wishes to start a career as an entrepreneur, it would furnish the necessary capital. (In this sense Tony Blair's proposed baby-bond, which would provide the newborn with a state capital share which yields interest till the first job is taken and can then be cashed, is a simplified version of Liska's "invention.") In Liska's model the economy is organized by banks he calls Enterprise Experiment Banks, but—unlike in an earlier version, in which the entrepreneur and the state share the capital increment—the entrepreneur pays only interest to his bank, and the capital increment remains his, so the bid returns to the bidder. As the entrepreneur becomes more and more successful, he or she has more and more on his or her "moral assets" account, and can start more extensive businesses.

At the beginning of the eighties, the Hungarian economy plunged into a deep crisis. Martial Law was declared in Poland in 1980, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, East–West relations froze, lack of further loans made Poland, Romania and Bulgaria bankrupt. A similar fate awaited Hungary. The country decided, despite a Soviet ban, to apply for membership in the International Monetary Fund. After joining the IMF in 1982, new loans were obtained within months and the solvency crisis was evaded. All this still did not help to solve the structural crisis of the economy. The political elite decided to carry out new reforms. Liska was given a

lectureship, which he used not so much to teach as to test his own views. At the debates held in the largest lecture theatre of the Budapest University of Economics, he asked the best economic policy makers and theoretical economists of the time (including János Kornai, professor at Harvard, György Surányi, who would become the president of the Hungarian National Bank, named best president of a national bank by *Euromoney,* and Lajos Bokros, whose stabilization policy saved the Hungarian economy from collapse in 1995) to prove his ideas could not be put into practice. He did not expect them to agree with him, he wanted them to prove him wrong. These long debates drew five to six hundred, sometimes a thousand, students who couldn't help wondering how interesting economics can be when the issues are real.

At the time it was thought Liska's teaching could best be described by Shakespeare's "Though this be madness, yet there's method in't." But, it wasn't madness, only different from what people were used to. As for the method, Liska never wanted his theses to fossilize into doctrine and a system. He held economics to be an experimental science, and his greatest ambition was to test his ideas in practice.

He was given the chance to experiment with a few bankrupt or near-insolvent agricultural cooperatives. In a few designated villages, the locals (uneducated) could place bids for tractors, trucks or broiler chicken sheds, and they soon proved to be able to manage this leased property at a much higher level of efficiency than the better trained employees. The experiment, restricted though its scope was, seemed to bear out Liska. Yet it was never tried out on a larger scale.

The administration was made apprehensive by Liska's popularity. They were piqued by his trenchant remarks and epigrammatic statements about public affairs, both of which gained currency faster than the best jokes. They made it more and more difficult for him to hold his public debates, research funds seemed to dry up. He became seriously ill, returning to public life only shortly before the transition. After the successful reception of *Ökonosztát* he was confident the time had arrived to publish those six thousand pages that had piled up in his drawers. He chose the usual Liskaite solution and invited publishers to make their bids.

But the post-transition political consolidation relegated him to a backseat once again. Politicians in the region proved more receptive to imported solutions than home-grown recipes. Jeffrey Sachs's quick and free distribution (the giving away) of state property in the form of shares had more advocates than Liska. Privatization, the hope of acquiring property pushed Liska's entrepreneurship concept way over the sidelines. He now shares the fate of an important 19th-century thinker, Henry George (1839–1897), who had a great influence on him: his memory is kept alive only by those of the faithful few who understood him.

Not long ago whole generations were listening to him. Listening, if not believing; his students were certainly greatly entertained in his classes. Which is probably the greatest injustice a scholar can suffer—and the greatest acceptance a scholar can earn. His economic model may not have caught on, but the hero of a novel (Gyula Hernádi's *Folyosók* [Corridors]) was modelled on him; he even played himself in two films, András Kovács's *Falak* (Walls) and Péter Bacsó's *Kitörés* (Break Out), both great successes in the sixties and seventies. Although he couldn't publish more than half a dozen articles under the previous regime, he became, we learn from one young academic, the single most cited name in Hungarian economic literature. In the footnotes, that is. ❧

Miklós Györffy

When Words Beget Reality

István Szilágyi: *Hollóidő* (Raven Time). Budapest, Magvető, 2001, 544 pp. • Kornél Hamvai: *A prikolics utolsó élete* (The Werewolf's Final Stand). Budapest, Ab Ovo, 2001, 271 pp.

The Transylvanian István Szilágyi (1938) has long had a significant yet virtually clandestine presence in contemporary Hungarian literature. Within a small circle of initiates, he has been highly thought of ever since *Kő hull apadó kútba* (Stone's Falling in a Dwindling Well) appeared in 1975, with some immediately ranking it as one of the great novels of its day. The keepers of the then prevailing literary canon, however, were at a loss what to make of it. No doubt, playing a part in the slight recognition that has been accorded him is his own modest and retiring nature, coupled with his isolation in Transylvania, which must have been particularly suffocating in the period before 1989. Whatever the case, he is to this day one of that ever-shrinking group of Transylvanian Hungarian writers who have chosen to stay and work in their homeland rather than transplant themselves to Hungary. He has never accepted a role in political or public life, either in Romania or in Hungary, and never aligned himself to any party or faction—another factor that does no favours for a writer's reputation in the hothouse political climate of recent times. Yet perhaps the main reason for the failure of Szilágyi's works to find a resonance is that, coming out at infrequent intervals, after prolonged gestations (the next was *Agáncsbozót* [Antler Thicket] in 1990) they are no one's idea of an easy read, nor do they fit neatly into any of the current trends of literary-intellectual discourse or fiction. They simply are not amenable to analysis in terms of the post-modern canon, or the traditional burden of writing for the nation, or some exemplary "oppositional" stance, nor even any sort of Transylvanism that denotes a distinct intellectual identity and claims autonomy.

The year 2001 saw a significant shift in that reception. Magvető, Szilágyi's Budapest publisher, brought out a handsome new edition of *Stone's Falling in a Dwindling Well,* thereby preparing the ground for the new novel, *Hollóidő* (Raven Time), which appeared soon afterwards. Critics seized eagerly on the new work, and not long ago it was awarded a prestigious non-state prize for Novel of the Year, by the same jury that in 2000 had bestowed the accolade (and the substantial

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reviews new fiction for this journal.

cash windfall that goes with it) on Esterházy's *Harmonia caelestis*—but with the difference that Szilágyi's book shared the prize with Ádám Bodor's autobiographical *A börtön szaga* (The Smell of Prison, see *HQ* 159, 160, 164). The prickly author of *Raven Time* refused to pick up the prize, declaring that his heroes would laugh at him were he to accept a half-prize. Anyone who has read the book, can understand Szilágyi's position and only be bemused by the jury's indecisiveness. *Raven Time* is a supremely original creation *sui generis,* and whether one regards it as good—the best of the crop for a particular period—or not, it really is demeaning to suggest equity is any sort of pretext for stuffing it under the same hat as another work, excellent though the book that Bodor and his interlocutor, Zsófia Balla, produced, is.

Szilágyi's new work is a historical novel of sorts, though not in any way one of the traditional kind. Like László Darvasi's bulky novel of two years ago, *The Legend of the Tear-Artists* (*HQ* 157), to which it has startling affinities in other respects, *Raven Time* is set in the tripartite Hungary of the Turkish conquest era. It is impossible to determine exactly when during that century and a half, not just because the narrator supplies no reference points but because he seeks quite deliberately and methodically to disorient the reader: any time something appears to offer a handhold, that is immediately gainsaid by something else. This sets up a never-was fictive temporal dimension. The same applies to the novel's spatial realm: we are recognisably in the Hungary of that era, but exactly where, we never get to know; this is driven home all the more forcefully by Szilágyi's use of fictive place-names that it is fruitless to try and identify since the novel's topography does not correspond to any reality. At one point, one of the narrators (there are at least two of them) declares, clearly on the author's behalf, "But then reality is one thing, words are something else. We may be more inclined to suppose reality is sire to the word, yet for all that there are times when it's as if the word were begetting reality." In *Raven Time* the word, in the most literal sense of language, begets the temporal and spatial reality of the novel's world.

To take a look, first of all, at the substance of what happens (it could be called a plot only with major reservations): this too barely accords with one's notion of a historical novel. Throughout Book 1, taking up two-thirds of the whole, we are in a market town known as Revek, which lies on the Great Plain, close to a big river, within the territory under Turkish suzerainty and subject to regular levies of tribute; in other words, somewhere along the southern reaches of the Danube (or could it be the Tisza?), in the Bácska or the region around Timişoara (Temesvár as was), that is to say, in what is now Serbia's northernmost region, the Vojvodina or the Romanian Banat. But the visible horizon is mostly kept within the even narrower confines of the Revek fortress-like manse, with its courtyard and garden, and the church. This is where the central character of Book 1 lives, a 17- or 18-year-old aide going by the name Téntás ('Inky'), who found his way into the manse as an orphaned infant and grew up to become the old minister's adopted son, amanuensis, right-hand-man and altar boy rolled into one. The minister is a Protestant, Lutheran or Calvinist, with a lawful wife and children of his own, though they frequently change, because they rarely survive beyond childbirth and are anyway on closer terms of familiarity with the household servants than with their master. Not that Lukács Terebi is in any way a despot, he is renowned for his erudition who, whilst he has to be served, is interested primarily in

his books and religious debates. These debates are carried on with schoolmaster Illés (Elijah) Fortuna, likewise a resident of the house, at least whenever he happens to be in Revek, since he often vanishes, sometimes for weeks on end. As Téntás slowly comes to realize, the austere, reticent teacher and impassioned debating-partner is just one of Fortuna's selves; the other self, concealed and never truly unbared, is that of a restive wandering sorcerer, a rebel-hearted, outlawed adventurer who, manoeuvring amidst the quicksands of daily shifts in the political and military position, strives to serve certain causes.

One such mission will be to find a way of gaining the release from the clutches of the provincial governor, the beglerbeg of Bagos, of the old priest, whom the Turks one day snatch from the church, along with about a dozen of his parishioners. The good burghers are liberated promptly enough in exchange for a ransom, but the clergyman is kept in captivity. For a while the Turks are unwilling even to name a price for which they will let him go, so that the prospect of securing his freedom looks more and more hopeless. In the end, after almost a year and a half has elapsed, this is accomplished, not through Fortuna's attempts at mediation, but through Téntás's astuteness—and also miracle-working powers that are mysterious and frightening even to himself. At this juncture Szilágyi's book encroaches on the dimensions of legend, and in that respect too is reminiscent of *The Legend of the Tear-Artists* (not that this is to suggest there is any question of a direct influence, since the two novels were being written at much the same time).

Book 1 in its entirety is composed so much from Téntás's viewpoint that it might even be read as a disguised first-person narrative. It may seem that the minister's release is the payoff towards which the tension is built, but the minister himself, insofar as his character, glimpsed through the aide's impressions and recollections, assumes any clear contours at all, is not a figure of sufficient substance or stature for his liberation to lie close to any one's heart, including that of the reader. It's a little as if Szilágyi were even betting on its already being pretty well a matter of indifference for this portly, comfort-loving old cleric—when he gets back home after all, a helpless wreck. That payoff in itself is in no way enough to maintain the tension all the way through the 375 pages of densely written, antiquated language of Book 1.

Yet *Raven Time* still captivates the reader, if read in the right frame of mind, with the requisite attention and patience, and (if at all possible) straight through in one go, and not according to the modern-day habit of snatching moments here and there to read snippets on the bus or underground, the beach, or just before dropping off to sleep. An open, receptive reader will find himself or herself being gradually drawn into a world created by the novel in which there is little in the way of novelistic plotting and which exists and dilates in time purely for its own sake. At every turn we are at Téntás's shoulder, experiencing everything that happens to him with magical sensitivity and palpability: his mundane tasks, his sexual awakening, his occasional love-making with the women of the household, his visits to the hiding-place of a partisan band formed by the younger men of Revek, the conversations he has with Master Fortuna (from which one possible account of his own origins slowly transpires), the adventure of the liberation itself. Like him, we too are completely unsure as to how the various concerns and incidents fit together, what course they are taking, and what their rationale might be. The novel's world is rounded and com-

plete in the way that any individual life is rounded and complete, whilst also haphazard, undecided and inconclusive, like that of a person unable to be certain of anything beyond his own momentary presentness of being.

The enigmatic allure of this constant sensory presentness of being is generated, I suppose, by two means in particular. One is Szilágyi's language: replete with archaisms and dialect words, its inexhaustibly rich vernacular comprises the tangible vehicle for the novel. Locale, object world, habitat, economy, mentality, everything that the novel takes as its historical, ethnographic, naturalistic and, not least, philological subject: all conjured into language which suggests there could be no other way of speaking about such matters. That, of course, carries the implication that *Raven Time* is in essence untranslatable, for the world that is created within it is inseparable from its linguistic reality. Szilágyi's other great feat is closely bound up with that: synthesizing knowledge of the most diverse specialist subjects, he knows all about the epoch and the way of life from whose elements this world is constructed.

Book 2 of *Raven Time,* only loosely connected with the first but sticking consistently to the narrative technique elaborated there, is about how the Revek lads' band of partisans, along with the minister's aide, set off in response to a mysterious summons and, through similarly mysterious help and solicitude, in which Illés Fortuna certainly has a substantial hand, grow up into manly warriors of the strongholds on the Hungarian side of the frontier lands, indeed, are eventually deployed in a military expedition that is being prepared against the Turks. This part is related by one of the young members of the band, for the most part in the first person plural. Téntás, the narrator of Book 1, soon parts company from them and disappears from the novel, along with Illés Fortuna, in such a way that neither the other characters concerned nor we readers ever learn, in the end, who they actually were, what they had to do with one another, or what thrust them, for a while, into the role of main protagonists of a novel.

All the more profound is the mark left on us by the intense suggestion of being-at-hand made by objects and language. And also by a sense of "raven time", which has a very familiar feel to it. On seeing a sack full of pointlessly decapitated, blood-smeared Turkish heads, Téntás says to Fortuna, "You may have been tormented by this horror, sire." To which Fortuna rejoins, "It's their look. The way their eyes cloud with sorrow in death. (How will it be henceforth? A raven rooting, pecking out the eyes of time? Or will time become a raven? Raven time?)," someone goes on to ask in parenthesis. Téntás, or the narrator identified with him? By the end of the novel that sack of heads has multiplied to three thousand: after a victorious battle, the Hungarian captain, as a wager, piles up the heads of three thousand slain Turks in two geometrically precise pyramids to honour the army's commander-in-chief, the almighty prince. The "saddened" gaze of three thousand pairs of human eyes stares out at us from the final pages of the book.

This "raven time" is, on the one hand, quite obviously the time of Transylvania's vanishing Hungarian populace—a modern reverberation of the shared yet so distinctive fates of the Hungarians of Revek under Turkish suzerainty and those of "royal Hungary", with its alignment to the "Western" sphere of interest. On the other hand, it is a time which gives no answer to the questions of contemporaries and fellow sufferers in misfortune looking for sense and order. A reader and critic who bases judgements on superficial impres-

sions might, perhaps, consider Szilágyi to be an old-fashioned, tediously historicizing writer, whereas in fact he is an author who, in an entirely original manner and with self-abandoned naturalness, succeeds in combining classic traditions of fiction with post-modernist logocentrism and deconstructionist disruption of orderliness of plot.

On the appearance in 1995 of his first novel, *Márton partjelző fázik* (Linesman Márton Is Cold), Kornél Hamvai was overnight acclaimed as one of the most promising of Hungary's new prose writers. He has gone on to attract attention with his plays, the first of which, a staged version of his debut novel, had a long and highly successful run at the Merlin Theatre. Critics voted his next two pieces, *Körvadászat* (Shooting Party) of 1997, and *Hóhérok hava* (Executioners' Holiday) of 2000, the best plays of their years, the latter still playing in the repertoire of the capital's Katona József Theatre. Translations of the plays have been made into English, Hamvai having had a spell at Oxford University during 1996–97, as a graduate in English studies.

His second novel came out some months ago under the title *A prikolics utolsó élete* (The Werewolf's Final Stand). That word *"prikolics"* in the title is likely to be strange even to Hungarian speakers, and one will find no entry for it in the standard *Shorter Explanatory Dictionary of Hungarian,* or even in the *Dictionary of Foreign Terms,* but an entry in the *Historical-Etymological Dictionary of the Hungarian Language* informs us that the word, in the form *"prikulics",* is of Transylvanian Romanian origin and denotes "ghost", "wolf-emissary" or "vampire". What, exactly, a "wolf-emissary" might be can largely be pieced together from the novel but may well be more familiar from the widespread European myth, particularly prevalent in medieval Anglo-Saxon cultures, of the creature known in Old English (and it can hardly be accidental that it is not the only reference in Hamvai's book to such sources) as a "werewulf", or "man-wolf", a man who periodically assumes wolf form. In Romanian and Hungarian superstition, someone or something "dispatches" the "werewolf" to a person as a curse or punishment.

This notion is the linchpin of Hamvai's novel, in other words we should read it as the story of a curse that is transmitted from one generation to the next. As we shall see, however, it is ultimately hard to interpret that code as the book's organizing principle, though little else offers itself as such. Events, and here too one can speak of plot only in a highly qualified sense, succeed one another along two separate trajectories, whose connection, for a good while, can at best merely be conjectured until they begin to converge and, in the end, meet. The novella-like episodes and scenes making up the two planes of events alternate: each of the novel's fourteen chapters plays on one plane or the other.

In one strand the narrator recounts odd tales about the inhabitants of a godforsaken Hungarian village. The first of these takes place in 1876 and concerns a "dancing girl" who one night, out of nowhere, suddenly bursts into the village tavern, cavorts wildly by herself for three hours on end, driving all the men to distraction, casting them into a shamanistic trance and whipping them into a mad dance, she then falls dead on the spot and is buried by the tavern's clientele that very dawn in the cemetery. This forms a sort of mythical starting-point for a series of spine-chillingly mysterious incidents that the villagers attribute to werewolves, though they never know anything for certain about them. A rumour goes round that the apothecary, Keserű, is possessed by a werewolf, and so

when a wolf-like creature attacks the baroness in the grounds of her country-house, clawing her all over and having its way from the rear (or so the victim claims), the apothecary is accused of the attack. When, nine months later, the baroness gives birth to a daughter who is entirely covered with hair, he is taken to be the real father and barely manages to escape a lynching. The child soon enough sheds the hideous pelt; bit by bit, her origins are obscured, and on growing up she is an unknowing carrier of the curse she has inherited.

The second strand concerns the ups and downs in the lives of a group of thirty somethings in the Budapest of 1998. At first, it looks as if a character called Baán is going to be the focus of the narrator's attention: he is the manager of a Burger King outlet on the Oktogon, who one day has the disconcerting experience that an old man is found dead in the toilet. Three weeks later he attends a fifteenth anniversary school reunion in a vacant country-house hired for the occasion, where he and his companions witness some odd supernatural happenings: a pianino emits groaning sounds, and glancing out of a window he sees a scene with a pre-war atmosphere redolent of long bygone summers, "an old-time girls' torch-lit summer garden party, with bespectacled governess and austerely bearded pater with his pince-nez." Antal Klemm, a former classmate and now a lecturer in the faculty of arts, specializing in Old English, also turns up here. Soon enough it is he who takes over from Baán what promises to be the central role.

In a convoluted and crowded text, in which, from the standpoint of orderly plot, many of the detours prove to be dead-ends, an important role falls not just to Klemm but also to his wife, Lidi Varga, a registrar of births, marriages and deaths, whom Klemm first met at his friend Baán's wedding, and to Olga Mikes, a nurse and Klemm's lover. As Klemm, torn between the two women, failing to find his place or his identity, drifting aimlessly (and incidentally paying a visit to Oxford), lives the typical life of those young loafer-free-wheeler intellectuals whom one suspects Hamvai knows all too well from personal experience, the two women engage in an eerie struggle, over a protracted period, without ever meeting yet still knowing of each other's existence. Finding a way though the labyrinth of events is complicated by the fact that the narrator jumps back and forth through the characters' lives, but since all along he knows more than the reader, indeed is omniscient, so to say, readers are sometimes left not knowing whether there is something they ought to know right now that they don't know because it has escaped their attention or they don't know because they are not yet in a position to know but will get to know, provided they keep their eyes skinned. Compounding that is an ever-growing sense, though it is dispelled by the end of the book, that it is impossible to know what does and does not have a bearing on the connections and the dénouement, what is essential and what is subsidiary. That could all well be part of an abstruse authorial strategy or, for that matter, a refined game. Some sort of order and connection does emerge, fortuitously and involuntarily as it were, out of the colourful, random jumble of incidents; except one gets a clear sense from the outset that this is not what it is about: the connections really are not given, fixed in advance, but some fateful curse is blazing a path for itself through it all, only it seems as if the writer were often absent-mindedly losing sight of it.

In the village setting, teeming as it is with miraculous appearances, mysterious tragedies and grotesque absurdities, by the time we get to the mid-twentieth century,

there likewise crystallises a figure whose role goes beyond just a single bizarre episode. This is Young Varga, the baroness's grandson. In the meantime, the old world has collapsed, the Romanians have arrived (it slowly transpires that we are in Transylvania), the priest's authority has been supplanted by that of the party secretary. Young Varga becomes a footballer and soon leaves the dying village, but not before getting fifteen-year-old Mucorka pregnant, the daughter of the teacher who, at the time of the dawn coupling, possessed by a prophetic impulse, happens to be standing on the roof of Johnny Nagy's house and announces to the people who suddenly throng there that he knows everything, but then says no more because nothing comes to mind. It is Young Varga who becomes the link connecting the two strands of the novel, for he is the father of Lidi Varga, the fruit of Mucorka's womb. Varga, however, is seventy years old before catching his first glimpse of his daughter, who has in the meantime grown up and is now struggling in a curse-ridden marriage, because back in 1958 he fled the country for Australia and only returns to Budapest after a lapse of forty years. He is the old man who tumbles out of the Burger King toilet.

Being a werewolf, however, Varga does not die in the way others do. Even after his death, he pays a visit on his daughter and reveals to her that a treasure-chest everyone in the village back then knew about, but never located, even though they dug up every home, was buried by Keserű, the apothecary and werewolf-ancestor, in the dancing girl's grave. Lidi Varga ups and offs from the ruins of her life, makes a trip to the now dead village of her werewolf ancestors, and finds the treasure in the grave.

I suggested above that the narrative play of the vagaries of the story elements in Hamvai's novel is expunged by the schematic order of a horror or ghost story format. In principle, however, the converse might also hold, with Hamvai fitting the elements of a family saga and a melancholy-cum-flippant portrait of a generation into the ironically handled frame of a horror story. In that case, the point of resorting to the conventions of that particular genre would be to depict figures and relationships from a horroristic but otherwise enigmatic angle through the distancing perspective of the "order" of those conventions. It is hard to decide from the completed work if either the one or the other programme actually served as the basis for its structure, or what the reader is supposed to make of the novel, some of whose passages are written with virtuoso talent, wittily and entertainingly, and shape up so promisingly, yet elsewhere are disturbingly half-baked and peter out in cul-de-sacs. What, for example, is one supposed to make of the fact that in the chapter entitled "In the Death Van", essentially brushing aside every other detail in the book, and without any follow-through or consequence, Baán beats his ex-wife's new partner to within an inch of his life in a delivery van, then kicks him out onto the kerbside? Or what to make of the chapter entitled "The Vacuum Pump Company", in which Klemm and his friends get together in a plot to enlarge their virile members, and then for page after page—possibly in a parody of pornographic video films—join in a sex orgy? Or then again, what about the chapter "Castel Felice", "Fifty-eight", interesting as it is, which deals with Young Varga's month-long voyage? Might it just be that we were really intended to read *The Werewolf's Final Stand* as a cycle of novellas, and in that case the individual chapters would tell us something different? ❧

George Szirtes

Superb Poems Superbly Translated

Attila József: *Sixty Poems.* Translated by Edwin Morgan. Mariscat. 2001, 75 pp.

"It is a great pity that Morgan's twenty-five renderings of József never made a book in themselves, because, for all the splendour of the mixed bag offered by his collected work, they are simply another item there, and get a little lost. Nevertheless, Morgan is one of the most gifted translators of the last forty years and I would certainly recommend any English language reader to consult his version beside the others."

