

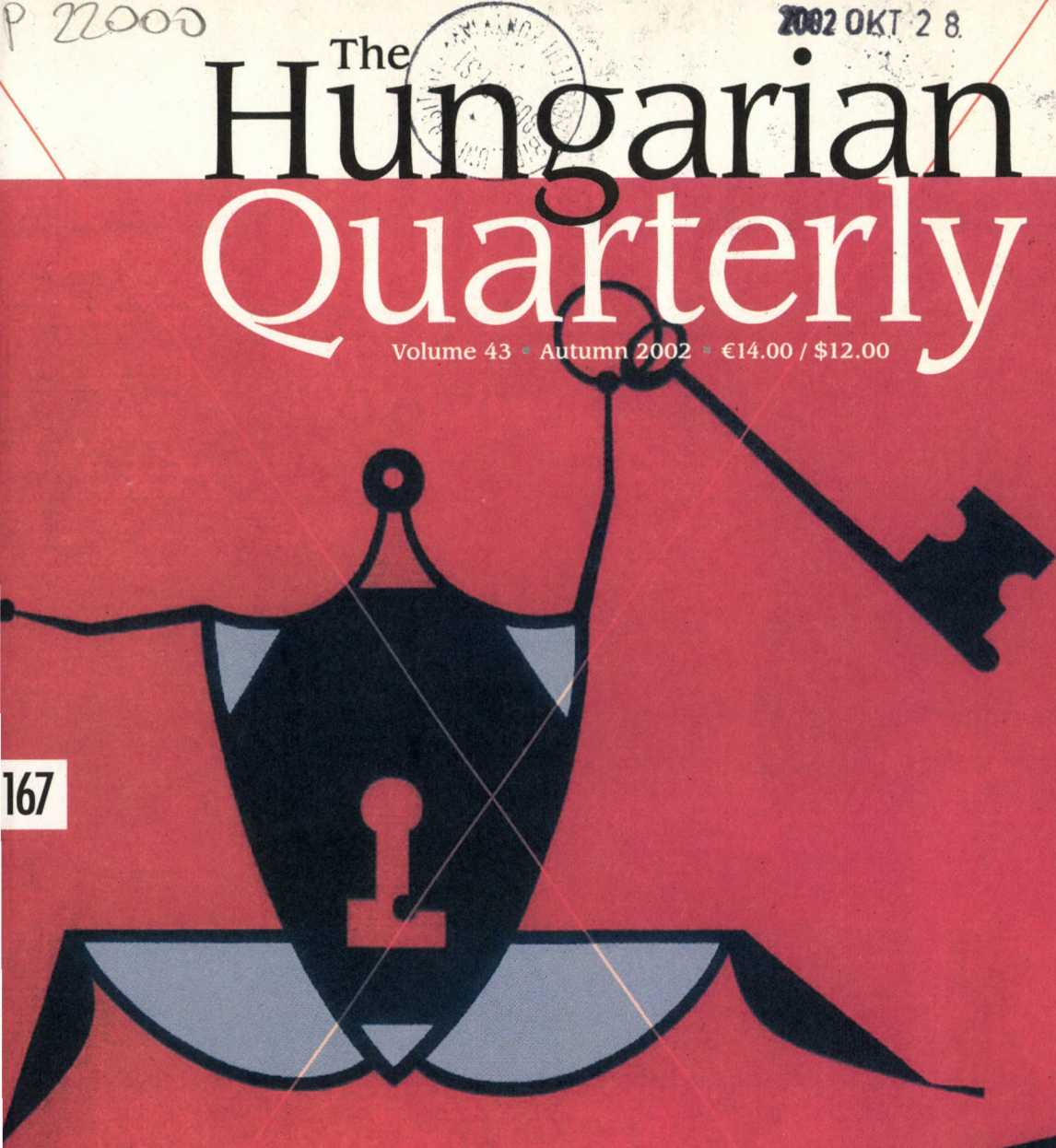
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Single-Person Groups & Globalisation

The Writer Who Believed in Miracles: Antal Szerb

On the Literaturexpress 2000

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Vilmos Csányi

Single-Person Groups and Globalisation

Globalisation, in the absence of a generally accepted definition, is understood to denote a process that extends to all parts of the planet, has cultural, economic and social components and, over time, supposedly creates some form of integrated, uniform culture. The process is highly complex, and we are still far not only from understanding it, but even from describing it in terms of accepted principles; the idea that in time we may create predictive models of natural-scientific precision is barely worth contemplating. The future horizon for the process of globalisation is not measurable in decades, years or even days.

Biology has had no small success in studying systems of comparable complexity; there is at least a case for analysing established biological methods in the chance that, appropriately modified, these might be of use to us in examining the nature of globalisation.

Biology became an exact science at the point when it took evolutionary theory into its armoury, alongside accurate description and conceptual classification. From the viewpoint of examining Darwinian evolutionary theory, it is essential and basic that in order to understand things, phenomena and processes, it is not sufficient to describe and study the observable forms they presently display, though in the nature of things these too can supply useful data. We can only understand a structure or a given form of behaviour in its entirety, however, if we are also familiar with its history. The definitive theories of modern biology are essentially evolutionary histories. It is unnecessary to introduce the notion of historicity to social scientists; biological histories, however, span such immense time domains as to provide a basis for a degree of generalisation. Furthermore, and from the viewpoint of this essay, this is the most essential

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difference; biological histories are always theories that impinge on multiple levels of organisation, which allow theory to be not merely descriptive but have an explanatory power that bears on significant aspects.

The influence of human nature on cultures

Precisely due to their complexity, the social sciences are inclined to constrict the objects of their investigation to a single organisational level. That was a mistake that biology too used to make; indeed, it seems to typify the initial, or one might say primitive, stage in the development of every scientific system. Just a few decades ago, biology concerned itself almost exclusively with the study of systematic and taxonomic descriptions and high-level physiological or ecological processes. A fair number of biologists were convinced that a knowledge of processes going on at lower levels of organisation (chemical processes, for example) had no descriptive role—indeed could not have one in principle—in understanding biological processes, because only regularities confined to the biological organisational level could be valid for the latter. Over the last fifty years, thanks to the work of outstanding chemists and, later, biologists themselves, that near-philosophical article of conceptual faith has been demolished. The spectacular successes of biochemistry-based molecular biology proved beyond any doubt that what led to results was an approach to systems that embraced complexity and multiple levels of organisation, rather than the unsound doctrine of the single-level. It is sufficient, perhaps, to mention the success of the human genome project and the readily discernible outline of its social impact to illustrate how the ordering of a handful of chemical building-blocks in periodic rows can supply explanations for the occurrence of complex medical, psychological and social phenomena.

It is possible that the social sciences too have now reached that stage in development at which it has become quite evident that an understanding of social problems does not end with description, and there may be a way that studies pursued simultaneously on multiple organisational levels are in a position to supply explanations of a predictive value.

In presenting here a simplified explanatory scheme, which requires more detailed elaboration, I take as my starting-point the proposition that globalising processes will only be understood in the light of a knowledge of the biological factors of human nature. To put it another way, the make-up and variability of the cultures that can be created by man, including that of global culture, are limited by the biological fundamentals of human nature.

The human behavioural complex

In order to uncover the biological roots of human nature, it is worth tracing the most significant events in the evolution of human behaviour, starting from the point in time where we branched off from our nearest kindred, the chimpanzee,

right up to the beginnings of the emergence of modern human civilisation and culture; in other words, we go back roughly forty to fifty thousand years (Csányi 1979, 1980, 1989a, 1992a, 1992b).

In the course of that evolutionary process, man acquired new, genetically determined, species-specific behavioural features, exclusive to himself, that fundamentally determine his social behaviour.

Our nearest relatives in the animal world are the chimpanzees and bonobos. The genetic material of man and chimpanzees differs by no more than one per cent. The ancestor that we share with chimpanzees and orang-utans, and the descendants of that ancestor on separating from those two species were socially highly developed animals. They lived in loose groups which occupied large territories and took care of their young for a long time. The loose group structure, also characteristic of chimpanzees, in essence entails that every individual seeks its own nourishment independently, but there is strong competition for the sources of food; as a result, individuals are relatively aggressive, though they are also capable of smaller-scale joint action when it comes to holding territory, hunting for prey, or, in some cases, to warding off predators; on such occasions they tolerate one another's proximity. Joint activities comprise only a small fraction of the individuals' day-to-day activities. They sleep alone and strive to eat alone, the sole exception to this being the years-long, continuous bond between a mother and her young offspring, in which the mother shares both her food and sleeping place with her offspring.

Sexuality has a subordinate role in chimpanzee group-life, whereas in that of bonobos, however, it serves multiple functions, as in human life. Sexual intercourse is frequent outside the fertile phase of the oestrous cycle, having the function of reducing aggression and alleviating stress.

To a list of behavioural forms we may add the occasional use of primitive tools (sticks and stones), and a system of communication, typical of animals, which is capable of transmitting 20-25 predetermined, genetically fixed messages. Communication serves to regulate aggression, status, play, coupling, and the mother-infant bond, as well as helping in detecting external threats and organising communal defence.

On inspecting the biological attributes of modern man, living in group cultures that can now be considered to be societies, what we find, besides the obvious overlaps, is that there are also conspicuous differences. In human group cultures the group structure is very tight-knit; groups are closed and generally have permanent or semi-settled places of abode. Both the individual and the group are characterised by an unusual constructive activity that is present only exceptionally in other animal species, with that construction extending to material, social and abstract structures. Members of a group work continuously in common to a high degree in acquiring resources and in the course of constructive activities. Aggression within the group is

minimal; relations between different groups can range from cooperation to total aggression.

Primitive animal communication gave way to human language; technologically complicated forms of using and making tools came into being; abstract thinking emerged. Sexuality intensified, the time and energy devoted to rearing offspring increased further, the role of early socialisation expanded significantly. Perhaps most conspicuously of all, groups became increasingly individualised; constructive activity, language, belief systems, religions, and customs became integrated into cultures and marked every group as unique. Group individualisation was a definitive process from the evolutionary viewpoint too, because of individual selection being replaced by the initiation of a biological mechanism of group selection (Alexander and Borgia, 1976), enabling a much faster rate of development, which we may term cultural evolution (Csányi, 1989a).

The biological bases of human behavioural attributes were manifested in a co-evolutionary process in which there was an on-going interaction between the developing culture and the currently available, but variable, biological bases—genes. In other words, after the appearance of the very simplest culture, the selective pressure of the cultural milieu modified subsequent genetic variations. As attributes that were conducive to cultural modification appeared, even if only in prototypical form, the moment that they created some form of cultural structure, and the milieu to which that genetic variation had been scaled immediately changed (Donald, 1991). Fitness for a culture ever more effectively transforms the original biological environment, thereby fundamentally determining the direction of selection.

Within a process that has been going on for several million years, the interaction of genes and culture is readily discernible if we examine more closely the species-specific groups of biological attributes that have arisen in the case of man. The complex of human-specific attributes has developed around group life. Amongst animals that live in groups, the size of a group is fundamentally determined by the structure of the resources that are to be found in its surroundings. In the course of human evolution, the size of the group has conspicuously grown fairly independently of the local resources. In the initial stage of cultural evolution, at the time group societies first arose, the group size has been put at around one hundred to one hundred and fifty people (Dunbar, 1996).

Obviously, a close-knit group structure can only arise if aggression within the group is suppressed and minimised, since a high level of aggression disperses the group. Man's ancestors had to tolerate one another's physical proximity, had to overcome all the sources of conflict which, amongst related species, would lead to a high level of aggression. The reduction of intra-group aggression, however, was associated with a rise in inter-group aggression, the development of xenophobia. The second condition for the emergence of a close-knit group structure was a reduction in sexual rivalry, if that were to remain at a high level,

constant conflicts would again tear the group apart and would also preclude a division of labour, such as the temporary absence of smaller subgroups of males on hunting trips. Amongst our anthropoid relatives, that problem was solved by the suppression of polygamy and by the development of monogamy and pair bonding, made possible by a change in the function of sexuality. Human sexuality assumed a stress-relieving and pleasure-inducing function over and beyond the production of offspring. With man that pleasure-producing function, on the evidence of sexual psychology, was also accompanied by the emergence of pair bonding. Human sexuality strengthens the pair bond, creating the more or less enduring monogamous relationships that made it possible for sexual competition to be minimised.

The systems of institutionalised pair bonding in different cultures conform to that biological basis. We find institutionalised monogamy in about forty per cent of cultures, but even in cultures practising institutionalised polygamy most men are monogamous, with only those at the very top of the status hierarchy actually practising polygamy (Murdoch, 1967). Furthermore, in both monogamous and polygamous societies we find deviances in the opposite direction: in the form of mistresses and prostitution in monogamous societies, and in the institution of the favourite and main wife in polygamous societies. Using a one hundred-point scale, where zero would correspond to pure monogamy and 100 to pure polygamy, on the basis of morphological features man lies at a value somewhere between 10 and 15. In other words, the monogamous tendency is strong but not complete, and it is likely that individual genetic variability plays a part in its degree of manifestation.

Man has yet another completely new attribute: loyalty to the group. Relations between animals in any group are determined by the links bonding them to single individuals. According to our present knowledge, the animal brain is incapable of conceiving of the group as an entity, divorced from its specific members. That, however, is precisely what the abstractive abilities of the human brain make possible. For man, the group exists as an autonomous, abstract reality, a social construct that is apparently independent of him (Berger and Luckman, 1967). The new attribute of human motivational systems is the unconditional loyalty which arises in the perfectly socialised members of a group. It often happens that a person will offer significant assistance to members of his group, to his own disadvantage if necessary, even sacrificing his life for the sake of his group: these are features that are unknown in the animal world. Amongst animals, parents may help their offspring, and males may be prepared to defend their females, but to do so lies in their readily predictable individual genetic interest and it is, in any case, tightly constrained. With man, the group interest, unconditional loyalty towards the abstract group entity, makes an appearance alongside the genetic interest, and that becomes a defining factor of our behavioural biology.

Another group of new attributes comprises such apparently disparate features as the use of language and artefacts, and abstract thinking. These can be traced back, however, to a kind of open-ended constructive ability which existed in the animal world, prior to man, only in a prototypical form. Animal communication is not a system for transmitting ideas but a physiological regulatory mechanism which serves to coordinate internal states. The 15 to 25 different, genetically precisely predetermined messages of animal communication can be regarded as components of what, from the viewpoint of information transmission, is a closed system (Csányi, 1994).

The function of human language is entirely different. It is a medium not just for swapping messages relating to emotional states but also for exchanging conceptual representations, through which the present, past and future, intentions, plans, ideas and alternatives can be expressed in an open-ended system that can transmit a theoretically infinite number of different messages. It permits phenomena, artefacts, actions and agents that occur in the environs (with the user group of the language as the implied environ), on gaining linguistic representation, to appear in new structures and new combinations as reconstructions of reality. An abstract, virtual reality is thereby brought into existence in which the attributes of entities—whether those entities be representations of objects or persons, real or imagined—are bestowed by the users of the language. The behaviour of the linguistic artefacts is a function of the creativity of the users of the language. By dint of the fact that imagined objects may assume any form and behaviour, virtual reality can expand the sphere of activity of speakers; but it also acts as a kind of restriction, because objects can only assume the characteristics that we bestow on them. The human brain is able to conceive of ideal systems, can imagine a point, a straight line, a circle, a plane, or the extremes of good and evil. The discovery of mathematics becomes possible and, equally, there can be summoned up a spirit world peopled by demons, fairies, benevolent or wrathful gods.

The production of instruments, above all the making and use of tools, was for a long time regarded as the sole and clinching proof of man's superiority. We have since learned that many animals also make use of objects, tools; some, indeed, even produce those tools for their own use. A survey a few years ago showed 80 animal species possessing those skills (Mundinger, 1980). The use of tools by animals is a special case, however, with only odd species making use of an implement for a fixed, specific goal. That ability is genetically endowed; it is only marginally improved by learning. In man's case, the making and use of artefacts is isomorphous with linguistic competence and abstract thinking. It too is a kind of open-ended reconstructive ability with the help of which we give objects new, imagined forms and attributes, adjust their function to logical systems of rules, and thereby create machines and technologies.

The basis of the above two clusters of attributes is the activity of the human group, which is unprecedented and totally dissimilar to that of animal groups.

The determining biological attribute of man is the above-outlined constructive ability, although it is not manifested as an individual attribute but, generally speaking, as a group activity. Group activity and cooperation of a kind may also be observed amongst socially developed animals (such as hunting in packs by chimpanzees or canine species), but all those forms of animal cooperation lack the element of constructive ability.

Human cooperation, by contrast, is an interaction of a complementary nature that rests on learning processes: the communal task is broken down into smaller parts, and roles, plans, and variants are anticipated even before the activity is embarked upon. Members of the group divide the partial activities up amongst themselves, so their cooperation is complementary in character and serves some kind of predetermined common goal. The cooperation of human groups is characterised by the prior construction of an "individual plan of action", leading to the individualisation of groups and the emergence of the mechanism of group selection. The individual plan of action is a linguistic construct; its elements are learned, and so in that respect too it differs from the "genetic action plans" that serve as the basis for animal cooperation. It is also typical that man is inclined to place such action plans and, later on, more complex ideas into a within-group ranking order, and to subordinate himself to the dominant action plan, in the same way as he does to a dominant fellow member of the group.

Indubitably, constructive ability, a tight-knit group structure and group loyalty, language, and the abstractive ability bestow on individual action plans an infinite richness, making possible the extremely rapid climb in cultural evolution. To these abilities were associated a string of mechanisms which are likewise manifested as biological attributes only in man and serve to synchronise the activities of group members. It would have been useless for a high level of constructive ability to be manifested in individuals had synchronising mechanisms not emerged, as the group would have been incapable of concerted activity. We know of many specialised physiological mechanisms that assist synchronisation.

The human ability ready to accept a system of rules—communal norms, for example—likewise leads to a synchronisation of the behaviour of group members. There are also countless modes of emotional synchronisation; people capable of, and receptive to, rhythm, music, song or dance take part in a kind of synchronisation of mind and behaviour in the course of those activities.

Finally, a few particular consequences of the interaction of the aforementioned clusters of attributes have to be underlined. A tight-knit group structure, constructive activity, and synchronising ability constitute a sort of closed feedback loop. A good part of the constructive activity of an isolated group is directed at the group itself, which is strengthened by synchronisation and preserved by group loyalty and its attendant phenomena; that is to say, the group constructs itself. This has several consequences. One is the emergence of surface structures of the various systems of rules, norms and language. In the same way

as children learning a language are capable of abstracting from the linguistic environment the system of rules that is valid for that particular linguistic environment (of which the grammar described by linguists is merely a scientific model), so too is the individual able to recognise some kind of system of rules in the interaction between members of his group and—thanks to his other attributes—obey, and thereby confirm, them. Language, kinship systems, rituals, even daily routines are manifested in a similar manner and become fixed in cultures, thereby contributing to the previously mentioned group individuality.

One very important biological attribute of man is his capacity for socialisation, that biological and cultural process during which, through the largely irreversible processes of individual development, the members of a group learn the language and customs of their group. Their biologically based bonds to the members of the group, and to its cultural ideals, are formed, along with an unconditional loyalty to the group. If the individual is born into an optimally sized isolated group—as was generally the case for a good portion of human evolution—socialisation will be perfect. In matters of group-level cultural ideals—loyalty, communal actions—contrary opinions cannot arise since every one (parents, relatives, all adult members of the group) is a vehicle of the selfsame views and customs. This socialising process fixes the structure of the group and higher-level structures; the group is able to change only over generations, in rather small steps, as the process of socialisation precludes major changes.

Human and animal groups are differentiated by a distinctive duality. The human group appears as an autonomous unit, with its own plans, goals, identity, and way of thinking, and it comes into being through the internal differentiation of those attributes, that is to say, through the individual roles, functions, cooperative actions, and independent, personal way of thinking of the group members. The animal mind is isolated; it may be able to reflect on its individual experiences, but all its knowledge derives exclusively from its own activity. The members of human cultures, through language, artefacts and customs, are in continuous contact with their group's higher-level actions and processes of thinking. As a result, they are able to make use of the experience of others going back many generations, but each one individually can also process every thought and action of the group in his own brain. That processing, the result of individual thinking, can act back on the group mind through communication. That organisation, incidentally, is strikingly similar to the system of links between brain and neurones.

Examining the new biological attributes from the viewpoint of the human individual, the relation between individual and group, we can conclude that essentially four decisive changes occurred:

The first is that common beliefs arise in human groups. A person accepts uncritically the culture that expresses his identity; he believes in the group's cultural ideals, myths, religion and ideology.

The second change is that man becomes capable of taking part in joint actions, in higher-level complementary cooperation with those belonging to the group and within a framework determined by the cultural ideals.

The third change is an integral complement of the first two: the cultural ideals and culturally guided actions continuously bring into being common constructions in the conceptual, social and material realms.

Finally, the fourth change is that man develops a tight emotional bonding to his group and, unlike in the case of animals, the interests of the group incline man to altruistic behaviour that may be diametrically opposed to his individual and genetic interests, even going as far as self-sacrifice.

The above four attributes amount, in essence, to an extraordinary innate human capacity for systems organisation. From the viewpoint of behavioural biology, that systems-organisational capability is man's basic species-specific attribute. Each human culture is a complex system of people, artefacts, behavioural forms and ideals. It is precisely the systems-organisational capability that coordinates those components and integrates them into a human culture. Artificial cultural systems, in which one or other of the four organisational attributes cannot be freely manifested, are dysfunctional.

Up to this point, we have been examining the mechanisms that operate within groups, but it is likely that already during an early period of cultural evolution there appeared a regulatory system, likewise having a biological basis but one in which what is yet unknown is the relative extent to which culture and biological determinants intercede with the emergence of mechanisms for groups to reach compromises amongst one another.

Group loyalty went hand-in-hand with the emergence of hatred of other groups, or xenophobia (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1992). Isolation of groups and antagonism between groups were essential components in the evolution of the early groups. As a result of evolutionary success, suitable vacant territories increasingly shrank; the fitter groups, on expanding beyond their optimum size, would keep splitting as before, but those who separated would remain increasingly in proximity with one another. In that situation, each group would increasingly be surrounded by other groups that, though differing from it and living their own lives, nonetheless had a language and customs that were comprehensible, a culture that could not be dismissed out of hand, and resources had to be shared with those groups. General warfare or migration were no longer options, there being nowhere to move to. Mechanisms for compromise appeared to help the groups divide resources amongst themselves. On examining these mechanisms, we find many rational elements and also tensions, but they lack, or are weak in, elements of cooperation, unconditional loyalty, self-sacrifice, and moral support based on common beliefs. In agreements between groups two autonomous systems enter into interaction at the group level. For the individual, belonging to one or the other group, that interaction is manifested in an entirely different way from the

link with his own group. Instead of common action, compromise becomes a useful mechanism; instead of a common cultural belief system, differentiation and cautious rejection; instead of loyalty, minor cheating, cunning and deception.

The mechanisms of inter-group compromise brought a further reduction of aggression, but they hindered the assertion of mechanisms for biological regulation of human populations and opened the way to the emergence of the modern megapopulation in which we live.

One consequence of the rapid growth of population is the ending of the isolation of group societies. Groups of different languages and cultures can no longer steer clear of one another, on the basis of various agreements, but must live alongside one another even when, on occasion, they may be at war with one another rather than in agreement. Agreements soon led to the creation of tribes and tribal alliances and, in more recent times, states in which the members of the earlier group cultures frequently live comingled. They learn one another's languages, observe one another's customs, families mix. That represents a huge challenge for a group society. As long as the group was isolated, members of the group, having undergone perfect socialisation, had no dilemmas over choices or decisions. Everything that might be thought or spoken about was given in the group culture. The group knew everything: the possible courses of practical action, all variants of every imaginable world; it had a sure answer for everything, because the minds making up the group's culture had become adjusted to one another through a process of evolution over many generations. The ideas of the various groups belonged to one possible (i.e. practically sound) cluster or organisation of ideas. The great mingling of cultures not only mixed people but ideas as well—ways of doing what had to be done, major taboos, foods that could and could not be eaten, customs, fairies and demons, gods. A lot of good came out of that mixing, with the emergence of new combinations and, an incredible acceleration in the evolution of ideas. But a previously unknown challenge was also lying in wait for individuals, the members of the group: Which idea was good, which was bad? What was the best way of sowing and reaping? Which is the most appropriate procedure for burying the dead? What gods exist, and how should they be appeased? Good and evil appeared on the scene. The individual had to decide; this was in reality the historical period of the biblical Fall, and evolution had not prepared man for that.

If human socialisation is perfect, it constructs a harmonious personality, when the child is surrounded by a balanced world in which there are no doubts. That was the case in group societies. People living within the protective ark of group culture had no need to ponder on the distinction between good and evil, were not obliged to make individual decisions, and did not have individual responsibilities. The absence of pressures to decide applied not just to ideas but to affiliation to the group itself. A perfectly socialised person does not wish to leave his own group and is unable to integrate into another. The imperfectly socialised

individual, on the other hand, is constantly seeking his own true group. Cohesion to the group and recognition of one's own group are two separate processes. There was a time when recognising the group played little part in a person's life. A member of a group society who lost his group simply perished; there was no possibility of any choice. The biological bonds that tie us to the group are so strong that we have to satisfy those under all circumstances. We need to have a bond to some kind of group, real or imagined, even if it is a pseudo-group that has been projected into the imagination by social manipulation.

With the mingling of cultures our capacity for adhering to rules also underwent a transformation. In natural group cultures there was no need even to formulate rules because these were imbued into everyone through social learning in the course of socialisation. The capacity of the developing child to recognise and adhere to rules, however, is no longer adequate to allow the functioning of nations, religions and states organised on the basis of ideas. That has prompted the birth of explicit, written laws, legal codes and the organisational ideas that, moving into the place of natural rules, are capable of coordinating the activities of even millions of people (Csányi, 1989b).