This passage comes from an article I wrote for *HQ* reviewing three volumes of translations out of Attila József by various hands. Broadly speaking my argument was, and remains, that there is no point in hoping for the "right" translation of any poem though there may be much that is good, and most of it helpful, because the nature of interpretation, and especially poetic interpretation, is necessarily and, in the best cases, brilliantly and subtly, coloured by the interpreter. To expand this a little, the "real" Attila József will always be elsewhere, but the doors the best translations provide would be those the poet would have been happy to talk through.

In life, of course, most doors were closed to Attila József. Born in abject poverty in 1905 as the last of five children to a factory worker and a peasant-born servant girl, deserted by his father Áron when he was two, he was brought up by his mother, Borbála, who earned a living as a washerwoman, seamstress and cleaner. Sometimes she could not cope, so quite early on Attila was sent to the country to spend time with foster parents. They beat him. His first schooling was disastrous and the family reunited and were constantly on the move. His oldest sister married a white collar worker from whom she separated during the war. The war was in some way a period of recovery for Attila, because on resuming school in Budapest he began to perform and excel in his studies. To supplement the family income, he sold newspapers in the street, then fell ill. The remarriage of Jolán to a liberal lawyer in 1920 provided Attila with some support and encouragement, but his life was never stable in either the material or intellectual sense. He studied and worked at a series of jobs. And he read and wrote poetry. He never finished higher education. Not

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George Szirtes's
latest volume of poems, An English Apocalypse, *was published by Bloodaxe in 2001.*

surprisingly he identified with the poor and oppressed. His first volume of poetry was published in the provinces in 1922, by subscription.

As a poet József springs directly from Endre Ady, but his reading was international from the start. Baudelaire and Whitman play a part in his development, and I think it is possible to detect in his later work touches of Keats, D.H. Lawrence, Aragon and even Hart Crane, not possibly as influences but as kindred spirits. Petőfi, Kosztolányi and Kassák are geographically closer to home, but József's poems are unmistakenly different, individual and somehow more comprehensive than the work of his own immediate predecessors or contemporaries. His life ran its tragic course of unhappiness, misunderstanding and neglect, through a series of suicide attempts, through active adherence to Marxism and Freudianism, through his own periods in psychoanalysis, to the moment when he died under the weels of a freight train in 1937, but by the time it ended, he had become, in many people's estimation, the greatest Hungarian poet, and indeed one of the greatest European poets, of the twentieth century, a poet of enormous energy, pathos, vision and restlessness, who will always be associated with the passion and experience of urban life. Between the love poems of 1922 and the late autobiographical work of 1937 his work develops a tragic momentum that finds its natural symbols in streets, embankments, tenements, apartments, railway stations and factories. It is, inevitably, as a poet of the city, and of the place of the poor in the city, that József enters the consciousness of the foreign reader through translation. It is the most convenient, and probably the most fitting, door for him.

And here, in these sixty translations by Edwin Morgan, the door seems finer, more complete and more convincing than seemed possible. It is a door for a whole poet, not for individual poems, in that Morgan's ear and intelligence have created a language and technique flexible enough to accommodate a wider range of József's poetry than anyone else has managed so far. This is certainly not to argue that Morgan's József is, in fact, József, but that Morgan's József has a coherent and convincing poetic identity that partakes of Morgan's but is not simply a version of Morgan. The most notable characteristic of great art is not that you think it actually is a picture of the world, but that, while you are in its presence, you are willing to believe it is the overwhelmingly most important aspect of your experience of the world. It is that kind of belief one has in the Attila József presented to us by Edwin Morgan.

Morgan himself, of course, exists in several versions, within a large, single coherence. He is a vastly protean poet, somewhat like Sándor Weöres (whom he has translated, again with substantial success). Morgan's excursions into concrete poetry, experimentalist anecdote, science fiction, wordplay, reportage (I mean the excellent "instamatic" poems of the seventies, "dialect" poetry, strictly formal and wildly informal verse), and into remarkably energetic translations from Russian, Italian, French, German, Spanish and Hungarian (his "Scots" Mayakovsky is brilliant, striking and ludic) are part of a constantly invigorating and humane endeavour that is courageous and coherent. The only crucial element in Weöres missing from Morgan is visionary mysticism. Morgan is a more intellectual poet and a very important major figure in his own right, one of the most exhilarating writers of the last fifty years.

Morgan shares József's sense of the social predicament: he understands and can give voice to József's rage against poverty and can pitch that tone accurately in its

English language context. When confronted by József's haunting "Night in the Suburbs" he can see the poor industrial suburbs, convincingly, in terms of Glasgow tenements: "The light smoothly withdraws / its net from the yard, and as water / gathers in the hollow of the ditch / darkness has filled our kitchen" sounds right because the place has actually been seen. Technically the broken rhyme of ditch / kitch(en) acts on the reader in a manner comparable to but different from József's fuller rhymes: more importantly though, it has already done its powerful work as evocation and image. The translation, in other words, has reached down deep roots into an experience familiar, and available, through the imagination, to the receiving language. I make this point early because I want to avoid the sterile debate between pedantic formal correctness on the one hand, and free adaptation without regard to any formal imperative on the other. True, formal imperatives spring from deep roots: they are not mere convention or decoration but the essential means whereby experience can be articulated. The imitation of formal ends is inadequate in itself without a deeper comprehension of the experience of the poem, especially as it chimes with the experience of the users of the receiving language. Morgan being a virtuosic writer himself, indeed among the the most virtuosic poets of our time, has no problem with formal ends and means, but first he seeks a bedrock of experience; the experience he shares with József.

What, after all, when we come to it, is the entire endeavour of language directed to but communication of experience? It is just that experience is complex and elusive and demands all the resources of language. These resources are best concentrated in poetry with its range of echoes and devices. Morgan understands the nature of a very wide range of poetic rhetoric—his feeling and perception operate through such channels—and he takes us down the passages of József's poem to arrive, convincingly, at: "Grave night, heavy night. / My brothers, I too must turn out the light. / May misery be a brief lodger in our soul. / May the lice leave our body whole." This is not easy to carry off and he does so with passionate ingenuity. The word "grave" for József's *"komoly"* is remarkable and simple: there is in the word "grave" a suggestion of seriousness, solemnity, physical heaviness, and of course, death. This is picked up and amplified in the idea of "turning out the light", a nice physicalisation of József's equally dark, but more abstract *"alszom"* (I sleep) which, in its turn carries a suggestion of sleeping power. Morgan then returns to the image of the tenement in his "brief lodger" for József's more rhetorical *"Ne üljön lelkünkre szenvedés",* which is part of the antithesis, with the body ("Ne csípje testünket féreg"). Morgan echoes the antithesis, so it resonates back down its earlier ambiguities. It is pointless claiming that the Hungarian and English versions are or are not the same. There is every point in remarking how the two poems resonate with and depend on each other. Both understand, in their respective contexts, the roots from which they spring. Their songs are shared. And the source is József.

Throughout the entire sixty poems, it seems to me, Morgan works at maximum power in the poems with the strongest physical setting, and the most pervasive sense of social despair. The poems of the last two years of József's life are particularly powerful. The volume is arranged roughly chronologically, with some allowance for thematic development, so József's poems about his mother—beautifully translated—appear in fairly close proximity at the beginning, with other po-

ems that establish the poet's origins. A series of panoramic poems, such as "Night in the Suburbs" constitutes the middle of the book and include "A Drunk Man on the Rail" *(Részeg a síneken),* "Freight Trains Shunt..." *(Tehervonatok tolatnak)* and "It is a Fine Summer Evening" *(Szép nyári este van)* before moving on to love poems and poems of loss. But the end of the book from "Elegy" *(Elégia)* on to "In Light White Clothes" *(Könnyű fehér ruhában)* and the various Fragments constitute the most sustained achievement. They are superb tragic poems superbly translated.

Of course, we can see how this or that line or this or that poem might be otherwise rendered. No translation will ever have the sense of absolute, unique and permanent rightness the original poem may possess. Many times, in reading through this book, I have wondered how it might be if, instead of this line or this word, I could substitute another, and, as a poet and translator, it is unavoidable that I should instinctively ponder the possibility of a slightly different accent, perhaps even a slightly different voice. Like any other poet, I can feel the flimsiness of the poetic mask fluttering before him (but, at the same time, its terrible weight too) and can feel some other song rising in the throat in response to József's. That is to József's credit, and, in some respects, to Morgan's too.

This book is a magnificent, moving and exciting piece of work. A whole voice is echoing through a foreign body. I believe in it and it will remain in my head. I cannot recommend it strongly enough. ❧

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Győző Ferencz

A New Life of Radnóti

Zsuzsanna Ozsváth: *In the Footsteps of Orpheus: The Life and Times of Miklós Radnóti.* Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2000, 264 pp.

It is a savage irony and yet a reassuring atonement of literary history that of all Hungarian literature perhaps Miklós Radnóti's poetry stands the fairest chance of becoming part of the "Western" canon. To put it more simply, among Hungarian poets it is Radnóti whose oeuvre attracts the most interest abroad. The attraction of his poetry is in part undeniably due to factors outside its aesthetic qualities. His work has irreversibly become one with his life and tragic death, just as in the case of the great Romantics Petőfi or Shelley. There is no divide between life and work, they continue to exist in an interplay, mutually interpreting one another.

Translations of Radnóti have appeared in at least half a dozen versions, including one issued by the respectable Princeton University Press, containing translations by Zsuzsanna Ozsváth and Frederick Turner.[1] Emery George has translated the complete poems.[2] Zsuzsanna Ozsváth's new book on Radnóti is the third English-language monograph, after Emery George's and Marianna D. Birnbaum's,[3] which is more than Hungarian literary historians have been able to produce. There is also a fourth book, edited by George Gömöri and Clive Wilmer, which collects individual studies.[4] But Radnóti makes repeated appearances in what is after all the most living form of literary presence, direct inspiration, as well. George Szirtes included in one of his early volumes a translation of a late Radnóti poem, "*Erőltetett menet*" (Forced March);[5] contrary to the Anglo-American convention, this version was not

1 ■ Miklós Radnóti: *Foamy Sky: The Major Poems of Miklós Radnóti,* Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1992.

2 ■ Miklós Radnóti: *The Complete Poetry.* Ann Arbor, Ardis, 1980.

3 ■ Emery George: *The Poetry of Miklós Radnóti: A Comparative Study,* New York, Karz-Cohl, 1986; Marianna D. Birnbaum, *Miklós Radnóti: A Biography of His Poetry,* Munich, Veröffentlichungen des Finnish-Ungarishen Seminars an der Universität München, 1983.

4 ■ George Gömöri and Clive Wilmer (eds.): *The Life and Poetry of Miklós Radnóti: Essays,* New York, Columbia University Press, 1999.

5 ■ George Szirtes: *The Photographer in Winter,* London, Secker and Warburg, 1986, p. 51.

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a loose rewriting (though Szirtes's book does contain such pieces) but an accurate, true-to-form rendering. Along with a number of other poems by Radnóti, Edwin Morgan also included his version of "Forced March" in his *Collected Translations* (Carcanet, 1996). The Scottish poet Douglas Dunn evokes Radnóti in a longer poem, "At Lake Balaton".[6] All of which is not to say that Radnóti's name rings with any of the familiarity of Lorca's, Ahmatova's, Milosz's or Celan's. But for those interested in Hungarian poetry, he is certainly the most emblematic figure, beside Pilinszky and Attila József.

What makes the afterlife of his oeuvre seem unpredictable (and what constitutes the savage irony) has its roots in the tragic contradiction of Radnóti's life and poetry. It was Radnóti's most fervent desire to be a Hungarian poet, while the country, which he never ceased to consider his home and to whose culture he contributed so much in his short life, adopted a political system which created laws that prevented him from doing so; laws whose conscientious application ultimately lead to his destruction. His work, however, became, in defiance of that murderous system, an indelible part of the body of Hungarian poetry. His death came to be a symbol, a universal memento of a horrible age.

Zsuzsanna Ozsváth's book addresses this duality. It is, as indicated by the title, a portrait of a man and an age. It would have been useful, nevertheless, to give a hint in the introduction of what this volume adds to the available Radnóti literature. Its standpoint is, of course, clear enough, but it would have been to the merit of the volume if the contours of the Radnóti portrayed here, which distinguish it from earlier attempts, had been drawn more sharply. As a biography it follows Radnóti's poetic development. It starts out with the assumption that Radnóti's art possesses high literary quality, and it apparently does not wish to add to the aesthetic analysis of his art. Quotes and interpretations are usually employed for the sake of their interaction with biographical and historical data: they illustrate the age and different phases of the career; the biography and the history are written to throw light upon and to interpret his poetry, an art of great importance. Though the book appeared in the *Jewish Literature and Culture* series, I don't think Ozsváth assigns Radnóti's poetry to Holocaust literature. Although if she did, that would be completely defensible.

The novelty in Ozsváth's approach is that she considers horror and the struggle for human dignity in the face of horror as the leading motif of the oeuvre, and divests the poet's death of the aura of heroic sacrifice, which later interpretations and recollections often drew around it. Radnóti died, she says, because he—like hundreds of thousands of others—was given no help to flee. Ozsváth, nevertheless, refrains from being too explicit here, as she knows it could easily sound like an accusation, when only history could possibly be accused. So she confines herself to providing historical facts, statistical data, events of the private life. And if she enumerates facts with undeniable passion, she reserves the most overt formulation of her own opinion for an endnote: when, contending with the view that the poet died because he wanted to enlist for forced labour, she remarks, citing Mrs Miklós Radnóti's letter to the literary journal *Kortárs* in July 1988, that "between the arrival of the German troops in Hungary on 19 March, 1944, and

6 ■ András Gerevich (ed.): *The British Council's Translation Competition Budapest-Tihany 2000*, Budapest, The British Council, 2001, pp. 30-34

Radnóti's draft card's being delivered to him on 18 May, no one offered help to the poet, nobody was there to provide shelter" (p. 230). Radnóti, claims Ozsváth, was a sufferer and involuntary observer of nationalism arriving, with a relentless logic, at its own conclusion.

There seems to exist a curious parallelism between his fate and that of Petőfi, the great Romantic poet. The appearance of Sándor Petőfi, as well as the 1848 Revolution, were cathartic moments in the development of the Hungarian romantic sense of national identity. Petőfi is widely known to have come from an assimilated background, his father being an assimilated Slovak and his mother a Slovak who spoke Hungarian with some difficulty, a fact Ozsváth herself refers to (p. 131). But the analogy can be extended. The nation had no hesitation in accepting Petőfi as the spokesman of the cause of its self-fulfilment. Assimilated to the Hungarian nation, the poet lost his life in 1848 in a battle during the war waged for the nation's independence. A century later Miklós Radnóti, the descendant of assimilated Jews, also decided to be a Hungarian poet. Here the ever more rigorous anti-Jewish laws made those parallel fates diverge, by excluding him, who considered himself a Hungarian until the very end, from the nation; racism put into practice ignored not only his sense of national identity but his baptismal certificate as well, and eventually claimed his life. Almost a century after the Slovak Petőfi sacrificed his life for his Hungarian homeland, his nation, the assimilated Jew Radnóti became the victim of an extremist version of the same nationalism. Petőfi marked out his life role, his task as a poet and even his death with an uncompromising deliberateness. Radnóti too defined his own poetic role, but it was not he who called the shots concerning his own life and death. A fact which creates a painfully wide gap between Petőfi's *"Egy gondolat bánt engemet..."* (There's one thought that troubles me) and Radnóti's *"Járkálj csak halálraítélt"* ("Just Walk On, Condemned to Die!").

Whether it was out of reverence for the Petőfi tradition, so powerful in Hungarian literature, or for some other reason, a view developed which tried to conceal this gap, one which Ozsváth now seeks to dismiss. It is misleading, she says, that Radnóti saw what would happen to him so early and so clearly, expressing this knowledge in a great many poems. This in no way meant that he willingly accepted the role of the victim. Ozsváth convincingly argues, on the basis of a broad historical overview in which she uses Holocaust research, that Jews were well aware of what was happening around, and to, them. It is the very peculiarity of Radnóti's poetry that he faced this bravely and consistently. He had to live with an awareness of impending violent death, but up to the last months of his life, he was never willing to accept it as his fate.

Yet, Radnóti's complete life is a calvary. His poetry follows the stations of this passion with the sincerity of a confession. Whichever way we look at it, Radnóti died a martyr's death. He did not consider himself a Jew: he considered himself a Catholic, a socialist, and above all, a Hungarian poet. Various aspects of his life and death bear the symbolic power of a passion. He was taken off to forced labour service three times; on the second occasion, in 1942, he was released thanks to the intervention of prominent personalities. His relief was short-lived: he was drafted for the third and final time. His last poems survived miraculously. Some of these were written in a forced-labour camp, fair copies of which were made on squared paper, and were rescued by his fellow prisoner Sándor Szalai, who

survived the ordeal. They were published in journals and then in a posthumous volume, *Tajtékos ég* (Foamy Sky), 1946. That same year the mass grave at Abda was exhumed, and the Bor notebook was found in the pocket of Radnóti's trench coat. Those eighteen months under ground damaged much of the notebook, humidity made many verses illegible. But the five poems which were not copied onto the pages given to Sándor Szalai, *"Gyökér"* (Root) and the four *"Razglednica"* (Razglednicas), were miraculously preserved. The story of the manuscript is placed in a special light by the fact that Radnóti's poetic career experienced a steep rise, as steep as the decline in the conditions of his life. When he made his debut, Radnóti did not display the fullness of his poetic prowess. It is not debunking to say that his first attempts promised a rather mediocre poet. When in 1934 he says in his diary, "yet this is a Radnóti generation,"[7] it is scarcely more than adolescent boasting. Even now, when his poetry is well known to have risen from the depths of sufferings to heights which few have attained, his name is not used to label his generation as that of Sándor Weöres, István Vas, and Zoltán Jékely. Radnóti's achievement is a lone one. His poetry is so moving precisely because the succession of the poems vividly represents his development towards the poet and person he eventually became. There is no evidence what-ever to show he had to die for this to take place. Zsuzsanna Ozsváth is right in making this claim, yet a remark on the uncertainties of the early poems would have been useful. It could also have brought more into relief the dramatic quality of the end.

Ozsváth has adopted a historical-sociological approach to outline Radnóti's poetic career. She preferred this to a text-based or psychological strategy, as being more suitable for her purposes. She, of course, considers Radnóti's confessional poetry of documentary value, and often cites it to illustrate events in private life and in politics. Ozsváth, a sound expert in Holocaust literature, is fully aware of the effectiveness with which psychoanalytic approaches are used to interpret the Holocaust. There is an extensive literature available on the processing and analysis of traumatic experiences; Geoffrey H. Hartmann, among others, wrote an outstanding analysis of the literary use of the method,[8] discussing also the possibilities of analysing the traumatic experiences of Jews. The use of a psychoanalytic approach could have furnished Ozsváth with solid arguments.

Ozsváth makes a succinct statement about the theoretical aspects of her approach in the chapter called "Growing Shadows." She rejects the formalism of New Criticism, claiming "it makes no sense to impose such a process on the large volume of works created by people who lived under the pressure of, felt threatened by, and wrote against the backdrop of the Holocaust" (p. 102). She also renounces the approaches of postmodernist schools of theory: "Clearly, such questions as post-modern criticism poses (e.g., whether all experience is 'self-enclosed' or whether 'meaning is incommunicable') are irrelevant to the discussion of a poet who lived under severe psychological and physical assault during most of his adulthood" (p. 102). With this she touches upon an old problem of literary criticism.

7 ■ Radnóti Miklós: *Napló,* Budapest, Magvető Könyvkiadó, 1989, p. 14.
8 ■ Geoffrey H. Hartmann: "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies," *New Literary History,* Vol. 26., No. 3, Summer 1995, pp. 537–563.

As John Bayley puts it, interpreting the poems of John Berryman, the American confessional poet: "How judge someone who while talking and tormenting himself is also writing a poem about the talk and the torment?"[9] Can a work of art which creates itself from the stuff of real sufferings be judged on aesthetic grounds only? If Ozsváth's dislike of a theory-based interpretation of literature can be respected, it is nevertheless unwise to give up any means which can facilitate a better understanding. A good example for the latter is Gábor Schein's analysis of Gábor Halász and György Sárközi's letter from the Balf forced-labour camp to Sándor Weöres, in which they ask for help and relate the death of the novelist and literary historian, Antal Szerb.[10] Schein employs a hermeneutical approach to show that the victims of the Holocaust did not possess the appropriate language to relate their experiences. This insight would not be alien to Zsuzsanna Ozsváth either, as she repeatedly remarks on how Radnóti only alludes in his diary to the horrors he experienced (p. 199). "Whatever his tormentors did to him, his diary, like a lattice, filters out all traces of torture and degradation" (p. 171).

While this repudiation of theory is unfortunate (in that it offers an unnecessary ground for criticism), it can nevertheless be accepted as a mode of accounting for the approach of the volume. There is every justification for refraining from the textual analysis of translated poems. Indeed, when she attempts to show Radnóti's virtuoso use of form, she immediately comes up against serious difficulties; unable to illustrate this properly, she resorts to not very efficient paraphrase of the text to point out the peculiarities of linguistic and stylistic layers, as in her interpretation of *"Mint a bika"* (Like the Bull) or *"Ötödik ecloga"* (The Fifth Eclogue) (p. 105 and p. 185, respectively). Since the tricks of the critical trade could be used only with limitations, the book abounds in ready made value judgments, and it uses more powerful attributes than customary in the Anglo-American critical tradition. Hungarian readers will probably concur with judgements like "images of great beauty and nobility" (p. 132) or "delightfully designed structure" (p. 103), but those who do not know Radnóti's works in the original may well be sceptical. Since the volume does not set out to reinterpret the poet's works, such evaluative analysis should have been used more sparingly.

All the more so, as the main novelty and merit of Zsuzsanna Ozsváth's volume is that it discusses Radnóti's life within a broad historical and sociological context, established with the use of a wealth of sources. The historical background is presumably drawn up with more than usual elaborateness, so as to provide those unfamiliar with Hungarian history and literature with a context for Radnóti's poetry. But the amount of data thereby processed is far too large to supply merely general information. Ozsváth reviews not only the literature on Radnóti and the Hungarian Holocaust, but also political and literary journalism between the 1920s and the middle of the 1940s. Historical and political data are resolutely enumerated to provide a precise and tangible representation of the atmosphere at the time.

Her basic assumption is that fear was the fundamental experience of Radnóti's entire life. She provides detailed documen-

9 ■ John Bayley: "John Berryman: A Question of Imperial Sway," In: Robert Boyers (ed.), *Contemporary Poetry in America.* New York, Schocken Books, 1974, pp. 64-65.

10 ■ Schein Gábor: "A csúf anya és az antikvárius emlékezet," (The Ugly Mother and Antiquarian Memory), *Pannonhalmi Szemle,* 9: 3, 2001, pp. 98–104.

tary evidence for its causes, like anti-Semitic articles, the physical assaults on Jewish students tacitly tolerated by university administrations, the "populist–urban" debate flaring up in the thirties, and of course the "Jewish Laws" sanctioned by the parliament of a country increasingly dominated by Fascist ideology. Radnóti, who abhorred violence, had a more and more acute sense of where all this would lead, whether speaking of himself or the country. Ozsváth makes repeated mention of the beating up of Jews at the University, which put Radnóti under physical threat, and which she describes in detail on page 48. Later she says "These scenes must have shaken and frightened Radnóti. He could not yet view himself as totally apart from the Jews. He was their undeniable descendant, his family still part of the larger Jewish collectivity. He must have felt threatened by this regular display of violence that could target him personally at any moment. For no matter how he defined himself in the world at large, to the members of the anti-Semitic student organizations he was a Jew" (p. 90). The last sentence summarizes, as it were, the tragic contradiction in Radnóti's life: his spiritual self-definition was brutally annulled by anti-spiritual racism.

In his diary he himself transposed, time and again, his humiliations as a forced labourer onto a higher plane, revealing a moving concern for the socially handicapped. "I'm ashamed. For the nation,"[11] he writes, when seeing the abject poverty of the peasants. On seeing the privation of an old workman in the Hatvan sugar mills, the family domain of a great patron of Hungarian literature, where he was doing forced labour during his second term, he bursts out: "So this is how the sponsoring of modern Hungarian literature became possible, I mutter, and feel glad I never received anything from Lajos Hatvany. Though I dined at his table several times, I recall, and when Thomas Mann was there..."[12] The naivety of the last sentence is a heartbreaking proof of his incorruptible honesty: in the midst of the mental and physical sufferings of forced labour he tries to determine whether a few dinner invitations compromised him morally.

He speaks about his Jewishness in an often-quoted letter, which survived in his diary, and in which he justifies his refusal to contribute to a Jewish anthology to be compiled by Aladár Komlós. He recorded the letter in his diary on May 27, 1942. "I never renounced my Jewishness, I still belong to that 'Jewish denomination' ... but I don't feel a Jew, I was never instructed in the religion, I don't need it and don't practice it, I find race, blood, roots and the ancient sorrow trembling in the nerves rubbish, things that don't define my 'intellect,' 'spirit' and 'poetry.' Even socially speaking I find Jews a community *malgré lui.*"[13] Later he adds: "My Jewishness is my 'life problem' because it was made one by circumstances, by laws, by the world. It is a problem by necessity. Otherwise I'm a Hungarian poet, I have listed my relatives, and I don't care (only practically, 'lifewise') what the current Hungarian prime minister thinks about it..."[14] And, as if to leave no room for doubt whether he is aware of what awaits him, he says: "And if they kill me? Even that won't change this."[15]

11 ■ Radnóti, *Napló,* p. 220.
12 ■ Ibid., p. 259.
13 ■ Ibid., p. 210.
14 ■ Ibid.
15 ■ Ibid., p. 211.

Untimely death, as a possible and likely outcome of the situation, appears as early as a 1937 letter fragment, written on August 24 to an unidentified person. The recipient—whom Ozsváth incidentally holds to be imaginary (p. 131)—asks "a Hungarian poet who has to be careful to save his skin" to give his opinion on the political situation. Radnóti rephrases the description: "You could just as well have put it this way: whose life is at stake."[16]

Which means Radnóti refused to acknowledge his Jewishness while being aware of having to share the fate of the Jews. István Vas also recalled that between them the topic of Jewishness "was a constantly returning cause of disagreement. Briefly, my position was that if one was born a Jew one only had two options left. One can either say 'I'm a Jew' or say 'I don't want to be a Jew'—I of course opted for the latter—but under no circumstances can one say 'I am not a Jew.' But that was what Miklós said: let Hitler and the whole world do whatever they will, he was not a Jew. Miklós was right in this too—as far as he was concerned, of course: he became the martyr of this truth. It is true he was killed as a Jew, but he didn't die as one: his last eclogues, elegies and *razglednicas* were not written by a Jew, and not by someone who wanted to be rid of Jewishness—these masterpieces of purity, sealed with blood, soar to heights where this yes or no question is not even heard."[17]

Typically, Radnóti represented the most sensible view on the issue of Jewishness. When an ultra-rightist poet, József Erdélyi, "accused" the then already dead Attila József with being half Jewish, and József's sister prepared to confute the statement with a birth certificate, Radnóti wrote in his diary: "nobody wrote or said anything about the heart of the matter. Attila was not half Jewish. And if he had been? Would that make him smaller? Would his work immediately lose its value, even its national value? Does no one think about this in connection with the whole issue? Are we really beyond recall?"[18] The entry is dated February 7, 1943, and the last entry was made two months later: during the last eighteen months of his life he recorded nothing in his diary.

In the light of the above it seems important that Radnóti's poem *"Nem tudhatom"* (I Know Not What) was received with utter incomprehension, as many survivors later recalled. Gyula Ortutay describes a 1943 New Year's Eve party,[19] and István Vas another meeting of January 7, 1944.[20] Those who knew him expressed their shock on both occasions that Radnóti should have chosen that particular moment to confess his love for his country. In her discussion of the anti-Semitism of the 1920s, Zsuzsanna Ozsváth points out that "the reaction of Hungarian Jews differed from that of their Central or Eastern European counterparts. In Czechoslovakia, Romania, Poland, or the Baltic States, national Jewish parties responded vigorously to the new anti-Jewish actions. In Hungary, however, there were no parties or organizations of similar significance. In Hungary the relationship be-

16 ■ Ibid., p. 22.

17 ■ Vas István: *Mért vijjog a saskeselyű?* (Why Does the Vulture Scream?), Budapest, Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1981, Vol. II, p. 177.

18 ■ Radnóti: *Napló,* p. 277.

19 ■ Ortutay Gyula: *Fényes, tiszta árnyak* (Gleaming, Pure Shades), Budapest, Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1973, pp. 231–232.

20 ■ Vas: ibid. Vol. I, p. 352.

tween Jews and Christians had been defined for generations by the Jews' intensely patriotic attitude. Although there was some Zionist activity, by and large the Hungarian Jewish community had always wished to be seen as indisputably Hungarian" (p. 47). The writers István Vas, György Sárközi, Antal Szerb, Gábor Halász, Miklós Radnóti and a great many other known and unknown victims and survivors of the Hungarian Holocaust were at various stages of assimilation. (Antal Szerb for instance was born a Catholic.) Radnóti's standpoint was radical but consistent. This is what lends his death such an unsettling tension, and if it is a sacrifice, it is so because of this. In one of her most important paragraphs, Ozsváth comes to the conclusion that Radnóti's wish to belong among Hungarians had its roots in the core of his existence: "By the time he started to find his place in the ranks of the Hungarian literati, he was a *Hungarian* poet and considered no other country, no other emotional and cultural space, as his own. And there was a particularly urgent, almost desperate, edge from the beginning in his stance, stiffened by the constant slander racists heaped on the Jews, a slander which must only have intensified his strong drive 'to prove' both his patriotism and his 'rootedness.' He considered himself a scion of the great Hungarian lyric tradition, and any doubt, question, or rejection of his right to identify himself so was a threat to his very existence" (pp. 48–49).

This also means this biography does not confine Radnóti's poetry to the realm of interpretation outlined by the threat his Jewish origin meant. Yet it certainly provides a valid interpretation for the tragic basic motif of his lyric poetry, represented so emblematically by the title of his 1936 *"Járkálj csak halálraítélt!"* (Just Walk on, Condemned to Die!) But as for the horizon of Radnóti's lyric poetry, "wracked with concerns for the suffering Hungarians, he successfully 'transformed' his fear of anti-Jewish atrocities into visions of the universal struggle between good and evil, between progress and stagnation, between humanism and orthodoxy" (p. 113). And as for his personal fate, "Radnóti's refusal to acknowledge that he was a target in a grandscale pogrom revealed itself through his adherence to the myth of the grand cosmic struggle in which Good is perilously close to falling victim to the armies of Evil" (p. 178). Ozsváth's interpretation consistently situates Radnóti's lyric poetry in this force field. From this perspective the poet's death, though necessarily resulting from the horrible logic of the events, was nonetheless not inevitable. When she comes to discuss the Shoah, Ozsváth provides article numbers and statistical data, but rescue operations are no longer mentioned.

It is almost certain, however, that an episode in Radnóti's private life, which so far has almost wholly remained in obscurity, was an intensive act of relieving the unbearable physical and psychological terror of those years. Ozsváth's is the first biography to deal with Radnóti's affair with Judit Beck in 1941. Though István Vas alludes to it in *Mért a vijjog a saskeselyű,* Ozsváth is the first to actually speak about it, and very discreetly. She elegantly does not mention that this moment in Radnóti's life has been left in obscurity. On the other hand, she makes certain to emphasise that the interpretation of such great love poems of the Hungarian lyrical canon as Radnóti's *Levél a hitveshez* (Letter to My Wife) remains unaffected by this episode, making at most their gentle tone more sincere. On the basis of the diary entries of those months, Ozsváth uncovers the relationship, discusses its possible psychological motivations; analysing the love poems of 1941 and 1942 (this time touching up-

on deeper layers of the text as well), she concludes that three of them, *"Csodálkozol barátném..."* (My Friend You Wonder...]) *"Harmadik ecloga"* (The Third Eclogue) and *"Zápor"* (A Gust of Rain), were probably written to Judit Beck. It is through an analysis of motifs that she distinguishes these poems from the others. She finds chiefly psychological explanations for how these three poems could possibly appear in the vicinity of *"Együgyű dal a feleségről"* (Silly Song about My Wife), *"Két karodban"* (In Your Arms), *"Tétova óda"* (Vague Ode) and other love poems to his wife. Radnóti scholarship will probably have something to say about this, yet it is to the credit of Ozsváth to speak about this issue with the same openness as about Radnóti's views on Jewishness.

This directness is characteristic of the tone of the book as well. The text suggests the impassioned delivery mode of a practising and proficient university lecturer. The first paragraph already speaks in the tone of a biographical novel, investing with narrative details the circumstances in which Radnóti was born: "The evening of May 5, 1909, did not differ from any other spring night in Budapest. As it deepened, darkness smudged the city's outline, blurring the silhouettes of the apartment buildings, the contours of the hills, the statues in the squares, the cobblestone sidewalks, the churches, and the bridges extending across the river. Now and then, the moon emerged from the clouds, throwing onto the Danube a trembling shimmer" (p. 1). Yet the paragraph ends in an index number which sends the reader to an endnote, wherein we learn that Ozsváth went to the bother to check the publication of the Hungarian Royal National Meteorological Institute for weather conditions in Budapest on Radnóti's day of birth. Chapters on Radnóti's life are written in this narrative tone, while historical-sociological discussions are presented in the more objective idiom of essay writing. This is unusual for academic writing, the mixing of styles does not always pass easily. But it is as if Ozsváth wished to alternate between styles to emphasise the irresolvable ambiguity of Radnóti's life.

This nicely presented book is unfortunately remarkably rich in typographical and spelling errors. Printers were especially hard on Hungarian diacritic marks. Such an abundance of misspelled proper names and inconsistencies undermines the scholarly credibility of the whole volume, which would be a great loss. The serious research and scholarly achievement manifest in this book deserves more careful work from the publisher. Even so, Zsuzsanna Ozsváth's book not only raises a monument worthy of the poet, but has also provided literary history with new perspectives for interpreting Radnóti. We can take it for granted that some critics and academics will argue against these perspectives, but this alone will contribute much to a more detailed and clearer view of Radnóti. ❧

Andrea Tompa

All the City's a Stage

Klára Györgyey: *Molnár Ferenc,* Budapest, Magvető, 2001, 292 pp. • György Nagy: *Molnár Ferenc a világsiker útján* (Ferenc Molnár on the Road to World Fame) Budapest, Tina, 2001, 202 pp.

Now that the 50th anniversary of Ferenc Molnár's death is approaching we are presented with two new books on him. On closer examination, however, they turn out to be not new at all, and definitely not portents of a Molnár renaissance in Hungary. Though both are written by Hungarians, they were originally published outside Hungary and are translations from their English and German originals. Thus their path to Hungary is emblematic of Molnár's person and oeuvre and his position in Hungarian literature and theatre.

Klára Györgyey's *Molnár Ferenc* first came out in the USA in 1980, in English, and György Nagy's *Molnár Ferenc a világsiker úján* (Ferenc Molnár on the Road to World Fame) first appeared in German in 1978. Ironically, Molnár's last work, his 1950 autobiography (*Útitárs a száműzetésben* [Companmion in Exile]. Pallas Studió, 1999), is also available only in translation: the Hungarian manuscript has been lost.

Molnár lived more than a decade in self-exile, after spending the preceding ten years in constant travel, a famous citizen of the world. As was customary at the time, and because he could afford it, he always stayed in hotels; indeed, he died in a hotel, the New York Plaza. I find it natural, even heart-warming, that these two books should have appeared outside his native land, in his two "new" homes: in one of the German-speaking countries, the land where his plays were perhaps even more popular than in Hungary; and in the United States, where in the 1920s he was a leading light on Broadway. He is, after all, the single most often performed Hungarian playwright on foreign stages. Whether because of the anniversary or for some other reason, his plays are in the repertoire of almost all Hungarian theatre companies. Yet if Molnár is very much present on the stage, he is virtually absent from works on literary history.

Both of the above seek to encompass not only a vast oeuvre—42 plays, an immense body of novels, short stories, journalism—but the life of a controversial, scandalous charmer as well. Klára Györgyey even attempts to outline the

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context in which Molnár started working and attained fame, the Hungary of the early 20th century. As a result, these books are more like broad overviews than in-depth studies. Their striving for comprehensiveness is to their credit but also a disadvantage.

Györgyey, as she relates in the preface to the Hungarian edition, had to comply with the strict guidelines of her American publisher, fitting her book into a series of critical studies. The limitations proved impeding: a ten-page outline of Molnár's age and Budapest, if interesting to the American reader who knows nothing about Hungary, is of little value to Hungarians. The limited scope allows only for a few dates, but nothing like a real discussion of the subject. A pity indeed, as a knowledge of the socio-cultural background is indispensable for a more thorough understanding of Molnár's work, be the reader a Hungarian or American.

Molnár was born in 1878, Budapest in 1873. He was the son of the physician Mór Neumann (he adopted the surname Molnár later) and Jozsefa née Wallfisch, the city's name was established by the union of Pest, Buda and Óbuda. The city and Molnár are therefore contemporaries. Budapest reached maturity as a metropolis at the same time as the young author. A new city was born, with new avenues and boulevards, a new underground, and what was most important, new cafés and theatres. Among them in 1896, the Vígszínház, the home of modern European plays and of the flourishing contemporary Hungarian drama, thus of Molnár's plays. Molnár, his plays, his now almost forgotten prose, are unimaginable without this new flourishing capital. Mátyás Sárközi, a journalist who lives in London, gives a good impression of this age and its influence on Molnár in his *Színház az egész világ* (All the World's a Stage, Budapest, Osiris, 1995), a biography, in which he claims Molnár's first play, *Doktor úr* (Doctor) owes much of its success to the idiom of the city and its jokes. Sárközi also makes a point others seem to forget, that Molnár was the first truly and completely Budapest author in Hungarian literature. His contemporaries, linked to the epoch-making journal *Nyugat,* (whose contributors numbered major writers such as Ady, Móricz, Babits, Kosztolányi, Krúdy, Nagy, Tersánszky, and many others) were born elsewhere and their works lack those intimate ties with the budding city.

György Nagy does not discuss the period, he gives a summary treatment of the life, trying to establish its phases and a logical sequence. Perhaps Nagy, the goals of whose work are so clearly defined, should have completely avoided this half-hearted treatment of biographical data. Györgyey cannot afford much space to biography either, a mere twenty pages are supposed to be our guide. But as Sárközi's book shows, Molnár's life deserves more than a publisher's frame. Due perhaps to his personal interest (he is Molnár's grandson), Sárközi is acutely aware of the peculiar relation between the life and work. Molnár's life, conduct and disposition were, again, defined by the city at the beginning of the 20th century, and, in return, provided food for metropolitan gossip. Without wishing to be a mythic figure, he became one: the well-off, talented, elegant man of the world, who features in scandal, who lives and works in cafés, writes, in an almost offhand manner, successful plays and short stories, and seduces stunningly beautiful actresses.

Success is the keyword in these two biographies. Yet it sounds differently to foreign and Hungarian readers of the biographies. Molnár certainly became a synonym for success in his times: success

in the theatre. It meant a great number of glittering premières, successful productions, loud critical acclaim, thunderous applause. And, lest we forget, money. Success requires a city to resound the name, the new play, the new scandalous affair. And though Molnár had great contemporaries, the writers associated with *Nyugat,* whose critical and literary importance is indisputable, and also weightier, no one would try to call them successful. Success itself, the striving after it, became the theme of many a play by Molnár. When he set off in the 1920s, success followed him, to Vienna and to Broadway. To countries where the word still rings with the same positive quality as in the Budapest of the early 20th century, where however, it no longer does. Marxist literary criticism did all in its power to define Molnár's success as clear evidence of his cheapness, of his plays' being bourgeois drawing-room comedies. Success became a stigma.

Both Györgyey and Nagy try to speak about the entire oeuvre, and fall prey to the same error: they deal with the prose (novels, short stories, etc.) one by one, and consequently have room for little more than a summary of the content: interpretation is out of the question. The principal loss is that no thematic or stylistic relation between individual works is sketched out, not to mention an in-depth analysis of motifs or solutions. Which is regrettable, as Klára Györgyey's book must have prompted her American readers to ask a number of questions, they being unfamiliar with the whole oeuvre: such as, why so many of Molnár's works seem to focus on suicide, self-analysis, money, success or male-female relations? György Nagy devotes little attention to Molnár's prose, a mere fifteen pages, which do not even serve to prepare the discussion of the plays. Neither Györgyey nor Nagy seeks to consider the oeuvre as a whole to find links between works in various genres.

At least one of Molnár's prose works must be mentioned, *Pál utcai fiúk* (The Paul Street Boys, 1907), a novel published in many languages and filmed more than once, and still familiar to all Hungarian teenagers; very likely the only Molnár work they know, being a set text in secondary school, and also the only work of his that the educational system cares to teach.

Yet Molnár has at least another novel which is important for both his oeuvre and for literary history. The plot-structure of his first novel, *Az éhes város* (The Hungry Town, 1901), anticipates the structure of plays that came later, and certain basic motifs also appear here first: money, suicide, the relations between the sexes. It also marks Molnár as an acute observer of human character, and a cold cynic as far as women are concerned. An actress says in the novel: "Oh, the past is over. I love my husband so much...," upon which the narrator remarks: "This rang like true love. These little actresses are all so infinitely in love with their husbands, their little family hearths, their cheap family dinners. Maybe it's not even love after all, but the great attraction of the respectable life..." This novel is also an interesting example of Molnár moving beyond Zola's naturalism (he wrote it in Paris), aiming at the abstract heights of symbolism: "One could tell the city was feeling the approach of money. Just as when a magnet is brought ever closer to a piece of iron and starts trembling, wriggling, half a metre left, so restless, turning with mad desire towards it when in contact, so was Pest society utterly breathless, waiting with an anxious trembling for the day of arrival, the marching in of money."

Neither Györgyey nor Nagy devote much attention to Molnár's often excellent

sketches and short stories written for dailies or his reports as a war correspondent in the First World War, even though they are very important for the later plays: the former include a number of two-character "scenes." It seems Molnár was thinking in dialogue form. I'm even ready to assume he was thinking in terms of the stage. Though Nagy remarks that certain plays had dialogues for their antecedents (pp. 140–144), he refrains from discussing the technique of the dialogues, or how plot was developed from them. Both authors fail to discuss Molnár's theatrical roots, though these early sketches certainly foreshadow the technical virtuosity and stylistic feat of Molnár, the playwright.

Nagy discusses the (chiefly German) translations of Molnár's works, which, Molnár carefully corrected. This is an important scholarly contribution.

It is in his treatment of the plays where Nagy is at his best. Originally written as a doctoral dissertation, it discusses seventy years of German-language criticism, the reception of Molnár's work outside Hungary, chiefly in the German-speaking countries. In fact, the book would seem to have benefited from a closer focus on this and from the omission of other chapters only loosely related to the principal objective. The discussion of individual plays here too starts with summaries, leaving regrettably little room for more careful analysis. Several important documents of the German (critical) reception of the plays are discussed, which, however, often fail to contribute to the understanding of the importance of Molnár for the theatre. Reviews often speak about little else than success or failure, enthusiasm or disappointment in their reception, leaving us in the dark about the merits of the production as far as acting or direction are concerned. (This may well be a general trait of German reviews of the time, but Nagy does not even raise the question.) Nagy seems primarily interested in the German reception of Molnár's plays, not how they were produced.

Corresponding to their relative weight within the oeuvre as a whole, the most important, best and longest chapters in Klára Györgyey's book deal with Molnár's plays. Each play is discussed in some detail and competently, with an eye to their reception in Hungary and elsewhere, chiefly in the United States. (As to the Hungarian reception, both authors ignore the anti-Semitic criticism of the 1920s.) All the discussions leave to desire is a discussion of all 42 plays as an entirety, in which the need to describe method does not dominate over an attempt to find connections within and without the oeuvre. This indeed would be a further book.

Nagy devotes a short chapter to "Molnár's dramatic art," in which he discusses the playwright's world view and dramatic technique. Though it contains important insights, it again lacks a study of Molnár's relation to contemporary drama and theatre, or a thematic analysis of his work written for the stage. Missing too is something that would substantiate the last sentence of the book, according to which "the future promises an increased interest in his entire oeuvre." To make this optimism sound better grounded, Nagy's book should have at least hinted at what makes Molnár of interest for the modern theatre.

Since both authors discuss the plays in chronological order, insights into ordering principles, or the treatment of the plays by their types, are absent. Consequently, the real novelty of Molnár is missed, something which is still valid and has not been completely explored: his progress from the drawing-room comedy towards re-theatricalization. The theatre is a basic theme in

many of his plays, which he doubles—like Pirandello—with life. Just like Pirandello, Molnár looks at life as reflected in the theatre. The theatre as an appearance or illusion is already featured in such early dialogues as *Színház* (Theatre), while the doubling as well as the making relative of theatrical reality and being became a basic theme of the "great" plays, like *Testőr* (The Guardsman), or the one held to be his best, *Játék a kastélyban* (The Play's the Thing). (György Nagy thinks eight of the plays have the theatre as their theme.) "Theatre as such is the lie—except for its essence. If the audience wants to believe a piece of painted canvass is a forest, they will believe it. And they will believe a woman does not recognize her husband when I say so," Molnár said in an interview, on *The Guardsman*. I think Nagy is wrong to say that "in Molnár's view people go to the theatre to be deceived, to escape from reality." In Molnár's Pirandellean search for truth there is room for several truths, and so the theatre itself has its reality of sorts —in contrast with life. Hence his interest in life, theatre and illusion in plays like *Egy, kettő, három* (One, Two, Three), *Olympia* and *Riviera*.

The link between Molnár and Pirandello is far from haphazard, and both books allude to it. Györgyey says that "Molnár contrasted relative and absolute truth before Pirandello" (p. 134). The similarities between the two playwrights are both typological and attitudinal: they must have seen each other's plays, and Max Reinhardt directed a play by each in two consecutive seasons: *Six Caracters in Search of an Author* (1924) and *Riviera* (1925). Sárközi even claims Molnár influenced Pirandello, rather than the other way round, though he provides little evidence. Though both Györgyey and Nagy hold *Riviera* to be an inferior work, Reinhardt directed it on two occasions; a year after his Pirandello production he must have been interested in the relation of two types of realities, the stylized world of the theatre and immediate, harsh reality of life. When Györgyey claims the puppets the two main characters "converse with" fail to work on stage, or as she puts it, "are not capable of acting," she must forget that one of the greatest of 20th-century directors, Tadeusz Kantor, revolutionised the theatre with the introduction of puppets. The relation between the then popular ideal of the marionette-actor (also favoured by Pirandello) and *Riviera* deserves a study of its own. This world of appearances (theatre included) Nagy calls—to my mind wrongly—a lie, which is void of "moral solidity." In any event, Nagy's turns of phrase are sometimes reminiscent of the rhetoric of the Hungarian Marxist literary criticism of an earlier time.

Both authors' approach to Molnár is consistently literary rather than theatrical. It is a matter of choice of course, but a book with a detailed biography and a discussion of the prose as well as of Molnár's values and validity for the modern theatre is yet to be written. ❧

Károly Csala

The Chronicle of a Film Artist

Vince Zalán: *Gaál István krónikája,* (The Chronicle of István Gaál)
Budapest, Osiris Könyvtár, 2000, 476 pp., with filmography and index.