It is a consequence of the operation of rule- and group-organising ideas that the social, functional and spiritual unity of group societies has broken down. As a result of complex differentiation, we now have separate religious groups for our spiritual activities, various groups such as schools, universities and parties for social activities, yet other groups in which we carry out our daily work, and still others in which we live our daily lives. We are tied to some of these by genuine group-cohesion mechanisms, to others by organisational ideas. The efficacy and organising power of the two types of bond are quite different.

The single-person group

The natural groups of those living in a megapopulation were quickly cut down over the course of history. The tribe turned into the extended family, the extended into the nuclear family, and now citizens of states that regard themselves as the most highly developed are proud of their individual, personal autonomy. In a group culture they would not have had much scope for personal autonomy: members of the group spent their entire day together, took part communally in the rituals, procured and consumed their food together, continuously conversing with one another all the while. The members of surviving archaic societies spend the greatest part of their day in conversation (Lee, 1969). Conversation is, in actual fact, the thinking process of the group, as a higher-level entity, and from it proceeds the group's activity, its everyday practice, its beliefs, its shared constructions. There is no private life, no room of one's own, isolation; these are all protective mechanisms that have evolved recently as a reaction to the biological influence of the anonymous mass. Modern organisational principles natu-

rally emphasise their own merits. "You are an autonomous, free personality who wishes to realise yourself," we say to young people who are starting to organise their lives. "If you find a partner, he or she will be the same. Reach sensible compromises, strike a balance so you will do well and the other will not lose either." Not a word about loyalty, eternal fidelity, moral obligation, self-sacrifice. These familiar pieces of advice model the mechanisms of compromise between groups.

The autonomous personality is the ultimate reduction of the group, the single-person group, which organises its actions and constructions for itself, chooses its beliefs for itself, is loyal only to itself but is ready to reach compromises with others. In modern society, therefore, the role of biological bonding is continuously diminishing (or alienation is growing, as sociologists would say, looking at it from from another angle); the structure of society is becoming increasingly describable in terms of the negotiated structures of single-person groups, that is autonomous individuals.

In the eyes of those unfamiliar with psychology and biology that may not seem as terrible as it actually is. Yet what is at issue is that modern society robs man of the manifestations of a fundamental aspect of his humanity, the normal development of cohesion within the group, and the consequences of that are the most diverse mental disturbances and neuroses.

Man's group-organisational attributes are biological in nature and, just like basic physiological needs, they continually seek to be satisfied. That is why innumerable groups of the most diverse kinds are formed in modern society. Since socialisation does not occur in a natural fashion, cohesion to these is rather weak, as is shown by the continual break-up of groups. Modern man attempts to counteract that weak cohesion by being a member of many groups simultaneously, seeking, by splitting these over space and time, to satisfy his need for groups in many different ways.

Technology also offers countless pseudo-solutions to satisfy the biological needs due to individualism in a megapopulation. One function of the mass media is to continuously present pseudo-groups to satisfy our biological need to be members of a recognised group. The casts of popular soaps, such as *Dallas* or *Friends*, are pseudo-groups of this kind, but so too is the collection of A-list international figures and celebrities who feature in news programmes. Man has always been mightily interested in the decision process of his group, he too having once been an active participant. The various pseudo-groups of presidents and political leaders hold out an invitation that we too are there amongst the decision-makers. At the same time this also gives the appearance that problems are in safe hands because the shop-window decision-makers come to solutions on the basis of some sort of scientific, predictive model. What becomes clear time and time again in daily events is that the decision-makers do not see events in society even so much as a few days ahead. They have no predictive models, the future is completely unfathomable, and yet analysis of environmental, energy

resource and other problems shows that there is a need for political decisions that look many decades into the future. The media servicing of our need for pseudo-groups compounds the problem by obscuring it.

Globalisation based on single-person groups?

The emergence of single-person groups no more started in recent years than did the process of globalisation. Individualism made its appearance the moment that societies began to hierarchise, and since then has unfurled at an ever-accelerating pace; at best the appearance of its ideologies, classical liberalism amongst them, seems very recent. The first constructors of globalisation were merchants, colonisers and missionaries, followed relatively inconspicuously by transport, freight delivery, and postal and other communication services that encompass the world.

In the course of evolution there always emerges a closed system, the human, artefactual and ideational components of which are in tight functional relationship, with the variability of the system diminishing continually in step with its development. In its steady state—providing external circumstances are likewise in balance—the cultural system stabilises, and for all practical purposes it can replicate itself for ever because its internal regulation effectively eliminates changes, and the future thereby becomes predictable, differing in no way from the present. The last few tens of thousands of years of cultural evolution, however, have been about the disintegration of stable cultures on exposure to external influences, and setting off on the path to a universal human culture, the final, most gripping phase of which we ourselves are probably part of right now. The disintegrated cultures do not disappear without a trace. Their beliefs, technologies, and values find their way into some form of communal melting-pot, and it is from them that the tissue of the new, universal culture emerges. That transformation, however, is attended by an extraordinary degree of selection and a frightening reduction of variability. The only cultural components that can endure are those which are capable of producing a functional whole in their mutual interactions. The emergence of that functional whole, however, does not occur along the line of traditional values but is centred on rationality. In imagining the future it is not the choice of values that predominates but the “hows”, the future variants of different technological possibilities taken to the extreme, without any time being given to considering the “whys” (Ellul, 1965).

The unconstrained technological development that has arisen through the loss of values is not driving the system of culture towards a stable, closed state but into an unpredictable, unforeseeable, open-ended state about which we have no way of knowing whether it might capsize at any moment, when it might lead to irreversible, irreparable changes, when it might bring an end to the conditions that are indispensable for the system's very existence.

For a long time cultural evolution took place within group societies and slowly. Slowly enough to enable the developing cultures, in a process of co-evolution, to alter man's behavioural-genetic endowments, to shape the specific human factors of fitness for the culture, to finally wrest man from the animal world. These changes made system-organisational attributes an inherited part of human nature. It is a biological endowment of our species that it is drawn to common actions and common constructions; that it makes these the basis of common belief systems; and moreover that, within his recognised groups, he is capable of relegating his own interests to the real or supposed interests of the new system that is being evolved with the group as a new, higher-level entity. The success of human evolution has brought into being a megasociety that extends across the whole world in which man's systems-organisational attributes, in line with their basic nature, are manifested with unaltered activity, but in place of the natural, humanly scaled groups of several hundred people that would also be controllable by biological regulatory factors, there have appeared the supergroups of rational systems-organisation, comprising tens and hundreds of millions of people, in the form of armies, nations, states, world religions and multinational firms. Man is not bonded to these groups, in accordance with his natural endowments, by every fibre of his systems-organisational capabilities but, for the most part, merely through one or two functions. Big armies and bureaucracies, for example, are organised through the attributes of obedience to rules and hierarchies; political parties, being based solely on distribution of power, do not constitute true groups with showy virtual actions now being the only things held in common. The family has become detached from the domain of common action, from work; the common constructions have become services; and finally, the function of sacrificing individual interests has been emptied because the reaction of people living in a megasociety to the loss of their natural social environment has been the rise of the one-person group. In group societies individual competition was reduced to a minimum; instead the groups competed with one another. That system gave humans an indispensable emotional stability and the group's unconditional protection, but the sources of creativity were also retained through competition between groups (Carneiro, 1967).

One-person human groups living in megasocieties are in continual competition with one another, and that is the source of the astounding creativity of megasocieties. The price of that is a seemingly definitive loss of emotional stability, the appearance of personal values instead of a common scale of values. That may have a particularly serious impact on the stability of the system. Group societies were able to regulate the size of the community, that being what the interest of the group demanded. In the case of single-person groups the suprapersonal group interest does not function; reproduction is left to the control of individuals. As a result, humanity, for all its technological and scientific advances, is unable to halt population explosion, and it will remain incapable of

doing so until it is able once again to match reproduction to the interests of the higher-level group. From the viewpoint of population dynamics, man is a prisoner of his biological endowments, and his cultural instruments currently appear inadequate for a solution.

Group societies were in equilibrium with their environment, if only because they exploited the environment to only a negligible extent. The beliefs and cultural ideals of those societies did not imperil the biosphere's very existence. Megasocieties have devastated a primeval biosphere that was independent of them; what we now take to be natural is in reality agriculturally managed forest, savannah or meadow and, from the evolutionary standpoint, so young that we can have no idea of its chances of survival. Man has eradicated nature from the ground beneath his own feet and now, together with a few selected animal and plant species and the remnants of a dying biosphere, he is hovering in what may be considered to be an ecological void. Or perhaps plunging at an ever-accelerating pace, for how would we know?

By dint of their smallness, group societies had no appreciable impact on the physical parameters of our planet and had the benefit of a climatic equilibrium that had developed over many millions of years. The energy consumption and output of pollutants of megasocieties have altered the Earth's surface temperature, atmospheric composition and the amount of incident energy that it absorbs at an astonishing pace and thereby set off unpredictable changes.

Notwithstanding the uncertainties, two possible paths for the process of globalisation suggest themselves from considerations of what we have learned about the biological organisational level.

One is that some way will be found of successfully hitching globalisation to the process of socialisation: of developing ideologies whose central values will include a small populational size, cherishing the biosphere, and the immorality of polluting the environment and excessive energy consumption. If everyone, or at least a majority, were to accept these during the period of socialisation, then even single-person societies, as building blocks, might give rise to a global culture. There already seem to be encouraging signs of this; human rights and environmental protection could be global ideals that might serve as the first pillars of a global culture.

The second path might be for the processes of individualisation to be a route by which a more vigorous group-organisational ideal were to gain the upper hand without—dissimilarities apart—provoking the antagonism of the new groups. These processes might be the seeds of open, territorially delimited, but not territorially expansive, regional organisations or concepts of receptive cultural nations. Coalitions and compromises of the new-type, higher-level organisations might then lay down the foundations for a comprehensive, global culture.

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György Poszler

The Writer Who Believed in Miracles

Antal Szerb 1901–1945

I expected something from literature, my redemption, let's say, because everyone's redemption is individually tailored and mine ought to have come from literature. It did not; nevertheless, I spent my entire youth in a happy purgatory, because I always felt that within minutes I would understand what I hadn't understood before, and then Beatrice would cast off her veil and the eternal city of Jerusalem would reveal itself to me.

Antal Szerb was born in Budapest, where he lived for 43 years as a respected scholar and writer, though he never received his redemption. He was not cut out for it by temperament. He was born not to be redeemed but to be waiting for redemption. He perished as a stigmatized and outcast Jew in the last months of the war in a labour camp in Balf, a small village near Hungary's western border. To be accurate, he never came to damnation, either. He was not cut out for it by destiny. He was not born to burn in hell, only to live under its threat. He spent his entire life in a feverish, agitated state of mind, in a purgatory. His working life lasted twenty years when he did research in libraries, taught at university, and worked as an editor. It began in the early 1920s, after Hungary had lost the war, had been dismembered at Trianon, after two revolutions; and it ended in the mid-1940s, anticipating a second defeat and great changes. In other words, Antal Szerb lived and worked in ill-omened times.

He belonged to a young generation of brilliant essayists, which included, among others, László Németh, Gábor Halász, László Cs. Szabó, István Sőtér, Dezső Keresztury and György Rónay, men who widely differed in their outlook, interests and fate. They tried to see clearly, given the problems faced by a Hungary shrunk to a third of its former size. They tried to face difficult questions like what would be the role of culture and literature, the relationship of Hungary

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to Europe, the nature of Hungarian society, and the responsibility of writers within it? What happened to Hungary and why? How could it happen? And, in the first place, what was to be done now that it had happened? Most of this generation came out from under the cloak of Mihály Babits, the great poet, novelist and editor who had revived Hungarian essay writing. Szerb made a successful start in two genres. His first short stories were published by *Nyugat*, the country's most respected literary magazine at the time, the first essays by *Minerva*, the foremost journal devoted to philosophy and criticism. This was in no way an ordinary start. He was a scholar amongst writers and a writer amongst scholars, that made him both a better writer and a better scholar. He believed in literature, yet he treated his faith with irony. He believed in scholarship, but he doubted his own accomplishments. Szerb was a mild-mannered man with an ever-present sceptical smile. His violent death betrays much about Hungarian history and literature in the first half of the 20th century, and about the triumph and failure of the assimilation of Jews.

A baby with spectacles

It all began... or rather, it never really began, because I always read and wrote, almost from the moment I was born (I was the spectacled kind of baby)... The moment when the realm of modern poetry opened up for me was so beautiful that I can only quote whenever I think of it, I am so moved, but as a mark of my respect, I quote from the greatest, from Keats, who, on first looking into Chapman's Homer, compared himself to Cortez first setting eyes on the Pacific: "...and all his men/ Look'd at each other with wild surmise— / Silent upon a peak in Darien."

He was an exceptionally well-educated man. He acquired his education by an easy and unconscious avidity. He read incessantly, out of passion, not with a view to accumulating knowledge. He felt happiest when he was in a library. Literature was not an object of study for him, but part of living. It was, indeed, redemption or damnation. He was interested not only in the work, but also in the author, the experience that gave birth to the work, and what this gave rise to in him, as reader.

Born into a middle-class family of Jews who had converted to Catholicism, he was educated in the highly regarded Piarist *Gimnázium* of Budapest. His form master was Sándor Sík, a priest and a religious poet, who was one of the great figures of Hungarian education. At university, Antal Szerb read Hungarian and German, to which he later added English. With the help of various grants, he spent months in Paris and Italy, and also an entire year in London. In literature he was initially inspired by French and English writers and German scholars. At the age of thirty-seven he became President of the Hungarian Society of Literary Studies.

In scholarship he started out from a double basis inspired by Wilhelm Dilthey and the German *Geistesgeschichte* school, and by Viennese psychoanalysis, chiefly Freud. Although not in an equal measure, his three major scholarly works—the

two volumes of *Magyar irodalomtörténet* (History of Hungarian Literature, 1934), *Hétköznepok és csodák* (The Quotidian and Miracles, 1936), a book discussing the problems of the modern novel, and the three volumes of *A világirodalom története* (The History of World Literature, 1941), are all based on these two pillars. In the early 1930s he also published a few playfully poetical, ironic/self-ironic short stories, followed in 1934 by a scintillating adventure story, embedded in cultural history, *A Pendragon legenda* (The Pendragon Legend, Budapest, Corvina, 1963). Then came a nostalgic and mysterious account of a generation, the novel *Utas és holdvilág* (*Journey by Moonlight*, 1937, English translation by Len Rix, Puskhin Press, London, 2001, reviewed in this issue). Next he wrote a case study and historical parable about the scandal of Marie Antoinette's necklace, *A királyné nyaklánc* (The Queen's Necklace, 1943), replete with prophecies of a crucial turn of events. And in the winter of 1943–1944, in what was close to being his nadir, he published the book that has, until this day, brought him the greatest success. Entitled *Száz vers* (One Hundred Poems), it is a bilingual anthology of what he thought were the greatest poems, translated by the best Hungarian poets. Through the works of others, Szerb speaks about himself, protesting against Nazism with the poetry closest to his heart.

Ladies' handkerchiefs

The style reminds me of an outstanding Renaissance dancer, who was praised by Castiglione for occasionally dropping her cloak purely to demonstrate how little attention she was paying to the whole affair. It is possible to lift a heavy weight with the usual gesticulation of a circus acrobat, but it is much more elegant when you pick it up pretending it is a lady's handkerchief. One conjunctive can make a world of difference, and an unexpected turn of phrase can open up a prospect to infinity, to see the world in a grain of sand...

That was his ideal. Heavy-weight scholarship—wrapped in a light, elegant style. The weight of knowledge and thoughts, presented with an ease of phrasing and wit. To pick it up, as if it were a lady's handkerchief. To write literary history for an adult readership rather than an academic audience.

The essay was the genre closest to his heart. It is shown in the way he mastered its art utilizing and adopting what he learnt from *Geistesgeschichte*. In the way he was inspired by French theorists—Taine and Sainte-Beuve, for example—in a concern for method and a critical faculty. In the way he turned to English historians (Macaulay and Lytton Strachey) to move towards pathos and irony. In the way he was guided by Hungarian models (the 19th-century novelist and essayist Zsigmond Kemény, and his own master, the poet Mihály Babits). He was inspired by many influences. But by the 1930s he had developed his own, distinctly individual style.

The two major scholarly attempts—the histories of Hungarian and world literatures—were preceded by some weighty studies. In Hungarian literature, these studies featured some of the great 19th- and 20th-century poets: the Enlightenment and Romantic Ferenc Kölcsey, the Classicist Dániel Berzsenyi, the Romantic Mihály Vörösmarty, and the classical-modern Mihály Babits. In preparation to his other major work, he published important essays on Blake, Ibsen, Stefan George and—in the footsteps of Castiglione—on what he called “the courtier”, and on European early Romanticism. He also experimented with compiling a tableau of a period or a movement with the help of several portraits. His favourite age was early Romanticism and Romanticism, his true ideal early-Romantic and Romantic man; periods and attitudes in which emotion and intelligence, inspiration and intellect, experience and form all come together to struggle in the soul and in the works of art. In the final analysis, this is, of course, a struggle between the conscious and the subconscious. If the subconscious fails to pry into or burst open the conscious mind, there can be no poetic ego and no great poetry. If the subconscious floods and sweeps away the conscious mind, the poetic ego and great poetry will both be destroyed. When the subconscious strikes a balance with the conscious mind, and when the tension is offset by resistance and form, then a poetic ego and great poetry can emerge. This is the essence of Romanticism in Szerb’s interpretation. The secret door between the subconscious and the conscious opens, letting the beautiful monsters of the subconscious underworld flood the conscious upper world. This is present in the poetry of Blake, Hölderin and Vörösmarty. They form the subjects of his best portraits. This requires the theories of inspiration and intuition formulated by the *Geistesgeschichte* school and the related philosophies that includes not only Dilthey but also Bergson. And that requires the “psyché-map” of psychoanalysis, the layered structure of the subconscious and the conscious mind. Freud and his id and superego, Jung and his individual and collective subconscious. Szerb has the same disposition: a fertile duality of irrationality and rationality, inspiration and irony, constantly provoking and correcting one another.

Magyar irodalomtörténet is not difficult reading. This is where the author mentions those ladies’ handkerchiefs—with a charming elegance. *Erdélyi Helikon*, the respected journal published in Kolozsvár (Cluj) for the Hungarians in Transylvania, arranged a competition for a new history of Hungarian literature. The book should discuss the links between Hungarian literature and Europe, and draw the distinctive profile of the Hungarian genius. Here, Szerb was also inspired by the great dilemma of the “generation of essayists”: What was the task and duty of intellectuals after the collapse of historical Hungary? He won the competition. He wrote the book. And he instantly rose to fame.

In method, he turned his back on the 19th-century conventions, the various versions of positivism and neo-positivism. As an alternative, there was *Geistesgeschichte*, although the German scholars had only written treatises on authors

and periods: portraits and tableaux. They never tried to draw an evolutionary picture of historical processes. But what could provide a link between the series of portraits and tableaux? Perhaps it could be the typology of *Geistesgeschichte*, with which he had experimented in drawing up a picture of European early Romanticism and the courtier. Perhaps it could be the evolutionary theory of *Geistesgeschichte*, as outlined by Eduard Spranger and the Hungarian Tivadar Thienemann. This was why he wrote in the introduction that *Geistesgeschichte* is a history of ideas (as Korff had clearly demonstrated in his book on Goethe), a history of styles (as Strich had clearly demonstrated in his treatise on Classicism and Romanticism) and creative intuition. The first two are scholarly categories, the third is more of an artistic one. Intuition is a form of creative/receptive empathy. This is what leads to the understanding of a unique author's given work. Or, more precisely, to the threshold of understanding (of a mystery?) This is not yet an understanding, only a possibility of understanding. But this is not enough, as ideas and styles, reception and understanding are conditioned by the historical/social setting. Something he learned from the most respected member of an earlier generation of Hungarian historians of literature, János Horváth. According to Horváth, literature is a spiritual community of writers and readers—mediated by written works. This needs further discussion, and for this reason, he extended *Geistesgeschichte* with the sociology of literature. And since the creative intuition leading to the understanding of authors and works must be concretised, he extended *Geistesgeschichte* and the sociology of literature with the psychology of literature.

So we have *Geistesgeschichte*, sociology of literature and psychology of literature, a highly modern methodology for his time. It showed up the character and evolution of Hungarian literature in an unprecedented way. It made the point that Hungarian literature and literary history was a miniature copy of European literature and literary history. It had everything on a small scale that European literature had on a large scale. It had everything in its individual version that European literature had in its focus. On a small scale and on the fringe of European development, Hungarian literature produced everything that much larger cultures had produced at the centre of development. In a small culture, at the periphery of development, everything appears differently from the way in which large cultures originally created it in the centre of development. The Hungarian Renaissance and Hungarian Enlightenment for example, could only emerge in a form that Hungarian conditions permitted and determined. It is this "difference" that provides the dynamism in the development of Hungarian literature. From period to period, it establishes a synthesis with Europe, and after a disintegration, it starts moving towards a new synthesis. The alternation between differentiation and integration is the law of evolution in Hungarian literature. This was the basis of Medieval Hungarian Latinity. Then the same became the basis of the Hungarian Renaissance and Enlightenment. And finally, this was

the basis of the wonderful blossoming of new writing in the first half of the 20th century around the literary journal *Nyugat*. The material in *A világirodalom története* (The History of World Literature) is even freer. It is not knowledge that becomes hesitant; it is the methodological rigour that eases up. The tone and the gestures become ever lighter. The task itself is entrancing: writing about world literature during a world war. The Muses are not silent in a war, as he said in the preface. On the contrary, he made a scholarly unsubstantiated yet humanly very reasonable claim: the world is in dire need of a little goodness. And anyone who loves books cannot be a bad person.

His idea is that the material of world literature is not very extensive: only the best qualify. A carefully selected private library can hold all of world literature. The most important books are those that mean something to everyone, regardless of borders and nations. Naturally, this world literature is more or less confined to the literature of Europe and North America. The common foundation is provided by Greco-Roman Antiquity and the Jewish-Christian Scriptures, augmented by the Romance and German languages, French, Spanish, Italian, English and German, and later also Russian, Polish and Scandinavian literatures. The notion derives from Goethe, but not in its original form. In Goethe's account, world literature resulted from the unification and integration of national literatures. In other words, unity emerged from diversity. Babits, who wrote a history of European literature, was closer to the truth when he said that the diversification and differentiation of the unity of world literature produced the various national literatures. In other words, diversity emerged from unity. Szerb follows in Babits's footsteps, but only insofar as his ideas are concerned, not his genre. In his history of European literature, Babits produced an extensive, poetic reader's journal. In his history of world literature, Szerb produced an enjoyable popular lecture on the subject. Hence a dilemma. A poetic reader's journal does not require systematic presentation, but a popular science lecture does. Szerb's conceptual framework can be derived from the crisis philosophies fashionable between the two world wars, such as Oswald Spengler's *Untergang des Abendlandes* (Decline of the West) and from the *Kulturkreis* theory: the ways in which living cultures could become dead civilizations. Western, "Faustian" culture had just reached that stage. To a certain extent, with his poetic diagnosis of the decline and of the "silver age" of culture, Babits's essays led the way in this regard, too. And so did the works of the widely read and much debated essayists, Julien Benda's *Trahison des clercs* and Ortega y Gasset's *The Revolt of the Masses*. Szerb's vision of world literature was imbued with similar ideas. How to save world literature at a period of the "Faustian culture's demise". This was similar to what Erich Auerbach said decades later: Right now it is still possible to collect and process the material, because there are still people who know and understand it. Therefore, the conceptual framework was given. But—luckily—it was not possible to bend the material to it entirely, only partly and with some

reservations—and Szerb knew this. Had it been possible to do so, then it would have produced a dry piece of scholarship. But since the material was bent to it only partly and with reservations, it produced some scintillating analyses. It provided a witty guide to centuries of the history of literature with some brilliant portraits and vignettes. A highly readable, nostalgic and ironic guidebook to what once, in an ideal world, has mattered, taking readers to the present, right up to the literature of Nazi Germany and Bolshevik Russia.

The miracles of Dulcinea

Once in my childhood I stood on Andrásy út, imagining that I was witnessing the rise of a new hill in Buda... I expected something like that to happen... Ruminating after a few beers in my London solitude, I feel that perhaps now the moment has finally come. Perhaps now people will understand that miracles are essential in life, more essential than our daily bread itself.

Cervantes' novel is the first literary work in which two worlds exist in parallel. Prior to that literary works inhabited only one world: historical works were rooted in reality, and novels lived in the world of miracles. The writers of history were as serious about reality as novelists were about miracles. Cervantes was the first writer to take both worlds equally seriously; or rather, he took seriously neither of the two, but a third one, symbolised by Dulcinea del Toboso.

Miracle is a key to Antal Szerb's life and theory. The nostalgic hope for, and the ironic rejection of, miracles with Dulcinea as its symbol. She mediates between dreaming and awakening, between miracle and reality, between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. Dulcinea is the deliberately assumed ideal: there is no certainty, yet we must pretend that it exists. The operative words are "between" and "pretend". The desired floating from one world to the other. Floating and metamorphosis are the key elements of Szerb's oeuvre: he hopes for the arrival of the miracle, and at the same time he grins both at the miracle and at his hope. This is what his short stories and novels are about, but he even creates a theory for it—on account of the Dulcinea parable and the miracle associated with it. The result is the book *Hétköznapiak és csodák* (The Quotidian and Miracles), a brief outline of the contemporary English novel.