István Gaál, now in his mid-sixties, is one of the best-known Hungarian film-makers—at least to those who look upon film as art. A new wave in the Hungarian cinema in the sixties brought acclaim for a Hungary intent on regeneration and had its first international success with Gáal's film, *Sodrás-ban* (Current) in 1964. After shorts and experiments, this was the first feature film to show that a new style and outlook was coming into being by the Danube. The cinema world took notice, at international festivals, in repertory cinemas, clubs and journals, and Gaál's name there stood for quality. The past fifty years has seen many a detour in the careers of those who initially debuted as talented revivers of culture and art: their talents ended up in the service of the entertainment industry, salvaging their original invention for new purposes. And who is to condemn them? This form of personal development seems completely natural these days. Yet there are a few exceptions, whose constitution or thinking prevents them from abandoning the path they created across the terrain of their own choice to turn onto well-administered highways.

István Gaál is one such exception. A film director and yet that does not describe him fully. Because he is a film artist. With all the blessings and handicaps thereof. And such he has always been.

There were times when he did not shoot for years on end. Few people knew what he was doing at such times. A colleague once lectured him on the dangers of not working, on the necessity to be ever present in the profession, to keep practising. "What's there for me to practise?" asked Gaál. "I'll know where to put the camera even if I don't shoot a frame in four years." Both knew exactly what lay behind these words. They were talking about money. Their words were to the effect that "Unless you constantly take on jobs you'll easily find yourself ostracized, which means the end of your career as a professional film director"; and, "I don't want to work unless I can shoot the kind of film I want. I won't be making films just to make money."

Gaál István krónikája is a portrait of this artist, although the anecdote above

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Károly Csala
writes on the arts and has published volumes of poetry, edited a movie journal, and translated Italian, Spanish, Russian, and Bulgarian poetry and prose.

comes from another source. In his case the old maxim would go, "he is a man first, and only then a film artist; a man by necessity, a film-maker by chance."

István Gaál's latest work is a film on Bartók, *Gyökerek* (Roots, 1996–2000). It seems a good starting point to approach Gaál's work and person with.

Gyökerek is a three-piece masterpiece, each film of one hour. As to genre, it does not yet have one. It itself creates its own genre, by virtue of its existence. Though not fiction, it isn't a documentary either, at least not in any conventional sense. It is a complete review of Bartók's personal and artistic development, without a word of commentary uttered: only pictures, music and the words the composer himself wrote in his letters and studies. At the same time, it is a montage film which is not about the composer or about music: it itself is music, a grand composition built along the principles of music. It is probably no exaggeration to say that Gaál's *Gyökerek* will instruct generations to come in the essence of motion picture. Or as Béla Balázs put it, "the soul of the film", in entitling one of his books *(Der Geist des Films)*.

This work seems to fulfil the promise this versatile film-maker held out in his earlier works; an artist who refuses to specialise in genres, whose only goal is cinematographic perfection, and whose career has been anything but smooth or straightforward. We have been waiting to see the ultimate outcome of his wonderful ups and disappointing downs. Anything but a smooth career.

His trilogy—*Sodrásban,* 1964; *Zöldár* (Green Years), 1965; *Keresztelő* (Baptism, 1967)—produced a certain visual and structural reduction or loss in its uncompromising attempt to formulate the essence of the dilemma of first-generation intellectuals, who (like Gaál) come from a village background, and who have to determine to what extent it is reasonable to live by moral values: when does following these approach anti-life "madness", and when do compromises and small lies provoked by the new social environment cease to be a "reversible" and temporary state and enter the individuals own values—become, that is, sins. The neatness of the problem has often produced a parable-like abstraction in Gaál's films. When the problem was addressed again in a later film, *Cserepek* (Buffer Zone, 1981), the description of the hero's self-laceration—who is also burdened, almost to the point of illness, by loneliness, became dominant, at the expense of dramatic presentation, which almost took away from the (at best, indifferent) audience the possibility of dramatic empathy. Gaál's austere concentration on the problem in the films mentioned above failed to earn him the admiration of audiences or critics. Neither did the outstanding *Magasiskola* (The Falcons, 1970) and *Holt vidék* (Dead Landscape, 1971), though these two were celebrated by French and Italian critics, and the former received the jury's award at Cannes. Understandably, the career he outlined for himself through these films was one not only of the exceptionally talented director, but also of the lonely artist.

Gaál was (and still is) exceptional and lonely in his non-fictional films as well, for which he had to wrench creative moments from the teeth of adverse conditions. And this a career starting with a documentary! Gaál's four-minute *Pályamunkások* (Workers on the Tracks), his graduation piece about railway workers, was applauded by the profession both at home and abroad. (The film returns in a later feature, *Baptism,* 1967, and the reference to it is made not out of vanity or to create an autobiographical link, but as something which is part of Hungarian reality, incorporating the mini-documentary into the

personal conflict of the two central figures.) For a few years it seemed he was not alone. A whole group of young filmmakers from the Balázs Béla Stúdió followed the example set by him and his friend, the great cameraman-turned-director Sándor Sára. By the 1970's Gaál had again proved exceptional and lonely in his pursuit. Hungarian experimental and documentary films had taken a different path, while Gaál had, as it were, still a few objectives in the course he had set out on, which to give up seemed impossible for him. As soon as the chance arose, he pushed on, and created such non-fictional films as *Krónika* (Chronicle, 1968), *Bartók Béla: Az éjszaka zenéje* (The Music of Night, by Béla Bartók, 1970), and *Római szonáta* (Roman Sonata, 1995). Markedly different in length (15, 6 and 60 minutes, respectively), they represent important stations on the way to *Gyökerek* (Roots). As it happens, it is now, after *Gyökerek,* that the road leading to it becomes obvious.

Gaál's adaptations of literary works for television have also found a role in his oeuvre. His interpretations of Gorky, Strindberg, Ibsen, or the Hungarian short-story writer István Szabó (not related to the well-known director), or Ferenc Sánta are as lonely and exceptional among Hungarian television films as are his cinematic feature films.

Vince Zalán's book, a collection of István Gaál's writings and confessions, helps us to acknowledge the exceptionality and loneliness of Gaál's art and personality.

As Gaál himself says: "I never follow any banners, but I never vindicate the right to judge either" (p. 226). Or yet more categorically: "I usually don't believe in groups, in the success of joint action. I especially don't believe in it, and this is perhaps the most important, if this teaming up takes place under a one-party regime. I could never imagine any sort of (collective or tendentious) artistic movement to appear in the so-called socialist countries. I always opted for partisan warfare, fighting as partisans and helping each other in secret" (p. 201). There is no arguing with this; others believed in collective or tendentious action and cooperation, and were not without success. The point is that Gaál describes himself accurately. He has always stuck to this principle. He preferred to guard his freedom and sovereignty on his own. "I already believed at the time of *Zöldár,* and still do, that what is needed is not freedom (in abstracto), but free people (in concreto)" (p. 202).

There is a Hungarian proverb that says "a good priest never ceases to learn." I think its wisdom is not independent of the fact that for a very long time the limited opportunities for the children of the poor (especially of poor peasants) to break out of their background was to become a soldier, a policeman or a priest. Those who chose to take vows were forced never to cease to proving that they were "good priests": there was always something to be picked up from their fellow clergyman from other social backgrounds, with other motivations. This eagerness to learn was natural to almost all the upwardly mobile descendants of peasants in Hungary, even during the decades of the people's democracy, so-called. István Gaál is such a first-generation intellectual, eager to overcome the cultural handicaps of his class; his life and endeavours bear testimony to the unquenchable intellectual thirst of the "simple boy." He is the kind of "boy changed to a stag" who appears in the lyrics of Bartók's *Cantata profana,* who is tormented as long as he lives by the desire to return to his original community, from which he tore himself, driven by the urge for knowledge, but to which he can never return; he can never be a boy again, and can never drink anything but the water

of "mountain springs." This "mountain spring" has been mentioned by so many—claiming privileges overtly or covertly on the grounds of their rural background—that overuse has almost wasted its authenticity. The kind of personal and artistic quality needed to restore its validity is represented by István Gaál. He never joined any cultural or ideological camp, although the opposition of these bore it marked Hungarian cultural life in his time. Despite his background, he never joined the side of the "populists", nor could the other camp, the urbanists count him among themselves either. He has always travelled his own road.

There are always exceptions, but most film-makers are not characterized by the urge to learn everything. Gaál István, whom film school instructed to be a director, learned, there and elsewhere, to be more, to be a universal film-maker. It seemed a form of bizarre eccentricity that in the credits of the widely discussed film he made with cameraman Sándor Sára, *Cigányok* (Gypsies, 1962), Sára appeared as director, while Gaál, who had a director's diploma, as the cameraman. In time he turned out to be a great cameraman and excellent film editor, one of the best editors in the trade. We must think it natural that this "simple boy" wanted to learn a number of things, which he then practiced with great ability. He is an artist with the manifold skills of an artisan: in this he resembles Renaissance masters. And as naturally and necessarily, his knowledge of the fine arts and music are also far from common. He had good teachers, whom he could also count as friends: he met art historian Éva Szőllősy (a legendary figure in Hungarian education) at film school, while her husband, the composer András Szőllősy, wrote music for most of Gaál's films and served as music consultant for the rest of them. But it all started in his home village, Pásztó, where he was lucky enough to have as instructor the historian of music Brother Benjámin Rajeczky Cistercian, an internationally acclaimed authority on Gregorian chant, about whom he made a documentary in 1987, *Béni bácsi* (Uncle Béni). It was with such a record Gaál came to direct a film version of Gluck's *Orpheus and Eurydice,* giving great pleasure both visually and musically.

All that went before—an insatiable desire for knowledge and the accompanying disciplined learning, an aspiration for completeness and the rejection of specialisation, the relishing of the artisan's—comes to be summarised, reflected in his latest opus, *Gyökerek.* In the accomplishments of an exceptional and lonely film artist.

This is a possible view of István Gaál by someone who happens to know his career from its outset, an outlook from the vantage points of the Bartók film, which stands as the epitome of his artistic endeavours, and of the volume, which is a suggestive yet economic summary of his artistic and personal fate, of his faith. But it is by no means the only valid view of his person and oeuvre.

Because there is something unmentioned so far, which it is impossible to ignore. Despite his well-grounded skepticism about the possibility of teaching the art of film, he sometimes becomes the tutor of young talents. He has given courses in the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, Rome (where in the sixties he himself had a postgraduate fellowship), and the national film and television college of India, in Puna. His students are excellently informed on what kind of a person István Gaál is. There must be a good reason he was invited to go back time and again; he must have been teaching something no one else knows. His students couldn't consider him a lonely man. Exceptional, certainly. ❧

Alan Walker

Ernst von Dohnányi (1877–1960): A Tribute

MUSIC

Leopold Godowsky was once asked what sort of audience he preferred, music lovers or experts. He replied: "Music lovers. The experts always come into the concert hall looking for trouble." There may be experts in the audience tonight looking for trouble. I hope that they will not find any in my presentation, even though I intend to refute with force some groundless political charges brought against Dohnányi by his enemies at the end of the Second World War. As far as the general public is concerned, however, even the most obvious facts of Dohnányi's life remain a mystery. That is shocking when you recall that the lives of his great contemporaries—Rachmaninov, Paderewski, Busoni and Godowsky, for instance, with whom he was readily compared in his younger years—are by contrast an open book. We know who they were and what they did; and the man in the street recognizes them by the hundreds of anecdotes within which posterity has meanwhile enshrined their names. But Dohnányi remains a secret. So it is my chief duty this evening to lift the veil just a little, and reveal the musician whose life we are honouring this weekend.

The first thing I have to proclaim is something that has not so far been mentioned at this festival. Dohnányi was a genius. And when I use the term "genius" I am not thinking of anything vague. Schopenhauer once compared genius with mere talent, and observed:

> A talent is like a marksman who can hit a target the others cannot hit. A genius is like a marksman who can hit a target the others cannot even see.

Dohnányi, in brief, was always hitting targets the others could not even see, as the most cursory examination of his life and music would reveal.

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II

Dohnányi was born in Pressburg, Hungary, July 27, 1877. He first studied music with his father, a professor of mathematics at the gymnasium, and an outstanding amateur cellist, but afterwards became a pupil in pianoforte and composition of Carl Förstner, organist at Pressburg Cathedral. Those last two sentences could begin almost any entry on the life of Dohnányi, but they would overlook one of the most important things of all. In 1877 Pressburg was one of the most musical cities in Europe. To Hungarians the place was always known as Pozsony, the coronation city. For three hundred years the Hungarian kings had been crowned there. The Hungarian legislature had also held its sessions there. In the 19th century it was a vibrant place brimming with music, and it was invariably included in the concert tours of the greatest performing artists. How fortunate for Dohnányi that he was born there! He soaked up the history and the culture of his native city like a sponge. It was a loss that he would have felt most keenly when, at the Treaty of Trianon, after World War One, the victorious British, French, and American politicians re-drew the map of Europe and gave Pozsony to the newly created state of Czecho-Slovakia, which promptly renamed the city Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia.

In 1894, when he was only 17 years old, Dohnányi moved to Budapest and enrolled at the Royal Academy of Music (later to become known as the Liszt Academy), where he became a pupil of István Thomán for piano and of Hans Koessler for composition. Thomán had been a pupil of Franz Liszt (he was actually a pallbearer at Liszt's funeral), while Koessler was a follower of Brahms. It was an interesting combination of influences, and throughout his life Dohnányi reflected them both—Liszt in his piano playing, Brahms in his composing. Hitherto, gifted young Hungarian musicians had gone abroad in pursuit of their higher studies. Dohnányi was the first major Hungarian musician to prefer Budapest and the Academy; and his decision influenced both Kodály and Bartók, who followed him to the Academy as well. When Dohnányi arrived in Budapest he brought with him a portfolio of more than sixty compositions, many of which he later discarded. But in 1897 one of them, a symphony in F major, was rewarded with the King's Prize. In a letter dated June 10, 1897, the 19-year-old Dohnányi addressed a special request to the Directorate of the Academy. He asked permission to skip the rest of his studies and take the final exams, both as a composer and as a pianist, in order to obtain his artist's diploma immediately. Permission was granted and a few days later he passed with flying colours. His graduation concert included a performance of Liszt's Operatic Paraphrase on Mozart's "Don Juan"—a telling indication of the young man's ability at the keyboard.

III

What to do next? And where to go? Such questions afflict many young music graduates. Dohnányi followed his star as a pianist. After a few lessons with Eugéne d'Albert, another student of Liszt, he made his debut in Berlin, in 1897,

and was at once recognized as an artist of the highest distinction. A similar success followed in Vienna. He made his London debut at a Hans Richter concert in the Queen's Hall, where he gave a memorable performance of Beethoven's G Major Concerto. Dohnányi was still only 19 years old. The following year he undertook some concerts in America. When he returned home, it was as the most celebrated Hungarian musician since Franz Liszt.

During the next few years Dohnányi established himself as one of Europe's leading concert pianists. He was openly compared with Rachmaninov, Paderewski and Ignaz Friedman. Although still in his 'twenties, he was appearing with major orchestras all over Europe and the United States—including New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and St. Louis. His repertoire at this time included a lot of Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Brahms, and the three concertos he played most frequently at this time were Beethoven's Fourth, Brahms's Second, and his own Piano Concerto in E minor. Soon he would be playing complete cycles of all the Beethoven Sonatas and all the Mozart Piano Concertos—for which he wrote a number of cadenzas, the manuscripts of which are kept in the Dohnányi Collection at Florida State University.

One intriguing piece that cropped up all the time in Dohnányi's recitals was his "Variations and Fugue on a Theme by G. E.". It dates from 1897, the year of his graduation from the Music Academy. Who was "G.E."? Her full name was Gruber Emma (as the Hungarians would say: or "Emma Gruber" to English readers) and she was a fashionable art benefactress. She was immensely rich and highly talented. Emma was not beautiful, but she compensated for this through her sharp intelligence and her magnetic personality. She was a gifted amateur musician (in the best sense of that word), and was enormously helpful to younger artists in whose company she obviously felt much at home. It was István Thomán who arranged for the 17-year-old Dohnányi to give Emma some piano lessons. She was born Emma Schlesinger, and enjoyed all the wealth and prestige of one of the most prominent Jewish families in Hungary. Later on, the family changed its name to the Hungarian "Sándor", to obscure its Jewish links, and later still Emma married a wealthy Hungarian named Henrik Gruber. Emma Gruber was thirty-five years old when she first met the handsome young Dohnányi. That she became enamoured of the attractive young man cannot be doubted and there is circumstantial evidence that much more than piano lessons took place in her salon. To her fashionable soirées in Budapest she also invited Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, and I am reliably informed that Emma had intimate liaisons with these young men as well.[1] After the death of her husband, and Emma became the wife of the much younger Kodály, she continued to refer to Dohnányi, Bartók and Kodály as "my three men". Why mention such personal matters, which appear to be of little relevance in a lecture on Dohnányi's

1 ■ Oral communication from Dr. Bálint Vázsonyi, Dohnányi's Hungarian biographer. November 18, 2001, Washington D.C.

place in musical history? For one simple reason. This quartet of outstanding human beings—Dohnányi, Bartók, Kodály, and Emma Gruber—contained within it some psychological dynamite which lay dormant for forty years, but then exploded with force, and came close to destroying Dohnányi's life at a time when he had just entered old age. I shall return to this point later.

IV

Altogether, Dohnányi married three times, and each time he left his present wife for a new one. I will leave it to his biographers to explain the exact circumstances that led him to introduce such profound changes into his life. His first wife was Elsa Kunwald. She was the daughter of a musical family, prominent in Budapest. They had been students together at the Academy, and had two children—Hans and Greta (the allusion to Humperdinck's opera *Hansel and Gretel* is too obvious to require comment). These children grew up in Berlin, where Dohnányi had meanwhile established himself at the Hochschüle für Musik at the invitation of the great Hungarian violinist Joseph Joachim. We shall hear more about Hans later on, who was to secure his own place in history. Even while his first marriage was collapsing (through the financial extravagance of his first wife), Dohnányi met another Elsa, this time Elsa Galafrés, the famous German actress and wife of the renowned violinist Bronislav Huberman. This proved to be a brilliant match and Dohnányi and Elsa Galafrés would eventually dominate both the social and the artistic scene in Budapest. It could not have been easy for Dohnányi to leave Berlin and return to the Hungarian capital with a mistress. They had a son, Matthew, born out of wedlock two years before Dohnányi and Elsa Galafrés were married. We are told that the first person to welcome Dohnányi back to Budapest under these difficult circumstances was his old teacher István Thomán, who shielded him from much criticism. Since Elsa also had a son by her first marriage to Huberman, Dohnányi officially adopted the boy. His name was John Huberman and Dohnányi felt closer to him than to his own children. John was the cause of the violent confrontation between Huberman and Dohnányi on the streets of Budapest. That John loved Dohnányi better than he loved his own father was a heavy cross for Huberman to bear. The third marriage took place in 1949, to the much younger Ilona Zachár, and it was Ilona whom Dohnányi brought to Tallahassee, and with whom many people in my audience tonight would have been personally acquainted.

Dohnányi kept Berlin as his base of operations until 1916, when he accepted an invitation to return to Budapest as head of the piano department at the Music Academy. After the War the country was in turmoil. The Communists briefly seized power, and for a short period of time, in 1919, Dohnányi actually held the post of Director of the Music Academy. This was not a position he ever sought, but he was recruited by the government to save the institution from collapse. He was dismissed from the Director's job a few months later when a Fascist govern-

ment took over and Dohnányi refused to fire Zoltán Kodály from the faculty because of the latter's left-wing political beliefs. (Kodály was so revolutionary in those days that he used to have the students sing the Internationale at the end of the academic term!) So Dohnányi was replaced by the great violinist Jenő Hubay as Director. Dohnányi was to be dogged by Hungarian politics all his life, even though he tried to avoid them.

The period that followed the First World War can only be described as Dohnányi's golden years. He gave more than 120 recitals and concerts a year. In 1920 Béla Bartók was able to write: "Musical life in Budapest today may be summed up in one name—Dohnányi."[2]

Dohnányi could not have moved back to Budapest at a better time. The city stood on the brink of greatness. Ever since the Compromise of 1867, representing a final peace between Hungary and Austria after the disastrous War of Independence in 1849, the massive building programme that had been put into place had not ceased. Broad avenues now swept away from the River Danube in all directions. They were lined with beautiful trees, and at night the city fairly bustled with energy, its people strolling along the boulevards, eating and drinking in the open air at the multitude of restaurants that jostled for a place on the sidewalks. The first electric trams were installed, giving easy access to many parts of the city. Elegant new apartment buildings had sprung up everywhere. Budapest was now likened to Vienna, that other jewel in the crown of the Emperor Franz Josef. It was often said that if you were to place someone in the middle of Vienna or Budapest, they could probably be forgiven for not quite knowing in which city they were.

V

Dohnányi was one of those pianists who were entirely at home on the concert platform. There are certain artists who undergo a kind of purgatory before walking onto the stage. They live their lives in almost perpetual agony, fearing they will play badly, have a memory lapse, lose muscular coordination, and so forth. These artists are elated only when they walk *off* the platform. Dohnányi was the opposite. He was elated to be *on* the platform. He was like a fish in water, someone in his natural element. What matter if he sometimes failed to give of his best? What matter if he had an occasional memory lapse? He was musician enough to improvise his way out of it. Nothing could stop the sheer joy of making music and communicating that joy to his audiences. And his audiences, particularly the Hungarian ones in the 1920s and 30s, adored him.

First there was his fabulous tone-quality, which made the piano sing. Then there was his composer's grasp of musical structure, which prompted him to lay

2 ■ *Musical Courier,* New York, April 1920, pp. 42–43. And he added, charmingly : "How often, the concert over, must he walk a weary hour or so home through all the rain and snow! For the electric cars only ply until 8:30pm and cabs are most difficult to obtain."

out the details of a Beethoven sonata like a map. Finally there was his innate ability to turn his interpretations into a form of mass communication. Not for him the secret performance almost ashamed to be heard, which turns the audience into eavesdroppers, or worse, voyeurs. The moment he walked onto the platform you were aware of a musician presiding at the piano, and the only reason he was there was to give you pleasure and musical enlightenment.

Dohnányi's playing was always marked by technical brilliance, a *bel canto* line (one is never in doubt where the melody lies), generous pedalling, and a well-nourished tone—which even the technical imperfections of his early recordings do little to diminish. One of his main expressive tools was *tempo rubato* (and its first cousin, the agogic accent) which he used to telling effect in his interpretations of Romantic composers. Above all, Dohnányi was a master of the nuance. He had few connections to the "blood and thunder" school of piano-playing. His occasional departures from the printed text, while they may worry the modern scholar, evoke an old-world charm and mark him as a child of his time. Dohnányi's piano playing has been criticized in modern times for its self-indulgence, its exaggerations, and its departures from the strict letter of the printed text. This opens the door to a large topic which would require a book to do it justice. In the absence of a book, let me address the problem in a single paragraph.

We often hear the question: "What sort of success would such a pianist as Dohnányi have today?" It is a condescending inquiry which contains within it its own condescending reply: "Not much". I would like to reverse the question, and ask: "What sort of success would today's pianist have had then?" By most accounts scarcely any. He would be unable to improvise. He would be unable to transpose. He would be unable to read fluently from full orchestral score. He would almost certainly be inept as a composer. Is there anything left that he would be able to do? He would be able to play the piano after his fashion, and probably be roundly condemned by our musical forefathers for his slavish adherence to the printed text, his ignorance of the singer's art of *bel canto,* and his possession of a *rubato* that was so parsimonious as to make a stop-watch sound erratic. Above all his tone-production would lack personality, so he would be condemned to occupy the ranks of the anonymous.

Dohnányi's ability to sight-read from full orchestral score was legendary, as were his capacity to improvise and transpose instantly from one key to another. He also had a phenomenal memory, and his pupils tell of him being able to sit down and play works he had not touched for years. Perhaps he relied too much on these gifts, but what gifts to possess! They place him squarely in the tradition of Franz Liszt, who possessed them in even greater measure.[3] It is perhaps not gen-

3 ■ Dohnányi greatly admired his English friend Donald Francis Tovey (1875–1940), one of the greatest all-round musicians of his time. He particularly respected Tovey's ability to play anything from memory. When he heard that Tovey could play any Bach cantata on demand, without the score, Dohnányi was supposed to have remarked: "Impressive, but not particularly useful"!

Ernst von Dohnányi with his master class in 1932 (Andor Földes, Annie Fischer, Jenő Zeitlinger and Endre Petri).

erally known that when Liszt became the first Director of the newly established Royal Hungarian Academy of Music, in 1875, he was able to set up the first curriculum. He insisted that all composers take piano lessons, and all pianists take composition lessons. The entrance exams contained tests in sight reading, sight singing, memory-work and improvisation. Those students who failed were shown the door. This was the environment in which the young Dohnányi flourished. It was the One-ness of music that mattered to him, not its separate parts. For the rest, time turns everything into treasure. Dohnányi's piano-playing is often described as historical, typical of its time and place. But that, too, is misleading. What is historical about his playing is not there because it is historical.

Dohnányi's master-class at this time included Annie Fischer, Andor Földes, Edward Kilenyi, Endre Petri and Péter Solymos. That he was absorbed in the well-being of his gifted young charges goes without saying. Dohnányi does not appear to have been interested in teaching technique. Because he himself had few technical problems, he either did not understand, or did not really care, that other people had them. What he taught was interpretation, passing on the great traditions of the past, and in this field he had few peers. He would often teach by direct example, and sit down at the keyboard to show the pupil how the work in question ought to be played. His fingerings were always revelatory, and his

"Essential Finger Exercises" for pianists (meant to save time with a short "workout" at the beginning of each practice session) are widely used and have become legendary.[4] It was Dohnányi who organized the first Franz Liszt International Piano Competition in 1933, which has meanwhile become part of the national pride. There have been eleven such competitions since then. As everyone knows, the first one was won by the eighteen-year-old Annie Fischer.

It is an indication of his curiosity in the mechanics of piano playing that Dohnányi had the firm of Bösendorfer make two experimental pianos for him, with semi-circular keyboards. One he kept in his studio at the Academy; the other he kept at home. He practised on them for about two years during the early 'thirties. The practical advantage of such an unusual piano is that no matter where the fingers are placed on the keyboard the distance between the shoulder and the hand always remains the same. The arms naturally describe an arc, so why not match them to a circular keyboard? Dohnányi abandoned this piano when he had to play a Mozart concerto in public on a normal keyboard, and found that he could not adjust to it in time.

VI

In 1934 Dohnányi became for a second time the Director of the Liszt Academy. He gave an interview to the *Budapesti Hírlap,*[5] outlining the task facing young Hungarian musicians. During his installation he extolled Franz Liszt whom he held up as a model of humanity and art for students to follow. In his inaugural address he declared:

> Many threads tie me to the Academy of Music. I studied here and the finest memories of my youth date from the time I attended this institute. My artistic career started here and years later I was invited to teach and then to direct the institution, a function that I am performing for a second time. Our Academy bears the name of Ferenc Liszt. This is not just vanity and pomp; it is a serious reminder: Ferenc Liszt is the paragon of artistic and human greatness.

By now Dohnányi was the most powerful musical figure in Hungary. Not only was he the Director of the Music Academy, but also the conductor of the Budapest Philharmonic Society, and the Head of Music for the Hungarian Broadcasting Corporation. This created the perception that he was a virtual dictator in the world of music, and he unwittingly created enemies at home—particularly among those second-class musicians who later blamed Dohnányi for blocking their careers, instead of attributing it to their mediocre talents. One of his first

4 ■ Its full title is *A legfontosabb ujjgyakorlatok biztos technika elsajátítására a zongorán* (Essential Finger Exercises for Obtaining a Sure Piano Technique, Budapest, 1929). The piano aficionado cannot afford to overlook these *Exercises,* and Dohnányi's Preface, with its absorbing ideas on how to practice, will give him a bonus.

5 ■ Issue of September 21, 1934.

official acts was to enable Bártok to resign his piano teaching at the Academy in order to devote himself to research into Hungarian folk music for the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, while remaining on the Academy's payroll. He thus ensured that Bartók had an income at a time when he was earning little from his compositions, and nothing at all from his musicological research. He also did much to help Kodály, by performing much of his music. In fact, these were the two Hungarian composers whose careers Dohnányi did most to promote.

VII

In 1941 Dohnányi's world started to collapse around him. In that year Hungary signed a treaty with Germany, and the country was officially aligned with the Nazis. Hungary was now compelled to implement the racial laws that had been introduced into Hitler's Germany years earlier. Dohnányi was ordered to fire two of his colleagues at the Music Academy, Ervin Major and György Faragó, because of their Jewish origins. He refused to do it. Then came the forced dismissals. Leó Weiner and György Kósa were obliged to retire, simply because they were Jews. Dohnányi saw the writing on the wall and he resigned his position. The statistics speak for themselves. In 1940 there were 85 Jewish students at the Academy; in 1942 there were 59; in 1943 there were 32; and in 1944 there were 25. The Nazis occupied Hungary on March 19, 1944 and Jews were expunged from the Academy altogether. Not a single Jewish student or faculty member remained in the building. By then Dohnányi had been away from his post for all practical purposes for three years (he was officially replaced by Ede Zathureczky in 1943), a fact of which we should take careful note in light of what was about to happen. The two months that followed must have been a nightmare for Dohnányi. During the spring of 1944 the Nazis insisted that he get rid of all the Jewish players in the Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra. He refused to carry out the order, putting himself at risk. The Nazis then gave him an ultimatum: carry out the order, or face the consequences. Dohnányi gave them his reply on May 11, 1944, by disbanding the entire orchestra. The Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra no longer existed. This would have created grave difficulties for the Gentiles in the orchestra, let alone the Jews, and may well have been the starting-point for some of Dohnányi's problems later on. Dohnányi was now without any official position whatsoever in Hungary. He himself had cut the links that bound him to the politics of his country, politics that he abhorred.

Personal tragedy now followed. He learned about this time that his son Matthew, a Captain in the Hungarian Army, had been captured by the Russians and had been marched to his death in a POW camp while suffering from typhoid fever. Not long afterwards Dohnányi learned that his other son, Hans, had been hanged by the Nazis for his involvement in a coup against Hitler. The case of Hans is particularly poignant. He had remained behind in Germany, we recall,

after Dohnányi's first marriage was dissolved. He had become a brilliant jurist in Germany, who had gained the trust of the Nazi party. Unknown to them, however, he slowly and methodically built up a dossier against the German Fascists, including Adolf Hitler, which provided evidence of their crimes against humanity. It was uncovered by the Gestapo when the assassination plot against Hitler on July 20, 1944 failed and the conspirators were rounded up. Hans was undoubtedly tortured before his execution—all such prisoners routinely were—and Dohnányi himself would have been acutely aware of that fact.

By now Dohnányi's despair was complete and he decided to leave Hungary, to leave the country where he had enjoyed his greatest fame. The Russian army was already advancing across the Hungarian Plain from the east, and the German gun emplacements on the hills to the west of the city gave the German artillery commanding views of the countryside for miles around—and of the advancing Russian army. The siege of Budapest was soon to begin, and Dohnányi must have sensed the impending catastrophe. Not long afterwards the Russians and the Germans began blowing Budapest to pieces, destroying more than half the city in the process, while the citizens shivered in the cellars beneath, subjected to a siege of 80 days, in which many of them died of starvation. Dohnányi is often said to have escaped on the last Nazi train out of the city—that is how his enemies later liked to describe it: "the last Nazi train". The truth was more mundane. He left in the back of a truck with two German soldiers who had been billetted in his house, were well-disposed towards him, and had warned him to get out of the city. It was in this unlikely mode of transport that Dohnányi left Hungary on November 24, 1944, never to return. His abrupt departure was later deemed to be controversial, even "unpatriotic", although it is difficult to see why.[6] Accompanying him was a much younger lady Ilona Zachár (who later became his third wife) together with her two children by her previous marriage, and her servant known simply as "Fräulein."[7] His marriage to Elsa Galafrés was by now dead in everything but name. The small party went first to Vienna, but

6 ■ Just as Dohnányi was criticized for leaving his native country in time of war, Richard Strauss and Wilhelm Furtwängler were criticized for *not* leaving theirs. There is no logic in such matters. As the old Jewish proverb has it: "If you want to beat a dog, you are sure to find a stick."

7 ■ By the time of their departure from Budapest, Dohnányi and Ilona Zachár (1909–1984) appear to have been lovers for at least four years. Two unpublished love-songs have recently come to light in Tallahassee, which bear the date 1940. Their titles are *"Az én édes, drága, egyetlen Icukámnak"* (To my sweet, dear, my one and only Icuka) [signed] Ernő; and *"Az én drága, egyetlen Szivecskémnek—Icuska verse, Ernő zenéje"* (To my dear, my one and only Darling) [signed:]—Text by Icuska; music by Ernő. This second song also provides the intriguing background: "April 8–9, 1940, 3:00 am., Gellért Hotel."

As for "Fräulein", she lived as part of the family, doing most of the domestic chores and preparing the meals. No one was ever sure of her actual name. When I asked Dohnányi's grandson Dr. Sean McGlynn about her, he told me that he and his sister grew up with her from their earliest childhood, but never addressed her by any other name than "Fräulein". Her real name, in fact, was Hermine Lorenz, and after the death of Ilona Dohnányi, she moved out to Baton Rouge with Ilona's daughter, still in domestic service.

soon left the city for the relatively calm surroundings of Upper Austria, in the village of Neukirchen-am-Walde, and it was here that fate allowed Dohnányi to spend a few brief months, before delivering a final blow. On October 1, 1945, the BBC World Service broadcast a news bulletin in its Hungarian Language Service in which Dohnányi was accused of handing over artists to the Gestapo. Dohnányi was horrified by this broadcast, coming as it did from an organization he admired above all others. Two days later he wrote a letter of protest to the BBC which, to the best of my knowledge, remains unknown. He sent it to his old friend Sir Adrian Boult, the Chief Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, in London, with whom he had often worked in the past, and to whom he now turned for help. It bears the postmark:

> Neukirchen-am-Walde
> Ober-Oesterreich
> 3rd October 1945
>
> Dear Mr. Boult:
> I have sent a letter to the BBC as follows:
>
> To the Direction of the BBC. Programme-Department, London
> Dear Sirs,
> In your Hungarian broadcasting [sic] on the morning of October 1st—as I was told by several people—the speaker mentioned my name in connection with war criminals, saying that I "delivered Hungarian artists to the Gestapo". I do not know from where such information came (surely not from any official place) but I have to declare it a calumny and a complete lie. I never had anything to do either with the Gestapo or with any similar organization. I never belonged to any political party, and nobody can prove that I ever committed an incorrect or unliberal action against anybody. My only fault was—it is strange enough that it should be a fault—that as a member of the Hungarian House of Lords, I signed (like other members of the House who were good patriots) the foundation of the "Nemzeti Szövetség" (National Association) which was directed against Russia. I leave it to your kindness and your sense of what is right, to investigate this matter and to do me justice. I remain, Gentlemen,
>
> Yours faithfully,
> E.v.D.[8]

With this letter, Dohnányi enclosed another one, addressed to Adrian Boult himself.

> Dear Mr. Boult, I send you the copy of the letter asking you to look after this awkward matter which bothers me because it puts me in a false light. I would be awfully grateful to you if you could do something in my favour. A few weeks ago, I sent you a letter through an American soldier [Edward Kilenyi]; I do not know whether you

8 ■ Hitherto unpublished. Originals in English. Copies of this correspondence are housed in the Ernest Newman Papers, Lila Acheson Wallace Library, The Juilliard School, New York.

received it or not. In this letter I asked you to give me some information about my friends in England, as I have not heard anything from them since this terrible war started. Especially I should like to know whether my dear friends Mrs. Oliverson and Miss Schubert are alive.[9] If it is possible, I would be very grateful for a few lines.

With many hearty greetings,
Yours very sincerely,
Signed: Ernst von Dohnányi.

In those days, the BBC's World Service was omnipotent, its reputation for accuracy impeccable. It was like the voice of God. It broadcast the news across the planet in more than fifty languages for twenty-four hours a day, and its record for unbiased reporting, especially during the difficult days of the War, had given it millions of followers in Central and Eastern Europe. Dohnányi was right to be concerned.

Sir Adrian Boult's reply was very formal. In fact it does not appear to have been written by him at all. The political situation after the war was considered to be so delicate that officials at the BBC probably prepared the text of a letter for Boult to sign. At any rate it is very formal in tone, and lacks the friendliness that had marked Boult's relations with Dohnányi so far. The BBC evidently thought that Dohnányi was already under investigation.

Boult's reply runs:

November 22, 1945

My Dear Professor Dohnányi:
Thank you for your letter of October 3, which is the only one that I have received from you since the war. Regarding the broadcast to which you refer, I have confirmed from the actual text that we quoted from an article in "The New Statesman", which we acknowledged. We did not originate the sentence concerned.

I am very glad to say that Miss Geisler-Schubert is well, and I have had some correspondence with her recently, and she has very kindly given me some very fine MSS.
I hope you and Madame Dohnányi are well.

(Signed) With cordial greetings,
Yours Sincerely,
Adrian C. Boult

Dohnányi would have been the first to appreciate the irony of such a dismal letter being dated November 22—"St. Cecilia's Day", the patron saint of music.

9 ■ Mrs. Margaret Clara Oliverson (1850–1941) and Miss Carolina Geisler-Schubert (1856–1951) were lifelong companions who lived together in a large house in the St. John's Wood district of London. Dohnányi usually stayed with them as their house-guest whenever he was in London. Mrs. Oliverson was a wealthy American divorcée who acquired her money from her former husband at the time of their separation. Ms. Geisler-Schubert was the great niece of Franz Schubert and in earlier years she had studied the piano with Clara Schumann at Frankfurt-am-Main.

The left-wing journal *The New Statesman,* then, appears to have been at the root of this false information, from which the BBC World Service was merely quoting. But that broadcast did Dohnányi untold damage.

Several months passed. Boult was clearly worried about the situation in which Dohnányi found himself, and on April 11, 1946, he wrote an internal memorandum to the Assistant Controller of the BBC's European service, as follows.

> I should be grateful to know whether I may yet have permission to correspond with my old friend Ernst Dohnányi. I hear a rumour that his reputation has been cleared.

This memo proves Boult's good intentions, for it indicates his desire to write to his "old friend." Wartime censorship of mail was still in force in Britain.[10] Boult's reference to "a rumour that his reputation has been cleared" must have stemmed from the fact that on December 14, 1945, the Hungarian Minister of Justice confirmed that Dohnányi was not listed as a war criminal. This important declaration, made before the Communists seized power in Hungary, is often forgotten today.

VIII

How could such a situation have arisen? From everything that we know of his life and work, it is astounding that Dohnányi could ever have been described as a "war criminal" who "delivered artists to the Gestapo". Nothing is simpler to explain, however. Once the Russians had routed the German army and seized control in Hungary they quickly put their own political puppets into power. These Communists lost no time in starting a witch-hunt, labelling as "Fascist" anyone who had been prominent in public life and might prove to be a threat to them in their desperate attempts to gain control of the country. That they used the War Crimes Commission for their own purposes almost goes without saying. It was enough to point the finger for the witch-hunt to start. And Dohnányi's "crime"? Far from being "pro-Nazi" he was "anti-Russian." As he points out in his letter, as a member of the Hungarian House of Lords, he and scores of other delegates had signed as good Hungarian citizens a declaration against Russia, and it was now the turn of Russia to see that these people were punished. Lies were the order of the day, and they created many innocent victims. It may be difficult for us to put this into historical perspective, but we must try. In 1945 Europe

10■ As a Displaced Person stranded in Austria at the end of the Second World War, Dohnányi's options were severely limited. Of all the countries in which he would have liked to settle, England was at the top of the list. The Home Office received his application for permanent residency with sympathy, but they refused to admit his extended family as well (Ilona Zachár, her two children, and "Fräulein") since at that time they had no legal ties to Dohnányi, who was still married to Elsa Galafrés. That refusal settled the matter for Dohnányi. He would not abandon those who now relied on him absolutely for their protection and support, and he looked to other countries for a haven.

was in turmoil, with millions of displaced persons wandering all over the map. Russia was an ally of the West, the Cold War had not yet begun. There was no Iron Curtain, there was no Berlin Wall. Anyone who was "anti-Russian" was almost by definition "pro-Nazi". Within a couple of years, of course, all that was to change; we in the West were all to become "anti-Russian", and spend untold billions of dollars protecting ourselves against the Soviet threat; but that lay in the future. For the time being Dohnányi had signed a formal declaration against one of our Allies. But what of the other charge, that he had handed over artists to the Gestapo? It was clearly intended to make him appear to be anti-Semitic. That accusation is even more grotesque if Dohnányi's lifelong support of Jewish artists is examined. The story seems to have been put about by a small group of disaffected and second-rate musicians in Hungary who felt that their careers had gone nowhere because Dohnányi had blocked them. Perhaps that had indeed happened, but it was based on their musical incompetence, not on their ethnic origins.

Even today it is not uncommon to hear it said that Dohnányi was a War Criminal, and that his conduct was reviewed by a court of inquiry set up by the Allies—both of which statements are totally false. Unlike Richard Strauss and Wilhelm Fürtwangler, there was no formal inquiry whatsoever into Dohnányi's alleged collaboration with the Nazis, for the simple reason that there was no case to answer. There was nothing. Just rumours. His American pupil Edward Kilenyi, who had studied with Dohnányi before the war, had meanwhile become an officer in the American army and was stationed in Bavaria immediately after the conflict, first as an intelligence officer and later as the director in charge of musical culture throughout the American occupied zone. It was Kilenyi who led the way in trying to get Dohnányi cleared of the perception of wrong-doing. He petitioned Otto de Pasetti, the American Music and Theatre Officer for Austria, to allow Dohnányi to pursue a concert career in Austria and Germany, but was turned down with the chilling words: "Ernst von Dohnányi's rehabilitation cannot be considered ...because of his anti-Russian tendencies." Not long afterwards Hungary fell completely under Russian domination, and was run in the main by left-wing thugs who were often no better than war criminals themselves, since they became responsible for countless deaths of their own countrymen, culminating in the bloody reprisals of 1956. Dohnányi's left-wing enemies tried to have him extradited, but in that they failed. Since the Communists retained their grip on Hungary for forty years, Dohnányi became *persona non grata* in his native land. In the 50s and 60s Dohnányi did not for them exist. His name was officially expunged from the records. It was not until Bálint Vázsonyi, his first biographer, received permission from the Kádár government in Hungary to publish his ground-breaking biography of Dohnányi in Hungarian that the tide started to turn. Dr. Vázsonyi's quest took him to the office of György Aczél, the Deputy Secretary General of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the second most powerful political position in Hungary. That was in 1967, and it

exposed Vázsonyi to some personal risk since he himself had left Hungary illegally in 1957. Since there were still some Hungarian musicologist party hacks, who tried to close down the project, an appeal was made to János Kádár, who opened it up again. The book was finally published in 1971.[11] Hungary woke up to the fact that the major genius who had lived among them for fifty years could now be acknowledged. A new generation of scholars emerged who began the serious study of Dohnányi's works, some of whom are in my audience tonight. Dohnányi's music was now played with increasing frequency, both on the state-controlled radio and in the concert halls. In 1982 a street was named in Dohnányi's honour. Again, the initial idea of this tribute came from Vázsonyi, although we cannot hold him responsible for the street that was actually chosen. He would doubtless have preferred a more imposing thoroughfare like Király utca, which runs past the side entrance of the Music Academy building. In the event, the authorities settled for the modest alley running along the back, which leads into Liszt Ferenc Square. But that is not a bad location. And it is a timely reminder to the Academy's many visitors of the man who dominated this institution for so many years. The state itself finally acknowledged its great musical son when it posthumously bestowed on him the prestigious Kossuth Prize, the highest artistic honour that Hungary can bestow on a private citizen.

IX

Something more needs to be said before we let this difficult topic go. And I have to return to the beginning of my lecture in order to close this particular circle. There were two immensely powerful and world-famous musicians in Hungary who could have silenced all criticism against Dohnányi with a single word. Bartók and Kodály knew better than anyone that the whispering campaign against their great compatriot was untrue. Both owed their careers in Hungary to Dohnányi from their earliest days. Alas, Bartók had moved to America in 1940 to get away from the War (that was before Pearl Harbor), and died there in 1945. Kodály, however, stayed in Hungary, but after the Communists came to power said nothing publicly in Dohnányi's defence, even though Dohnányi had supported his career without stint over many years. Although Kodály was never a member of the Communist Party, he enjoyed many of their perquisites and on artistic matters he had the ear of the party leaders. And that the post-war Communists hated Dohnányi there is also no doubt. Is there a connection here? I simply have no answer to this riddle, and must leave it to others to explain why Kodály remained silent. One thing is sure. Emma Gruber had found her "great man" in Kodály, and was not going to do anything to ensure that his position was threatened, as it would have been if Dohnányi had returned home. During the post-war Communist years, Kodály came to dominate the musical life of

11 ■ Vázsonyi: *Dohnányi Ernő,* Budapest 1971.

Hungary, just as Dohnányi had dominated it *before* the war. Emma Gruber, with whom we became acquainted at the beginning of my talk, had known Dohnányi for nearly fifty years and knew better than anyone that Dohnányi was incapable of handing over musicians to the Gestapo—Jew or Gentile. That it suited her ambitions for Kodály that Dohnányi remain in exile we have no doubt. With Dohnányi out of the way, Kodály, the sole survivor of that great triumvirate, could reign supreme. Looked at in this very human way, Emma's silence is much simpler to explain than that of Kodály himself. Emma was 98 years old when she died on November 22, 1958—just two years before Dohnányi himself expired. It is ironical to find St. Cecilia once more providing an exclamation mark in Dohnányi's life.

X

We have to say something at this point about the reception of Dohnányi's music, since he had the misfortune to write in a style that was considered old-fashioned for his time. The situation is complex, but I will try to make it simple.

At the turn of the 20th century something new and entirely unexpected began to happen to the language of music. The process was driven by a new attitude of self-awareness towards the history of music itself, and to the composer's place within it. Briefly, the notion was put about that the vocabulary of music had to develop, had to do ever new things, in order to be worthwhile. The greatest premium was placed upon originality. Musical vocabulary, so we were told, was something that could actually wear out through repetition, and it would lose its expressive power unless composers sought to renew it. We were introduced to such concepts as "the rising norm of consonance". What that meant was that since the dissonances of each generation were turned into consonances through sheer repetition, the next generation had to incorporate ever-increasing dissonances in order to get the same expressive power out of the language. We were told to look at history. In Palestrina's time, the dominant seventh chord was so dissonant that composers scarcely used it. A century later it was commonplace, and a century later still composers such as Schumann and Chopin were actually *ending* their compositions on such chords. By the time of Richard Wagner, we were in a state of high chromaticism, where dissonance resolved into dissonance, and tonality itself started to fall apart—as in Tristan. From there was but a short step to keyless or atonal music, from which 12-note serial music was born. Arnold Schoenberg and the so-called Second Viennese School led the way. And from 12-note music we entered a world of Determinism, then a world of Indeterminism, then a world of Chance, then a world of Chaos, then a world of art as anything you want it to be. For the first time in history anybody could become a composer, because nobody knew what composing was any more, and certainly no one knew the difference between good and bad music. The way something was done was now more important than what was done. Hitherto

composing had been a natural process, akin to the apple-tree bringing forth fruit at the appointed time. The apple-tree does not know whether its fruit is sweet or sour, green or red, large or small. Its function is fulfilled when the fruit appears. But now the tree itself had to know. It became a Tree of Knowledge; and just as in the Book of Genesis, knowledge corrupted. Composers for whom music was a native language fled from the Garden of Eden; the Gates of Paradise began to close. There was a wholesale loss of innocence. To change the metaphor: hitherto it had been sufficient for the clocks to tell the time. Now the clocks themselves insisted on knowing the time. All this happened in tandem with the career of Dohnányi, who understood quite well what was going on around him, but like many other composers of his generation who wrote in a conservative style, chose not to participate in it. Nonetheless, there was a very clear perception to the outside world that such composers were being left behind. Music had come to be regarded much like science: it was a discipline that had to progress. If you were not in the vanguard, you did not count.