It is a history of the English, American, French and German novel in the first decades of the 20th century—based on a graceful theoretical foundation. Its two pillars are formed by the theories of the novel proposed respectively by Georg Lukács, the Marxist philosopher, and Karl Kerényi, the historian of religion. The novel as the formulation in prose narrative of the dilemma of a "problematic individual," as the prose narrative of the myths of *Odysseus*, reduced to a bourgeois adventure story. Both the problematic individual and the bourgeois adventure story contain the elements of miracle. Miracle and playfulness turn the myth into prose, and prose into myth. As regards the Dulcinea parable, Szerb's short stories

serve best to illustrate it. They usually have at their centre a scholar waiting for some miracle to happen, floating idly between reality and dream. Szerb writes four versions of this theme in four outstanding, lighthearted short stories. The point of departure is "*Szerelem a palackban*" (Love in the Bottle). It is about Sir Lancelot and his ill-fated love for Guinevere. He is tormented by this love, by his inability to attain the dream in reality, to produce the miracle in ordinary life. But when the wizard Klingsor sets him free, he becomes really unhappy, he cannot live without the dream and the miracle. He would rather spend his life in agony for the dream, than in a dreamless reality. So, when Klingsor restores him to his unhappy love, he feels happiness. In "*St. Cloud, egy kertü ünnepeylen*" (A Garden party in St. Cloud), the literary man Dr Batky experiences a miracle, a dream: he encounters a beautiful English girl. In the meantime, however, reality, ordinary life also has something in store for him: a red-blooded French woman. But he does not confuse the two. By the time he gets his fill of reality, the dream, the miracle has disappeared. In the short story "*Gondolatok a konyvtarban*" (Musings in the Library), Dr Batky, this literary alter-ego of Szerb, meets his colleague, a beautiful young Hungarian woman, in a library in Paris. He feels that his dream has become reality, a miracle has happened in ordinary life. He feels it, but it scares him and so he retreats from his dream to reality, from the miracle to ordinary life. He takes the beautiful Hungarian woman back to her college just in time before the gate is locked. In "*Madelon, az eb*" (A Dog Named Madelon), the same Dr Batky encounters the dream, the miracle, in a London park. She does not torment him, she does not evaporate, and he does not retreat from her. He gets her quite simply and without much fuss. And he could get her at any other time. But he is bored with her and sends her away. It is not the dream, not the miracle, that he sends away, but reality, ordinary life, because he does not recognise the miracle. (See the story on pp. 29–34 of this issue.)

The central character of the novel *The Pendragon Legend* is again Janos Batky, the mild-mannered, shy scholar. But instead of being entangled in romantic affairs while floating in the border zone of two worlds, he is physically transported to another world. From reality to dream, from ordinary life to a miraculous one. From a London library to a castle in Wales. From the imagined fantasy world, inspired by medieval scholarly writings, to a resurrected, real medieval world. The atmosphere is decidedly eerie. The resurrected myths of the Rosicrucians are transposed into a 20th-century adventure story, with a sympathetic and faltering literary man from Budapest messing things up a little. The story takes place on at least three levels. With a castle in Wales at stake, there is a case of a contested will, leading to a murder. Hence the detective story. In connection with the murder, ghosts, genuine and feigned alike, roam the night. Hence the ghost story. And the contested will and the murder investigation are set in the cultural history of the entire Rosicrucian Brotherhood. This provides the foundation for the essay-novel. The three together form its structure. A detective story, a ghost

story, and an essay-novel, all put between quotation marks. These are three ironic, rather than satiric, parodies, which are montaged. One element is reflected in another. As a result, all three elements are questioned, as well as elevated. And of course, we have a self-portrait and a picture of a historical period. This is in fact an experimental novel: What can you do with the combination, rather than the mixture, of novel types, if you happen to be a writer who loves them all, but have faith in none of them? Or if you happen to be a scholar who knows everything, and is sceptical about all knowledge. He uses his scepticism to check his illusions, and his illusions to get him over his scepticism.

Szerb's second novel was *Journey by Moonlight*,* an almost purely autobiographical fiction. It is also a novel of adolescence, or at least a nostalgic look back on adolescence from adulthood, confronting dreams and enthusiasms with disillusionment and the fading of memories. It is a gently poetical, lyrico-epical masterpiece about the dilemma of someone not wanting to grow up but not being able to go back either. The hero longingly thinks back to the delicately erotic intimacy of rebellious adolescent gangs, but he cannot reconstruct it. All he can do is investigate what's left. He also investigates what's left of it in the others. Thus the book fits into the history of novels of adolescence, those by Alain-Fournier, Cocteau and the Hungarian Sándor Márai. But Szerb's book also transcends them by looking back on adolescence, rather than going back to it, and by saying a painful farewell to it. Italy is the location of the farewell. The country where the ghosts come out of the alleys. First are his own ghosts. Then the ghosts of the others follow. Mihály, the hero and the narrator, embarks on a journey into his own past. He must peer into the abyss, both psychologically and historically, so as not to fall into it. He meets three varieties of ghosts, three versions of one's wish to settle accounts without breaking off relations. He meets up with the participants of the morbid-erotic games of his youth. One turned the outward layer of the former games into the amoral lifestyle of a confidence man. The second transformed the deep strata of the earlier games into an ultra-moral lifestyle of a monk. The third became a mystical-erotic death demon in the deep strata of the earlier games. And what about the hero and narrator? He woke up with a bitter taste in his mouth, leaving behind both layers of the old games. A generation's awareness of impending destruction is also evident here, with a historical cataclysm already looming large over the horizon.

Descent to Hell

Dear Sándor, for just this once I turn to you not with a literary problem in mind, but with a pressing personal need. I have been allotted to the digging of trenches here in Balf (outside Sopron), completely cut off from home, and also from any kind of reinforcements. Tóni Szerb was here with me, but sadly, he is no longer with us; we

* See George Szirtes's review on pp. 147-149 of this issue.

buried him yesterday. Gyuri Sárközi is here, too, and he will join me in this appeal: please send us some money by way of a loan... the best thing would, of course, be something in kind, such as food... I am sorry to bother you with a request such as this, but this is most serious... Embracing you: Gábor Halász... Sanyikám, de profundis... help us, please, if it is possible and if you can. Embracing you: Gyurka Sárközi.

Balf, January 31, 1945.

"De profundis" it was. The letter was written by Gábor Halász, one of the finest of the "essayist generation", Szerb's friend, jointly with the poet György Sárközi, another friend of Szerb's, to Sándor Weöres, one of the great Hungarian poets of that century. I wonder how many letters Halász wrote "not with a literary problem in mind".

Antal Szerb was a Catholic, at a time a practising Catholic, who was considered a Jew under the anti-Jewish laws. After 1943 he was called up to do several stints in a labour battalion. The 42-year-old teacher, who had won numerous awards both as a teacher and as a scholar, was sacked from his job in 1944. He was forced to wear a yellow star. Then, in 1944, he was called up for the duration. Initially he unloaded barges in Budapest; later he was taken to the western borders to dig anti-tank trenches at Balf to hold up Russian armour. He died there of exhaustion, but possibly a violent death. Sárközi and Halász perished, too.

He was full of plans. He left behind manuscripts. Even before the German occupation on March 19, 1944, his last book, the anthology of Greek, Latin, English, French, German and Italian poems that contained both the original poems and their best Hungarian translations appeared. He arranged them thematically: Loners, lovers, sorrows, nights, visions—and so forth. The one hundred poems make up a self-portrait, a veiled and bashful confession. It is about the things one does not like to talk about explicitly. In any event, it collects and preserves values in a cataclysm.

Not every detail of Szerb's descent into Hell is known. There were attempts to rescue him, both in Budapest and at Balf. The letters he wrote to his wife provide us with only a sketchy picture. His tone was initially quite hopeful. Then came physical deterioration and spiritual surrender. Something must have gone astray in Balf. It could have been an attempt to get him out. His last letter, dated December 6, 1944 makes a reference to it. Then his figure disappears in the night:

...My dear ones, I am infinitely saddened; not only your plan failed, but I did not even get the parcels. In general, the place where we are now, Balf, is awful, and we are in dire straits in every regard. I have no more hope left, except that the war will end soon; this is the only thing that keeps me alive. It is getting dark now and I am really not in the mood to write more. All of you, have faith in that we shall see each other soon, and love your poor Tóni. ✎

Antal Szerb

A Dog Named Madelon

Short story

Unattainable, oh human desire.

Unattainable faery, delusory aim

Vörösmarty

János Bátky, Ph.D., cultivated a variety of countermeasures against the grey-ness of workaday life. In his childhood he sometimes succeeded in convincing himself that the chocolate he was eating was actually salami. Later in life he developed a great fondness for cocktails. Gin and vermouth conjured up the mighty spirit of extinct evergreens. Red wine laced with curaçao evoked a maiden of sixteen who must surely be married by now. He consistently managed to forget women's faces.

Let's see, what does Jenny look like, he mused one autumn afternoon in London as he stood contemplating the ivy-covered walls of the petite Welsh Methodist church. The churches of London have a miraculous way of preserving the provinciality of true faith in the midst of automobiles.

Being a methodical man, he quickly jotted down the aphorism before redirecting his thoughts to Jenny. He still had five minutes left before six. It might prove catastrophic if he can't remember Jenny's face by then. Although she had a tendency to wear dark blue suits, this could not be relied upon with the certainty of an axiomatic truth. Doubtless she had some unmistakable Jenny-ness about her, but this distinction was as faint as the difference between two varieties of tea. Ultimately, all women were Jennies.

"Hullo, is it you?" said Jenny, arriving.

The question was most appropriate. "The first and most difficult task of every rendezvous is ascertaining identity," Bátky made a note, this time only mentally. Here was an unfamiliar lady who said silly things and was angry because she did not find me at the agreed-upon meeting place. Bátky allowed Jenny to vent her anger before asking:

"Won't you come up to my place for tea?"

"No, I won't," replied Jenny, petrified as always whenever this prospect arose. And they ended up having tea at Bátky's flat, as always.

Jenny spoke about the customers. An old gentleman had purchased a Georgian fire-rake, a Madonna carved from wood, and a small African sculpture. But the time he took to make up his mind! Crocodiles were still a big item.

Oh and there were two young men, they must have been artists, because they told her she looked like an Italian painting. What was the name of that famous Italian painter?

"Giovinezzo Giovinezzi," offered Bátky.

That's the one. And they also invited her to dinner. But she refused. A decent woman does not do things like that.

Jenny worked in an antique shop.

And Lady Rothesay came by again.

"Oh, she did?" responded Bátky, somewhat stirred awake. Rothesay... how lovely. A historical name. One ancestor was hanged by James I of Scotland, possibly in St Albans. He would look it up at home.

"Tell me, what is Lady Rothesay like?"

"Oh, she's most peculiar. Yes, you could definitely say that. She comes in, points at something, say a candelabra, and off she goes with it..."

Bátky relapsed into his thoughts.

At his flat, while Jenny was making tea (that was what she liked best in their encounters), he looked up the Rothesays. One had indeed been hanged. His mind's eye envisioned a lake in Scotland, the traditional greyhounds in front of the castle; the melancholic Earl collects ivories and is a clandestine drunk in the wee hours in the window casement. His Lady is a Catholic at heart and receives Jesuits disguised as physicians, admitted through a secret door. Passing clouds assume ominous shapes.

After tea Jenny sat passively awaiting her womanly fate. Bátky was silent.

If instead of Jenny this were Lady Rothesay, I would ask, "Mylady, how could you do this? How could you risk your reputation like this? Next door Mrs Bird is constantly spying on us... And anyway... how could a Rothesay, whose ancestor was hanged under such tragic circumstances, humble herself by condescending to me, to the level of a commoner, an ordinary historian? The Earl's hounds are on our trail... Fly, Mylady, at once, while there's still time..." And on the way out, as she stands in the doorway with proud head raised, I would say: "Oh Mylady, stay, if only for the fraction of a second longer, come what may..."

And he threw himself at Jenny's feet. Somewhat embarrassed, she stroked his hair.

Then everything proceeded as usual.

Once again Jenny managed to leave some item of her apparel behind, and when she came back to claim it she found Bátky in a terminally acrid mood. He had been reflecting on how his whole life has been wasted on a series of horrid little Jennies, while ever since he was a boy he had yearned for a Lady Rothesay. For him history possessed an eroticism such as others found in the dressing rooms of actresses, and the true, great love of his life would have to have at least several centuries of history in her family tree. Instead, he had Jenny... It was all lies and masturbation.

"What's the matter?" Jenny asked.

"Nothing. Except I don't want to see you any more. Women with hands scrubbed red should stay at home. And you need to lose some weight in your thighs. Just go away."

For days on end he loitered on those streets of eternal repose where he imagined the English aristocracy resided when they sojourned in London. He watched the occasional large vans bearing the names of prominent London provisioners. He found the thought of an impending fashionable soirée titillating. Here and there he managed to chat with the family members of doorkeepers.

"Invisibility is the hallmark of aristocracy," he scribbled. After some reflection, he added, "Blonde ladies may not be fond of fish, but are ecstatic if you offer them spider crabs."

But waking one Sunday he felt depressed by his aristocratic solitude and set out for Regent's Park to add one of the strolling shopgirls to his repertoire of women. His attention was mainly captivated by the squirrels that entertained the public in incredibly large numbers; he also watched the dogs. A most fascinating black dog marched past him, sort of like a Scottie, but much larger and far more devilish; probably some novel invention. It came with a lady in tow, dragged along by the relentless canine. The dog seemed to be looking for something, anxiously sniffing the trail. At last it halted in front of a memorial. It then set about the real purpose of this walk with the delirious excitement of those who have attained a goal. But some internal obstruction seemed to hinder the execution of this plan which promised to be a drawn-out process. The dog went through a series of most peculiar contortions and doubled over as it circled around, providing a most painful spectacle. Several little boys looked on with great interest, providing a running commentary. The lady nervously turned away from the sight.

"If you would like me to, I will take care of your dog," volunteered Bátky. "Perhaps you would prefer to feed the squirrels meanwhile."

"Not a bad idea," replied the lady, and handed over the leash.

"Excuse me," Bátky shouted after her, "what is your dog's name?"

"Madelon," said the lady, and strolled off.

That evening Bátky returned to his small apartment in possession of a dog. He had lost the lady in the crowd. Then he remembered that dogs have excellent instincts and let Madelon lead him. They walked out to Hampstead Heath, and admired a pond created on the hilltop where London ends. Madelon ambled along in silence, and seemed somewhat distracted. They must have walked for hours on end. It was late evening when they reached Golder's Green, the city limits. Here Madelon turned around and started back in the direction of the city. That was when Bátky realized that the dog had tricked him. He hailed a taxi and took Madelon home at the cost of sacrificing next day's lunch.

He had a restless night. The dog refused to eat or drink. She eyed Bátky's furniture with suspicion, then retired to a corner and howled. Toward dawn Bátky could stand it no longer and went out to an all-night tea-house where he slept for an hour or two, laying his head on the marble tabletop.

In the morning the sun rose in the sign of the dog. Bátky went home and found Madelon still alive, sound asleep on his bed. She looked like a black shawl with a fringe. As soon as she caught sight of Bátky, she growled moodily. She still refused to eat.

Bátky plopped down into an armchair and attempted to think in a rational manner. What was he to do with Madelon? Should he donate her to the Kensington Museum, where there were so many stuffed dogs on display? But his humane heart protested against this solution. Should he keep her and try to make friends with her? Human will was capable of wonders. Little by little he resigned himself to this thought.

We'll get used to each other, he thought. I have always longed for a pet, so I wouldn't be so alone. Too bad Madelon will only leave the bed to water the marble slate in front of the fireplace.

With bowed head he acknowledged the complaints of the tipsy charwoman. He was used to being misunderstood.

Why, in a month or two I'll have this dog taking walks with me. We'll be strolling along in Regent's Park one fine spring afternoon, and run into the lady who gave me Madelon. "Madam," I will say, "as you can see I have faithfully guarded what you have trusted to me. Madelon has grown somewhat bigger since then, perhaps she's even put on some weight, but not enough to spoil her figure. You can tell she has spent the last few months in intellectual company. I don't think it proved detrimental..."

And one thing will lead to another; we might go and have tea, then to the movies, who knows.—The lady, as far as he could remember, was comely and prepossessing, with extraordinarily upright bearing. And dressed simply but tastefully. Obviously married to a young but prosperous tobacco merchant. Her father a respectable, greying accountant at a large insurance company. She lives in a small house somewhere, possibly in East Ealing, on a street that has sixty identical houses on each side, with identical lives in each of them. Oh, the English middle classes with their afternoon tea, restful winter evenings by the fireplace, a few words dropped every half hour, mostly about the Prince of Wales...

In the afternoon his doorbell rang. Bátky shook himself out of his reverie about the middle class and opened the door. The lady, herself, stood in front of him.

"I've come for Madelon," she said.

"Oh! Oh! And Oh again!" said Bátky, lost in the contemplation of fate's unpredictable ways. "Won't you please come in and have a seat? Madelon is still alive. But how did you find me? London, after all, is so huge..."

"It was very easy," the lady replied. "Yesterday you gave me this book to hold while you took care of Madelon. There was an envelope inside, addressed to János Bátky, Francis Street, London...and I concluded that must be you. I came in the afternoon to make sure I'd find you home. I would like to apologise... I can imagine what Madelon must have been like at night... Poor man!"

"Oh, we were just starting to be friends," said Bátky modestly. "I caressed her all night, because I imagined that your hands must have touched her at times."

"How charming of you," said the lady and took off her hat.

Only now did Bátky realize that she was beautiful. I've always had a weakness for tobacco merchants' wives. Her hair has the colour of the finest Virginia tobacco.

They made tea, and while the lady poured two cups Bátky seized the moment to scribble on a slip of paper: "Love affairs have a tendency to begin in September or January."

After tea he sat at the lady's feet and rested his head on her lap. He imagined being at home with her in East Ealing. Family portraits on the wall, including one of grandfather with muttonchop whiskers. Christmas carols playing on the phonograph. Everything so serene and unchanging. The British Empire stands on unshakeable foundations. Madelon plays with a kitten in front of the fireplace.

The lady's lips tasted of home-made strawberry jam. As she undressed her movements were calm and gentle, secure in the knowledge that tomorrow will be another day. Her entire being radiated such self-confidence that Bátky forgot to marvel at this unexpected conquest. It would seem that this was the thing to do after tea. Just like Jenny...

"I'll come by again," said the lady as evening fell.

"I'll be delighted," Bátky replied with conviction. "Will you tell me your name?"

"Oh! I thought you recognized me. You might have seen my picture in the magazines. I am Lady Rothesay."

With that, she took her leave.

This parting note grated on Bátky's ears, for he held truthfulness in others in the highest regard. He usually broke off a liaison with ladies who claimed to be at the dentist when they in fact had been with another man. Why should she be ashamed of being the wife of a young but prosperous tobacco merchant? The English were such incorrigible snobs. If I had a little house in East Ealing with grandpa and his muttonchops hanging on the wall, I wouldn't think of denying it.

Her lie depressed him so much that he refused to fall in love with the lady. His solitude again descended over him like a slowly lowered ceiling. The streets of London were always gloomy; a fine rain was mizzling; on Camden Hill aged gentlemen were strolling toward eternal rest. In Kensington alone there must

have been two million elderly ladies. Life makes no sense at all. Somewhere, perhaps inside a castle in Scotland, or on a dark avenue of centenarian trees, an earl's unbalanced wife was contemplating suicide.

One day the lady stood at his doorstep again.

Once more they spent a pleasant afternoon together. Bátky was in an intimate and sentimental mood, and spoke about Budapest, where the cafés cast cozy lamplight upon the pavement, the waiters know exactly which newspapers you prefer to read, and mysterious indigents shovel the white snow at night.

"What is your name?" he asked, expecting an honest answer this time.

"I told you before. I am Lady Rothesay."

Bátky became cool and detached. He realized that he could never get close to this woman and what is love without a true meeting of souls?

"Tomorrow I am leaving for France," he said, "where my father is a watchman at the Cathedral of Nôtre Dame."

"When will you return?" the lady asked.

"I won't be coming back," was Bátky's grim reply.

"As you wish," said the lady with a shrug, and hurried down the stairs.

A few days later the Sunday Pictorial once again carried a photo of Lady Rothesay. It was the same woman.

"Women are unfathomable," wrote Bátky on a slip of paper, which he carefully kept.

Translated by John Bátky

László Bertók

Poems

Translated by Daniel Hoffman

Superfluous

Fölösleges

*Time, when you'd like to rush it,
passes slower, space, when you can't
decide where you are standing, expands.
When at three thirty at dawn someone
strolls around in the house as if
collecting the broken pieces
of the night for you, then it's
superfluous to wonder whether his
next step will resound as loudly as
the previous ones and whether
all his steps could somehow
be contained in each and every one,
or it's only you who feel they could while
waiting for the next one. In all probability
he'd be busy with doing his thing, stuffing,
trampling the world into that invisible black
hole, which demonstrably sucks in everything,
into which you are unable to fall back into sleep,
and has to look out very carefully in fear that
something is overlooked, sticks out or*

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*gets lost, and it doesn't occur to him
at all that you are thinking about him
at that very moment and wishing him
to hell, what's more, that you are getting
more and more frightened of him, because,
however much you may listen, it's impossible
to define from which flat, and if it's
from a flat at all, or from the stairwell, or
probably from the corridor-like doorway, or
maybe from the dark arch of your skull
that you hear the knocking. So it's betst
if you get up, grab the torch in your
hand and also the club standing in the
corner, and go and check the stairwell,
look at the gate, listen to the noises
of the night, and the stirrings of dawn that's
rubbing its eyes. If you, too, occupy
yourself with direct reality that
is on close terms with your senses
and which, indeed!, again surpasses
imagination, it doesn't care even
if you have to fight and get knocked out.*

Goes up to the Attic

Fölmegey a padlásra

*He goes up to the attic for the snow-shovel, also brings down
some apples, walnuts, onions, five inches of snow
fell in the night, it's falling still (who knows?)
so whatever he may need should be at hand,
within easy reach. It's more and more the little things,
the mechanical daily chores occurring
almost by themselves, that fascinate him, these
he feels he still can trust, can cling to,
they need one another. Great causes
(redemption of the world, historical necessity
and so forth) no longer interest him. Two levels up,
to look around in the attic, and even more
to go up and fetch something tangible, that's better;
—even if he sometimes goes a little cautiously
for fear that among the clutter, pieces of furniture*

*piled on one another, from behind or under things
(rickety armchairs, children's desks, bicycles,
age-old kitchen cabinets, shelves, uncounted boxes)
some creature (a rat? a man?) might leap out.
Or someone (the ghost of adolescence? the
Reaper?) suddenly might beat the drum
gathering dust beside the door. Will the torch
he holds light up so he won't trip
on something in the narrow corridor left free
for passage? Or he might for instance fall
into the time-machine, since then he would
find himself at once in the attic of
his childhood home, where he was born, and start
searching for prunes, pears, smoked hams, sausage,
thin flank, and his great-grandfather's rifle
and pistol, forgetting why he'd come up...
How pleased he is to find in the corner of a box
some thin-shelled walnuts too (those down in the larder
are so hard, no use to crack them, he can't
pick out the kernels), and that there are fewer
rotten apples. In the long run, it seems,
if he pays attention the minute widens, chances
equalize, or at least approach equality,
all you have to do is stick it out till then,
it's only this, the present moment, just this one
you have to survive somehow (by for instance shovelling
snow from the terrace lest it melt, then freeze
and stay there until Spring), you have constantly to keep
putting things in order around you so space is left
for the extraordinary, even though you know
whatever you do it will create some for itself.*

After Time

Idő után

*He works more slowly, slowly than he'd like to,
it is as though he'd left behind something
indispensable for normal functioning
and wouldn't be able to decide whether
to go back, or if he could go back, to fetch it,
or rather wait till someone else would bring it*

*for him or maybe by itself it would
drift his way while everything goes along, but
there's always something left at the bottom,
and it's getting harder and harder both
to do it and to stop. It doesn't help
that old dragonfly-winged poets of twenty-
thirty years ago occur to him who
on such occasions just shuddered and hey
presto! landed in their own selves of twenty-
thirty years ago, and between the two
points of time the distance was the same length,
they had only to discard their bodies,
only to crumple like a piece of paper
and cast off the minute. With him, his wings
grow leaden, or get inflamed, for him
it's enough to fly backwards, and better
to spin around or mark time, easier
to move forward than reminisce, or yammer,
or maybe imitate the unselfconscious,
conceited twenty-thirty years younger
ones flying in and out the window, or
the steadfast ones of his own generation
who keep running up and down with the window
on their bodes. It doesn't happen,
is left incomplete, doesn't begin, it
gets finished too late, this thing on which,
should he wish to be precise, his life depends.
As if in this way he'd still be given
some chance to ruminate on the transience of
finished things.*

Not Identical

Nem azonos

*He would have liked to show his nicer face,
the smaller paunch, the imaginary one
that merges with mortality, even then,
actually then most of all, when
he got found out, when suddenly
he should have burst into laughter, guffaw
with those who were laughing, to embarrass*

those who muttered, to surprise the ones
pouting their lips with a "yes!", a "so what?,"
and a "who doesn't?" when he still
would be able to fly over the city
with closed wings or gloriously crash
beside a dish of stuffed cabbage and a bottle
of red wine, when explanations, shameful
creepings-away made sense no longer, and
even less his pondering on behold!,
look at these, look at those, truly,
they made it, and what an idiot he is still,
and there's the mirror, there's the calendar,
and he's hideous too, and old, and at least
forty-five pounds overweight, and
oh no, he doesn't want to look different, it's only
he keeps forgetting that he's not identical
with his own appearance, that his body
stays there somewhere, and inflates, moans,
radioes to him, and from time to time he
should go back to it and look it over,
pat it, sniff it, tidy it up, and above all
acquiesce in it and, what's more,
identify with it, and if he can
change it, if not more, then at least
his image of it, in other words, the self
that fidgets ill at ease within the self.

László Garaczi

Ambaradan

On the *Literaturexpress* 2000

After many years of preparation on the part of the Literaturwerkstatt Berlin—organised and headed by Thomas Wohlfahrt—the Literaturexpress 2000 project embarked on its voyage across Europe in the summer of 2000. For six weeks over 100 writers, from almost every country in Europe, participated in readings, symposiums and round-table discussions in a number of European cities. The trip began in Lisbon and following the route of the old North-South Railway, it ended in Berlin, after crossing the Baltic States and Russia. The goal of the journey was to assess the possibilities of European literature and to acquaint different cultures with one another.