Such a climate had a profound effect on the way Dohnányi's music was perceived. He himself was deeply suspicious of atonal and serial music. In his *Cantus vitæ,* he actually composes a few bars of unnaturally dissonant music in order to signify the breakdown of culture! At that moment Dohnányi has the tenor soloist turn to the orchestra and ask: "Gentlemen, why do you spoil your art like this? Do you like what you are playing?" Dohnányi also harboured a contempt for those composers who lacked the most rudimentary skills in instrumentation, harmony and counterpoint, while cheerfully masquerading as "composers". Their mindless cacophony he considered to be a threadbare garment behind which they hid their artistic nakedness.[12] In a newspaper interview, given in America, Dohnányi was asked why modern composers neglected the lyrical qualities of the piano. "That is not entirely true," he replied. "They neglect the lyrical qualities of *all* instruments." Much of his music could have been written in the 19th century, and for that reason alone it was dismissed. To condemn a

12■ Although I cannot prove it, I believe that there were two reasons why Dohnányi may have disliked atonal and serial music. The first may have been because, as Constant Lambert pointed out long ago, it is almost impossible to express humour through serial technique. "The idea of a 12-note comic opera is a chimerical thought", he wrote in his stimulating book "Music Ho!" Arnold Schoenberg's comic opera *Von Heute auf Morgen* (From One Day to the Next) seems to bear him out. The text is funny, and so is the plot. But we do not laugh at the music itself. By contrast, the music of Dohnányi's comic opera *Der Tenor* overflows with jest, and forms a perfect counterpart to the comedy on stage. This opera, by the way, enjoyed a hugely successful run in Hungary and Germany until it was brought to a sudden end by Dohnányi's refusal to remove the Mendelssohn song quoted in the finale and replace it with a "non-Jewish" alternative. Even Dohnányi's purely instrumental music is full of laughter. The best known example is his *Variations on a Nursery Song,* for piano and orchestra, op. 25. It bears the inscription: "For the joy of friends of humour, and for the annoyance of others."

The second reason is more esoteric. You cannot improvise in strict serial technique. To Dohnányi, for whom improvising at the piano was as natural as breathing, this would have represented an impossible drawback.

composer because of his dates may seem preposterous, yet in the middle of the 20th century this vacuous idea constantly did duty for musical criticism. It never occurred to critics to think things through, and get to the only point that mattered: What was done, not when it was done. The Tree of Knowledge has harmed criticism as well as composition. Consider Dohnányi's Symphony no 2, in E major, which typifies the entire situation. At its British première in 1948, under my old teacher Norman Del Mar, a leading British journal described it as "workmanlike bombast which grows worse as it proceeds and is not worth the paper it is damned on." If only the Symphony had been written in 1908 instead of 1948! But 1948 was a vastly different year. The chattering classes knew that it was no longer modish to write such music after the Second World War. As we listen to this music, and especially to its powerful finale (a set of variations based on Bach's Chorale "Komm, süsser Tod, Komm, sel'ge Ruh!" "Come, sweet death, come blissful peace!") could we not say the same of the reviewer's own words? They are not worth the paper they are damned on.

XI

But back to the story of Dohnányi's life. He now had to pick up the pieces of his shattered existence and make a livelihood for himself. Years earlier he had had a secretary in Hungary named Árpád Bubik, who now came forward with a proposal: namely, that Dohnányi should move to Buenos Aires from which safe haven Bubik himself would arrange some concert tours. It was fatal advice. Many of the concerts did not materialize, and while the Argentinians themselves embraced Dohnányi with warmth, that very embrace might have turned into a kiss of death because Buenos Aires was quickly becoming a place where genuine war criminals could settle without fear of persecution—including figures like Adolf Eichmann. To stay there meant guilt by association. It is easy for those of us who make a profession of looking backward to see how such mistakes were made. But Dohnányi, like everybody else who has a life to live, could only look forward, and in the clouds of post-war Europe no one could see more than a few days ahead, let alone an entire decade.

Somehow, Dohnányi managed to put together a concert tour of the United States in 1948/49. This was not easy. The previous year he had been obliged to cancel some American concerts because the Jewish lobby in New York and Boston prevented them from taking place. The *Boston Sunday Herald* openly accused Dohnányi of being anti-Semitic,[13] a view that had earlier been touched on by the *New York Times,* which added for good measure that he was the "musical dictator" of Hungary, who had brought ruin on the culture of his country by pursuing a personal agenda.[14] Absurdity could go no further, except when pursued

13 ■ Issue of November 14, 1948.

14 ■ Issue of March 9, 1947.

by the *New York Times* itself. It reported that Dohnányi had been arrested "because he supported Ferenc Szálasi and had established the Nazi musical organisation in Budapest."[15] Neither report was true. But by 1948–49 things went more smoothly. By now he had an enterprising American manager named Andrew Schulhof, who not only helped him to get his career re-started, but delved into the murky swamp of Hungarian politics, determined to help Dohnányi clear his name. Among the letters to Schulhof about the false charges pursuing Dohnányi, there are two of significance. On May 24, 1949, Jenő Sugár, the head of the publishing firm of Rózsavölgyi, told Schulhof:

> I am convinced that Dohnányi is not guilty in any respect, and that he was always an honest servant and sincere admirer of his motherland. I do not think he has ever been involved in politics, and as far as I know, he did not even have the time for it. In any case, he is a man of the arts to his fingertips, and as such high politics is far from him.[16]

The other letter came from Ede Zathureczky, who had succeeded Dohnányi as the Director of the Academy in 1943. It is dated 8 July, 1949.

> It was well known that during the Nazi regime Dohnányi, who was at that time a member of the House of Lords, was never heard to speak in the House in that period, and never expressed any political opinion. To clear things up, I now addressed myself officially to the Minister of Justice asking him to give me information about Dohnányi's having or not having been on the blacklist.[17]

This letter may have been crucial, since the Minister of Justice did, indeed, clear Dohnányi of wrong-doing in December of that same year, although the charges were soon to be resurrected. Leó Weiner also wrote in Dohnányi's defence.

Alas, these men—Sugár, Zathureczky and Weiner—prominent as they were in the musical life of Hungary, were not as powerful as Kodály, who appears not to have uttered a single public word in Dohnányi's defence—at this or any other time. And the more powerful Kodály grew (especially after the 1956 Uprising) the more perplexing his silence became. That silence was like an endorsement of the position taken by the Communist Government itself.

Thanks to Schulhof's persistence Dohnányi's public appearances gradually made their mark, especially in the American mid-West where, unlike Boston and

15■ Issue of June 30, 1946. The Hungarian-language American journal *Az Ember* later seized on this calumny and in its issue of November 20, 1948, described Dohnányi as "the infamous pianist, chief criminal music dictator of the Arrow Cross mass murderer Szálasi." It is clear that the writer of this article knew nothing of the history of Hungary—even the most recent. Szálasi and his fascist Arrow Cross Party assumed power in Hungary on October 15, 1944. Dohnányi fled Hungary five weeks later, on November 24; he held no official appointments whatever under the Szálasi regime. Szálasi was executed on March 12, 1946, after being captured in Germany by the Americans.

16■ Hitherto unpublished: Translation by James Grymes. From the Red Album. See fn. 18

17■ Hitherto unpublished. Original in English. From the Red Album. See fn. 18

New York, the "Jewish question" was hardly an issue, and as a result of these concerts he was offered positions at several American universities, including the University of Ohio where he had a strong following. It is to the everlasting credit of Florida State University that Dohnányi was appointed Professor of Music at Tallahassee, in 1949, a post he held for eleven years, until his death in 1960. The temperate climate may also have helped him to choose Florida. Since he was already 72 years old at the time of the appointment, we are told that Karl Kuersteiner, the Dean of the School of Music, had to go to the State Legislature to persuade them to pass a bill to enable Dohnányi to teach, since he was already past the State's mandatory retirement age. Years earlier Kuersteiner had studied the violin at the Liszt Academy in Budapest, and he was well aware that he was making history by bringing Dohnányi to Florida. The legislature passed that bill in time for Dohnányi to begin his professorial duties in the Fall Semester of 1949. Dohnányi's starting salary was $5000 a year. Since he joined the faculty at such an advanced age he was not entitled to a pension.

XII

Throughout his years of ordeal, Dohnányi never lost his innate sense of optimism and his sunny disposition. As the charges and counter-charges swirled around him he remained tranquil. A man who had lost two sons in the war, and had left his homeland virtually penniless after an unsurpassed career there, could easily have given in to rancour and bitterness. But Dohnányi gave way to neither. His wife Helen used to say that she sometimes got angry with him because *he* would not get angry.[18] Several colleagues have left eloquent testimony to the wit and wisdom of his final years in Florida. He often gave dinner-parties for his students and intimates, and would regale them with funny stories from his earlier years. These were made all the more hilarious because Dohnányi had a habit of interrupting himself in the middle of a joke in order to chuckle at the humour still to come, much to the delight of his friends, who exploded with even greater mirth when the punch-line finally arrived. At one of his first New York concerts, in the late 1890s, de Pachman was in the audience, and after hearing Dohnányi play some Brahms surpassingly well he got up in the middle

18 ■ There exists in the newly-established Dohnányi archives at Florida State University an uncatalogued family album bound in red covers containing an entire run of letters dealing with the false charges against Dohnányi. It includes letters from Dohnányi, Edward Kilenyi, the BBC, Sir Adrian Boult, the Austrian Military Commission and other interested parties. After Dohnányi's death, Helen Dohnányi never allowed this album to be seen by others, presumably because it represented a painful episode that must now be closed. The album is valuable not only because it shows the charges to be baseless, but also because it reveals the pettiness and bigotry of those who wanted to keep the matter alive. Incidentally, this same archive contains hundreds of letters from Dohnányi's sister "Mici", filled with personal information. "Mici", who wrote to Dohnányi at least once a week, sent him many family documents from Hungary (birth-certificates, early newspaper reviews, photographs) which he carefully preserved.

of the performance, made his exit and paced furiously up and down in the foyer. Afterwards he went to the artist's room and complained to Dohnányi: "You play Brahms too well! He doesn't deserve it!" On one occasion Dohnányi climbed into the passenger seat of a friend's very large American car (he himself had never learned how to drive). After examining the complex dashboard with care, he observed two silver knobs, one marked "light" and the other marked "lighter". He reflected on the matter for a few moments, then remarked: "Ah! The comparative case." Another favourite story concerned the violinists Jascha Heifetz and Mischa Elman. They were dining in a café in Vienna, when the waiter brought a message to the table. Elman took it and after reading on the envelope "To the world's greatest violinist" he handed it to Heifetz, murmuring "For you, Jascha". Heifetz returned it. "No, for you, Mischa." This went on for some time. Eventually they decided to open the envelope and read the note. It began: "Dear Fritz". Dohnányi even made fun of his doctors. One pupil remembers a dinner in which the place-setting for Dohnányi was surrounded by medicine bottles. "This one is from my doctor in London", he declared; "this one is from my doctor in Buenos Aires; and this one is from my doctor in New York". He referred to them as his United Nations pills, and they accompanied him on his travels. During one of his recording sessions in London, when the sound engineer complained of a clicking noise in the background which Dohnányi could not hear, and which necessitated several re-takes, it turned out to be a box of "international medicine-pills" in his jacket pocket.[19]

Now that security and freedom were once more a part of his life (he had become an American citizen in 1955), Dohnányi was free to concentrate once more on his international career as a virtuoso pianist. Britain again extended the hand of friendship, and in 1956 Dohnányi was invited to appear at the International Edinburgh Festival. He was also reunited with Sir Adrian Boult, did some BBC broadcasts, and made some of his best commercial recordings in London. This marked the beginning of his international "rehabilitation", and he once more found himself in ever-increasing demand as a soloist. In 1960 he received an invitation to record some of the late Beethoven keyboard works for the Everest label in New York, and set out from Tallahassee, in the company of his wife, to be greeted by the sub-freezing temperatures of Manhattan in early February, 1960. The studios were not properly heated, Dohnányi developed pneumonia, and he suffered a fatal heart attack shortly after committing some late Beethoven compositions to disc.[20]

Dohnányi's last public recital was given in 1959, on the platform of the Opperman Auditorium in Tallahassee. Fortunately that recital was recorded, and

19■ William Lee Pryor: "The Wit and Humor of Ernst von Dohnányi." *Clavier Magazine*. February 1977.

20■ The chief Beethoven works to be recorded were the Sonata in E major, op. 109; the Sonata in A flat major, op. 110; and the "Diabelli" Variations.

the tapes later formed the basis of a 90-minute documentary programme about Dohnányi which I put together while I was a producer at the British Broadcasting Corporation and which contains interviews with a number of his former students and colleagues, including Ilona Kabos, Louis Kentner, Georg Solti, Sir Adrian Boult, Béla Siki, Joseph Weingarten and Bálint Vázsonyi. That is how I was brought into the field of Dohnányi studies, and by extension to the platform of the Opperman Auditorium nearly forty years later to deliver my tribute. For me, a circle has closed.

XIII

What of the future? Let me use this occasion to rally the conscience of the conference and issue a Manifesto. There are five things required to enable Dohnányi to take his proper place among the leading musicians of the 20th century.

1 ■ A Complete Edition of his music, akin to the monumental scholarly editions of Liszt, Chopin, Brahms and Bartók. This would surely serve to promote more performances of his compositions.

2 ■ A Complete Edition of his many letters, hardly any of which have so far been published. They would reveal a musician of uncommon grace, wit, and intelligence, and their publication would lead inevitably to

3 ■ A large-scale biography, in English, which would unfold Dohnányi's remarkable story in the detail which it deserves, and in a language that would carry the message around the world.

4 ■ A Thematic Catalogue of his works, akin to Köchel on Mozart and Kinsky on Beethoven in size and scope.

5 ■ Finally, a luxury, which may be the simplest thing of all to achieve. The establishment of a Dohnányi medal, to be awarded every three years to the best young composer/pianist. You note that I did not say composer or pianist, but "composer/pianist", in keeping with Dohnányi's own tradition. Improvisation and orchestral score-reading at the keyboard must also form part of the requirements.

Is this too large an undertaking? The cause is worthy. The time is ripe. I call on the conference to muster to these ideas, and help to make them a reality. The memory of one of Hungary's greatest musicians deserves no less. ❧

Author's Note: I would like to express my thanks to Dr. Bálint Vázsonyi (Dohnányi's biographer), who gave me some important facts about Dohnányi's early years in Budapest and to Dr. James Grymes (Head of the Dohnányi Archives, Florida State University), who drew my attention to a number of hitherto unpublished sources relating to Dohnányi's post-war years in America and to Dr. Sean Ernst McGlynn (Dohnányi's grandson), who provided me with some personal information about Dohnányi's American family in Tallahassee.

László Vikárius

Bartók and a Natural Phenomenon

Bartók Béla Írásai 3 (Béla Bartók's Writings Vol. 3). *Írások a népzenéről és népzenekutatásról I.* (Essays on Folk Music and Folk Music Research I)
Edited by Vera Lampert and Dorrit Révész. Budapest, Editio Musica, 2000, 446 pp., illustrated with a large number of music examples and facsimiles.

The art of the village must of necessity be spontaneous; when someone tries to meddle in it, and tries to control it artificially, that is the end of the peasant art of the villages as we know it.

Béla Bartók[1]

"Actually, we look upon ourselves as scientists who have chosen a certain phenomenon of nature, folk music, as the object of our investigation." Bartók slipped this reserved but eloquent phrasing of his professional credo into one of his polemic writings. But he did not stop at merely giving a definition: he followed it up with a precise explanation as to why he looked on the study of folk music as a scientific discipline—rather than one of the humanities.

> Because the method of production in the case of the peasantry's cultural products—at least here in Eastern Europe—is altogether different from that of the other social classes. These products can be regarded as natural phenomena, because the creation of their most typical feature—the emergence of markedly homogeneous styles—can only be explained by the instinctive variative skill of large masses of people living in a spiritual community. This variative skill can only be conceived as a natural force of some sort.[2]

Thus it is possible to identify the workings of a natural force in the homogeneous, non-individualistic character of a folk style.

Anyone who looks into this latest volume of Bartók's writings, which contains the better part of his scholarly output, will understand what he, as a student of folk music, meant by scientific method. It was Bartók's concept of the study of folk music that gave rise to heated debates, and this was also why all these debates proved futile. Understandably enough, his opponent, Heinrich Möller, whose anthology of Hungarian folk music Bartók severely criticized in the article cited, described Bartók's scholarly approach as an "analytical-mathematical method".[3] Although Bartók never quite dispensed with aesthet-

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is on the staff of the Budapest Bartók Archives. He is lecturer on the history of Medieval and Renaissance Music at the Musicology Department of the Liszt Academy of Music.

ic considerations (which had originally inspired him), in his collection and classification he focused on statistical data and precise findings. In his articles he studied the structure of the verses, the number of syllables, the types of lines and phrases together with their closing notes, i.e. the cadences, the scales of melodies, typical melodic turns as well as the characteristic features of both rhythm and performance.

His transcriptions bear witness to this approach. In his early publications they were anything but detailed. The musical notation of the first ballads, published with hardly any commentary, is simplified regarding both rhythm and notes (mostly principal notes without ornament were used). A quick comparison between a famous example, the ballad of *"Úti Miska"* (a variant, published here, of the old-style fifth-shifting "peacock-tune" best known from Kodály's orchestral variations), incidentally one that does have ornaments, and the much more detailed notation of the same in *A magyar népdal* (Hungarian Folk Song) should suffice to make the point.[4] Indeed, it was only later that Bartók's notations acquired their microscopic precision, which can be seen in the examples of Turkish tunes also published in this volume.[5] Still, it seems characteristic that from the outset—or at least from an early stage on—Bartók wished to document the actual presentation. Whether or not folk music in general is a subject for the methods of the natural sciences might be open to debate. But from where Bartók looked at it and in the actual way he examined folk song, there seems to be a case for the proposition. When he turned away from the "popular" folk-like art songs as raw material for his compositions, so as to replace them with authentic peasant music, he did more than merely change the object of his interest. Together with Kodály, he fundamentally revised the notion of "the national heritage of folk tunes" by rejecting the consensus concerning this heritage and by rendering it the subject of scholarly study. By also collecting Slovak and Romanian material, and by setting up cautious yet far-reaching hypotheses, he stepped out onto the international scene and expressed his views outside a simply Hungarian framework. Perhaps nowhere else did he present his circumspect and strictly logical method of argumentation more consistently than in the structure and phrasing of his essay "Népzenénk és a szomszéd népek népzenéje" (Hungarian Folk Music and the Folk Music of the Neighbouring Peoples, 1934), also included in the present volume. With its eighty numbered music examples, most of them highly convincing comparisons between folk songs of different ethnicities, the essay not only allows a glimpse into the workings of Bartók's mind, it also pledges support for the notion of a community of the peoples inhabiting the Danube Basin through comparative ethnomusicology, just as he had done in the musical idiom of the *Dance Suite.*[6]

The first volume of Bartók's collected writings was published more than ten years ago, in 1989.[7] Collecting the composer's writings on himself, his compositions and the new movements in Hungarian music, it contained the long-overdue Hungarian publication of one of his most important essays, which was undoubtedly his most extensive analytical piece on contemporary, primarily Hungarian, music and his own compositional tools: the incomplete Harvard lectures of 1943. The series had made a promising start. The fifth volume, which came out second in the series one year after the first, featured Bartók's fundamental study on Hungarian folk music, *A magyar népdal* (Hungarian Folk Song) and, just as for the first volume, the well-known text was accompanied by an intro-

duction and critical commentaries, as well as an entirely new document, the book's original German version. This third volume, which was published in 2000 after extremely drawn-out preparations, also contains previously unpublished versions, and even entire essays.[8] In addition to the 22 major writings (1–15: scholarly pieces and editions of folk songs; 16–22: polemical writings and reviews), there are 10 text variants. Of the entirely new publications, special importance can be attached to no. 10, "A tót népi dallamok" (Slovak Folk Songs, 1920?), no. 12, "Az Adana-vidéki török népzene" (Turkish Folk Music from the Adana Region, 1937) and no. 5a, "A hunyadi román nép tájzenéje" (The Folk Music Dialect of the Hunedoara Romanians, 1914). As an added value, the now published version of the article on Slovak folk music identifies nearly all of the 48 songs in the compilation of examples missing from the original manuscript.[9] The volume competently throws into relief the numerous facets of Bartók's ethnomusicological work. It includes several writings on Hungarian folk music—his studies introducing folk musical instruments (1911–12 and 1917), two of his early pieces on Hungarian folk songs, "A Magyar katonadalok dallamai," (Melodies of the Hungarian Soldiers' Songs, 1918), and "A magyar parasztzene" (Hungarian Peasant Music, 1920), as well as the presentation of his Arab collection from Briskra (1917), and a lecture, "Az úgynevezett bolgár ritmus" (On the So-called Bulgarian Rhythm, 1938), on his "discovery" of the late 1920s with momentous consequences for his compositional work.