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A rusty iron pole, weeds pushing through the tiles, the gravel burning-hot in the still shining sun. Boarded-up windows; someone's overturned a leaky pail on the fence-post. A rotted railway-tie without tracks runs beside us, smoldering circles by the embankment. The last telephone pole, a scrubby little wood full of messy trees. A rough concrete ramp, a forest ranger standing in a door looks behind him, waist twisted. Clearings in the woods.

The blue smoke of our railway engine.

We slow down, the scenery diminishes pace: staring teenagers by the crossing barrier. Then we lunge forward again; the ladder leaned to a house is twice as big as the house itself. A motionless cow-head in the high grass. The marshy woods flash out from between the boxcars of the train roaring by in the opposite

László Garaczi

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direction; the draft blows the curtains into the middle of the compartment: great, red tongues of flame.

A messy, deserted slope, a vacant lot in the middle. A small vegetable garden, a locked cargo container. Concrete circles built onto the poles, the cables stretch out over them. Tiny plots of land, two hunched-up figures in front of a shack tear the grass from the ground. An empty dirt road, then a paved road; the lake is like a giant fish-scale. White plastic sacks in the courtyard of a factory, a windowless, yellow building: a square-shaped pyramid with three aluminum pipes bent backwards stick out from the top. A green bus, the No. 17 local. A truck lot, an endless stone wall fills the entire scene; the sky and the ground disappear. A highway, a petrol station with flags, white stripes on the pavement. This is no longer a forest, it's a park. A traffic light, stop signs, streetlights, advertisement space, a construction site. A black Ford rolls out of an underground parking lot. A boy sits on the sidewalk and watches the train. Guards in front of a warehouse. Graffiti, tenements, parking lots. Tracks in the scenery.

The palace guard presents arms and turning towards us, performs his salutation. The president is late, we drift towards the buffet tables. The sun is shining, the rain is falling. The president arrives and asks the question: is there need for writers in this day and age at all. We stand around in the pebbled yard, then walk out in front of the palace to watch the guards diligently presenting arms to salute everyone coming and going. The question is, where is the border of the invisible circle inside of which they must carry out their greeting ritual. I slide my foot in and out of the circle, moving them faster and faster, until one of them decides he's had enough. He points his rifle at me, then turns away, standing at rigid attention.

Yet another speech, now it's a top railroad official. After every sentence the phalanx of writers presses one step closer to the buffet table, like the wall before a free kick. He says something to the effect that the railroad and literature have always "gone hand-in-hand". Once, on a given route, it was possible to read a 600-page book, but since the development of the railway, today, on that same route, one can only read a 300-page book, and soon there'll only be time for 150 pages or even less on this same route.

Don't look at the sandwiches while the speech lasts. The hungry writer.

I study the technique of clapping with a glass in your hand: you have to slap the top of your hand, it doesn't make any sound, but from a distance it looks like you're clapping.

Finally we can eat; if we continue like this, by the end of the trip we'll have plundered an eight-mile long buffet table. Who eats first, which nations, and how they chew. The hungry writer. I saw hundreds of hungry writers across Europe. One of them exclaims angrily: this is not caviar, this does not deserve the name caviar! He's the one who invents the word: ambaradan, since then,

this is how we always greet each other: *ambaradan*, meaning disorder, chaos. He bought a digital thermometer (he buys something wherever we go), and then left it at the MickeyD's, and when he went back to retrieve it, the glass of a shop window blew up next to him. He must be a talented writer.

I spit my gum in a glass and slide it under the couch. I'm sitting near the wall on a chair, so I don't get swept away by the crowd. From a sharp angle I stare at a painting covering the entire wall, the edges of dinner-jackets brush against the petrified oil.

Too many people, too much info, hyper-stimulus and impression-shock. Who are these people, why are they speaking incomprehensible languages, and why am I sitting here, what is my duty, and is it possible that at this very moment I am actually somewhere entirely different?

Group photo: let's wave to Europe. We've regressed into a group of tourists. We ought to dye our hair green. It's like the army: they load us onto trucks, and we have to work in various fields. I'm going home tomorrow for sure this time, repeats a colleague next to me.

On the way back to the hotel I check out the MickeyD's: the swept-up shards are still there; in the meantime, they've hurriedly replaced the glass in the window. Maybe it fell from the sky, a shop window dropped from the sky? Just like when there was a rumour that astronauts saw a piano in space, but they didn't dare tell anyone.

Some religious ceremony: a glaring neon cross hangs above the water from a huge crane, mass held on the pier, priests scurry for holy water.

What's scarier: a hundred writers or a hundred priests?

Our glass hotel is a large, bright wave between two stone columns.

But we're not going home yet: an exclusive garden party, the black tips of bushes stick out of the silky mist, the never-ending sundown on the horizon. We sit around a fire, ashes settle in our hair, burying us. The film crew sleeps, reclining in their huge padded coats. A woman by the table: sitting, smiling, smoking, silent. T. goes inside to breast-feed, P. dumps the remaining wood onto the fire from a basin. This is the kind of drunken state when I strain to be funny, but it doesn't work. The next day: a wet towel under my head, if the water gets cold, I turn the tap on with my foot. I must not move quickly, something's broken in my brain. *Ambaradan*.

On the first day of our trip, the writer everyone always calls "Our Nobel Prize" explains that the same way the men of old traversed the earth, discovering new lands, so should we discover Europe. According to another colleague, however, the deputy mayor of Szekszárd would have whipped up a snazzier speech. I try to defend him, after all, he is a Nobel Prize. Our next logical topic of conversation: who could be, or could have been, the Hungarian Nobel Prize. We agree on Janus Pannonius: wrote in Latin, a bishop, Humanist, and a womanizer.

Next day at the café Pessoa used to frequent. Photos on the wall, Pessoa looks like Babits and Chaplin mixed together: high forehead, moustache, somber and

grotesque reticence. Another picture of him walking on the street with furious vitality, his pant-legs flapped to either side. The same scene in a shop window. Pessoa the souvenir: manuscript in his hand, price tag on his right wrist.

Flemish scenery, a cow tries to race with the bus, then gives up, turning away morosely. This is where the front line stretched: one million dead lay under us. The glowing disc of the sun canters above the trees.

The house of a classic writer: in the pictures and in the film he's a white-haired old man, as if he were already born old. The sitting room, his study, the kitchen. Personal possessions, a paperweight, paintings of friends on the walls. A view of the gently sloping, Mediterranean scene. The serving table where they laid out the spoils of the hunt. He liked to go out to the kitchen for scent-inspiration. The bearded grandpa. There's no bedroom, toilet, or bathroom: a saint? I lift one of the paperweights on the desk, it's fitted with an anti-theft sticker. Flat stones in front of the entrance. They show us a tree, in front of which the little five-year-old writer was photographed. With the help of the actors' mouths we are reminded of Cézair, the chauffeur, and the roly-poly servant-girl who churned the butter.

With a quick count, I estimate how many writers there are on earth: about half-million. Settle them between Kiskunmajsa and Kecskemét, Writer Land: everybody does everything, one week hoeing, one week writing.

I find out from a Spanish colleague that Hungarian literature is to Europe like Columbian literature is to Latin America. We are Europe's Columbia, Columbia is Latin America's Hungary. Ambaradan.

A square on the outskirts of the city, this is where violent political actions take place, this is where historical turns of events start. On the border of north and south, this is where poverty clashes with wealth, racism with emigration. Kurdish hunger strikers on the corner in white sheets, they sit by an army tent, drink vitamin-enhanced beverages, they are serious, proud, fat. Mouth-watering smells drift toward them from the market, so they should suffer more. The water from the fountain is tousled by the wind. On the quay children dangle their feet over the water. The Russian translator woman tells us how in '52 the people rebuilding the Alexanderplatz formed long lines, handing bricks to one another, and the whole square was filled with the thousandfold echo of their whispers: *danke schön, bitte schön, danke schön, bitte schön.*

The train starts moving with a few uniformed officials on board, they pull the emergency brake without hesitation. A border guard with a Cossack-face stands in the pouring rain in shirtsleeves on the ravaged platform. He gets on the train, atavistic blackness under his cracked nails.

From now on there will be hard liquor at the banquets, the hotel-room key-chain doubles as bottle-opener. The toilet is so high my feet don't touch the ground. The local pussycats offer themselves on little xeroxed slips of paper

shoved under the doors. There's the familiar stale smell. Glum waitresses, coffee made from the grounds, the future swishes at the bottom of the stuff.

A longhaired kid by the square, a butt hangs from his lips, a boa twists around his neck. Next to him a veteran in uniform, complete with medals. They are discussing something gloomily. The snake sticks out its forked tongue at intervals. The old veteran questions the boy, why does he wear a snake around his neck. The kid is sure of himself, maybe even a little cheeky, but they don't want to insult each other, or to convince the other of their own right. A third man silently watches the scene. The Lenin Mausoleum peeks out above the wall.

I saw Lenin's cap in the Smolny. Lenin had two caps. And he had a pen, a seal, some books, and a bed. Lenin's bed looked like a large crib. Then I saw Lenin himself too, in person, he was standing around by the edge of Red Square, he was small, but dressed nicely. I asked if I could take his picture; a hundred-twenty rubles, he said, and turned away. He was strict, tired, bored.

Someone pulls a rope and balloons drop on our heads, then there's an explosion, a shower of sparks and a pillar of flame, the brass band bellows from their instruments with ruddy faces, a children's chorus howls in the background, a storm of applause, the loudspeaker blares a welcome speech, suddenly the crowd lunges forward, following the women in folk costume offering bread and salt, while others play accordions.

"This is a city that has a strange past, a strange present, but the strangest of all is its future," says Olga, but fails to explain the latter. The strange things at the moment include a nightclub in an Orthodox church, an amusement park built over a cemetery, and the casino next to the Lenin statue. Gum has been stuck into the slot, that's how they capture the phone cards. And then the widows in black shrouds by the granite wall, the artillery shell case rumbles open, revealing a slight little birch, doves fly towards the sky, another wailing choir, little girls in white dresses climb out from under the skirts of the widows—so many little peaces—then suddenly they too collapse on the ground: ambaradan.

A little boy squats motionlessly on the corner, his face in his hands. The waitress nicks a bit of food off the plate before serving it to the customer. Tired, wild sadness in the eyes of the precocious boys shaved bald. The Church of Shed Blood; the holy madman who prophesized that you would defeat the enemy but would also kill the one you loved the most. At night a detonation, the riot commando team waiting in the hallway files out the door. In shock, M. admits that he knows the niece of Ságvári, the first Hungarian terrorist.

As the Smolny was originally a women's college, the journalists who couldn't gain admittance to Lenin informed the world that a lady teacher had taken over power in Russia. Nowadays, they sell "McLenin's" T-shirts by the front gate, a drunk lolls on the steps, in front of him a cop making a phone call. The rain

starts up. "Fokin' tajm," says someone near me. And adds: "We have no need for Chechnia, but we need the victory over Chechnia."

Why are there no muscles in the legs of Marshall Zhukov's bronze horse? And if the horse has testicles, where is its penis, and why is the tail flying behind it if the horse is standing? The latter may possibly be explained by the tempestuous head wind.

Our miniscule room can be divided into smell-zones, a five-pointed star outside our window, beside it a striped dome, a yellow crane to the right of it. Fuzzy clouds, sifting rain. A tear drops onto her plate as the young translator eats greasy French fries. I try to console her by remarking that Raskolnikov lived somewhere near here.

We awake to banging on the door, looking like a wild duck a woman is standing there: "Frühstück, schneller, program!" "Gud mórning," I answer. "Schneller! Schneller!" she yells, playfully threatening me.

We toast to the undying friendship of the railroad and literature, we toast to the peace between nations, the Slavic roots of the Hungarian language, and since the past cannot be erased, we toast and hold a moment of silence for the memory of fallen heroes. They are overbearingly friendly, banging my back, hugging us, groping L., and kissing each other on the lips. The boss laughs heartily when after the umptieth toast of unknown subject we can't seem to turn our vodka glasses bottoms up anymore. We have to sing the *Katiusha*, we start to sing the Hungarian version in retort, but when we get to the part about the piano and the Russian soldiers fucking the lame grandmother, we stop short, realizing that our Slovak colleague—who has already fondled practically everyone and whose mentality does not stray far from the pan-Slavic ideal—speaks Hungarian, but it's too late to stop.

The train arrivals and departures in this city depend entirely on us, explains the railroad president menacingly, so we'd better get acquainted with the idea that if they say so, this train of ours will only leave tomorrow, or the day after, or never. He's a big side of cantankerous bacon, proposes a last toast, waves the interpreter to silence and focuses his hypnotic gaze on us, the two Hungarians, yes, we are the only ones left who have to be convinced of something, we are the last pillars of obstinance, who refuse to succumb, even though it would be so easy, and why don't we do it, it would cost us nothing, mourning a little for those poor war heros. Suddenly he stands up, on which everyone scrambles up after him, this is how we continue, with glasses raised high. He slowly steps towards us, tears trickle from his eyes, I think he's forgiven us, and without further ado, attempts to smooch the Hungarian translator girl. Then he turns to me, looks me over and says: *yong boi*.

Applause. A group photo.

It's four-fifteen, our train has probably left, and I'm smashed.

The sad smile of the railroad president's wife as she stands on the platform: this is how we live.

At the end of the car stands a leathery-faced old man in uniform, a gun at his waist, a whip in his boot.

"These people are indestructible," says someone next to me.

A sparrow hops along the table, then lifts itself into the air, a great, yellow beam in its beak. It flies away among the trees. One minute later it's back on the edge of the table, blinking innocently towards the bag. The pigeons, ten times the size, are stupid, unable to lift the piece of French fry. Sparrow-pigeon: one-nil. Anti-sparrow-shaped fries? It probably wouldn't sell, just like colourless cola.

A round table discussion, moderated by actor-king-with-goatee, he sits us on the stage, there's no air, and he doesn't give us water because "the stage is a sacral space". I'm a little pessimistic about the statement that Europe's mutual language is poetry; that's all I've got to add to the discussion, now I'm home free. Cipolla comments on the remarks, and soon it turns out that Europe's centre at the moment is America, and this is a big problem. I'm a bit sick of this intellectual whining about satanic America. We must use Europe's spiritual tradition as a buttress, a few others suggest gravely, but exactly what that might be remains unexplained.

We were also told at the discussion that God created the Russian language. This creation, the Russian language, is now being threatened by English, this low-down weapon of American imperialism. This English is no longer the language of Shakespeare, but the language of business, unfit for poetic self-expression, destroying imagination, exploitation coded within it. I think about how we luckily survived the forty years of compulsory Russian (which was naturally still Pushkin's Russian and not the Russian of the occupation), because it seems that it did not inflict irreversible destruction on the Hungarian language.

I also think about how Europe is refined, sophisticated, self-reflexive, with a little loss of self-esteem, like an old man who can't understand the young, and finds their actions primitive, naive, and aggressive. The "young": America. I wonder why does Europe react so heatedly to this challenge? Maybe because it is in need of fresh blood, dynamism. Europe knows that tradition is the history of organically integrated, outside forces, but still, it is afraid of this knowledge. Why?

The last day of our trip is also my birthday. Back in Budapest, for weeks I sometimes still see my travel companions as they sit in a café or as they board a bus. Maybe they see me too in some far-away city? "You're so young still," said a fellow writer to me in Moscow at the top of a skyscraper, "so why do you always write about death?"

Translated by Ildikó Nagy

Gábor Pataki

The Return of Corneille

Exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts Budapest,
16 May–1 September 2002

The Budapest Corneille exhibition will leave the history of Hungarian art one charmingly dotty legend the poorer but will undoubtedly enrich it by a number of exciting works and a number of new conclusions. Legend had it that in 1947 a young Dutch artist was tossing his pictures out of an upper-floor window and one all but knocked the head off a passing young Hungarian woman painter. Apologies were followed by closer acquaintance, a swift grant to travel to Budapest, and success. That is how the Hungarian popular press saw it at the time, at any rate. The truth, as is made clear in Claudia Küssel's book, now published in Hungarian translation in association with this exhibition*, was a bit more prosaic. Transporting his pictures by tricycle one day, Corneille happened to meet Margit Eppinger, wife of a Hungarian industrialist and herself a patroness of the arts, and she subsequently arranged for him to be invited to Hungary. What luggage did Corneille bring with him, then, and what did he leave with? A childhood and adolescence spent in an ordinary middle-class family, succeeded by studies at a school for applied graphics and the academy—in a milieu almost as conservative as that of Fifties Hungary, one that looked on Van Gogh as a crazy ne'er-do-well. Rebellion against teachers still bogged down in the aesthetics of the Haagse School led to adaptation of the innovations of Matisse, Pignon and the École de Paris, but even that mild modernity provoked furious controversy at the opening of a joint exhibition with Karel Appel in 1946.

What could he have got out of a country even poorer than war-ravaged, poverty-stricken Holland, and one of which he knew nothing apart from its Gypsy music? At a rough guess, no doubt the possibility of travelling, with its

* Claudia Küssel: *Het Hongaarse Avontuur 1947*. Amsterdam, Galerie Elisabeth den Bieman de Haas.

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hint of escape, and a readily accessible exoticism that Tunisia and so on would also offer later on. A particular post-war *couleur locale* with the odd sights of people maimed in body and soul, lush vegetation proliferating on its ruins, May Day parades, and Russian soldiers. That is all natural enough. What is more unexpected is that the intellectual and artistic influences acting on him should bring about a turning point in his work.

His encounter with Imre Pán, one of the founders of the European School, was of decisive importance. The European School had been formed in the autumn of 1945, in a Budapest barely coming to from its war-time battering, in order to win acceptance for modernist efforts, including surrealism and non-figurative art—hitherto rebuffed at an official level. Amongst its founders were Ernő Kállai, a pre-war editor of the Bauhaus' house-journal and now, after the demise of constructivism, the father of so-called "biromanticism", which proclaimed an intrinsic relationship between nature and modern art, along with Lajos Kassák, long-time apostle of Hungarian avant-garde art and poetry, and a by then somewhat impatient generation of young or barely middle-aged artists who had had enough of scenic painting based on sensitive transcriptions of nature. Through the stock of art periodicals, books and prints that could be perused on the premises, the Művészbolt (Artists' Shop), a little book shop owned by Imre Pán, was a treasure trove for those interested in modern art; indeed, it put on shows of graphic works that fitted in with the series of exhibitions mounted by the European School. The biggest influence of all on the young Corneille's outlook may well have been the acquaintance he made with the graphic work of Klee. From him and from Miró, another artist whom he got to know from the lithographs stocked by the Művészbolt, he learned fluency and spontaneity; through them he acquired a sense of the spontaneous power of children's drawings, with their straight-to-the-point directness and creation of vigorous stereotypes, and through them studied the symbol-creating capabilities of high culture and folk art. And just as Árpád Mezei, who was to make a name as one of the theoreticians of the European School, had done a few years earlier with the French surrealist Marcel Jean (then working as a textile designer in Budapest), so Imre Pán introduced Corneille to the works of Lautréamont, and it was also here that the Dutch artist first heard about dadaism.

And, of course, he also got to know something of Hungarian art. The works of Lajos Vajda in particular made a profound impact on him. Having died young of tuberculosis in 1941, Vajda may have had no direct disciples, but he became the charismatic apostle of a contemporary and authentic way of viewing the world for the young artists of Szentendre, the little town just upriver from Budapest, who were seeking creative freedom to produce an art without conventions. It was more for his intransigence than his versions of surrealism, employing stringy organic structures in which constructivist discipline proceeds as one with nature, that Vajda became an exemplar. His influence on Corneille was not



Corneille in Budapest. 1947, black & white photograph. Property of the artist



Corneille: *A Hungarian Day*. 1947, collage and gouache on paper, 40x29 cm.
Private collection, Courtesy Galerie Elisabeth den Bieman de Haas, Amsterdam
(Photo: György Makki)



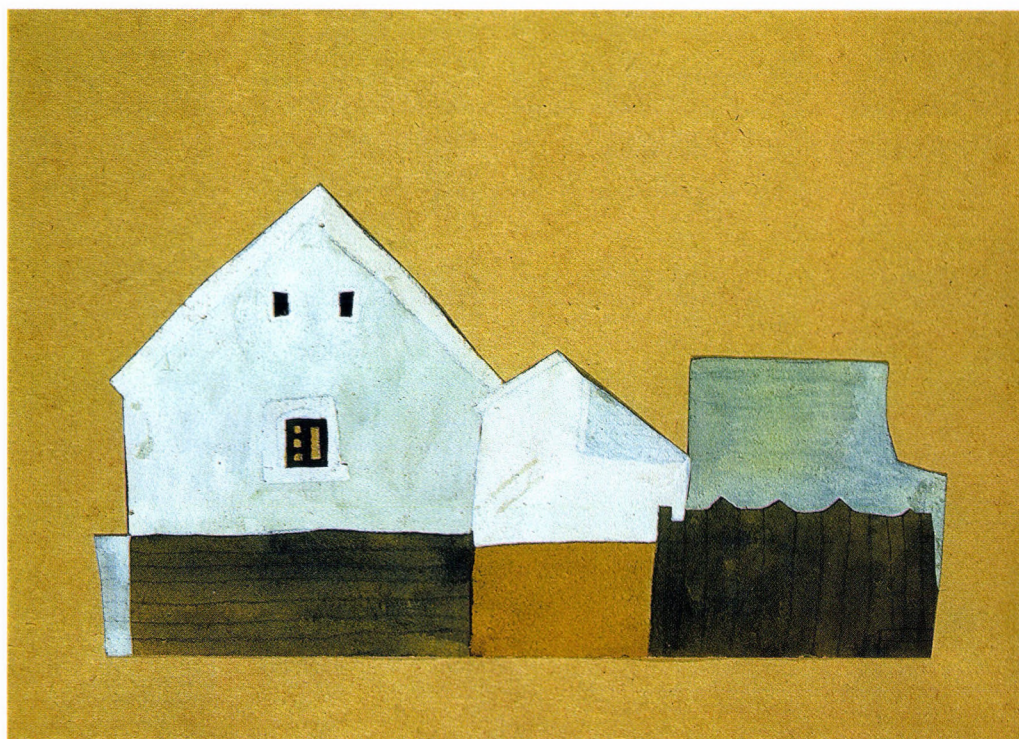
Corneille: *Scorching Summer*. 1947, gouache on paper, 25x36 cm. Private collection, Courtesy Galerie Elisabeth den Bieman de Haas, Amsterdam (Photo: György Makki)



Corneille: *Szentendre*. 1947, ink on paper, 38x45 cm. Property of the artist (Photo: György Makki)



Hugó Scheiber: *Portrait of Imre Pán*.
Cca. 1936, paper, tempera, 41,5x28,5 cm.
Private collection (Photo: György Makki)



Lajos Vajda: *Coloured House*. Cca. 1935, paper, pencil, tempera, glued later, 180x240 mm.
Private collection (Photo: Tibor Mester)



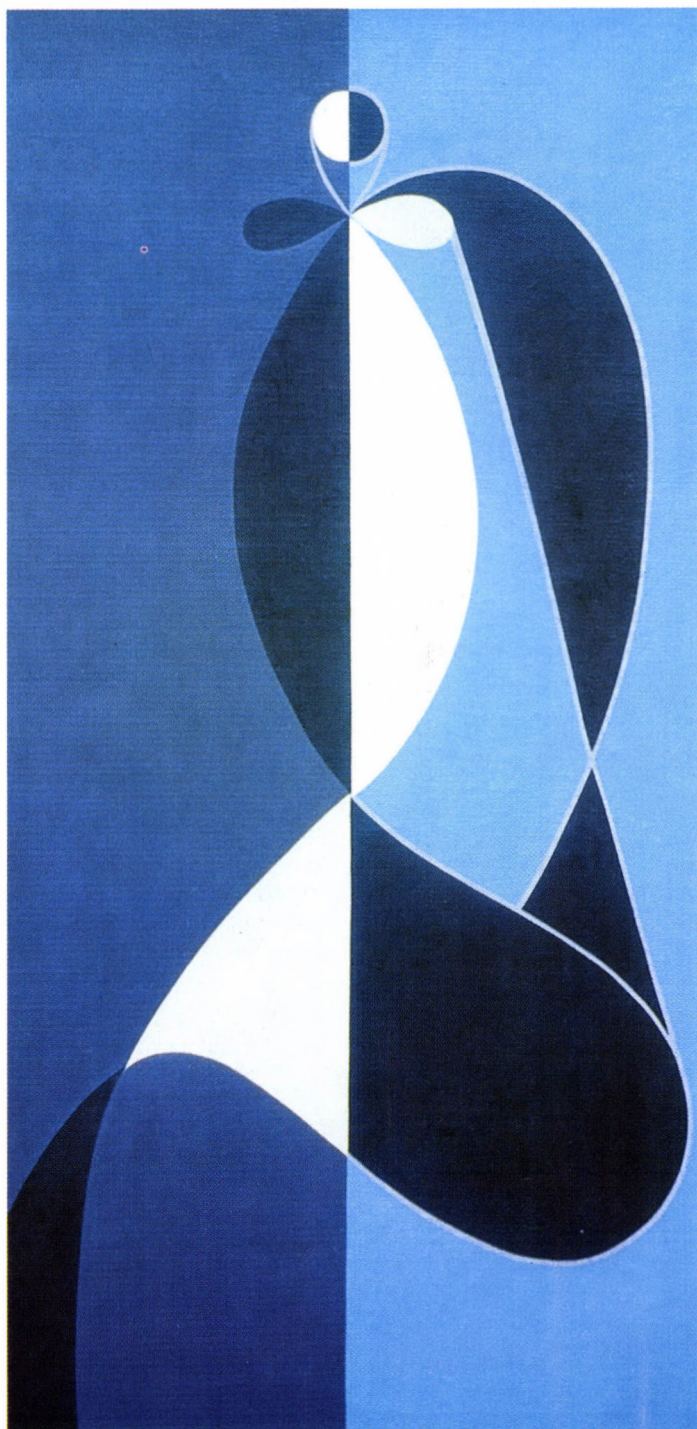
Margit Anna: *Fisherman*.
Cca. 1947, oil on canvas, 46x34 cm.
Private collection
(Photo: György Makki)



Margit Anna: *Birdsong (Spring)*.
1947, oil on canvas, 45,5x35 cm.
Győr, Kolozsváry-Collection
(Photo: György Makki)



Dezső Korniss: *Mourning*. 1944, oil on canvas, 36x26 cm. Private collection
(Photo: György Makki)



Dezső Korniss: *Angel*.
1947, oil on cardboard,
88x43,5 cm.
Private collection
(Photo: György Makki)



Lajos Vajda: *Black Creeper*. Cca. 1939, paper, charcoal, pastel, 63x78 cm.
Private collection (Photo: Tibor Mester)

a direct one either; it was more Vajda's free use of associative fields and his facility for precisely mapping natural processes (germination, sprouting, rotting), sensed rather than visible to the eye, that seem to have spurred Corneille to re-think his artistic approach. Judging from the letters he wrote back home from Hungary, he considered Jenő Barcsay, master of the human figure compressed between the forms of Szentendre's houses, to be the best contemporary Hungarian artist. As a representative of the constructivist-surrealist trend of the European School, Barcsay had his first encounter with the experience of dynamic structurability in the rhythm of the hills and dales, the reddish-browns and greens of the ploughed fields, of the Danube bend. His discovery for art of the formerly Serb-inhabited, Danube-bank town of Szentendre, with its steeply tilted roofs, its wall surfaces oddly transected by casements and doorways, only came from the mid-forties onwards. It was Barcsay who took Corneille with him to Balaton to visit József Egry, a painter whom the younger generation also held in high respect for his transformations of landscapes into expressive, organic visions. Corneille's letters and recollections also record a fond appreciation for the art of Dezső Korniss and Margit Anna. Korniss's strikingly rhythmic works, capturing unbridled good humour and fateful tragedies alike in riveting order between bands of pure colour, may have touched the Dutch painter precisely by virtue of their disciplined emancipation. Margit Anna's puppets, on the other hand, their bulbous heads painted with raw, simple brush-strokes, may well have caught Corneille's attention precisely because of their elementary nature, a primal energy that paid no heed to classical aesthetic and pictorial conventions. There was good reason why it was one of Margit Anna's dumpling-heads that should have featured on the main wall in the Corneille exhibition at Amstelveen in the Netherlands in January 2002. True, one cannot speak of any directly demonstrable influence, but there is no question that the free, experimental atmosphere around the European School, along with the group of abstract painters who seceded from them (whilst still maintaining close collaborative links), the lively, variegated milieu that was Hungarian art in that period, had a big hand in Corneille's ever more radical endeavours.

Just as important a source of inspiration must have been the lacerations suffered by the Hungarian capital, the seas of rubble that were to be seen all around. He was particularly preoccupied by the fantastic forms into which the maimed stumps of Castle Hill in Buda had been petrified, and the contrast supplied by the plant shoots and shrubbery proliferating around them. On the evidence of his letters to the Netherlands, he was well-nigh transfixed by the experience of the mobile surfaces created by the vegetation in which the inorganic rubble was so swiftly smothered. (That experience was somewhat akin to Korniss's shocking war-time memories, his vision of fields strewn with decomposing corpses yet luxuriating in marvellous flowers and insects; but of course Corneille, not least by

dint of the different artistic traditions he was part of and by intention, did not come up with a synthesis like that of one of Korniss's major works *Crickets' Wedding* of 1948.) The water colours, organising the horizontals and verticals into organically playful structures, may not yet completely rewrite the visual field, but their looser structures and involuntary playfulness already point to the wayward compositions of the COBRA period. Alongside those works, better looked on as outline itineraries for the future, there are still screamingly passionate collages (*A Hungarian Sun*), which, although they have precedents in Corneille's oeuvre, are nevertheless the pieces that are most compatible with the European School. Another group of works that have discernible links with Hungary show the influence of Barcsay. The squeezing of figures between blocks of subdued colour by that artist (who on this evidence was admired by Corneille not merely for his long beard) turns up here in a perhaps somewhat more surreal packaging. In other works what shine through are the graphic skills: with the aid of a touch of more strident colour here and there, the slim, dynamic, radial contours give rise to stylised cockerels, birds and other kinds of animals, and by now clearly adumbrating the individual approach that became characteristic in the COBRA period.

Corneille profited considerably, then, from his not particularly long stay in Hungary, and there was every chance for the European School to have continued to enrich its international links. That this did not happen was not the Dutch artist's fault. He did not forget about the Hungarians even when, shortly afterwards, he found himself at the epicentre of a group that almost overnight gained international acclaim. This (like the European School itself) was a revolt of the fringe against the centre to which they were tied, a number of Paris-based young artists from Belgium (Alechinsky, Dotremont), the Netherlands (Corneille, Appel) and Denmark (Jorn, Heerup, Pedersen), dissatisfied with the stagnating *École de Paris* and the increasingly esoteric, introspective surrealist cliques, attempted to realise their own ideas, based on uncorrupted instincts, man's elemental desire for freedom and playfulness. They were impetuous and radical, and their activities were accompanied by noisy scandals, banned exhibitions; nevertheless (or perhaps precisely on that account), they became widely known and recognised. For that to happen, it was, of course, also necessary that they insert themselves into the lineage of European art that preferred elementality and rawness, that they range their own way of seeing things—a revolutionary surrealism and a rediscovery of Scandinavian vernacular art and German expressionism—alongside Dubuffet, Fautrier, Wols and the rest. Taking their name from the initial letters of the main cities of their respective countries (Copenhagen, Brussels, Amsterdam), the group operated little longer than the European School itself, being disbanded in 1951, but in that short time it brought into being a movement and a periodical that, together with the artists

(German, Swedish, Icelandic, British) who subsequently aligned with them, served as an expressionist-elemental counterpoint to the École de Paris.

Corneille, as one of the leaders of the group, was also counting on participation from artists in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. He planned an exhibition, wrote letters, sent out reports, and did not understand why he was getting no responses from countries that by then were being browbeaten by the terror of one-party rule. Members of the European School were then, for a long time, denied any chance to show their work publicly. During the 1950s they earned bare subsistence doing work such as painting pins or hand-colouring posters; Jenő Barcsay was the luckiest of them in being able to teach anatomy at the Academy of Fine Arts, but even he was not allowed to exhibit his pictures, which were officially deemed "formalist". The group did make an attempt to reorganise during the days of the 1956 Revolution, but in its wake they again had to go back to their separate struggles. Only from the early to mid-Sixties were they re-admitted into Hungarian art life, but even so still subjected to many cruel humiliations at the hands of art critics and bureaucrats, holding them to the ever more obscure dictates of socialist realism. It was younger artists who had embarked on careers in the meantime—the neo-avant-garde generation of the Iparterv Group (the name comes from the industrial construction planning office which was the venue for that group's exhibitions)—who discovered the European School as their own domestic precursors in the battle to create a modern artistic formal language. Although by the Eighties the School even gained a measure of official recognition, their international contacts had been lost, and with the Western art world by then promoting simplified schemata, and thus barely deigning to accord them any attention, they found they were unable to make good that tragic rupture.

The European School announced its involuntary dissolution at the end of 1948, abandoning any international activity that might be interpreted as "official". The Dutch painter slowly took on board the reality of what the Iron Curtain rolling down across Europe meant; his Budapest adventure increasingly faded in significance. After the passage of years (and decades) the by now garlanded master only re-discovered his beginnings when his Hungarian works came to light in the course of renovation work on his studio, and by dint of persistent detective work on the part of Claudia Küssel. A golden jubilee exhibition of the 80-year-old painter's work at Amstelveen's COBRA Museum was mounted under the banner of that "Hungarian adventure", with a joint show that presented works of the European School proving a resounding success.

By way of reciprocation for that exhibition, a first show of Corneille's work was brought over to the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest. Apart from its instigator, Zsuzsa Jegesi, director of the Stichting Europeer, who has worked so tirelessly to build up Hungarian-Dutch cultural relations, particular credit must go to the Museum itself for not just simply hosting an exhibition pre-assembled by

others, but actively contributing by mounting a display of its own selection and putting out its own catalogue.

Even within the relatively limited confines of the gallery space available, Ferenc Tóth, the curator of that show, made an attempt to evaluate certain stages of the oeuvre. Naturally, the aforementioned pieces that were actually completed in Hungary were given particular prominence, whilst the COBRA period represented the other main highlight. Corneille was possibly the tamest of the poisonous snakes amongst the founding members of that group, preferring to be playful rather than stomach-churning, to stylise rather than distort. His tiny beings and impish creations cite Miró but are scrawlier, more unpredictable. In the nicest possible sense, they are the progeny of an infantilism born in a state of grace, genial responses, experiments in release, to the torments of an era (and art) that had been afflicted by a long succession of traumas. No panacea, of course; not a salve for wounds, but a balm that did at least give relief to lesions that would not readily heal.

Corneille's later beings are further simplified, becoming earthier, losing their humanoid character. That growing non-figurative aspect did not save him from the second flowering of abstract expressionism in Europe in the late Fifties, with works that edged the vertical and horizontal bands increasingly towards a wriggling, writhing organic structure. By the Sixties, Corneille had unquestionably joined the modernist discourse of that time. He found the possibility of rejuvenation in a return to the stylised simplicities of his own early years. In his old age, Corneille composes without inhibitions or shackles, with resoundingly vigorous, lively colour surfaces squeezed, mosaic-like, between thick contour lines typical of paintings and sculptures that play variations on several Pop Art-influenced, strongly figurative symbols (bird, flower, woman).

Ágnes Kelecsényi

A Hungarian on the Silk Road

The Sir Aurel Stein Collections
in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Sir Leonard Woolley, the discoverer of Ur, Mesopotamia, called the expeditions of Aurél Stein "the most daring and adventurous raid upon the ancient world that any archaeologist has attempted." Stein, the greatest archaeological explorer of Asia in the 20th century, established his name with the three expeditions he led to Chinese Turkestan between 1900 and 1916. The sand of the Taklamakan Desert, which is surrounded on three sides by the highest mountain ranges in the world (Tien Shan, the Pamirs, Kunlun) and on the fourth by the Gobi desert, holds the ruins of ancient cities which lay along the most important trade route of the Antique World, the Silk Road, which connected China, India and Iran, via Central Asia, with the Mediterranean. From the 2nd century B.C. on, this caravan route, along with the oasis towns, conveyed not only merchandise for over a thousand years, but intellectual goods as well: the area was the meeting point of Western and Eastern civilisations, absorbing and providing a peculiar synthesis of various cultures. This was, for instance, the way Buddhism travelled from India to China, and the channel through which Nestorian Christianity and Manichaeism spread. Chinese art, especially that of the Tang period (7-10th centuries), encountered the Hellenistic style of Gandhara here, producing the unique art of Serindia.

Engulfed in sand, this ancient world began to be explored at the beginning of the 20th century. Those participating included Swedish, German, French, Russian, American and Japanese explorers and scholars (Sven Hedin, Albert von Le Coq, Paul Pelliot, Langdon Warner, Count Otani, and others), but the greatest achievements were those of Sir Aurel Stein.

Aurél Stein was born in Budapest, on November 26, 1862. He first attended schools in his home city, and continued his studies in Dresden, whence he re-

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turned for his final examinations in the prestigious Evangélikus Főgimnázium (Lutheran Gymnasium) in Budapest. He then went on to study under the leading scholars on India and Iran in Vienna and Leipzig, then prepared his PhD dissertation at Tübingen University, at the age of 21, under the guidance of Professor Rudolf von Roth, a great authority on Vedic language and literature. Between 1884 and 1886 he held scholarships to London, Oxford and Cambridge, where he continued his studies in the Oriental languages. In 1885 he interrupted his scholarship to spend a year on the reserve officer course of the Ludovika Military Academy in Budapest. The knowledge of cartography he acquired there greatly contributed to his achievements in mapping Central Asia, which secured him fame in the history of this discipline as well.

From 1888 he lived in India, where he was first Principal of the Oriental College, Lahore, and then also Registrar of Punjab University; after various positions in the educational service, he was employed by the Archaeological Survey of India until his retirement.

His tranquil home, a camp at an altitude of 3000 metres on Mohand Marg, Kashmir, where he stayed from spring to autumn, provided him with perfect conditions for the writing of his books, and the processing of the findings of his expeditions. His first important publication (1892) was the critical edition of the 12th-century *Rajatarangini*, a chronicle by the Kashmiri poet Kalhana. It was followed by an English translation (*A Chronicle of the Kings of Kashmir*) in 1900. In the course of this work he gained a thorough knowledge of the folklore, historical geography and archaeology of Kashmir. It was from here that, in 1900, he set out on his first expedition into Central Asia. From this journey to Khotan and its region, he returned with not only valuable archaeological finds, but also priceless written relics. A popular narrative of the expedition, *Sand-Buried Ruins of Khotan*, appeared in 1903, followed by the two-volume scholarly *Ancient Khotan* in 1907.

The second expedition took three years (1906–1908), continuing the route of the previous one further east, to the Lopnor region. It was during this expedition that he discovered and traced over 240 kilometres the westernmost remains of the Chinese *limes*, built in the 2nd century B.C. under the Han dynasty, to protect merchants from nomads. This was also when he made the greatest of all his discoveries: the finding of the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, almost 500 cave temples carved into the sandstone walls of Tun-huang, containing thousands of square metres of frescoes, and a hidden library walled-up in the 11th century, holding, in perfect condition, thanks to the extremely dry air, tens of thousands of 5-10th-century Tibetan, Chinese, Sanskrit, Khotanese, Kuchean, Sogdian and Runic Turkish manuscripts. The finds included the oldest known printed book, a Chinese translation of the Buddhist philosophical treaties, the *Diamond Sutra*, dated A.D. 868, and silk paintings combining the Chinese painting of the Tang period with the Graeco-Buddhist style of

Gandhara. The expedition is recounted in *Ruins of Desert Cathay* (1912) and in the five volumes of *Serindia* (1921).

In the course of the third and longest of his Central Asian expeditions, in 1913–16, he once again spanned the territories previously covered, and extended his research as far as Eastern Iran. No popular narrative was written of this journey, “merely” the four scholarly volumes of *Innermost Asia* (1928).

On a journey to North-Eastern India in 1926, he traced certain routes of Alexander the Great’s eastern campaigns, on the basis of Antique sources. In 1929 he travelled to the United States, lecturing at the Lowell Institute, Boston. In the first half of the 1930s, he conducted excavations in Persia; in 1938, at the age of 76, he turned to the study of the Roman *limes* in Iraq, Syria and Transjordan—utilising aerial photography and the services of the RAF.

Nearing eighty and still vigorously active, his long-standing wish was granted and he was allowed to explore Ancient Bactria in Afghanistan. He set off immediately, but a few days after his arrival in Kabul he caught a cold and died, on October 26, 1943. His last words were: “I have had a wonderful life, and it could not be concluded more happily than in Afghanistan, which I have wanted to visit for sixty years.”

A variety of scholarly societies, universities and academies heaped their honours on Aurel Stein. A British subject from 1904, he was made a Knight Commander of the Indian Empire in 1912, and thenceforth called Sir Aurel Stein K.C.I.E. His many awards included the Back Grant and the Founder’s Medal of the Royal Geographical Society, the Julien Prize of the Académie des Inscriptions, the Flinders Petrie Medal of London University, the Lucy Wharton Medal of the University of Pennsylvania, the Gold Medal of the Royal Asiatic Society, and the Huxley Memorial Medal of the Royal Anthropological Institute. He became a member of the British Academy and was an honorary doctor of, among others, the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

Stein took pride in being a British subject and made available all his knowledge to his adopted country, but he maintained close ties with his native land throughout his life. These ties are perhaps best reflected in his relationship lasting sixty years with the Hungarian Academy and its members.

To understand this, we must examine the purpose for and the historic circumstances in which the Academy was established. In the first two decades of the 19th century, a reform movement was emerging in a Hungary under the oppressive rule of the Habsburgs. The reform movement set itself a dual goal and aimed to achieve civil progress as well as national independence. When the Hungarian Diet was convened in 1825, moves were made to promote the cause of the national language. Count István Széchenyi, who was to be called the “greatest Hungarian”, supported the initiative and offered one year of his income from all his estates towards setting up a body for the Hungarian

language, the Hungarian Learned Society. The higher nobility immediately rallied behind Széchenyi, thus the Learned Society, or Academy, can claim to have been brought into existence in 1825 by public will. The Society set itself the objective of pursuing and disseminating science and art in Hungarian. The founding of the Academy's library less than a year later—also on the initiative of an aristocrat, Count Joseph Teleki, the first president of the Academy—held much in store for science and vastly contributed to the future of Hungarian research.

The wave of revolutions sweeping through Europe reached Hungary on March 15, 1848, and the Revolution turned into a War of Independence. Hungary's struggle for independence was eventually quelled in 1849 by Russian troops invited by Francis Joseph, the young Emperor; a harsh decade of Austrian subjugation ensued. Since it was only the Academy alone that could, at least to some degree, express the national spirit, efforts were made to build the Academy a permanent home. As a result of a burst of national enthusiasm with an influx of generous grants and donations, a spectacular neo-Renaissance palace was built for the Academy on the banks of the Danube in Pest, which was inaugurated in December 1865. Stein was then three years old.

Less than two years later, the year 1867 brought a brand new turn: the Compromise between Austria and Hungary restored Hungary's statehood and constitutional life. The following decades of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy saw an unprecedented boom and development in all walks of life. Pest, Buda and Óbuda, three separate towns until then, were united in 1873, and the new boomtown capital, Budapest, became the country's centre in terms of politics, economics and the arts. The position of the Academy had also changed. From 1868 on, it received state support. Ties with foreign academies and scientific societies were expanding and the Academy Library had by 1880 established exchange partnerships with as many as one-hundred and fifty institutions. From the very beginning, the Library had played a key role in the promotion of science and scholarship by conveying a wide variety of foreign publications—acquired through its exchange system operating across the world—to Hungary's academe.

In the late nineteenth century, Oriental studies came to the fore throughout Europe. Societies and university departments of Eastern studies were established. The Hungarian Academy has always granted Oriental studies a high priority for a number of reasons. Primarily, the historic roots of the Magyars were supposed to have been somewhere in the East: the urge to identify their original home never ceased. An almost equally important reason was that the origin of the Hungarian language had long attracted keen interest. Another factor that accounts for the surge of Oriental studies was that the prehistory of the Magyars included a wealth of untapped sources for ancient history: before the Hungarian conquest in the Carpathian Basin in A. D. 896, the Magyar tribes

had roamed the steppes for about a thousand years, and in the course of their wanderings they appeared to have established an intricate web of relations with a host of peoples. Yet another factor prompting scholarly curiosity was the some one-hundred-fifty years of Turkish occupation and, as a result, Ottoman-Hungarian "coexistence" as part of the Ottoman Empire in the 16th–17th centuries, and the presence of Islamic culture in Hungary.

The centuries-old debate about the origin of Hungarian came to a head in the last decades of the nineteenth century: following a protracted and passionate clash, the Hungarian language was shown to be of Finno-Ugric origin and its rich Turkic elements were established as merely borrowings and loan words. The Academy presented itself as an ideal forum for discussing opposing views and concepts. The investigation of Turkish ties gave birth to Turkish studies and eventually, to Altaic studies.

The Academy also covered other areas of Oriental studies: from Egyptology through the linguistic and historic problems of the Ancient Near East to Persian studies. In 1873, a new chair was founded at the University of Budapest for Indo-European comparative linguistics, with the study of Sanskrit as one of its prime objectives.

When Aurel Stein, in early youth, stepped across the threshold of the Academy for the first time, he was received by a dynamically developing institution headed by enthusiastic patriots. This environment proved stimulating for young Stein who was attracted by Oriental studies. As a matter of fact, in his boyhood Aurel Stein actually lived close by the Academy. His uncle, the ophthalmologist Professor Ignaz Hirschler, a member of the Academy, helped Aurel Stein to visit the Academy Library while he was still at secondary school. He later wrote: "Many pleasant memories of my youth are connected with the fine library of the Academy. Apart from the paternal home I spent my happiest hours there and it was there that I began my studies to become an orientalist taking pains to learn Sanskrit grammar ..."¹

Stein left Hungary in order to study and, later, to work overseas. Yet, even with the great international acclaim he enjoyed, he never forgot his native land. Throughout his life he continued to recall with gratitude "the effective support I had been given at the outset of my Oriental studies both from the Hungarian Royal Ministry of Public Education in form of grants and, through its Library and great Orientalist scholars, from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences."²

His gratitude was reflected both in his spiritual, moral and financial support of Hungarian scholars and scholarship all his life, and in the significant bequest he made to the Library. Thus he arranged to have copies of his books sent to the Library. In 1921, Stein donated his family correspondence to the

1 ■ Aurel Stein to Kálmán Szily, *Akadémiai Értesítő*, 1922, p.38.

2 ■ Aurel Stein to Albert Berzeviczy, *Akadémiai Értesítő*, 1912, pp. 589-590

Academy. The correspondence between Ernő Stein, his older brother and Professor Ignaz Hirschler, his uncle, discussing Goethe, was deposited at his request in the Goethe Room of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. At the general meeting of the Academy held on 30 January 1922, the chief librarian reported that the Library had received a copy of Stein's *Serindia* and gave details of a letter from Stein, dated 24 December 1921, indicating his intention to donate part of his library to the Academy. The letter starts with the words quoted above about the "fine" Library, and continues, "so I do not have to give any reason why I have bequeathed my books to the Library of the Academy in a will made many years ago. It is a rather small collection consisting of about 2,000 volumes mostly on subjects like Indian and Central Asian linguistics and archaeology. I do not know whether this donation will be of much use to the Library. Notwithstanding, I have arranged that these books should be transported to Budapest at my expense and no terms whatsoever should prevent the Library from selling works it does not want for its own profit." The library consisted of books on the subject of Indology, Iranian studies, Central Asian linguistics and archaeology that Aurel Stein could dispense with. There were also a small number of works in Hungarian and several runs of periodicals. This first donation also contained manuscripts, including his school and university notes, notes for his Ph.D. theses, and the manuscripts for several of his own publications, for example: *Memoir on the Ancient Geography of Kashmir*, Jammu Sanskrit manuscripts— Rough inventory list, *Notes on Rajatarangini*, etc.

The second major donation was the bequest. In a will dated 28 July 1934, there were two sections which concern Hungary: he wished to bequeath his printed books to the Academy and to establish a fund to support British and Hungarian scholars in the exploration of Central Asia. The fund, known as the Stein-Arnold Fund, is still administered by the British Academy. Stein gave the following specifications.

I give all my printed books (other than those selected as hereinafter provided otherwise) to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences to be added to its Library in token of my grateful remembrance of the help I received from the latter as a student and of the encouragement which the Academy accorded me as one of its Members.

I direct that in addition to my book-plate a mark or label with the suitable Latin inscription showing that the books were bequeathed by me shall, at the expense of my estate, be placed on each book before being sent to Budapest.

The instructions may have been simple, however, the execution of the will was a lengthy process, further compounded by international politics. Therefore the bequest only arrived in Budapest in October 1957, fourteen years after Aurel Stein's death. The bequest added 2300 books and offprints and 180 volumes of periodicals to the Library of the Academy.

In addition to the books, the bequest contains one Turkish, two Sanskrit and three Persian manuscripts of more recent date, and an important collection of photographs, containing over four and a half thousand photographs, many of them arranged in albums.

The bequest also contains Stein's correspondence, over 1,400 letters written between 1897 and 1943, received from around 300 different persons and institutions. There are both private and official letters, and some have a carbon copy of Stein's letter or reply attached. This correspondence contains new biographical details and also the complete documentation of certain scholarly and academic problems. The rest of the bequest is diverse, comprising maps, captioned prints usually found together with the related correspondence, proof-sheets, manuscripts of some of his works, anthropometric notes, expedition invoices, diaries, photographic notebooks, diploma certificates, etc. Stein subscribed to Durrant's press-cutting service, and to the Authors' Syndicate, and there are several hundred press-cuttings on his expeditions and publications.

Aurel Stein maintained contact with eminent scholars in Hungary, all his life seeking their opinion and in many cases helping them to solve their problems. His extant correspondence attests how diverse the help was which he provided to his fellows in the Academy, including the acquisition of manuscripts or the sending of soil samples to Hungarian geologists interested in Central Asia. But the relationship was never onesided. In particular it is worth noting that Stein's most famous discovery, the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas at Tunhuang, was the direct result of his communication with the Hungarian geologist and geographer Lajos Lóczy (1849–1920). Lóczy had discovered the caves in 1879 as a member of an expedition led by Count Béla Széchenyi (the son of Count István Széchenyi, the founder of the Academy).

"It is a great satisfaction to me that the work in recent months was conducted in the Tun-huang region, an area where a Hungarian expedition deserves credit for first systematic exploration. Lóczy, my highly esteemed friend, drew my attention first to the Sa-chou "Thousand Buddhas' grotto temples", and I believe he will be glad to know that their research there has added many precious finds to my collection."³

He could also count on the help of Hungarian scholars and availed himself of this, seeking advice for his research or helping the work of his friends. An example of the latter is that P. S. Allen was able to include a hitherto unknown Erasmus letter in the complete edition he published. (His lifelong work—with his wife Helen Mary Allen—was collecting and editing the vast correspondence of Desiderius Erasmus. The letters fill 11 volumes, published between 1906–1946)

In 1895 Aurel Stein was elected corresponding member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, one of the first academies to confer such an honour.