The publication of this third volume was placed in the best of hands. Vera Lampert, formerly on the staff of the Bartók Archives who is now based in the United States, took charge of the publication. Her early writing established Lampert as an expert on Bartók as an ethnomusicologist and his compositions based on folk music. The "Lampert Catalogue" of the musical sources of the folk-song arrangements has become an indispensable tool for scholars.[10] As for Dorrit Révész, who is in charge of the complete series of *Bartók Béla Írásai,* and who published *A magyar népdal* (Hungarian Folk Song—BBÍ/5), she was earlier responsible for the production of the four facsimile volumes of Bartók's writings published in the 1960s that made up the series *Ethnomusikologische Schriften,* edited by Denijs Dille.[11]

This new series of Bartók's writings is not meant to replace *Bartók Összegyűjtött írásai* (Bartók's Collected Writings, or *BÖI*), edited by András Szőllősy. That will continue to be the storehouse of information. Thus, for instance, as Vera Lampert herself pointed out in the Foreword, the articles to which Bartók responded in his polemic essays have not been included in the present volume. Had András Szőllősy not already published them in the Appendices of *BÖI,* it would not have been possible to omit them. Therefore, *BÖI* continues to be an indispensable source. The principal aims of the new edition are different: it would be pointless to look for the same goals that Szőllősy's monumental publication had set itself. Nevertheless, they share one objective. Szőllősy had already begun to compare and to separate the numerous text variants. He published the most important writings in the main part of his one-volume edition, but in addition he also included all available published text variants in the notes—usually omitting the parts which would have been exactly the same in the notes as in the main body of the text. But this also conceals the most important conceptual differences. The new editions usually publish complete text variants on the consideration that in the process of rewriting, any new variant of a text is given a new character and new

emphasis. Only the omissions and changes within the different variants are relegated to the notes as comments. (In this regard the volume is entirely consistent with the practice established in Volume 1). However important this changed policy may seem, though, the principal difference between the two publications is that, thanks to major changes in opportunities for research since the Szőllősy edition, the new series has been based on manuscripts (drafts and corrected proofs), rather than on printed and published sources which the earlier edition had relied on. This opens up new possibilities in the discovery of text variants produced in the course of writing and revising manuscripts and, in some cases, even the formative process of the essays can be traced with the help of scattered remarks and sketches. The edition based on manuscripts also makes it possible for, otherwise extremely telling, passages deleted from the actual text to be published in their context. The importance of this was first pointed out by Tibor Tallián through the examples included in his article "Bartók-marginàliák" (Marginal Notes by/to Bartók).[12]

The new series was basically meant to form a "Complete Edition" of Bartók's writings. However, Bartók published several of his works in German, and sometimes also in French, or later in English. In many cases the drafts themselves were produced in a foreign language, mostly in German, but later on in English. Since a collection of all the language variants of Bartók's writings has not been compiled, it is somewhat unfortunate that the editor of the series often has to resort to translations. To have a collection of Bartók's writings published in foreign languages with his approval, writings that are often not readily available by now, seems a justifiable demand. The present undertaking has the special merit of incorporating at least some of the more important first drafts in the language of their composition in the Appendix. In this way writings composed in a foreign language and translated into Hungarian in the book's main text become available in their original form.[13]

The textual editor's (and the series editor's) work, in addition to the choice and the arrangement of the texts to be published, primarily concerns the composition of the notes placed in the appendices of the individual pieces. Besides defining the text, the editors also provide information regarding its first publication—as well as any other major publication that appeared in the composer's own lifetime. While it is perfectly in line with the series' earlier practice that only information concerning *BÖI* and Benjamin Suchoff's edition of *Béla Bartók Essays*[14] are listed under the next heading, Collected Editions, it would have been worth considering adding the new English-language publication, *Studies in Ethnomusicology,* to the list of references. (Comprised of essays on folk music and publishing several important essays of BBÍ/3 for the first time in English, *Studies in Ethnomusicology* can be regarded as the continuation of the Essays.)[15]

From the viewpoint of Bartók research the next heading in the Notes, the list of Manuscript Sources, is especially important. This is where detailed information on the manuscripts held mostly at the Budapest Bartók Archives is first published; it includes references to identified note sheets, first drafts, fair copies and translations. All this, however, only constitutes an inventory of the documents. Their interpretation and dating, as well as the discussion of the circumstances of their origin, are left to the next section, under the heading Commentary; here, in each case, the editors tell the story of the texts' genesis in admirable detail. To add just one comment in connection with a document of lesser impor-

tance, a book review marked no. 22, I would like to point out that according to Pál Gergely, who published an earlier, manuscript form of the article, it had originally been written in the Spring of 1935, at the request of the General Secretary of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.[16]

In the explanations published here we find a general assessment of the text variants, along with a description (or in some cases transcription) of the identified sketch material. How revealing is Bartók's remark, for example, appearing on one of his first drafts made in preparation for his lectures on the methodology of folk-music collection. He specified the need for *eliminating subjectivity*.[17] In the next section, notes related to various places in the text inform us of possible discrepancies between the manuscript and the printed versions, publishing every single correction and omitted passage. The editor's attention was even drawn to the problems regarding the music examples. In the case of the articles on Slovak and Turkish folk music, published here for the first time, data on the individual songs appearing in other publications are also included.[18]

One would occasionally like to find seemingly circuitous explanations even in books concerned with the scrupulously accurate publication of sources, as is the case with this series. If we take "Székely balladák" (Székely Ballads), for example, an explanation as to why we see the remark, "collected by Pál Bodon", over the notation of several folk ballads from Csíkmadaras would seem in order, in view of the fact that Bartók selected these pieces from his own collection. The probable answer to the question lies in a previously unpublished postcard held at the Budapest Bartók Archives. Pál Bodon (1884–1953) was a composer born in Martonvásárhely who, like Bartók, had studied under Koessler. In 1910 he became the director of the conservatory in the town of Kecskemét. Initially Bartók and Kodály tried to win over Bodon (along with László Lajtha and Antal Molnár) to the idea of folk music collection.[19] In the summer of 1907 Bodon agreed to collect folk songs in Csík County—in conjunction with, and presumably following the "intentions" of, "Professor" Bartók, only three years his senior and already a teacher at the Academy. A postcard dated July 22, 1907 from Bodon at Csíkmadaras to Bartók at Csíkrákos, in which the collection of nine ballads is mentioned, sheds light on this.[20]

Volumes 3 and 4, of which the former is the most recent publication, were planned to contain separate articles and lectures under the title *Írások a népzenéről és a népzenekutatásról* (Writings on Folk Music and Folk Music Research).[21] As Lampert points out in her Foreword, the arrangement of the material in the two volumes occasionally entailed the need to split certain topics. The method of selection chosen by her (i.e. scholarly publications in volume 3 and writings for the general public in volume 4) seems very appropriate. It is debatable, however, whether the collection of Serbian and Bulgarian folk songs from the Bánát, published by Denijs Dille in *Documenta Bartókiana* in facsimile, which Bartók himself had distributed in facsimile with a French title and French comments, sending one of the copies to the eminent Bulgarian ethnomusicologist Raina Katzarova in early 1936, would not have been better placed in this volume.[22] None of the other volumes in the series would appear to be more suitable than this one, which, in addition to "scholarly essays" and "polemical writings", also contains "editions of folk songs".

The large number of reproductions in facsimile greatly adds to the value of the volume. In some cases the drafts are so intriguing that more detailed explanations

and captions would have been handy. (Specifically, I would have welcomed a few words of explanation about the comment regarding the musical instrument on page 397.) In most of the cases the editors have obviously made the right decision to publish Bartók's fair copies of music examples in facsimile. Only the Arab notations—especially those made for the Hungarian version of the article—are somewhat more difficult to decipher. In this case alone it would have, perhaps, been wiser to publish a new notation, with sample pages of the original manuscript included. The often extremely complex editorial work is, otherwise, exemplary.

At the end of the book we find an index of names, indispensable in the case of scholarly publications. In view of the fact, however, that the volume contains such voluminous and variegated folk music material, an index of the opening lines of the published tunes, on the analogy of volume 5 containing *A magyar népdal,* would have been convenient. And finally, from my point of view as a musicologist, a subject index would also have been welcome. This could have registered the occurrences of a long list of such terms and notions as *"csujogatás",* folk instruments, or *"hora lunga",* the ancient Romanian folk musical style that fascinated Bartók all his life. But since in the case of volumes 3 and 4, we are dealing with a closely linked pair, further indices referring to both volumes might still be appended to volume 4. This might, of course, lead beyond the scope of the present series and could be regarded as a separate research topic.[23]

One of the special merits of *Bartók Béla Írásai* is that, drawing on all known manuscripts, it contains not only finished documents, but also corrections, discarded ideas and versions. In this way we get a more direct insight into Bartók's point of view, and sometimes even his thought processes. The publication of text variants has the added value of giving readers access to authentic historical documents. Text no. 5a, for example, reconstructs, on the basis of the manuscript, a lecture given by Bartók on March 18, 1914, while the article based on the same lecture and published in *Ethnographia* has also been included in the main body of the text (Text no.5). In the case of the presentation of the Arab collection, the first Hungarian publication was obviously the right choice, rather than a translation of the subsequently produced German text.[24] Naturally, it is very important that we have access to Bartók's writings—classic and regularly quoted texts of Hungarian musicology—in the form they appeared in Bartók's own lifetime. But whenever possible, the series offers a glimpse into the author's original—and sometimes rather offhand—wording. The reason why Bartók regarded the phonograph as indespensable was that, unlike transcription, it preserved folk songs in the uniqueness of performance. In "Miért és hogyan gyűjtsünk népzenét" (Why and How to Collect Folk Music) Bartók wrote:

> From an academic viewpoint only material can be regarded as truly authentic, which is accompanied by a recording. No matter how skilful a transcriber might be, certain finer points [...] simply cannot be captured accurately [...] Therefore, we can in the best of cases hope for a tolerably good transcription, which in the final analysis shows the melody in a form in which it has never really existed.[25]

In a subsequently omitted passage Bartók also went on to describe this never-existing form:

> in one part of which the flourishes heard in one performance will be mixed with flourishes recorded in another performance, and so forth.[26]

The ideas of Bartók the writer are captured, in their uniqueness and directness, not in phonograph recordings but in his manuscript drafts. These may contain some incidental elements, just as a unique performance may do. Their publication is acceptable in this form, in the practice established in this ongoing publication of Bartók's writings, that is documented with careful and exemplary scholarly scrutiny, including well-chosen facsimiles. ❧

NOTES

1 ■ "Népzenénk és a szomszéd népek népzenéje" (Hungarian Folk Music and the Folk Music of Neighbouring Peoples), 1934, *Bartók Béla Írásai* 3. (Béla Bartók Writings Vol. 3, henceforth BBÍ/3), p. 224. For an English edition see Béla Bartók: *Studies in Ethnomusicology.* Selected and Ed. by Benjamin Suchoff. Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press, 1997, pp. 174–240.

2 ■ "Cigányzene? Magyar zene? (Magyar népdalok a német zeneműpiacon)" (Gypsy Music? Hungarian Music? [Hungarian Folksongs on the German music market]), 1931, BBÍ/3. p. 354. For an English translation see "The Bartók-Möller Polemical Interchange" in Bartók: *Studies in Ethnomusicology,* pp. 142–5.

3 ■ Quoted by Bartók: "Viszontválasz Heinrich Möllernek" (A Response to Heinrich Möller), 1932, BBÍ/3, p. 372. For a Hungarian translation see: András Szőllősy (ed.): *Bartók Összegyűjtött Írásai* I (The Collected Writings of Béla Bartók I, henceforth *BÖI*), Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1967, p. 870. Cf. *Studies in Ethnomusicology,* p. 156 and earlier in the English translation of Möller's article, "On the Issue of Publication of Hungarian Folk Songs," ibid., p. 147.

4 ■ For the former, see: "Székely balladák" (Székely Ballads), 1908, BBÍ/3, p. 36, example 12C; for the latter, see Dorrit Révész (ed.): *A magyar népdal* (The Hungarian Folk Song=BBÍ/5). Budapest, Editio Musica, 1990, p. 90. Example 21 ("Romlott testem a bokorba"—I lie wounded in the thicket). English edition: *Hungarian Folk Music.* Trans. M.D. Calvocoressi. Oxford: Oxford, University Press, 1931.

5 ■ Kodály is generally cited as the authority on Bartók's folk music notation. According to him Bartók, starting from a rough and ready sketchy notation, which he repeatedly revised on the basis of phonograph recordings, reached that final limit which a human ear can achieve without using instruments. See: "Bartók the Folklorist," 1950, in *The Selected Writings of Zoltán Kodály.* Budapest, Corvina Press, 1974, p. 107. More recently Sándor Kovács, bringing new points of view to bear, carefully reexamined the relationship of objectivity and subjectivity in Bartók's notation. See: "Wir können sie in drei verschiedene Phasen einteilen': Einige Gedanken über Bartóks Volksliedaufzeichnungen.", *Studia Musicologica* XXVI/3–4 (1995), pp. 381–91.

6 ■ In a letter to Octavian Beu dated January 10, 1931 Bartók referred to his aims in art as "the embodiment of the concept of integration." See János Demény (ed.): *Béla Bartók Letters.* Budapest: Corvina Press, 1971, p. 201.

7 ■ Tibor Tallián (ed.): *Bartók Béla önmagáról, műveiről, az új magyar zenéről, műzene és népzene viszonyáról* (Béla Bartók on Himself. His Works, New Hungarian Music, and the Relationship Between Art Music and Folk Music=BBÍ/1). Budapest, Zeneműkiadó, 1989.

8 ■ András Wilheim (ed.): *Beszélgetések Bartókkal. Interjúk, nyilatkozatok. 1911–1945* (Conversations with Bartók. Interviews and Statements 1911–1945). Budapest, Kijárat Kiadó, 2000, also appeared last year but outside the series and governed by absolutely different editorial principles. Volume 8 of *BBÍ* had originally been planned to include Bartók's interviews.

9 ■ See in greater detail editorial notes to BBÍ/3, p. 203 and also Ferenc Sebő: "Népzene és számítógép. Egy új írásbeliség filológiai problémái" (Folk Music and the Computer. The Scholarly Problems of a New Literacy). In Márta Papp (ed.): *Zenetudományi tanulmányok Kroó György tiszteletére* (Musicological Studies in Honour of György Kroó). Budapest, Magyar Zenetudományi és Zenekritikai Társaság, 1996, pp. 261–262. Ferenc Sebő, who was responsible for setting up *BBÍ*/3, including score graphics, there also discusses methods of identification.

10 ■ Vera Lampert: "Quellenkatalog der Volksliedbearbeitungen von Bartók." In László Somfai

(ed.): *Documenta Bartókiana* 6. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1981, pp. 15–149.

11 ■ The *Ethnomusikologische Schriften* published by Editio Musica Budapest (1965–1968) were new editions of four of Bartók's German folk music books: *Das ungarische Volkslied, Volksmusik der Rumänen von Maramureş, Rumänische Volkslieder aus dem Komitat Bihar* (with post-original publication revisions of the notation by Bartók) and, most importantly, *Melodien der Rumänischen Colinde (Weihnachtslieder)* which, contrary to the German title, included the texts as well—as arranged by Bartók but never published in his lifetime.

12 ■ In *Zenetudományi Dolgozatok*. Budapest, MTA Zenetudományi Intézet, 1979, pp. 35–45.

13 ■ Tibor Tallián, the editor of Vol. 1 of BBÍ, in the case of many of the included writings was able to refer to their publication by László Somfai in the original language. See "Vierzehn Bartók-Schriften aus den Jahren 1920/21. Aufsätze über die zeitgenössische Musik und Konzertberichte aus Budapest." *Documenta Bartókiana* 5. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1977, pp. 15–141.

14 ■ Published in London, Faber and Faber, 1976.

15 ■ See note 1 above. Besides "Népzenénk és a szomszédnépek népzenéje" (Hungarian Folk Music and the Folk Music of Neighbouring Peoples) and the Arab collection, it included a number of prefaces and encyclopaedia entries (previously unpublished in English) and the Möller dispute (the writings of both parties to it). The absence of any reference to this volume is probably explained by publication delays. BBÍ/3 in its original form was ready for the press before *Studies in Ethnomusicology* appeared.

16 ■ "Népzene és népdalok" (Folk Music and Folk Songs) (1936), BBÍ/3, pp. 385–389. See Pál Gergely: "Bartók Béla hét éve a Magyar Tudományos Akadémián". (Béla Bartók's Seven Years at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences), In Ferenc Bónis (ed.): *Magyar Zenetörténeti Tanulmányok Mosonyi Mihály és Bartók Béla emlékére* (Hungarian Musicological Essays in Memoriam Mihály Mosonyi and Béla Bartók). The MS appeared in the 1966 *Közleményei* of Section I of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, pp. 269–279.

17 ■ "Miért és hogyan gyűjtsünk népzenét" (Why and How to Collect Folk Music), 1935–36, *BBÍ*/3, p. 290. The idea is expounded on p. 280. Cited from *Essays*, p. 14.

18 ■ The Turkish recordings appeared on a CD edited by József Birinyi, see Béla Bartók: *Turkish Folk Music Collection. From the Phonograph Archive of the Hungarian Ethnographical Museum*. Hungaroton, 1996, HCD 18218–19.

19 ■ Zoltán Kodály: *Magyar zene, magyar nyelv, magyar vers* (Hungarian Music, Hungarian Language, Hungarian Poetry). Ed. by Lajos Vargyas, Budapest, Szépirodalmi, 1993, p. 238.

20 ■ Unpublished postcard. Bartók Archives. BH–N: 128. Kodály too published—in "Ötfokú hangsor a magyar népzenében" (The Pentatonic Scale in Hungarian Folk Music)—folk songs collected by Bodon in Csík in 1907. See Kodály: *Visszatekintés* (Looking Back) Vol. II. Ed. by Ferenc Bónis. Zeneműkiadó, 1982, p. 68 and also *Erdélyi magyar népdalok* (Transylvanian Hungarian Folk Songs, jointly authored with Bartók) 1922, reprinted in 1987 by Zeneműkiadó. The Preface draws attention to this fact.

21 ■ Vol. 6 and 7 of the series are scheduled to include a collection of the introductions of major ethnomusicological works under the heading *Népzenei tanulmányok* (Folk Music Studies).

22 ■ This refers to "Musique paysanne serbe et bulgare du Banat", which publishes twenty-eight folk songs collected in March and November 1912. See Denijs Dille (ed.): *Documenta Bartókiana* 4. Budapest, Akadémiai, 1970, pp. 221–244. Dille also published correspondence between Bartók and Katzarova (pp. 165–172). A letter written to Vinko Žganec in connection with work on the collection (December 23, 1935) is found on p. 516 of *Bartók Béla levelei* (Béla Bartók Letters). Ed. by János Demény. Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1976

23 ■ Both *Essays* and *Studies in Ethnomusicology* contain helpful indexes of persons and subjects, something that unfortunately cannot be said about Szőllősy's almost 950 page-long publication. That makes do with a table of contents.

24 ■ Different notations in two-line score format, which gives a more immediate picture of the music by showing both melody and percussion accompaniment in each of the examples, have been taken from the MS of the German article and are printed as an appendix.

25 ■ *BBÍ*/3 p. 279. For an English translation of the whole article, see *Essays*, pp. 9–24.

26 ■ *BBÍ*/3 p. 290.

Paul Griffiths

Bartók's Eyes

István Gaál: *Gyökerek* (Roots) • Béla Bartók: Solo Piano Music 7. Philips 289 464 639

At a time when, in the wake of Wagner the arts were supposed to be coming together, Bartók seems to have given rather little heed to what he saw. He did not, like Debussy, try to evoke impressions of the visible world by means of sound: even *Bluebeard's Castle* is not an exception to this, for the sonic eruptions that come from the orchestra, a new one for each opened door, are not suggestive prompts to the visual cortex but wholesale replacements of sight by hearing, moments that overwhelm us with self-sufficient auditory information. Nor did Bartók, like Schoenberg, paint—or, like Stravinsky, Sibelius and Varèse, associate with painters. And the journeys he made were all to hear.

The paucity of the seen in his life would appear to make him an unlikely subject for a documentary film, and yet István Gaál's *Roots,* in three hour-long parts, is an extraordinarily successful biography of the composer, partly because it makes a virtue of the sobriety Bartók's life imposes on it.

It is a film for the ears—rather like a radio programme with quiet illustrations. The focus is firmly on what is heard: music, of course, both Bartók's and that of the villages he visited, and words that, too, were his, for the entire script is skillfully put together from his letters and other writings, spoken in English as a voice-over. The fact that no other witnesses are called—and in particular that there are no talking heads on screen—gives the film a quite unusual visual calm. It also suggests the emotional isolation in which Bartók seems to have lived. And because we hear only his point of view (and only the point of view he was prepared to trust to paper), the episode of his remarriage comes across as abrupt and mysterious—like an episode in one of his scores.

The roots to which the film's title alludes are, of course, those of his music. These roots are demonstrated with breathtaking immediacy, often simply by placing together a folksong recording (some of Bartók's own are heard) and his adaptation. Exemplary performances are provided by Jenő Jandó, Zoltán Kocsis and Dezső Ránki, performances heard complete, and subtly and simply filmed.

Here a long parenthesis has to be entered, for Mr Kocsis has just finished his complete recording of Bartók's solo piano music —a pictureless movie, as it were, in seven long parts, this last—Philips 289 464 639—including works from rather early in the

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composer's career as well as one startling masterpiece from much later. The early items include the Four Pieces of 1903—a very miscellaneous set that includes a rhetorical rhapsody for left hand and a scherzo that, with its gnomic turns and ostinatos and sudden changes of colour, is much more distinctly Bartókian—and the composer's transcription of the funeral march from his tone poem Kossuth of the same year. Unsurprisingly, these are not pieces Bartók chose to keep in his active repertory, and Mr. Kocsis bravely confesses that he would not have undertaken them "if he had not been compelled to do so by the need to finish this complete edition of Bartók's piano music".

But if compulsion suggests something heavy-hearted and weak-willed, that is not at all the effect of his performances. As he also says in his fascinating notes (complemented by others from the doyen of Bartók scholars, László Somfai), "these works call not so much for analysis as for help". And help he supplies, in abundance. It is a matter of treating the pieces frankly, as the wide-shooting outbursts of a young man full of creative energy that was, as yet, undirected. Then it is a matter of understanding that young man to have been Bartók—of finding in it what is personal and strong and suggestive. These late juvenilia are not likely to be recorded again too often. Nor need they be.

Still, the major pieces are the later ones. Scrupulous for completion, Mr. Kocsis includes two versions of the Rhapsody op.1: the original "long version" of 1905 and the "short version" he let his publisher issue three years later. This means that the same ten minutes or so of music are included twice over, but nobody should feel this to be a problem when the disc is so full (playing for over 76 minutes) and when Mr. Kocsis takes the opportunity to offer subtly different ways of doing things. In both versions he is, again, full of ideas that have the music springing to life in full Bartókian character—moments when the notes just blur together into a gesture, whether rapturous or full of foreboding.

An even more amazing achievement is the one fully mature piece on the record, for who knew that the Dance Suite was a great piano composition? Thus it indeed appears. Mr. Kocsis has a marvellous way of performing so that the music is filled with bodily energy but not hindered by what comes naturally: you hear the notes at play, not the fingers. And superb notes these are in the Dance Suite. Never for a moment does one feel the lack of orchestral colour, so precise and various are Mr. Kocsis's piano timbres. And the single view of phrasing and harmonic balance is excellent to hear when it is so thoroughly considered and so frankly presented. Mr. Kocsis does not need to persuade: there is nothing rampant in his performance, just complete conviction and magnificent completeness of form and detail.

Much the same qualities of honesty, intelligence and willingness to serve are there in Mr. Gaál's film, which wisely avoids the pitfalls of putting an ensemble or orchestra on the small screen by confining itself to its beautiful piano sequences by Mr. Kocsis and his colleagues, where music is allowed to shine through undisturbed. However, excerpts from quartets and orchestral works are heard on the soundtrack, and there are archival snips from the stage works, including a powerful passage from *The Miraculous Mandarin* in a Budapest production of the 1950s.

Such things will be a revelation to non-Hungarian audiences—similarly the wonderful shots of places where Bartók worked and walked, especially in Transylvania. With its wide green meadows hung between mountains and its springtime streams bubbling over ice, the film offers glimpses of an idyll and suggests that, after all, Bartók did have his eyes keenly open. ❧

Tamás Koltai

Ferenc Molnár and his Afterlife

Ferenc Molnár: *Játék a kastélyban* (The Play's the Thing); *A testőr* (The Guardsman); *Liliom* • Andor Szilágyi: *El nem küldött levelek* (Unsent Letters) • *A vészmadár* (The Croaker) • Péter Kárpáti: *Pájinkás János* (John Brandison)

April the 1st will be the 50th anniversary of the death of the internationally best known Hungarian playwright of the 20th century, Ferenc Molnár, in suite 835 of the Plaza Hotel in New York. His plays were performed all over the world in the first half of his century. The best of them are still in repertory, revived by companies that put their faith in elegant and entertaining plays. Twenty-six films and three musicals have been based on his plays in America. Naturally, Molnár is the most freqently performed Hungarian playwright in Hungary, too. It was only for a short period in the first half of the fifties that theatres were advised to ignore him, when Communist cultural policy identified him as a representative of "exploiting capitalist society".

Now that the anniversary is coming closer, Molnár productions are multiplying. Out of a huge dramatic oeuvre of forty-two plays, a small segment (ten plays or so) are continuously (and alternately) on stage. Some years ago, the "suburban legends" (first *The Glass Shoes,* then *Liliom*) were in fashion. More recently, it has been plays in middle-class settings *(The Play's the Thing, The Violet, The Guardsman, The Devil, The Wolf)* that have been staged, some in more than one production. They are redolent of the atmosphere of salons, spas, manager's offices, elegant restaurants, sumptuous homes and the writer's favourite setting, the theatre. These productions usually go down well with audiences, despite their usually superficial quality. This raises the question of the need to change the style of performing Molnár.

Audiences today are accustomed to radical changes in the performing style of most classical writers. None would be surprised to see Shakespeare's history plays, Molière's comedies, or even the Greek classics, Goldoni or Schiller in contemporary settings, the text in counterpoint to the scenic effects. More astonishingly, yet accepted, the great naturalists or expressionists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in all their diversity, have also been altered on the stage. Social dramatists such as Ibsen are now "contemporary": *The Doll's House* was recently produced in Budapest set in a middle-class home, in contemporary costume, with

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marital sexuality and the physical fit of the Platonic lover losing control of himself displayed in a manner that was unimaginable earlier. Chekhov's plays are no longer conversations between pensive characters in birch groves or in dim corners, they are now harsh physical and psychological clashes, often literally so. The latent eroticism of the Wedekind plays or the social misery of Hauptmann's works is presented more openly than ever. Even the plays of later dramatists such as Arthur Miller, who sought a rhetoric based on the classical Greek drama, are being stripped of their literary verbalism, to be replaced by some primitive ritualism (a recent production of *The Crucible* here is a good example).