3 ■ Aurel Stein to Ignác Goldziher, Wang-fu hsia, Kansu, 30 June, 1907. Oriental Collection of the Library of the HAS (Goldziher-correspondence, 41)

The title of his inaugural lecture (delivered on 24 May 1897) was "White Huns and Kindred Tribes in the History of India". His inaugural speech expressed his thanks for the honour:

I feel that the discipline I study with modest talent barely offers me any opportunity to do work which would make me worthy of being a corresponding member within the close meaning of the Academy's constitution referring to works "explicitly interesting to Hungary or the Academy".⁴

Yet in a letter written to the President of the Academy, Albert Berzeviczy, in 1912, he provided the justification for his corresponding membership: "I am sincerely delighted to know that with the help of the Indian Government I have had the opportunity to work in an area which is of close interest to Hungarian research as regards the historic background of the migration of old Hungarian and Turkish tribes."⁵

On the occasion of the centenary celebration of the Academy in 1925, the British Academy asked Stein to represent it and to convey its best wishes. He could not, however, be present on this solemn occasion as he was on assignment in India, so he wrote a letter instead. The President and Secretary, in turn, sent the following greetings.

The Fellows of the British Academy desire to join in acclaiming the many eminent scholars whose names adorn the Roll of the Hungarian Academy. They gratefully acknowledge the valued contributions by the members of the Academy to the advancement of learning, more especially in the domain of Oriental Philology and Archaeology. Alexander Csoma de Kőrös was the first to interpret Tibetan literature to the West. His heroic self-sacrifice in the cause of Buddhist lore is enshrined in the record of his life, by another member of the Hungarian Academy, Theodor Duka, whose life-long devotion to the interests of his native land went hand in hand with deep-seated affection for England, his adopted country, to which he was linked by closest ties.

Vámbéry, philologist and publicist, Ignatius Goldziher, the greatest authority of his time on Islamic culture, one of the first Corresponding Fellows of the British Academy, are gratefully remembered on this occasion. Happily, among its present Fellows, the British Academy numbers Sir Aurel Stein, who so well maintains this two-fold tradition of Hungarian scholarship in the fields of Oriental studies.⁶

Aurel Stein published regularly in Hungarian periodicals and was a member of several Hungarian scientific societies. His very first article, "On the Old Persian Religious Literature", was published in 1885 in *Budapesti Szemle*, a review sponsored by the Academy. A number of his books have been published in Hungarian, translated and reworked by Gyula Halász. To mention just a few:

4 ■ Published in *Budapesti Szemle*, Vol. XCI, August, 1897

5 ■ *Akadémiai Értesítő*, 23/1912, p.589

6 ■ *Akadémiai Értesítő*, 36/1925, p.302

Sand-buried Ruins of Khotan, Desert Cathay, On Ancient Central Asian Tracks, etc. From his youth Stein had close ties with Ignác Goldziher, who is still recognised as the most prominent student of Islam. On the occasion of Goldziher's 60th birthday, he wrote a study entitled *Note on Buddhist Local Worship in Mohammedan Central Asia* for inclusion in a *Festschrift* published in Budapest. Stein later played a major role in bringing the correspondence of this prominent scholar to the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

The Academy also invited Stein to write a memorial address on Theodore Duka, the first biographer of Alexander Csoma de Kőrös, himself a medical officer in the Indian Army and paternal friend of Stein. In 1914, he published it also in English in Oxford under the title *In memoriam Theodore Duka*.

Stein was in regular correspondence with the principals of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and these letters show how he kept track overseas of developments in the Hungarian academic world and his active participation in this work. He supported the Academy in establishing relations abroad as well as in its ambitions from which the Hungarian scholarly world might benefit and which might extend its limits. To acknowledge these activities of Stein, at the proposal of Albert Berzeviczy, the President of the Academy, he was presented by the Hungarian state with the Class II Medal with Star in 1931.

Sir Aurel Stein was deeply attached to two countries: to his native land, Hungary, where he spent his formative years and acquired the educational foundations which allowed him to attend the best universities of Europe and set about unfolding his talents. So too was he attached to his adopted country, Britain, which provided the opportunities to work in areas where he could make best use of his knowledge and expertise. As Sir Denison Ross described him: "This great Hungarian is the pride of two nations and the wonder of all."

Correspondence played an important role in Aurel Stein's life. Studying abroad from early childhood, he maintained relations with his family by means of letters, and they helped him keep the links, once he had moved to India, with his loved ones, friends and colleagues in Europe. He lived a solitary life, and he never took European companions on his expeditions; the only exception was when, in 1932, he chose Károly Fábri to be his colleague for work in Persia. He would retire to his camp in Kashmir for months, to work, with the sole company of his servants. An endless flow of letters were always and everywhere his link with the world. No matter where he happened to be, not a day passed without his writing a couple of letters, only to be prevented in high mountains or winter deserts by frozen ink. Turdi, a dak-man familiar with the desert, delivered his mail several times even during expeditions.

And this was of course how professional relations could be maintained. Stein did not prepare his findings for publication alone but consulted the greatest

scholars of each field. Letters were the medium for proposing problems, discussing issues and for the first drafts of findings.

A sample of this extensive correspondence is provided here, letters written to Aurél Stein and held in the Oriental Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. All of these are listed in the *Catalogue of the Collections of Sir Aurel Stein in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences*, which was co-published by the British Museum and the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 2002, within the framework of an Anglo-Hungarian project.

Letters to Aurel Stein from Friends and Colleagues

Percy Stafford Allen, Thomas Walker Arnold and Fred H. Andrews

Aurel Stein met them immediately upon his arrival in Lahore, and their friendship proved to be lifelong. As Stein's first biographer, Jeanette Mirsky says: "Stein could count friends, good friends, by the score, but these three were part of the fabric of his being." (Mirsky, Jeanette: Sir Aurel Stein—Archaeological Explorer, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977, p. 73.)

They called each other by nicknames given in their youth. They were the Mayo Lodge (this was where Stein, Allen and Andrews stayed for some time in Lahore), a "contingent of volunteers" (non-military): Stein, the leader: General, or later, Beg General; Arnold: the Saint; Andrews: the Baron; and Allen: Publius (his initials being the same as those of the Roman Publius Scipio Africanus).

Allen, Percy Stafford (1869–1933). Professor of History; Government College, Lahore, 1897–1901; President, Corpus Christi College, Oxford, from 1924; Curator, Bodleian Library and Indian Institute; Arnold, Sir Thomas Walker (1864–1930). Arabist, Professor of Philosophy, Government College, Lahore, Dean of Oriental Faculty, Punjab University, Assistant Librarian, India Office Library, Chair of Arabic, School of Oriental Studies, London University; he joined the Oriental College, Lahore from Aligarh Muslim University in 1898.

He was the English Editor of the Encyclopædia of Islam; his works: Preaching of Islam, Little Flowers of St. Francis, The Caliphate, The Islamic Faith, Painting in Islam. Stein, in the provisions of his will, conveying his property to the British Academy for the establishment of a fund for Central Asian exploration, desired that the fund should be known as Stein-Arnold Fund in memory of his friend.

India Office Library
London, S.W.
May 31st 1907

My dear Stein,

Your great work* is published today, and 65 copies are to be handed over to me to dispose of according to your instructions. I will send off the 35 copies to the names set down in your official list, and to the 9 persons for whom you sent me presentation slips, in your letter of Dec 5th from Charklik. (You sent a presentation-slip also for Lord Curzon** (which I will forward to him), but his copy will be sent to him, direct from this Office.) So there will remain 21 copies left for me to take care of for you.

And now let me congratulate you on the fact that the fruit of your vast labours has at last appeared, to shine in the eyes of men, or at least to win from scholars the applause that is due to such immense learning. They make two fine volumes, and it is sad that you will have to wait until you reach Peking or Kashgar before being able to see them yourself.

Chavannes is at present in China, so I shall send his copy to Sylvain Lévi, to await arrival. Foucher is on his way from Hanoi, to succeed Henry as Professor of Sanskrit. I met Sylvain Lévi and Senart*** in Paris last week and they both enquired very warmly after you. I don't think that you need fear any deminution [sic] of their friendly feelings towards you, on the score of international jealousy. They recognise that Chinese Turkestan has now become a hunting-ground for the scholars of all nations; Senart told me that even the Japanese have sent an expedition there.

Publius sent on your letter of Feb. 17 from Abdel, Lop-nor; your fresh finds sound most interesting, and open up quite new fields.

Keltie's**** article in the Times appeared on Sat. May 25, almost entirely (it seemed to me) in your own words. I gave Luzac***** the information, as you desired.

Yours ever

T. W. Arnold

* *Ancient Khotan: detailed report of a journey of archaeological and geographical exploration in Chinese Turkestan. Vol. I-II.* Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1907.

** George Nathaniel, Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, Viceroy of India 1895-1905, President of the Royal Geographical Society, 1911-14.

*** Edouard Chavannes, Sylvain Lévi, Alfred Charles Auguste Foucher, Émile Senart: French Orientalists.

**** Sir John Scott Keltie, Secretary of the Royal Geographical Society, editor.

***** Luzac: The London publisher.

19 Gloucester Walk
Kensington W.8
5 June 1929

My dear General,

Alexander has arrived* and was duly welcomed with a fanfare of trumpets. I so much enjoyed reading your account of this thrilling expedition of yours, when I went through the proofs, that I rejoice to have it again in my hands. It was a great triumph for you to have settled a problem that has been waiting so many centuries for a solution, and it is wonderful to think that you should have achieved success in finding what you searched for in vain, a quarter of a century ago.

When are you coming with me to the London Museum? The Director there is interested in air-photography in connection with archaeological work, and may be able to help with advice in regard to your scheme for future work. Nancy will not be available as your guide at present, as she will be in Holland from the 7th to the 21st.

Our love to the Presidencies.

Yours ever

T.W. Arnold

* *On Alexander's Track to the Indus: personal narrative of explorations on the North-West Frontier of India*, London: Macmillan, 1929.

*

Andrews, Frederick Henry (1866–1957). Vice Principal, Mayo School of Art, Lahore 1890; Director, Technological Institute, Srinagar; Curator, Lahore Museum. It was Lockwood Kipling who introduced Stein to Fred Andrews and their friendship lasted 53 years, ending only at Stein's death. He was also Stein's trusted assistant in cataloguing his finds and made the arrangement, detailed descriptions and illustration of the antiquities in all of Stein's scholarly books.

Works: Catalogue of Wall-Paintings from Ancient Shrines in Central Asia and Sistan Recovered by Sir Aurel Stein; Description of Antiquities Recovered by Sir Aurel Stein; Wall Paintings from Ancient Shrines in Central Asia Recorded by Aurel Stein.

60 Prince of Wales Mansions
12.2.07
Battersea Park s.w.

My Dear General,

I cannot tell you how great was my pleasure in receiving the 'complete rect. document'. I could scarce believe my eyes at first. Ram Singh,* under your direction has acquitted himself most ably in this direction, and I hope my appreciation of his skill may be allowed to reach him. There is only one small detail in which he has not been quite accurate, and that is in leaving a rough floor to the

seal cavity. In all the ancient examples this is deliberately roughened to give a 'tooth' for the sealing clay; his is smoothed.

Your management of the string is perfect and the seal is, of course, as it should be. Altogether it is a most delightful surprise and a possession I shall treasure. The history of the wood, in itself is fascinating. Tomorrow I shall have Joyce, Dalton and, I hope, Read over here to my enamel class, and I shall then produce the document to their eyes.

You will be glad to hear your Report is nearing completion. Yesterday I answered a few straggling queries from the press and Publius. My experience on this Report has taught me many things, and if it should be my good fortune to have the same work to do at a future time (as I gather from your letter it may be) I shall know how to obviate much of the labour that this last has caused. But something must be done to secure that I can commence work immediately upon your return. This is the matter that troubles me, and which I shall hope your skill in such matters may achieve. It may be useful that I am keeping in very close and friendly relationship with Read and his Department, and I am known personally to Morrison who is the new Member of Council. I have also seen Foster recently. To increase the interest in my affairs I have applied to be appointed to the Superintendentship of the Madras S. of Art, and am still awaiting a decision. If I should be appointed to this post, it should be a fairly easy translation to the work in which our mutual interest lies. If not, some other channel must be constructed. It seems certain that my duties here (at the Poly) are so heavy and so exacting that I must be freed from them to successfully follow the line most congenial. Surely the small demand I should make in this connection could be provided for without a great deal of trouble if only pressed judiciously in influential quarters. I tell you all this now, because I know you have my personal well being at heart, and also because you would be (I feel sure) disappointed if insuperable difficulties remained in the way of my taking up the branch of your work in wh.[ich] I can be useful the moment you are ready. The work I am doing here could be done by a man of experience but without my Oriental training and sympathies. But the work you bring back with you requires those qualifications which are complex and which I believe I may claim to possess (owing to my unique experience, and natural inclination) in a greater degree than will easily be found elsewhere. Forgive this seeming egotism, but you will read aright I know, and realise that I am anxious that no chance wh.[at] may come to you of achieving or helping along that which we both would welcome may be missed for want of a clear statement to you on my part. Your news is extremely interesting and you are evidently doing an immense amount of work. I am indeed longing to see and handle the new finds! A week or two back, Barnett** very kindly showed me Grierson's Report.*** Of course it is not nearly as fine as yours, and it is nearly all Tibetan and Chinese Art. In your discoveries it is the Western influence which is so fascinating. The more I study your terracottas and stuccoes the more strongly impressed do I become with the conviction that the

links between the Khotanese and the terra-cotta workers of the West—the Etruscans—must be connected up. They are two branches of the same people—Pelasgians or whatever common name may be chosen for them. Their handling and treatment of their materials are identical, and among your finds, I find archaic types of face which are exactly similar to those of the Etruscan and Lycian sculptors. Will Balkh help the connection? It will I believe if you can get down deep enough. It is very significant that while the many resemblances which Khotan Art bears to Etruscan, Cyprian, Lycian and Persepolitan work, are so striking and convincing, there is comparatively so very little Tibetan or Chinese influence apparent; and that in spite of the proved Chinese official position in the country for so long. Perhaps these problems have long been resolved in your mind, with your great knowledge of the philology and ethnography of these peoples. I only read the signs manual of the craftsmen, as a craftsman, and would ask, with all becoming deference, your opinion.

I wrote yesterday inquiring as to the Saint's condition, and I hope to hear in time to enclose the latest news in this. He had a very bad time indeed, but when last I heard was making good progress. Publius was also very unwell before Xmas, but says he is now better. I also was on the sick list as you know, and went to Swanage to recoup. I am glad to feel better again. The continuous fight for exams, and the unwholesome competition between the various educational authorities is very worrying and destructive to health, temper and good sound work. I often envy you in the desert, and more often than you would suspect I remember those few days when we camped together in Kashmir. I positively yearn for those mountains and a tent!

We are all in good health I am thankful to say. Nora is looking forward to leaving school in the summer and to the commencement of her new course of study at the Poly. She writes cheerfully. The girls of her form are playing the Merchant of Venice next term and Nora plays the parts of the Duke and the Moor.

On Wednesday I showed your tab to Joyce and Dalton, and they were very struck with it.

They brought some old Celtic (c. II-III cent A.D.) enamel to try in my furnace. It was an interesting experiment but rather confounding certain theories as to possible colours used by the Celts.

The Saint I hear is much better and comes to London this week.

Must close now, with kindest greetings from us all. (The Newtons spent a week with us recently, at the flat and made many kind inquiries after you.)

Again thanks for the tablet. I look forward to hearing more of your movements.

Yours ever

Fred H. Andrews

* Ram Singh: the Indian surveyor working for Aurel Stein.

**Lionel David Barnett: Keeper, Department of Oriental Books and Manuscripts, British Museum.

*** Sir George Abraham Grierson: Linguist, Superintendent of the Linguistic Survey of India.

Kipling, Rudyard (1865–1936). Stein became a friend of Rudyard Kipling's father, Lockwood Kipling (1837–1911), who had come to Lahore in 1875 to take up the dual position of Principal of the Mayo School of Art and curator of the Lahore Museum, "the wonder house", as the museum was immortalised in his son's novel *Kim*. From him Stein learned much about the iconography of India and with his tutelage became familiar with Greco-Buddhist art. During his early years in India, Stein spent many evenings with the Kiplings and though Rudyard had left India in 1888, the parents remained and through them a lifelong friendship had formed.

Another friend from the early days was Major-General Lionel C. Dunsterville, who as a junior officer won Stein's lasting affection. Dunsterville had been at school with Rudyard Kipling and he was the model for the character Stalky in *Stalky and Co.*

Sep. 18, 1916

Dear Stein,

Thank you very much for your letter. Ruins of Desert Cathay has just arrived and I have stolen time from my book just to look over it "in anticipation" of a good evening. It's a superb thing and an enduring record. But the cities you photo are—curiously enough—more traceable as cities than some of the villages I have seen on the French line. They have been reduced to little mounds of variously coloured dust—not rubble but fine dust. Thus we see how modern "science" is in advance of mere nature!

I had a letter from Dunsterville only last week. He's had an extra allowance granted—to him and local brigadiers—by the Govt. which is even more pleasant than ADC ships and C.B's.

With all good wishes

Ever sincerely yours

Rudyard Kipling

*

Hedin, Sven (1865–1952). Swedish geographer, traveller. Studied geology, physics and zoology at the University of Stockholm, and geography at Berlin University under the great Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen—to whom is owed the name *Silk Road* for one of the world's oldest caravan routes. He was the pioneer of research in the Taklamakan, starting his expeditions in 1895 and continuing till the mid-1930s. He was an explorer who discovered many sites, but not being an archaeologist, left that discipline to specialists.

Government House
Calcutta
2/1 1902

Dear Mr Stein

I am very glad to receive your extremely kind and interesting letter and the beautiful book* describing your work in Eastern Turkestan. I will just now on my return journey to Ladak get the great pleasure of reading it. The illustrations are admirable.

I see in your book you have made excavations on two of the old places I found in 1896 and it will be very interesting to have now from your book what your opinion is, as you are just the right man to decide that question.

We could easily have met, as I also went to the Andere-daria coming from Tjertjen.

I made a short visit there in the middle of January 1900, but had the bad chance of getting an exceptionally heavy snowfall.

The ancient sites I found now to the N. from Kara-Koshun belong to a quite different period than Kara-dung, and the MS are Chinese, but they give the key to the Lop-nor question and are extremely interesting.

If you are in Rawalpindi about the middle of this month, I should be very glad to meet you. I will let you know when I am coming, and should be very happy indeed to have a long talk with you.

Believe me

Yours sincerely

Sven Hedin

* *Preliminary Report of a Journey of Archaeological and Topographical Exploration in Chinese Turkestan*, London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1901, 77 pp. + 29 ill, XVI plates.

Sven Hedin and Sir Aurel Stein felt considerable mutual respect for each other despite the rivalry between them. Hedin was primarily an explorer, Stein was an Orientalist, who sought evidence for his theories in the field. Hedin usually preferred not to enter into discussions on archeological questions, but, as this note from the Stein Collections shows, he was not pleased by being corrected by Stein.

I have read Dr. Stein's wonderful paper with the greatest interest and although it was impossible for me to be present at the lecture itself* I cannot help writing a few words expressing my sincere and deep admiration for the splendid work Dr. Stein has carried out on his second expedition in Central Asia as well as on his first. The tremendous treasures of old records and documents he has brought home now will form a most important addition to the first one, and he and his collaborators will be able to spread new light over the ancient history of those immense countries where now nothing but deserts and moving sands pre-

vail. We are in a most interesting and unexpected era of Central Asian exploration just now. The époque of geographical discoveries is almost gone although a lot of detailed work is still left to be done. The time of archaeological investigation has set in. It began already years ago with "Bower's Manuscript", Petrovsky's, Macartney's and Dutreuil de Rhin's collections and with my discovery of Dendan Uilic and Kara-Dung, those sand-buried cities in Takla-makan which later on were visited and examined so carefully by Dr. Stein. The archaeological investigation has now taken a great step forward. From several different countries, England, Germany, France, Russia, America, expeditions have been sent out, but we can hardly talk of any competition—the deserts are big enough for as many parties as Europe, India and America can afford to send out—and to some more still. From what we already know we have every right to draw the conclusion that there must still rest under the moving sands whole civilizations of different ages and races. The records now brought home by Stein, Grünwedel, Lecocq** and the rest is so overwhelming as to keep a whole staff of experts busy for years to come and in Paris I heard from Sénart and Chavannes that they could hardly see any end of the work before them. A quite new science or anyhow a new branch of ancient history is in this way steadily growing up from the deserts of Central Asia and I congratulate my friend Stein most heartily to the splendid and glorious place he has conquered for himself in this fascinating branch of science.

When in the beginning of 1896 I travelled down the Keriya-darya to its end and thence through the desert to Shah-yat I did not regard this journey as any particularly great risk as the river and its underground continuation showed me the road. It was a much more, incomparably more dangerous task Dr. Stein faced when he went the same way—in the opposite direction. Everybody will easily understand this from a single glance at the map. Wherever I went, keeping fairly straight north, I could not help reaching the Tarim river sooner or later, whereas Stein, coming from the north, had only one single point to keep on, namely the point where Keriya-darya dies away in the sand. Everybody who has travelled in the Takla-makan will understand what it should have meant for Stein if he had not reached this very point—he should very likely have lost both his own and his followers lives in the Killin desert situated to the east and the west of the Kerya-darya. As nothing else existed from this part of Asia except my map I should have had a terrible responsibility for his fate if he had not found the inland or desert delta of the river. So nobody can be more glad than I that this most dangerous journey of Stein went off in such a happy way. The fact that the delta had changed its place some miles is only a new proof of the instability of the rivers in the desert, a phenomenon that both Stein and I have studied and described at so many different occasions.

I am very glad also to hear from Dr. Stein's paper that he was able to find the old site of Lou-lan from my map. It is by no means easy to find the place, every-

thing is grey and yellow, the "yardangs" are very like ruins, and the ruins like yardangs, old dry trees look like parts of houses and vice versa, and one can be quite near the place without seeing it. I, or rather one of my Russian cossaks, discovered the ruins only by chance, but one year later I visited it again coming from the north and of course following my own map. It was more difficult to find the place from the south as Stein did. I am not an archaeologist so I cannot take part in a discussion as to whether this place is Lou-lan or not. I have called it Lou-lan from a communication by Karl Himly in Wiesbaden, who undertook to work out and publish my records, almost all of them Chinese. Dr. Stein says in his paper that these ruins were not Lou-lan, this place being situated further south. After the death of Karl Himly my collection had a rather long time of rest until Professor Conrady of Leipzig continued Himly's work, and is still busy with it. I asked Prof. Conrady the other day about Lou-lan and he positively said that the site in question is Lou-lan and nothing else and that there are absolutely sure proofs of the fact in the collection of manuscripts I brought home. But as I said before, the discussion about the real situation of Lou-lan is a matter which I leave, without the slightest jealousy, to the experts.

It is of very great interest to learn from Dr. Stein that those new lakes I found in the Lop desert, had almost disappeared at the time of his visit. Does that mean that the lakes are just in a period of wandering and changing of place, or that in general the volume of water carried down by the Tarim has been diminishing during the last years. Dr. Stein's maps and measurements of the river will tell us about this question and will give us all the material necessary for comparison and conclusions.

There are several other things in Dr. Stein's paper which invite to interesting discussions, but I have no time now. This last journey has opened up magnificent perspectives not only in the field of archaeology, but also in the field of physical geography, formation of deserts and dunes, wind-erosion, dessication, the wanderings of rivers and lakes etc. and it is most difficult to understand how closely the physical phenomena of Central Asia are connected with the archaeology, the explanation and understanding of the possibilities of ancient culture, the cause of migrations of nations, the dying away of empires, the disappearing of roads and stations etc. The one cannot be understood without the other. From a verbal communication of Dr. Stein I am glad to hear that he quite agrees with my theory (Vol. II Scientific Results) of the curious morphology of the Lop desert, and specially about the formation of "yardangs" by the action of the wind erosion. A detailed description of any part of the earth is always extremely valuable, not only for its own sake, but also because it gives the next explorer the possibility of deciding in which direction the changes go, and this holds good specially for deserts like Takla-makan and Lop where the changes are so very rapid. No doubt Dr. Stein will later on give us a lot of important conclusions to which he has come by comparing his own observations with mine and which he

had no time to mention in his lecture. He will be able to tell us the changes in the bed of Keriya-darya which he visited ten years after me and he will tell us a good many things about the desperate struggle between the water and the sand in the Lop desert.

It is surprising that the present Government of India does not seem to realise what a treasure they have to their disposition in the person of Dr. Stein. He is much too good for the place he occupies and he ought to be created a Director General of an Archaeological Department with some lakhs of rupees per annum to his disposition for archaeological exploration in a big scale.

If I should be asked to express my opinion of Dr. Stein as an explorer, in one single word, I should use the word: EXCELSIOR!

Leipzig,
March 26th, 1909.
(signed) Sven Hedin.

* Between January 1909–December 1911 Stein was in Europe working on his collection at the British Museum and giving lectures in different countries: Paris, Vienna, Munich, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Cambridge and Budapest.

**Albert Grünwedel, Albert von Le Coq: leaders of German expeditions.

*

Rapson, Edward James (1861–1937). Professor of Sanskrit, Cambridge University. In Ancient Khotan's Appendix D with S. W. Bushell he prepared the Inventory of Coins Found or Purchased (at that time he was assistant keeper of the Coin Department, British Museum). He worked on the Kharosthi MSS found by Stein.

14 June 1912

My dear Stein,

My wife and I heartily congratulate you on your well deserved honour*. The birthday list this time is quite cheering in the way in which scholarship is recognised.

I am getting on with the Kharosthi** tablets of the second expedition and am doing the work in strict order from the beginning, so as to avoid all the confusion which resulted from our rather badly organised efforts to deal with the tablets of the first expedition.

It is more than a week since I wrote to M. Senart to know whether it would be convenient for me to come to Paris for 10 days or so on the 22nd of this month. I'm afraid he may not be in good health. If I do not hear from him today, I will write to the Abbé Boyer***.

All your friends will rejoice that your great services to Indian archaeology have been thus recognised. I will wish you many years of health and strength for further achievements.

Believe me

Yours very sincerely

E. J. Rapson

* your well deserved honour: K.C.I.E. (Knight Commander of the Indian Empire).

** Kharosthi: ancient script of northwest India, reads from right to left.

*** Émile Sénart, Abbé Boyer: French Orientalists.

17 June 1932

My dear Stein,

Just a word to say how greatly delighted I was to read the account of the presentation to you of the Royal Asiatic Society's gold medal by the Secretary of State. Please accept my most cordial congratulations. The medal was never more fitly awarded.

And please let me say personally how proud I was to see my name among the scholars whose good fortune it has been to be supplied with original documents of the highest interest and importance from your boundless stores.

This letter needs no answer. I gather that your stay in this country is to be a very short one, and your time must be fully occupied.

Believe me

Yours ever

E. J. Rapson

*

Ross, Sir Edward Denison (1871–1940). Professor of Persian, University of London, Director, School of Oriental Studies.

Succeeded Stein as Principal of the Calcutta Madrasah in 1901. In 1914 he took over the cataloguing of the Stein Collection at the British Museum, when Andrews moved to Kashmir. He worked on the Uighur and Turki MSS found by Stein. Unfortunately, we do not know who Stein's "compatriot", mentioned in the letter of 13 January, 1910, is.

Jan 13, 1910, Calcutta

My Dear Stein,

Your compatriot [...] brought a charming letter to me from you. I will certainly do all I can to assist him in his researches. There is also another Hungarian now in Calcutta, Herr Löffler, who is likewise a great enthusiast, and he has

taken an enormous interest in the tribute I recently paid to the great Csoma in a lecture I delivered before the ASB* on January 5th. I send you a cutting from the Statesman in case it may interest you in spite of its scrappy nature and its numerous misprints. In order to help me in my work of love in editing Csoma's Ms. I have a lama from Lhasa who sits in my study all day and does copying and correcting—and when I have time (which is all but seldom) reads with me Buddhist Sutras.

I wrote last mail to Barnett asking him to send me your Uighur** Mss. I hope he will do so.

You will see in the Times of the week in which you peruse these lines an account of a young Jap's journey over your ground. He has got a large mass of Mss. chiefly Chinese. One of the later Han period. Hensman and I put the article together from the very indistinct account we received verbally from Count Otani.

You will probably meet these gentlemen in London as they are on their way to Europe via Egypt.

I am most anxious to hear what Pelliot's*** treasures consist of. I hope his hoard in the Louvre will not delay Chavannes's**** work at your finds!

With kindest regards and best new year wishes from us both

Yours very sincerely

Denison Ross

*ASB: Asiatic Society of Bengal.

** Uighur: Turkic people.

*** Paul Pelliot: French Sinologist, a leader of a French expedition. He visited the Tunhuang Caves after Stein and returned to Paris with many MSS from the hidden library.

**** Edouard Chavannes: French Sinologist, a leading authority on all Chinese sources concerning the history and geography of Central Asia. In *Ancient Khotan* and *Serindia* he translated and annotated the Chinese documents.

The Madrasah

Calcutta

February 10

My dear Stein,

I have never written to you since receiving an introduction by your countryman Mr. Löffler, whose acquaintance I was very pleased to make. By a most curious coincidence he walked into my office on the very day on which I was going to deliver a lecture before the Asiatic Society on Csoma de Körös: a coincidence on which I of course alluded in my lecture.

I hope I am doing something to liquify the debt which the Society owes to that great countryman of yours. The work of editing the Tibetan Sanskrit vocabulary is well advanced—though it is hard work parsing anything so difficult

through the [...] in the cold weather season with two offices in one's charge. I am also going to imprint the 14 articles Csoma contributed to our journal and to this imprint, I shall prefix the substance of my lecture.

I wrote some weeks ago to Barnett asking him to send me your Uighur documents. I hope I did right in this. You very kindly suggested I might apply through an official channel in order to be put on special duty—but I fear this would be of no use. As matters stand I mean either to spend the worst of the hot weather in the hills or to chuck India altogether. Sir Harold Stuart is quite agreeable. It only remains for Sir E. Baker to consent: and the province is in such a state of political torment, that I have not liked to approach him on the subject. For you must realise that we live here in stirring times and no one has any thought to give to research archaeology. So with regard to your Uighur Mss. I hope whatever happens to me to be able to give them the best of my time: and trust they or some of them will reach me shortly.

Trusting you are well and with our united kind regards

I am yours very sincerely

Denison Ross

*Franke** has been making some wonderful discoveries in Leh and its neighbourhood, of which you will probably hear shortly.

* August Hermann Francke: Tibetologist, a member of the Moravian Brethren, missionary scholar at Leh.

*

Lanman, Charles Rockwell (1850–1941). Professor of Sanskrit, Harvard University. Stein's longest standing correspondent in the United States. He had studied under Prof. Rudolf von Roth at Tübingen a few years before Stein, and they had been writing to each other since the 1890's, though they had met for the first time only in 1929, when Stein was giving lectures in the States. He was the Editor of the celebrated Harvard Oriental Series, of which 32 volumes were published between 1891–1925.

9 Farrar Street, Cambridge, Mass., 11 December, 1902

My dear Stein,

I fear that you will think that I am the most ungrateful person in the world, for I have let more than a year go by without thanking you for your superb gift of your translation of the history of Cashmere,* about which you wrote me when you were in camp up there yourself; but I have been under such pressure of scientific work that I have been almost unable to make any proper acknowledgment of the things that are sent to me, but you may be assured that there are

very few things sent to me so beautiful as your two superb volumes. However, as the German students say at their beer table, I propose to "revenge myself" in very short order by sending you the two magnificent volumes of Whitney's *Atharva Veda*. I am expecting a telegram from the printer to-morrow saying that the last of the thousands of folios of copy has been set. It makes a good deal over a thousand pages, and is a model of careful and well digested work, such as Whitney was famous for. Indeed, it seems to me to indicate the way that the Rig Veda has yet to be treated.

I cannot tell you what a bitter disappointment it was to me that I could not get over this autumn to Hamburg. Above all, I wanted to see you and hear you as well; but I did not feel that I could put off the completion of the Veda any longer, and so I stuck at home, although I am not sure that it was not really a serious mistake. I most envy you your splendid career. It is so different from the scholar who sits at home over his rusty books from year to year. What a bit of the world you are, indeed, seeing! and I wonder if it ever occurs to you that modern nations are doing just what the people in South-Western Asia have done,—ruining the whole civilization by indiscriminate deforestation and by *wildwirtschaft* generally.

You may be interested to know that immediately after the ending of the *Veda* I propose to take up the text edition left almost ready for the press by my friend Warren,—the text of Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhi Magga*. It is really a great work, and I hope it will prove to be as good a piece of text editing as has ever been done in Pali. Compared with some of it, that would not be saying much, for I must say that Oldenberg's *Dipa Vansa* is a pretty ramshackly performance. Often, in wondering who should be my successor here in case I die within a reasonable number of years, I have thought that you were the man if anyone; but, of course, the chances are that I *may* live quite a while, and it is hardly worth thinking of; and yet I cannot help wishing that Whitney had left some definite record of his opinion as to who should be his successor at Yale. It has seemed to me an outrageous shame that you were not made the successor of Bühler**—not that I have anything against the present incumbent; but it does seem to me as if no one was so naturally fitted to hold that charge as you. It seems strange that we have never seen each other, when I feel as if I know you so well. Will you not send me a photograph of yourself; and, if you like, I can send one to you. Please accept my kindest Christmas greetings. With all best wishes,

Faithfully yours

Charles R. Lanman

* *Kalhana's Rajatarangini, a Chronicle of the Kings of Kashmir*, 2 vols. London: Constable & Co., 1900.

** Georg Bühler: Stein's professor at Leipzig University, an authority on Indian paleography. Stein dedicated the translation of the *Rajatarangini* to his memory.

From Charles R. Lanman
9 Farrar Street
Cambridge
Massachusetts
U.S. of America

Cable-address
Indiman, Boston

Harvard University
1932 November 26
Saturday

To
Sir Aurel Stein

Honored and loved friend:

Within the last few weeks, you have—as I hope—got some signs from your American friends that they bear you in mind and wish you well. But there is no knowing how long time a letter may take to reach you from Bandar Abbas. So the next best thing to do is to have you in mind today, the seventieth anniversary of your birth, and to hope that you realize, and realize with gladness, that your friends respect and love you. Your leading of the scholar's life is and has been a noble example of unselfish devotion to the highest ideals which are given to us mortals to cherish.

The purpose of creation and endless evolution seems to grow to be more and more of a puzzle as the years for any one individual grow fewer. But there is one thing we may be sure of: we know right from wrong, and firm adherence to the right seems to carry its own reward with it, let others think as they may. I look into the future fearlessly. If it be unknown, I may yet hope. And I must have faith in a Supreme Being. And Saint Paul says: And now abideth faith, hope, goodwill, these three; but the greatest of these is goodwill.

The only way to have goodwill prevail as between peoples, is to practice it as between persons. So here's a message of goodwill to cross seas and lands to you, dear friend.

Mrs. Lanman is holding her own pretty well, and bravely. Hard as the times are, and dubious as the general outlook is,—we must not forget that we have much to be thankful for. Please don't take time to tell me your doings—adventurous or otherwise. Those I can learn from Sachs, who is most kind about that. With best wishes for your health and courage, affectionately yours

C. R. Lanman

Ádám Bodor

The Smell of Prison

Responses to Zsófia Balla

(Extracts)

Part 3. Conclusion

Did that whole passport business have something to do with your decision to leave Transylvania and settle in Hungary?

It must have. The thought that there are other places in the world occurred to me with greater frequency. Anyone living in a place where his dignity as a human being does not figure in the social equation, and where the preconditions of a secure existence are not even close to being met, day after day thinks about getting away. And if one is a writer, then, rather than fall silent, he ought to be thinking of doing the same, if only as a protest. Even if the place he can move to is one that offers but a milder form of the same dictatorship.

In my case, there were no moral objections to leaving to be taken seriously. I had no job, I was living in a vacuum, as it were, from hand to mouth. No one could expect me to be loyal to something that no longer had meaning for me. I had a feeling—there were plenty of signs in the air—that I'd have fewer and fewer opportunities to get my things published, my breathing space would be further constricted, so making myself scarce at that point seemed like the smart thing to do. The passport business clearly added to my resolve. At that time, in the mid-seventies, emigration to or resettlement in Hungary was practically impossible. Jews were allowed to leave, as well as ethnic Germans, but for each emigrant the Romanian government demanded a bounty from the country

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admitting them. Hungarians, however (though a similar arrangement may have already been part of the government's long-range political plans and calculations), obtained passports only in exceptional cases, usually if they married citizens of Hungary. I myself got married at that time, though my bride was not from Budapest but from Târgu-Mureș. Laying our cards right on the table, we applied together for permission to emigrate. It took five years till, in 1982, we were finally allowed to leave. Though in the interim—miracles do happen—we managed to go abroad a few times. Once, just for fun, we latched on to a tourist group and went to Poland with them. Later, as a member of a delegation, I was able to visit the Soviet Union—Moscow, Yerevan, Tbilisi—courtesy of the Romanian Writers Union. It looked as if the authorities got around to appreciating and rewarding my decision to finally take the step they had long been expecting me to take.

But we got a little ahead of ourselves. We were up to my release from jail. Yet it wouldn't hurt to stop here and, as though on the edge of a fault line, take a breather. In retrospect it seems that until the big move, and even afterward, every aspect of my life was defined by my political proscription, the two years I had spent behind bars. It affected my career and other life choices—the friends I had picked, the goals I had set, as well as my sense of well-being, the nature of my fiction, my moral commitments—and on the whole, I am not unhappy with the way things have turned out. It's true that in my daily existence I remained a marked man, yet rather than being encumbered by a constant feeling of frustration, I felt enriched by the joys of life. Thanks to my instinct for self-preservation, I was always able to turn whatever fate had in store for me to my own advantage. In the quagmire, or ice clumps, that was Romania in the nineteen-fifties, sixties and seventies, I managed to keep my balance and survive, mainly because I am blessed with drives and passions that for the most part compensated me for very real losses. When I went on my ski trips up in the Radna Mountains, for weeks, even months at a time, those who believed they could fence in my thoughts seemed very far away. Besides, I had wonderful friends. And I held on to them, too; only some passed away before their time. Perhaps it's not that easy to understand, but by serving my term and seeing that officialdom had written me off, striking my name from the list of possible partners, I felt I earned the right to be free and go on living an honest life—and I did, until finally the time came to make the break and leave for good. It may be that by then much of my life had gone by. But then, that was my real life, back in Transylvania.

You haven't said much about your family.

My mother came from a family of civil servants, with ancestors from various parts of Transylvania: Székelyudvarhely, Háromszék, Fogaras. My grandmother still had a strong Székely accent. My father's ancestors were landowners, barristers. One branch of this large clan moved at one point to the village of

Hejőcsaba in the north of Hungary, but later returned to Transylvania and settled in Szamosújvár (Gherla). My paternal grandfather was a lawyer, a magistrate, and grandmother, born in Gherla, came from an Armenian family. Which makes me one-quarter Armenian. In a family like this, the preferred profession at the time was the law. But there were quite a few army officers, pharmacists, clergymen and school-teachers among my relatives. My father studied economics, and while still a young man, held important positions at various banks. Then, for decades, he was general manager of the Credit Bank, one of Transylvania's largest, and in the early forties became the president of the National Banking Association. With that he reached the highest position he could aspire to. For his professional achievements he was named chief government councillor. Which naturally didn't mean that he gave the government one sage counsel after another; such titles at the time were strictly honorary. However, in 1945 he was invited for real to join the newly formed Hungarian government as a minister or under-secretary, I forget which, but by then he had decided to return to Transylvania. Although he suspected that in the changed political environment his return entailed certain risks, and that his career might soon come to an end, he felt his job now was to help rebuild the banking system. And that in the new situation his place was in his native land. In general, his every move was carefully considered, and he was guided always by a high sense of honour.

How did your father react to your success as a writer? Did he feel vindicated?

Unfortunately, he lived to witness only the beginnings of my literary career. I couldn't really say what it all meant to him. My father was born in the nineteenth century, and I was a very late child, arriving, unexpectedly perhaps, when he was fifty-one years old. It wasn't just the big age difference that set us apart; we were separated by an entire historical era. I always had the feeling that he would have been much happier if I had chosen a more traditional, middle-class profession. When I was a child, he bought me books all the time, almost everything then available in second-hand bookshops. And he did this without ulterior motives. He never tried to guide me, but was smart enough to let me pick and choose from what was available. His own cultural needs and cognizance were mainly in the field of music, and because he belonged to the generation that came of age in the palmy days of peace before the Great War, his musical interests did not go beyond composers who provided music for that more tranquil age. But we were also different temperamentally. He was a highly moral, devoutly religious man, and not just in a narrow, denominational sense but in that he saw the hand of Providence in all things. In addition, he lived in the second half of the twentieth century with values and habits rooted in the nineteenth. In many ways he was ill equipped to handle the twentieth century (he shared this failing with many others), and not being philosophically inclined, he was unable to contend with it rationally, or even grasp its terrible contradictions, its dramatic dy-

namism. He reacted to historical events and horrendous moral losses with utter dismay. He believed in a higher moral universe, and everything inconsistent with it he could accept only as manifestations of the Almighty's inscrutable ways. His attitude did not change even when, late in life, he was imprisoned—although the experience no doubt enriched him emotionally. His encounter with Bishop Áron Márton in jail had an inspiring effect on him. The Roman Catholic prelate and he, the Protestant lay leader, slept next to each other on their prison cots—their friendship became personal as well as ecumenical. He may have considered his prison ordeal a trial laid upon him by the grace of God, but his self-respect as a citizen was sorely tested by the outrageous miscarriage of justice. In 1968, thirteen years after his release from prison, at the initiative of the Prosecutor General, he was rehabilitated, and also had his pension restored, though not retroactively, of course. He had to be content with a moral victory. He expected the country's leaders, or rather the judicial authorities, who at the behest of higher powers had delivered a wrongful verdict, to make amends and vindicate him publicly. Having always lived by civil norms, he was pleased and reassured when one day he saw his and his prison mates' names in the newspaper, among those whose innocence had come to light and who, on instructions from the highest party leadership, had been fully rehabilitated. I had no such expectations. I never viewed my opposition to the regime as a morally dubious act, never objected to the legal proceedings initiated against me, and bore my criminal past with head held high. From those whom I continued to regard as my enemies, I never expected any sort of pardon. The two of us, my father and I, experienced the same events very differently, in ways that reflected our dissimilar views and philosophies. Our differing attitudes marked our relationship to the end, and I think he detected telltale signs of these differences in my writings. He may have appreciated their literary merits, but I have a feeling he didn't really understand them. But what is much more important, he was a patient, caring and loving person, and not for a single moment did the undeniable distance between us cast a pall over my image of him. On the contrary, whenever I had to mull over something and make a tough decision, his uncompromising honesty was the only model before me. I never saw him behave unfairly—decency was the guiding principle of his life, it informed everything he did, and made things easy for him. Living up to his high moral standards was second nature to him, like breathing. It sprang deep from within and was communicated somehow to others. In our large family he commanded enormous respect; but he also met with expressions of high regard wherever he went. Sometimes, on the streets of Cluj, when we walked home together, I was amazed how many strangers raised their hats to him.

Let's backtrack a little. After you got out of jail, what did you do?

I didn't have much of a choice. My father was still in jail, my mother lived with my sister who had been kicked out of the academy of music, and was making a

living by taking on occasional typing jobs. I also had to look for some kind of work, but before I did, I gave myself a ten-day break—though I don't remember starting it by going on a wild spree. I just had a look around the city, took in the sights like a stranger, walked over to the Botanical Garden, the Citadel, went rowing in the city park, and in the evening, hung around the Promenade, trying to size up the physical progress made by the young ladies of Cluj. There I met acquaintances, of course, most of whom came over and embraced me, though I also remember spotting a former teacher of mine, who conspicuously turned his head and crossed over to the other side. Then I began working as a factory hand. I'd already had summer jobs at the Technofrig Machine Works, where I had made enough money to cover the basic expenses of my excursions into the mountains. I knew the people at the factory, working conditions were pretty decent, the managers mostly Hungarian, and the workers experienced old-timers. I started as a loader in the factory's lumber depot, but after a few weeks, got transferred to the machine shop and became a metal cutter. In the prison workshops I had grabbed every opportunity to watch the lathe operators, so I knew a little about the process. I got to handle an automatic milling machine, which did not require any particular expertise, only basic skills. When feeding a piece into the machine, for instance, you had to make sure the turning speed, the coolant temperature were just right, the piece was locked in position, the blades were switched as needed, and so on. I think if I were handed an unfinished piece of steel and the appropriate diagram, I could still turn it into a usable gearwheel. Because it was an automatic machine, if you set it correctly and started it up, you could walk away for hours, especially if the piece to be cut was fairly large—the machine completed the operation all by itself. When I worked the graveyard shift, I'd read, or stroll over to the main shop floor, actually to the nearby tool shed, which was run by a young girl. I'd lean through the little window as far as I could. Most of the time, it was worth it. She was a beautiful, blue-eyed, slightly Oriental-looking girl with olive skin, bluish-black hair, bluish-white teeth, and a soft, warmly glistening tongue. Over the top button of her dark-blue smock, between the mounds of her world-class breasts, even in the discreet shadow of the cleft, her pearly skin seemed to glow. I couldn't figure out what this perfectly beautiful creature was doing amidst all that hardware, toiling away in the dead of night.

In addition to working, I attended night school, hoping to complete my secondary education finally—though the truth is, I paid absolutely no attention to my studies; I never opened a book or looked at my notes. And during the final exam, I cheated shamelessly. As soon as I learned what the question was, I simply took out the textbook and my notes, spread them out, and copied from each as much as I thought was necessary to earn me a passing grade—I wasn't overly ambitious. My teachers and the board of examiners' must have seen what I was doing, but I guess they just didn't believe their eyes.

After all that, how did you end up studying theology?

As a direct consequence of what I have just told you. It didn't even occur to me to apply to one of the faculties of the university; I had no chance at all of getting in. I could not deny my past, or my father's, for that matter, who after five years had just been released from prison. He was friendly with a number of prominent clerics, some of whom also taught at the theological seminary. So I jumped at the opportunity and decided in favour of the seminary.

Did you think of becoming a clergyman yourself?

No, not for a moment; it was the farthest thing from my mind, in fact. But I was always interested in the liberal arts. And given the political climate of the times, the theological seminary seemed the best place to pursue historical and philosophical studies. There the teaching of these disciplines was still free of Leninist interpretations. I confess I first thought that if I was admitted and got used to the place, I'd use it as a hideout for the next five years—something was bound to happen during that time. Then there was the army: the threat of the draft was always present. Enrolling in the seminary, in short, was a way to gain time. And while it seemed highly improbable by then that one bright morning American paratroopers would appear outside our doors, you could still pin your hope on the passage of time. The seminary for me was a last resort.

In an interview you said that it was also a place of intellectual refuge for you.

It really was. I still had the good fortune to study with renowned professors who also happened to be enlightened, open-minded scholars, impressively erudite Renaissance men. With their wide knowledge and captivating personality, they were able to inspire even the uninitiated dullards who wound up in their classes by default. I can honestly say that not since that time have I come across such commanding and impressive personalities.

Despite the many good things that happened, in matters of faith I remained a sceptic. Though both my parents were deeply religious, very little of that rubbed off on me. The gift of true faith eluded me. So much so, that I blithely skipped compulsory religious services. I might as well come clean: on Sundays, instead of listening to sermons, I went on outings under the sky's lofty canopy, in nature's cathedral. That, too, is a proper sanctuary for serious meditation, I thought. Still and all, an enduring part of my identity is that I am a Calvinist.

I should note that at this time theological seminaries became havens not only for social outcasts like myself; many would-be seminarians were without religious leanings or affiliations of any kind. Interestingly enough, some of these people, those who ended up inside the venerable walls by accident, as it were,

did choose to serve later on. They may not have shared in the bliss of true faith, but the cloth did become their calling. While others, driven by blind faith and entering the seminary eager to do God's work, "sobered up" in due course, and later in life sought happiness elsewhere. In my own case, a halfway solution was found: as a graduate of the seminary, I worked as a civilian employee of the church, and therefore was never ordained.

What happened then?

Having been a top student, I was offered the job of arranging and cataloguing the archives of the Cluj diocese. The future bishop of the city, who as a member of the examining board was present at my oral exam in history, must have liked my answers, because he asked me right away if I was interested in working as an archivist. My task would be to plough through a huge body of hitherto untouched archival material. I'd have to bone up on the relevant historical periods of course, and the job also required a certain facility in writing. But I'd get paid as much as a practising clergyman. The records of the smaller, provincial diocese were just then transferred to Cluj, so the amount of material waiting to be gone over was enormous. The keeper of the church archives at the time was my beloved one-time literature teacher, the same man whose advice we had sought as fledgling conspirators years earlier, at a memorable outing in the woods. And for which, he was locked up for a good long time. At any rate, I accepted the offer. And soon thereafter got down to the business of reading vast numbers of letters and other documents penned hundreds of years ago, and then preparing brief summaries of each one. The letters did not always refer to church-related matters or religious life, but often contained information about the private lives of individuals close to the church. A typical summary may have read like this: "May 2, 1824. The wife of Ádám B., assistant pastor in the village of Barót, caught her husband fornicating in a jasmine bush near the belfry. In this connection she asked to see rural dean Constantine Pussywillow." There were many such cases, involving tiresome parsons' wives, hot-blooded reverends, buxom servant girls—minor dramas, unhappy, incomplete stories devoid also—thankfully—of cathartic resolutions. A one-line summary on the back of the document, a catalogue number, and into the file box—this was my job. As an archivist, I didn't make intriguing discoveries, I couldn't get fully engrossed in my work; the joy of research was something I never experienced. And though I didn't consider what I did mere drudgery, a dispiriting waste of time, I never let myself believe that I had found my life's calling. What made the job bearable was that I worked in the company of two excellent scholars. Years passed, and the part of the bishop's promise having to do with my remuneration was as good as forgotten. I earned only half as much as a practising preacher. Let's face it: I lived in humiliating poverty.

While you were a theology student, did you ever conduct services? The reason I ask is that, knowing you, I cannot see you deliver a sermon you didn't seriously mean.

Yet deliver it I did. And not in jest or as a put-on, and not out of a cynical disregard for the faithful, either, but because every theology student had to deliver sermons. On the three major holidays, seminarians were sent to smaller congregations in the country to help out during those busy times. Traditionally, the arrival of these student ministers in the villages was an event in itself. There was no way you could get out of it. Besides, for third-year students, preaching was part of the curriculum. In the course of the academic year, each student had to compose a sermon and deliver it in the presence of worshippers at one of the regular services. On these occasions, I, too, had to prepare as best I could, trying to overcome, among other things, a speech impediment I've always had.

I also conducted services in Cluj, in the twin-tower church on Magyar Street. The event could not be kept a secret, the secular world got wind of it too. To my dismay, a number of my friends came to see me perform, budding artists for the most part, musicians, painters, and a few literature students from the university. They filled an entire row. It was pretty scary seeing them all together from the pulpit. The Securitate, as could be expected, was also represented, by two men who specialised in religious affairs. One of them, a pig-faced character named Onac, kept making the sign of the cross so as to appear devout, not realizing that among Calvinists this is not customary. For a while he looked straight at the pulpit, watching my every move, pretending to be all eyes and ears, but then, yielding to his professional instincts, he pulled out his little notebook and pencil, and began taking inventory of those in attendance. The other agent stood at the entrance, smoked one cigarette after another and, between puffs, spat on the floor. He was a rank amateur—he didn't even remove his hat. One of my friends, a composer, got up from his original seat, sat down in the first row, and with his head tilted sideways gazed at me with an exultant look in his eyes. In the manner of screwy churchgoers, he assumed a super-pious expression, now shaking his head, now nodding in agreement. But he overdid it, so I had to rebuke him from the pulpit, saying that those who visit the Lord's house with frivolous intent and not because they seek genuine peace of mind ought to search their souls. The warning was also meant for the security agents present. But the services ended without incident. The agents left in a hurry, presumably to submit their reports, and I, after depositing my minister's cloak in the vestry, joined my congregation in a neighbourhood pub, which was located right next to the seminary and frequented by veteran porters, moving men—and theology students. After all that tension, we needed a quick drink. To act like a clergyman, pray in a real church, in front of a devout congregation that also included a bunch of undesirables—all this wasn't really for me. I may not be religious, but the profane has always been alien to me.