So how about Molnár? Shakespeare's royal courts have long ceased to be royal courts on stage, but can the court of Molnár's archduke undergo this change? Style is integral in Molnár's plays. The style of the venues and behaviour represented. The furniture, chandeliers, mirrors, tableware, costumes; the etiquette, aristocratic manners, often the target of ridicule; the ritual of entries, bows, hand-kissing; the deportment of those costumes; the proprieties of sitting down in them; the way a dinner is served; a butler's attitude to his master, the waiter's to the guest; the theatre director's to the great actor, the chorus-singer's to the mediocre actor, the primadonna's to her dresser. The style of the Molnár plays is tied to his own age, just as that of Oscar Wilde, or to a lesser extent, Bernard Shaw's is. Isn't this style outdated now? Where has that lofty, gallant, subtly ironic manner gone? Where have the gallantry, wit and charm, the ceremonial of salons, mansions, dressing-rooms and restaurants gone? Gone from life, and gone from the stage. It is not to be seen in the real world any more, and it can hardly be acted out authentically on stage. It is no longer taught in drama schools. Then why force it? So far so good, but what remains of Molnár's salon-naturalism without the salon?

In the production of *The Play's the Thing* at the Katona József Theatre in Budapest some years ago, the mansion (the Hungarian title includes the word) was demolished. A geometric stage was built in its place. In the recent revival of *The Guardsman* by the Madách Theatre's studio, the middle-class drawing-room and operatic box were replaced by Art Nouveau scenery on a revolving stage. The play concerns a jealous actor who seeks out a guards officer to test his actress wife's fidelity and acts out the role. Both comedies are the apotheoses of acting, of the stage. In the former, a makeshift play, in the latter a role solve the conflicts of life. Illusion is more real than life, Molnár says. We must believe that in the room behind the wall, that what takes place is not love-making but a rehearsal, and we must believe that the actress does not recognize her husband courting her in costumes and mask. Or we needn't necessarily believe it. It is also part of the game that those taken in are aware of the ruse but pretend not to. Part of Molnár's elegance is his double- or triple-entendre.

The productions mentioned, however, show no trace of it. The writer in *The Play's the Thing*—Molnár's alter ego—is no juggler of wit but a narcissistic poseur; the actor in *The Guardsman* is not a nonchalant virtuoso but a hulking monster hamming up his role. It is hard to know for sure whether current productions deliberately disclose the illusion, or illusion itself vanishes in a reality devoid of subtlety, elegance, wit. At any rate, Molnár is put in quotation marks. The same goes for a third production, *Liliom.* This poetic legend of the urban fringe was put in a frame by the Krétakör Theatre Company.

They performed it as a sideshow on a stage lined by velvet curtains, with orchestra and clown-faced actors singing cabaret songs between scenes. Banishing the dogma of style, it revealed that Molnár could be performed differently.

It would be good to be able to note at this point that Molnár has successors in contemporary Hungarian dramatic writing. But he hasn't. Middle-class social comedy, to which Molnár so much contributed, lives on through British (Alan Ayckbourn) and American (Neil Simon) writers. There are sidelines, though. It could be demonstrated that Molnár's playful stage metamorphoses influenced Andor Szilágyi's *Unsent Letters,* written some years ago and revived recently. As did a sense of hopeless alienation typical of Harold Pinter's plays, such as *The Lover* or *The Betrayal*. (Is it too far-fetched to show how Molnár influenced these two Pinter plays, especially *The Lover?*) The characters in Szilágyi's two-handed play are called Angelus and Angelika, they meet at a railway station, a tempestuous passion is kindled in them, and this inspired moment apparently determines their whole life. They never meet again, but write letters to each other throughout their lives (without mailing them). The play is a sequence of imaginary meetings materialized in the letters, and since every correspondence is one-sided—the other side only exists for the writer or recipient of the letter—the lovers never recognize each other. The venue is always the same (fictitious) railway station where trains pass by each other, just as Angelus and Angelika do. The plot is complicated by a dramaturgical twist, also used by Pinter in *The Betrayal,* that of a reversed chronology. The play begins with the last event in time when the persons are old, and moves backwards. The last scene is their first meeting.

We have a poetic play with style here, the tone is sentimental and ironic, the dialogue is fluent and frivolous, and that is perhaps what brings *Unsent Letters* most closely to Molnár. Besides the fact that it ignores reality. The actors live in a self-made reality and, in this sense, the play is timeless and eternally valid. This production was by the studio of the Budapest Thália Theatre, the director was Sándor Guelmino, who made his debut in a lyrical tone, perhaps with somewhat less humour that it might have had.

The comedy entitled *The Croaker* presented in the Bárka Theatre drew more heavily on classical farce, Georges Feydeau and his followers—Marc Camoletti and Ray Cooney—than on Molnár's comedy of middle-class mores. It was probably inspired by Cooney's farce, *Out of Order,* which has had a long and successful run in Budapest for years now (and, adapted to a Hungarian context, also filmed). Here the situation is almost the same. There a minister, here a senior official has an assignation which would come to light if an apparent corpse is not cleared out of the way. The bigwig and his secretary are desperately working on a solution, but end up by producing a whole range of new farcical situations. The dramatic novelty is that running parallel with the knock-about farce, a political plot is also taking place. The official is corrupt, and a businessman appears at the worst moment with a plastic-bag full of money and the police at his heels. Eventually they try to hide the sham corpse in the museum, which is the venue of the opening of the tenders for a major (and corruption-imbued) investment. The announcement of the tender attended by the prime minister ends up in a scandal: the "corpse" comes to life, so it has to be made to vanish. (In the folk ballad, *The Walled-up Wife,* the wife of

the master builder is walled in to prevent the collapse of the wall—the castle is built on human sacrifice.) When all difficulties are smoothed out, the participants drown their joy in drink and in shooting at museum exhibits.

Being a farce, it doesn't have to be taken seriously. It's a joke. The details are, of course, familiar to the audience. Is there any country averse to similarly presented moments in public life? Still, those who are in power in a democracy would not take it amiss, and the "National Castle" (the name of the competitive tender in the play) would not fall apart.

The playbill says the production was written by István Mohácsi, János Mohácsi and the Company, and that it was directed by János Mohácsi. We know that for this director collective work means a carefully written script for a start which is gradually transformed, extended, embellished, paraphrased during rehearsals, with the active involvement of the cast. The outcome is a heap of puns, aphorisms—above which maybe the spirit of Molnár may hover, too—and an endless row of gags, which work like clockwork.

The studio stage of the Vígszínház presented Péter Kárpáti's fairytale for adults, *Pájinkás János* (John Brandison), an alloy of peasant folklore and surrealistic fancy. It would be nice to root this in Molnár, too, who wrote several fantasy tales especially in the last third of his life *(Waxwork, The Emperor, The King's Maid),* without much success and thus rarely performed. However, there isn't much ground for this. The source of Kárpáti's tale is a Gypsy story-teller called Lajos Ámi, who told them during the First World War, as a prisoner-of-war in Russia. He wove the elements of the reality of that particular time into fairy stories. The protagonist of the play is an archetypical figure of traditional tales: the youngest boy, the smallest prince, the poorest man reared on brandy instead of mother's milk. But he is also the victorious mythical hero, who refuses the young Czarina's hand. Everything is due to him: inventions, constructions, industrialisation, social movements, revolutions, wars and peace. The story of *Pájinkás János* is actually an ironic travesty of the myth of Prometheus the fire-giver. Or, as the creators of the production said, it is the story "of man who has produced a series of technical achievements over the millenia, and with the help of his mind constantly in search of something new, and with his indefatigable activity arrived at a truly enthralling amount of knowledge—and total irrationality and moral chaos—by the end of the millennium.

The active hero has his opposite, lazy Nemtudomka (No-know) whose reply to everything is "I don't know", yet flowers sprout and life is revived wherever she goes. The two walk their paths side by side, inseparable, thus creating an ambivalent world harmony.

Director Péter Forgács and his cast have a tiny space to create a colourful kaleidoscope from the symbiosis of fact and fancy, and they do so imaginatively indeed. The story-teller, Lajos Ámi, who sings magical Gypsy songs, cooks a fantastic chicken paprika with dumplings and cream cheese in the meantime, and at the end of the performance the result is offered to the audience. ❧

Erzsébet Bori

A Week of Promise

Film Week 2002

György Pálfi: *Hukkle* • Szabolcs Tolnai: *Arccal a földnek* (Face Down) • Ibolya Fekete: *Chico* • Gábor Dettre: *A felhő a Gangesz felett* (Cloud Above the River Ganges) • András Dér: *A kanyaron túl* (Beyond the Bend) • Ildikó Szabó: *Chacho rom* • Zoltán Kamondi: *Kísértések* (Temptations)

This year's Hungarian Film Week was pale: no sign of a masterpiece, nothing particularly outstanding. But this was a strong Film Week in both the number and quality of the films on display: development, vitality and the justification for domestic production were demonstrated. These were the two conflicting reactions to the feature films of the 2002 Film Week.

First, the hard facts. Boundaries were broken down: the number of features came to more than thirty; the number of shorts and documentaries in the programme had to be restricted; there were protests that the structure of the Film Week couldn't go on in its present form. The formula is simple: the Film Week is feature film oriented. It always was, but as long as no more than twenty films were being shown (of which half a dozen at the most were interesting) there was time left to pay attention to shorts and documentaries too. But if you have to watch more than twenty films over four days...

Film Week is a time for summing up. This is when the previous year's distribution figures, up to then shrouded in silence, and the reaction of foreign festivals come to light. The overwhelming consensus that the world isn't interested in Hungarian films, demoralizing to the producers, film-makers (and critics), and that Hungarians don't watch Hungarian films, seems to be coming unhinged. A hundred thousand viewers is no longer a once in a decade wonder, the main body of film-goers has grown ten times in comparison to the earlier number of admissions usually fluctuating between 700 and 7000 (and achieved with one or two prints of a film). Production, distribution, viewing and watchable films are now elements built onto one another. In order to get the public aroused, you need good films and/or a strong name. The latter is the more difficult. After all, for popularity you need awareness (continuous presence) on the cinema or television screen, but if there aren't many films, and television being what it is, the circle closes. Public opinion dates the crisis in Hungarian film to recent years, but with hindsight we can now see the situation as much worse: with the exception of one or two great directors, no one could have built up a film-maker's career here. The process is hectic: the fate of a film project or screen-

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play depends on pure chance, promising ideas never come to life. A decent success is no guarantee for the next film, a flop can have consequences that last for years. Even sadder is that whole generations have faded from the scene without the opportunity to make their name.

Given this, the appearance of young directors, with their first or second films, seems encouraging: the start of a career, the ability to stay on. Also it maintains the fact that there is life beyond the film academy and the big studios: there are workshops, communities, ivory towers and country fortresses... However almost unnoticed, the former strong bastion, the Balázs Béla Studio, their important state-financed workshop for experimentation. has quietly signed itself out from among them. The arrival of watchable films and films that find a niche audience has put a deserved end to the bogus debate over popular as against art film.

How thirty full-length feature films came to be made when the Hungarian Film Foundation (MMA) has to manage on a budget which shrinks year by year is a fascinating question. The annual budget for feature films is just about $1.5 million (the cost of a single decent video clip in the West); due to the opposition of film-makers, the state moneybags, under the cover name of a Film Centre, weren't opened. Meantime, private capital is held back by the claim that to produce Hungarian films, to invest in Hungarian films, means a guaranteed loss. I don't want to answer the question, nor am I in a position to do so. I can see with my own eyes, however, that recent films don't thrust certificates of poverty under audience's noses: the days of cheap movies when everyone involved was moonlighting are now over.

The lineup of young, first and second time directors was remarkably strong. Their films, so varied in themes and styles, would deserve a separate report. Here I just want to mention the most unusual of the debut films, which György Pálfi directed. *Hukkle* (the title is untranslatable, formed from the onomatopoeic word for hiccup, not to be found in any dictionary) is almost a silent film; there is no dialogue, simply ambient noise, clanking, animal and human sounds and some (incomprehensible) snatches of conversation. This itself would be enough to draw attention to György Pálfi's work. We are led into a village idyll, where man and animal live side by side in perfect harmony with nature. But beneath this bucolic surface, a ruthless struggle for existence is going on, a war between the species (and the sexes). A single hiccup (hence the title) brings mass destruction to the industrious ant society. For the young mole, the old woman's hoe is a guillotine. And once the food chain gets going who knows where it will come to a end... The fly is taken by the frog, the frog by the pike, the pike by the poacher, who returns contentedly with his booty to his own loving family circle. I won't reveal the end because *Hukkle* is a crime film, the chronicle of serial murder, at the end of which everything comes to light. Almost everything. Telling a story without words made great demands on those involved (Tamás Zányi mixed the sound, Gergely Pohárnok did wonders with the camera), because there's no beating around the bush here, no chance to use dialogue for what they can't say in pictures.

The originality of *Hukkle* cannot be doubted, though we have seen a similar film, *Our Stork* (Livia Gyarmathy's European Prize-winning short). A practically silent film, it featured village people and animals, who are sometimes surprisingly similar, and this produced some extremely funny pictures and associations of ideas.

This is not nit-picking, this is praise. There are more and more signs that the new cinema, whether it aims to go deep or is content with the surface, does not look to Hollywood. Now that everything from Hollywood is released here more or less at the same time as in Western Europe, the set-up is beginning to change: not only have the ticket touts lost out, so too have the suburban Scorseses, fledgling Tarantinos and pocket Lynches. It's to everyone's advantage that the gangsters' world has faded from our screens and the cops have been squeezed into a subordinate role.

A first film is a big thing; it is surrounded by friendly interest, special attention, even the severest criticism keeps its claws in. (In order to extend them when the second film comes around.) This year Ibolya Fekete, Kornél Mundruczó, and Szabolcs Tolnai presented their second full-length features. I'll start with Tolnai because his *Face Down* is not strictly his second film, his debut having been an amateur film (*Summer Movie*, 1998). But you could tell from this film, shot in his own country, the region around Kishegyes, that there was more to be told here. This is a province of Yugoslavia inhabited by Serbs and Hungarians, in its Tolnai-style depiction. In this borderland of a federal state on the point of collapse (in its prime it was only of middling size and significance), in the hinterland of the war underway next door, from where the young men are dragged off to the battlefield by force. They are not really trusted, this suspicious Hungarian minority, but they'll do as cannon fodder. The ones at home, those who have returned already, the ones who didn't make the grade and the deserters, not finding their places, roam about at a loss on the rich land of the Bácska. Between Tolnai's two films, one of the Balkan wars comes to an end, another one has started and is brought to an end (in Kosovo), the federation has shrunk into a dwarf state, a regime has fallen, a dictator has been removed from power. In the borderlands there is peace and a void. Our hero gets himself out of military service in a more or less foreign army through the good old method of going nuts, and returns to his home town. Where almost everyone is nuts, and for real. *Face Down* reminds me a little of a Krleza novel, *The Return of Philip Latinovicz.* It's as if our hero is looking on his estranged native soil with the eyes of someone from afar. Wildly surrealist things and figures thrive among the delapidated sets. When we set out in an unworldly vehicle, a decrepit rail-bus, travelling from Szabadka (Subotica) to Szeged, in Southern Hungary, carrying an entire brass band, we have to wake up to the fact that we are bound together irrevocably with Kusturica's Balkania.

Ibolya Fekete carried on where her film *Bolshe Vita* left off—with the Yugoslav war. She took on Providence itself by taking on an adventurous war film set in many countries and across several eras. The result didn't only do justice to her, it also proved that talent and enthusiasm alone are not sufficient to carry out a large-scale plan.

Chico was born in Bolivia, his father was a Jew from Hungary, his mother belonged to the local establishment. He was raised in a dual world of Catholic and communist ideas. After the putsch he breathes in the air of revolution in Chile, his family is forced into exile by Pinochet's bloody dictatorship. The next stop is Hungary, but Kádár's goulash dictatorship is too soft for a professional revolutionary: he goes to the Soviet Union to study, straight to the KGB school from which he returns disillusioned and enters the service of the Ministry of the Interior. By this time the Red Brigades and the RAF terrorists are on the rampage in Germany and Italy,

and the great Carlos himself directs Chico's affairs from this new vantage point of world revolution. Then Gorbachev comes onto the scene, the Soviet regime falls, the Berlin Wall comes down. Our hero shoots a report film in Albania, then travels to Jerusalem to seek his identity. He is reporting on the outbreak of the Balkan war when he makes an about-turn: swapping his camera for a Kalashnikov, he fights as a volunteer in the Croatian army forming up against Serb aggression. He fights in Slavonia, a province also inhabited by Hungarians, at the head of an international brigade that awakens reminiscences of the Spanish Civil War.

Ibolya Fekete began as a documentary film-maker, her features show her ability to create authentic figures and situations. Presumably lack of production money was the reason why one or two chapters of this eventful life are little more than illustration. The archive and documentary footage interwoven into the story say more. The other drawback in the depiction of Chico's story is an excessive demand to catch everything in the act. The hero is there at every milestone, every historical change of fortune, he personally goes down the paths of the ideologies—communism, world revolution and ("existing") socialism. This is not a man's life, it's a paradigm with clothes on. As far as I'm concerned, the best moments are not those when Chico revolves on the stage of world history, but when he just gazes into the world and doesn't know what's what. For instance in Albania, where he really has no business to be. Or in Jerusalem, where he is trying to find himself. In all the coming and going and searching, it's as if the discovery would be overlooked. Chico was searching for a great cause and he found a small place, a village called Szentlászló. I've got dozens of problems with this film and yet ... I admire Ibolya Fekete's ambition and boldness immensely. It's not just Hungarian, it's that the cinema as a whole has turned its back on the "big" questions of our time; now along comes a Hungarian director, without a bean to her name, just an axe which she drives into the sky-high tree.

Among the different topics, only the more forceful presence of the Roma and drugs stood out. Of the two drug films, Gábor Dettre's unfortunately wasn't able to avoid naturalism. This depiction of the physical and mental reactions to detoxification would perhaps have been more acceptable in a documentary, in which case we would have been spared a fictitious story and affected dialogue. *Cloud Above the River Ganges* seemed to want to put on film the theory that those who didn't get enough love and care in childhood turn to drugs. In other words, to come off the stuff is not entirely hopeless: we only have to watch out that we don't die before getting hold of the necessary amount of tenderness from heroin. The good thing about the heroin addict and the woman escaping from a bad marriage getting together is that it is accidental and illogical; the more they try to prop it up with the means of psychological realism, the more unstable it becomes. The boy (perfect proof of his inability to grow up) wants to go to India; he is tempted by visions of ritual cleansing in the Ganges. The two actors (Zoltán Ternyák and Ildikó Tóth) struggle heroically and make this extremely long film watchable.

András Dér's work, about unhappy people submerged in alternative music and drugs and their relationship with a fanatic priest—also promised to be an ordeal to those who still remember the metaphysical hell of *The Shadows of the Century (1992).* Yet *Beyond the Bend* is a surprisingly down-to-earth film, on account of the character of the priest who wants to bring the central figures back to the life of this world

from the transcendence of drugs. Sándor Csukás's camera follows in reality the path that the story follows symbolically: from descent to ascent.

Gypsies have come into fashion, we might say, though that's not (only) what it's about. Naturally we meet the subjects on everyone's lips, all over the printed and the electronic media, and so in films as well. In the wake of minority programmes and assistance, we become acquainted with the concept of ethno-business. There is a positive (though cynical) interpretation to this morally reprehensible practice: it helps escaping from quarantine, from being an underdog, if more and more people consider that to be a Gypsy means good business and prestige. If we look at the thing pragmatically, it doesn't hurt the Roma to get into mainstream culture, and it's also true that films paint a lot more favourable picture of them than today's media. It's a new development that Roma, are being asked to play Roma parts, which means the directors don't want to bring the Gypsy archetype or stereotype to the screen (in which case the Hungarian actor is the logical choice) but a person who happens to be a Gypsy. Yet if we take a closer look at the image of the Roma, in contemporary Hungarian film, we'll have less reason to be pleased. We are still treading the stony ground of the stereotype, and there was a case when someone cried racism from the sterile viewpoint of political correctness.

Ildikó Szabó's film is slightly over-the-top from the point of view of the Roma cause. The idea must have originated at the time of her film *Bitches,* some six years ago. Not a long time, but it has brought a lot of changes in the Gypsy question. *Chacho Rom* builds its own Roma image on the only positive judgement up until recent times: Gypsies are an exceptionally exotic, romantic people; you can't set them to work because that is as alien to them as respect for private property, their souls are full of music and they love freedom. In other words, the reason we put up with Gypsies, perhaps even like them, is because Hungarians are supposed to be able to have a really good time only to their music.

There's no royal road. The solution will be that the Roma take their own fate in hand, they will control and chose the discourse; they'll make films and criticize films.

"Chaco rom" means a true man in Romany. The starting point of the story is the Habsburg Archduke Joseph's interest in Gypsies: he learnt their language, edited a dictionary and settled Romanies on his estate. The film follows the coexistence (involving love, hate, misunderstanding and conflicts) of the Roma and Hungarians down through generations of the archducal family up to the Roma holocaust. Unfortunately, '*Chaco Rom* bleeds from several wounds. If I say it's eclectic, I haven't said enough, after all that is a style. Ildikó Szabó's film on the other hand didn't manage to find a style of its own. This is the fundamental problem; one could have taken on everything else: a story with many strands, many characters and covering an extended span of time, the to-ing and fro-ing in time, the change of viewpoints, the blending and separating of the different layers of portrayal, and the mixing of reality and imagination, history and myth, pictures and symbols. The story of the first generation and its members is well-drawn, the spectacle delightful. (When was such an expensive period film made here last?) But then the mechanism gets going, rumbles across later generations, making it difficult to detect who's who and who is what to whom; characters are replaced by historical roles, and finally we come face to face with the director's

own portrayal of the holocaust. Music could have done a lot to ease the confusion, but Ildikó Szabó was unable to decide what kind of music she wanted: the famous Gypsy music played for the entertainment of "gentlemen", or the quite different music that they played for themselves. Thus apart from the few classic pieces of gypsy violin music, a stylised kind of music is heard throughout. *Chaco Rom* seems to be several different films. I prefer the beautiful romantic story of the first part.

Temptations by Zoltán Kamondi is so far his most restrained film. At the centre is a love triangle, or rather quadrangle. Three women: the mother, the girlfriend and a Gypsy girl are fighting over a hero who is quite unable to choose between them, not knowing who he is himself. He could consider himself lucky to have so many lives open to him: living off his mother in affluence and comfort, a respectable career with his degree in informatics, or, on the fringe of society, earning millions through computer crime; he could live with a pretty girl bent on earthly pleasures, or he could dive into the unknown with a little Gypsy girl. Marci, however, is more preoccupied with finding himself. It seems Kamondi here was more interested in the relationships between characters: this makes the film's tracing relatively simple and clear—not dominated as in his previous films by mystic-gothic motifs, cultural references and quotations and emblematic elements of scenes. The figures are well-depicted, especially Juli Básti's mother, from whom separation would really be difficult. The boy does not know who his father is. His mother eventually tells him, but on the condition that he must not let the man know he is his son. This makes for an interesting situation. It wasn't in vain that Kamondi toured the country making his documentary series *Magyar tarka* (Hungarian Speckled Variety). The knowledge he accumulated of life and people fills the space left free by the theoretical constructions he had previously relied on.

So, what was this Film Week, in which we didn't discover any outstanding piece, like? We didn't find anything outstanding because the main body was so strong, most of the players did exceptionally well. And we were able to witness a real breakthrough. Last year's Film Week took place in a confrontation with authority. The filmmakers thrust away the hand that fed them, they wanted none of state paternalism, instead they took their places behind the camera. To bring to the public about twenty-five good, watchable, films worthy of note within the most impecunious, least representative Film Week of all time is no small feat. Something which would have been unthinkable in the past thirteen years: the emancipation of Hungarian film. ❧

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I saw many splendid things and learnt much in England, but it is not a pleasant country [...] England is as beautiful as a park, extraordinarily rich, and therefore does everything splendidly on a colossal scale. In great things she has many practical ideas, but in much is very narrow-minded, stupid and lacking in taste. The food is bad and very expensive, the language is spoken hideously and badly, the women are not beautiful, their legs are like those of elephants, their toilette is like that of monkeys, the climate is not good, and in short: the English are the world's leading nation and in many respects are barbarians.

From an 1884 letter by Ágoston Trefort, Minister of Education, in A Portfolio of Hungarian Letters, *pp. 40–63.*

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