When did you finally break with the church?

The fall of '63. November, I think it was. Yes, that's when I asked that my employment be terminated as of January 1. But in response to my blunt letter to the bishop, he immediately relieved me of my responsibilities. So, earlier than planned, I was again without income. Christmas was upon us, then New Year's Eve, followed by the ski season, which always used up my meager resources. I needed money, and fast, so I decided on a desperate course of action: I was going to become a painter! I purchased twenty-five A/3 cardboard panels, helped myself to my painter friends' leftover tubes of paint and brushes, and working at a furious pace, produced within days an itinerant painter's complete inventory—which I intended to sell before Christmas at the Óradna fair. The standard collection, grouped according to subject matter, usually contained the following: Parched deer slaking its thirst on a riverbank. The same animal in a winter landscape; also in a purplish red sunset or in a vast plain, in winter or summer. Solitary windmill on a hilltop. Performing bears. A harbour in the faraway north. Same harbour in the tropics. Lonely traveller in a storm; in heavy snowfall. Virgin Mother with Infant Jesus. I had never seen so much kitsch up close. After priming my "canvases," I sketched out the background in pencil and put out all the cardboard panels. After running out of space on the table, I lay them on the floor and worked on all at the same time. For instance, if there was a bit of titian on my paintbrush, I added a smidgen to all the landscapes that I felt could use the colour. And they all could, being that my landscapes all had this dusky glimmer. I was pressed for time; I dried the paintings with a hair-dryer. A week before Christmas, very early in the morning, I displayed my stuff at the Óradna weekly fair. There, near the foot of the mountains, winter had set in with a vengeance, with heavy snow and bitter cold. I had travelled all night without closing my eyes, in case one of the passengers felt like relieving me of my treasures. With my teeth chattering from fatigue as well as the cold, I stood in the marketplace behind the display, offering my wares with a friendly smile to every passer-by. I have to say that on that day, at the foot of the Radna Mountains, the beauty of the world as seen by me attracted little interest. It was as if the sight of my pictures had with sudden force awakened the rural population's critical sensibility. At noon time I still had about ten unsold pictures, the best of the lot, too, and just then it started to drizzle, which quickly turned into freezing rain. Within minutes everything, including my pictures, was iced over with this amazing sugar frosting, a crystalline glaze. The tree branches under which I stood were encased in glassy glitter. It almost seemed as if a fairyland, a magic kingdom, were emerging all around me. A rain-soaked itinerant artist, I just about fit into my landscapes. However, this beautiful but inclement natural phenomenon drove people away in droves; every potential patron of the arts took off, I had to close shop. Leaving the unsold pictures with a family I knew, I told them to try to get the best possible price for them, and that I would be back by early sum-

mer the latest. I didn't even wait for the ice cover on my canvases to melt, I ran to the station to catch the afternoon train. That is, I would have run; instead, I shuffled along, and kept holding on to the picket fences, and even crawled on all fours now and then—the road, too, was a sheet of ice. On the train I reflected on the events of the past weeks, and came to the conclusion that I would never make it as an artist. A few hundred lei was all I ever made as a painter. Still, anyone who thinks that I couldn't possibly note this sad fact with droll satisfaction would be wrong. I later learned that my local representative was able to sell off the remaining canvases. An enthusiastic art collector bought all ten for three hundred lei.

This is the first I've heard about you as an artist.

I thought it better to keep it a secret. Yes, in the past I had—rather thoughtlessly—done some sketching, but only for fun. I never took it seriously, and certainly never bragged about it. The only reason I'm telling you now is because it feels good to recall an adventure. Never, not for a single moment, have I ever thought that I'd missed my calling.

But wait: the story didn't end there. A good ten years later, as a writer and member of the Romanian Writers Association, I spent a few weeks at the Association's retreat in the Radna Mountains. One day—I'd just been to the village post office—I stood on the main street, trying to thumb a ride, when my heart gave a leap. Displayed on a porch across the way were five familiar landscapes. No, I wasn't seeing things: they were my paintings. I just couldn't leave it at that, I walked over, knocked on the door, and told the lady of the house that I'd like to take a closer look at the pictures hanging outside. After ten years I again stood very close to the visual outrages committed by me. Confronted so unexpectedly with this sorry moment out of my past, I stared in horror, but also spellbound, at the pictures, while the woman kept shifting her feet behind me in her excitement, and finally said in a whisper: "My son did them." "A gifted child," I nodded. "Does he have... other works?" The proud mother then told me that her son was busy painting even as we spoke. We could soon expect new, no less significant works from him. The following, quite horrible thing had happened. Two years earlier, the son, in a bold move, gathered up the remainder of my output as a painter, travelled to Nagybánya (Baia-Mare), and showed them to an instructor at the local school of art, saying they were his own creations. He received not only encouragement from his brand new mentor, but thanks to the man's connections, he was soon admitted to the school. I imagine that in the process a certain amount of cash also changed hands. At my polite urging, the mother proudly brought out her son's latest creations. At first he had simply copied my pictures, but now, here and there in his dauberries, a few original touches could be detected. So hopefully, liberated from my influence, he may yet abandon the world of purplish red sunsets and explore other settings for his

work. A year later (for this thing left me no peace and I asked around how the misguided youth was doing), he was preparing to take his entrance exam to the Academy of Art. In short, with this youthful lapse of mine, I ended up irresponsibly molding another person's fate. For all I know, he may be a famous artist by now. In which case, my landscapes, too, should be considered part of his early period.

Let's get back to the 1960's.

After I left my job as an archivist, I lingered in misery for a few months, but then began working for a translating and copying office. There I got to pound away at the typewriter for twelve hours a day. We copied all sorts of documents, from college notes and texts to official papers that needed to be notarised. I also helped to put various petitions, including petitions for divorce, in final, proper form. And because I was quite familiar by then with Romanian legal phraseology, on the sly I even wrote some of these petitions, which was illegal of course, since I wasn't a lawyer. But after preparing papers for the tenth divorce case, I was comfortable enough with legal terminology, knew how to cite relevant statutes, and had also mastered the language of the courtroom. Thus, if a sad-faced woman sat down next to me in the office and wanted to be rid of her cruel husband; or if a cuckolded husband decided to open his heart to me, I was ready, for the right fee, to translate their pain into the language of the law. At about the same time, in the evenings, at the kitchen table, I began writing my first story.

You started writing in 1965. Did the fact that after 1963 literary journals from Hungary finally began circulating in Cluj have something to do with this?

There is no question that somebody like me, a marked man politically, began to feel in the sixties that his chances of seeing his writing in print had improved somewhat. Actually, my first literary attempts coincided with a subtle shift, in style, at first, in the political sphere. In Romania around this time, Gheorghiu-Dej's promising successor appeared on the scene, who had nevertheless had an odious reputation from the beginning of his political career. Almost as if trying to counteract this old image, he made sure, during the first years of his rule, that signs of greater tolerance would be felt everywhere. To show that he was different from his predecessor, the new leader, who was to become a vain and violent despot, introduced himself by granting favours, loosening the shackles, leaving holes unplugged, through which—even in very important offices—fresh currents could blow. All this of course was not part of a well-considered programme of liberalisation, but rather a way of preparing the ground for a policy of unbridled nationalism that would peak years later. But there is no denying that the beginnings of the subsequently disastrous and dehumanising Ceaușescu regime were encouraging, and these early signs deceived a great many people. But once the

tail of the spirit slipped out of the bottle, it was no longer possible—here the laws of physics as well as of politics applied—to push it back. Concessions were made in the arts. Works not exactly conceived in the spirit of Socialist Realism could see the light of day. And even things by incorrigible offenders, like myself, could be published without the authors having earned the right to publish, either by producing a work in the right spirit, or by offering a public apology for past misdeeds. In this period of thaw, one could indeed talk a little more freely about certain things. All the same, what made me turn to writing at this time was the belief that there were still things too difficult to talk about. What in effect inspired me was the existential condition of my native land and of Eastern Europe in general—its primitive moral state, its melancholy spirit. I would not have been able to write about anything else, or write in any other way. My writings therefore gave the impression from the beginning that they came into being in an open society, where freedom of expression was taken for granted. They seemed far removed from language identifying power structures of any kind. Not a word was ever mentioned in them about the political and social environment in which I lived, only about the atmosphere of a region whose geographical location was never specified—though it goes without saying that this atmosphere or feeling could evoke the menacing image of a fictitious but familiar political power. But never so directly or explicitly as to make the holders of real power recognise themselves, and have reason to be offended. What made this approach easy for me was that I was not really interested in the anatomy of Communist tyranny, in the catalogue of its sins, or in the critique of its basic tenets, but, as I said before, in the more general moral and existential condition of the region, which—and this seemed clear even back then—is basically unrelated to the ideology espoused by those in power at any given moment. What I tried to work out was a subtly coded form of communication, the key to which led to realms of aesthetics and ethics, and not to politics. To this day I am uncomfortable with direct statements, with writing that conveys an unambiguously political message. Yet, back then, one still wanted to touch on essentials, and express the feelings of utter defenselessness and imperilment. While one searched constantly for adequate forms, language itself became more supple. The use of allusive and elliptical language could be seen to enhance a text. At the same time, when lured into the labyrinthine world of aesthetic subtleties, the censor wavered, grew uncertain, and therefore was more easily deceived. While it's true that all my stories came into being in a repressive world, and they all take place in such a world, those in authority, when faced with the timeless fictions of this world, its lethargic air and absurd ways, were reluctant to recognise it as their own. In short, they didn't know what to make of it. No story of mine was ever lifted by censors from an about-to-be-printed issue of the journal. The choice they faced was probably this: either they remove every single one or with some distaste tolerate them all. From the moment I "went public" and shared the products of my imagination with

readers, something in me became whole, let's call this something my personality. My inner conflicts seemed on their way to being resolved, I got better at taking charge of my life. Feeling strengthened in my convictions, I perhaps also got better at being free, and understanding what freedom really is.

As far as my everyday life was concerned, this turning point occurred without anyone noticing it. All that happened was that after my first story was published, I became a member of the circle of Cluj writers and intellectuals that mattered. In fact, they invited me to join their table at the city's literary café. This meant a small, backless chair at the Café Bar on Szentegyház Street. The day I picked up the check for my first volume of stories—with careful planning the money should have lasted a year—I decided, on an impulse, to quit my job, pack my bags, and leave Cluj behind. Luckily, it was early summer; the fresh-smelling slopes and heights of the Radna Mountains beckoned. I didn't come down from the mountains until late autumn, and when I did, I was fully rested and energised. I was going to become a freelance writer.

And earn enough to support yourself in the 1970's?

I was never good at handling money. I'm still not. But I learned to live on very little. At the time, the Literary Fund extended loans to writers, which it then collected piecemeal through deductions from fees received by writers for published work. In this way, the Fund actually subsidised its members. In addition, it covered the travelling and *per diem* expenses of writers working on stories and reports for newspapers. All you had to do was submit a brief request, something like this: The undersigned would like to study the lives of wood-choppers at such and such place for this or that length of time. Whenever I felt like spending time in Székely country or in Sighet, or wanted to go skiing in the Radna Mountains, I asked for a ten-day "documented allowance," as it was called. In addition to a train ticket, I received sixty lei a day for subsistence, which in those days wasn't all that little. 600 lei was enough to pay for basics—milk, butter, bread, bacon, eggs, cheese, a drink or two in the evening, plus cigarettes—for a whole month. Thanks to the generosity of the Literary Fund, I spent a large part of the year, the nicest months, in the mountains. Living on the same money in the city was harder. Socialising in Cluj was especially expensive. My growing debts there caused me much distress; I was often embarrassingly late repaying them.

But back to my favourite retreats. The area around Lake Saint Anne deserves special mention. Tuszád and its environs, the Csomád mountains with their moss-covered, pillowy soft nooks and hollows, their ever-changing colours, the dazzle of rainbows after a storm—I felt ever since I was a child that this had to be the loveliest, most inviting spot in the world. Nowhere else did the sun light up a clearing quite so beautifully. In the old days, campers could settle anywhere around Lake Saint Anne. They'd pitch their tents, take a dip in the gently

caressing water, and then set about cooking dinner. I was an even more adventurous camper. Most of the time I went up alone without any camping gear. Either I found people willing to share their tents, or, dozing off by the flickering campfire, spent the night under the stars. The only thing to worry about here was an errant nocturnal cloudburst. Or nighttime wanderers of a different sort: bears. Moving undisturbed during the hours of silence, under the cover of night, they'd smell food and end up growling between the tents. Bears are far from the loveable inhabitants of the wooded landscape they are made out to be. The picture book image of the cuddly teddy bear must leave them cold. They are vain, touchy—we might as well come out and say it—destructive, scoundrelly creatures, the whole lot of them, with drab, cheerless personalities to match. Spotting their eyes in the glare of a flashlight was no cause for merriment. But it wasn't any more heartening to discover that colonels occupied the neighbouring tent.

On one occasion, after arriving at my usual place on the eastern shore of the lake, I saw something straight out of a western—a pair of bloody jeans with singed bullet holes swaying in the wind. They hung from a tree branch in the middle of a campsite occupied by a group from Sfintu Gheorghe. The scene was the direct result of a visit the day before by a Securitate officer. He and a member of the group had words, and because of who the man in uniform was and the sort of temper he apparently had, he whipped out his gun, and this seemed the only way to settle the dispute. The officer was not Romanian, by the way. In the early seventies, among security police officers serving in the Székely region, there were still plenty of Hungarians. The area around the lake—everyone knew this was sacred ground for Székelys—was rarely visited by Romanians.

The same cannot be said of Germans. They came back year after year, and in their own way they also partied and had a grand old time by the lake. Rumour had it that sometime in the late fifties, Erich Bergel, who later became a noted conductor and whose sense of Germanness in his youth was almost mystical, summoned to the lake a large group of young Saxons, the brightest and the best. Thumbing his nose at the magic emanations of the ancient Székely ground, he had them swear that they would forever respect their ancient German traditions, and in the spirit of loyalty to their heritage, would not mingle with other ethnic groups and choose their spouse from their own kind. In spite of this desecration, the waters of the lake did not boil over, the poisonous brimstone fumes did not overwhelm the crowd, but this ritual meeting, which could indeed be considered odd, even perverse, for any number of reasons, did not lead to tangible results. In subsequent years, a growing number of pretty German girls set their eyes on Hungarian boys, and vice versa. There was a noticeable rapprochement between the two historical nationalities of Transylvania in that more and more mixed marriages were celebrated. Come to think of it, on my first try, I myself chose

a woman whose people were Saxons from Nagyszeben (Sibiu/Hermannstadt). Life itself set things right, and not even Erich Bergel could avoid his fate. A few years later, he married a Hungarian girl from Cluj.

Besides the gentle, sun-kissed slopes of the Székely highlands, there was still my old love—the Radna Mountains. It was a crucial moment in my life when after a summer snowstorm, I first cast a glance northward from a ridge, and saw Sighet with its magical lights and shimmering sky overhead. And not far away, in a barren valley high above the timberline, I spotted a patch of light, which kept shining in the early evening twilight. I decided to investigate—it was the wet shingled roof of a night shelter for mountaineers.

For the next fifteen years, this became my place of refuge. In the summer it was always the first stop on my hikes, and in winter I spent the two-month ski season in this house, four thousand feet above sea level, where the snow cover, especially on the northern slopes and the even higher-lying hollows and crests, did not melt until well into May. The ramshackle little house was visited only by the most intrepid of walkers, who were willing to put up with the isolation and harsh conditions only hermits may be accustomed to. The shelter was too far, the wind whistled through the tumbledown walls, and a ferret family also had a run of the house. There was no food on the premises, except for some canned goods and cheap rum. Still, this deep valley, often lashed by the elements, exuded a natural, elemental calm. I was young then and hardy by nature, so I endured the hardships—unusual for a person of urban habits—without much anxiety. Undue fear or alarm did not get the better of me either, although in a place like this there were things to be afraid of. Even when I was alone, I went skiing every day; in clear weather, I climbed up to the highest point, an elevation of six-thousand feet, and from there descended into the valley. Only now do I realise that on those snow-covered slopes, five miles from the nearest living soul, the most trivial accident could have turned out to be fatal. Sometimes, of course, as evening approached, the melancholy hours, you missed a fellow human being with whom you could share a drink. I sometimes leaned over the porch and searched the valley, waiting for somebody to appear on the steep path leading up. When the wind blew from that direction, gently shaking the snow-laden branches of the tall pines, making visible a crooked tree trunk behind them, then, against the white backdrop, a strange play of shadows unfolded—I thought I saw a lone, exhausted woman waving to me desperately. At times I also seemed to hear her cries for help behind the crackle of the stove in the chimney.

Then one gray afternoon, at the foot of the steep incline, in the usual place—no mirage, this time—I did discover a woman sitting there. I brought out my binoculars to make sure, and to my astonishment, the figure of a real woman quivered in the crosshairs. My heart began to race, for I knew that life can fool you and confront you unexpectedly, in the course of a fatal adventure, with the object of your fantasies. In the meantime, a young boy walked into the house.

Because of the sheer drop, I hadn't noticed him trudging up the trail. He confirmed what I saw: his Mummy was catching her breath down below, and his Daddy won't be here for another couple of days, if he had left the house at all, and could still make it up here, because the night before he'd got terribly drunk. To my queries—Is your Mummy young? Is she pretty?—he gave a loving son's highly subjective and therefore promising answers, and made a few belittling remarks about Daddy. So as a gentleman, a helpful fellow hiker, and above all, as a male, I ran down to help the lady in distress, ready to carry her up in my arms if need be. When I reached the bottom, I discovered that the boy had badly misled me, or else his idea of a pretty woman conformed to an entirely different set of standards. During the fifteen minutes it took the two of us to walk uphill, with me lugging her backpack, I was already siding with her husband, thinking he'd probably done the right thing drinking himself under the table every night. The woman snored, to boot. So there were no great encounters in this godforsaken place. Any excitement that may have come with them was monopolised entirely by Mother Nature.

Getting back to your urban life, how was it possible to endure the particular Romanian blend of misery and mendacity?

I really don't know; there is no magic formula for such things. Everyone tried to cope in his own way, and most people succeeded, I think. I tried by shuttling back and forth between the mountains and my friends in the city. The filth overran us in stages, not in one smothering torrent, so there were a few moments left always to take a deep breath. It made a big difference, of course, whom you associated with. I had wonderful friends in both Cluj and Târgu-Mureş, and even in the ever-more depressing Bucharest. The fact that we saw one another regularly meant that we cautioned and at the same time enlivened and preserved one another. As long as we had a chance to share our troubles, despair could not get the better of us. And let us not forget that Cluj, even after the mid-seventies, wasn't exactly the back of beyond. If I just think of the world of music, I recall that Sviatoslav Richter performed in the city, as did Claudio Arrau. Carlo Zecchi, Enrico Mainardi showed up more than once, and so did all the famous Russians. And I can only say good things about local artists. I have never heard a more authentic performance of Bartók's "Music" than the one conducted in Cluj by Mircea Cristescu. The city at that time was still sustained by its hidden reserves; what stirred within its walls were not the pathetic exertions of provincials.

Except for your father's arrest, you don't write about events in your childhood. Any reason for this silence?

I have avoided the subject, haven't I? It has to do with the way I view the world, I suppose, but there is also a natural reluctance. I generally avoid true stories and situations. I write about things I have invented; I never choose myself, my

family or my friends as subjects, and I don't try to portray people I know, even if my characters do sometimes bear a resemblance to an acquaintance or a friend. I did not describe my father's arrest in any of my stories. What you are referring to—in a story called "The Euphrates at Babylon"—is not my father's arrest but somebody else's, whom I invented along with a family, neighbours, an apartment with a particular layout and furnishing—I have never lived in an apartment where the bathroom was at the end of a long hallway. The whole thing is made up, and the fact that the author of the story witnessed his own father's arrest simply makes him more credible, for he had a model before him. Using various elements of this model, he contrived a new situation, thereby distancing himself from the original experience. This reluctance to depict actual events is both conscious and instinctive—I am bound to obey inner prompts. I know it's rather unusual in post-modern prose, but real-life characters do not have a place in my fiction; they are not enigmatic enough to convey my somber messages. Familiar landscapes don't appear either. Even when describing weather conditions, climatic phenomena, I rely for the most part on my imagination. So my own childhood, too, is absent from my works. Or perhaps the only way it's present is through its absence. For childhood's many voices and colours and echoes, all the wondrous sensations of an emerging consciousness, are very much a part of these works, if only because these sensations are lodged deep and fixed forever in memory. And our adult sensibilities are all rooted in childhood experiences. But if I were to pierce the delicate skin enveloping the world of these experiences, and extract from under the wrap past happenings in all their tangible reality, I would strip them of their suggestiveness, their purity and strength, and ultimately of their power to inspire. For this reason I don't intend to write a prison novel. For me the experience in the Gherla penitentiary is too real, too close, and still so powerful, I could not turn it into literature. Whatever is important in that experience is bound to show up in my writings in other ways.

As reluctant as I am to describe real people, it has happened that an invented character of mine came alive and actually sought me out. For example, I once wrote a story called "The Place Where Baskets Are Woven". After it was published in the journal *Utunk* at the beginning of the seventies, basket weavers who worked in the area showed up in the editorial office of the magazine and asked to see me. As I didn't work in that office, they had to settle for the editor. They wanted to clear up a couple of things, they said, because not everything in that piece corresponded to the facts. As a matter of fact, they were asking for a correction. The writer may be a fine comrade, who got a number of things right, especially as regards a fellow worker of theirs, an ex-convict, but certain things needed to be gone over and corrected. In any case, how did he know all those things he wrote about, since they didn't remember him visiting their workplace. I discovered, in other words, that an imaginary setting, the place described in the story, had its real counterpart not far from where we were, a more mundane,

trite version, without the stylised enhancement of some of the stranger aspects of the real place. The objection centred on this artistic plus, which the respectable basket weavers didn't know what to make of. They wanted me to delete the very thing for which I had written it in the first place. The meeting between us never took place. I remained at a safe literary distance, a phantom that had meddled in their lives. It seems that something well invented can be part of reality.

We began this conversation by referring to strange, unusual names. How do these invented place and personal names compare with real ones?

The connection is tenuous, indirect, and in most cases there is no connection at all. A mountain peak called Pop Ivan is the only name in my stories that can be found on a map. And more or less in the same area where my stories take place—the name is undoubtedly a tip-off about the approximate location of the Sinistra stories. I was so much taken by the fact that a mountaintop bore a person's name, I simply couldn't resist it. But something happened once, in connection with naming things, that's even scarier than the basket weavers' story. After *The Sinistra District* was published, some of my critics tried to puzzle out my naming techniques—a risky undertaking, surely. The place name Dobrin, they thought, derived from a Romanian family name. It's not very nice to reveal such secrets, and an author should be the last to do it, but this time I will. A long time ago, in my tender youth, while roaming through the Gyalu Mountains, I came across an elderly hiker, joined him, and we stopped to rest on a mountaintop, where we tried to recall the names of the surrounding heights. After we listed them all, he pointed far away, beyond the waters of the Jára, to a valley wrapped in mist, and said: "Over there is the Dobrin." You could see nothing of the Dobrin, but the name, because of its sound perhaps, stayed with me, and with the passage of time took on the elements of a mysterious, enigmatic world eternally shrouded in mists. For decades it was mystery itself to me, and remained so because I never got a chance to see it. The name, after lurking about in the back of my mind all that time, found its place in the fictitious geographical and historical environment of *The Sinistra District*. Sometime after the publication of that book, my friend the composer György Orbán presented me with an old military map of the Radna Mountains. I had owned this map myself, but during one of the house searches, a couple of overeager gentlemen took it with them—I missed it terribly for years afterward. Anyway, from a fair amount of internal evidence, one could surmise that—fiction or no—my stories were set somewhere in the northern Carpathians, in Maramureş. One time I spread out this map and put my finger on a spot covering a radius of perhaps seven miles, which I said might be the geographical location of the Sinistra district. The word under my fingertip was—Dobrin, a totally insignificant local stream. I still haven't recovered from the shock of that moment. You spend all this time trying to be clever until finally you invent reality.

I've always thought that your fictional universe can be easily compared to that of Gabriel García Márquez, Julio Cortázar and other Latin American writers.

I don't quite understand why you think so. Perhaps because in both, the fantastic mingles with the real... But it's not for me to dwell on such parallels. No matter how you look at it, the image of Colonel Borcan's floating umbrella in my *Sinistra* would have come about even if I had never read a single line by García Márquez. Latin America, from here, is a very exotic place, full of vampires, sloths, collared pecaries and mysterious ladies, and permeated with an exciting mestizo culture and identity, whose depths we cannot begin to fathom. But from up close—and I have been to that part of the world—it still looks as if the basic questions of existence and the impulses that are behind every creative act are more or less the same there as they are in the bleaker parts of our own continent. We receive these Latin-American stories, which could have been invented by Gogol, Dostoevsky or Babel, along with the sultry atmosphere of an incredibly colourful world, a world filled with the screech of giant parrots. Eastern Europe is no doubt a far less exotic region. Colder winds blow around here; the growl of a bear is what passes for exoticism. Yet both regions live under the threat of third-world existence, with the anachronistic conditions that go with that. And wherever such anachronistic conditions prevail, extraordinary, miraculous things can happen. Unicorns can appear on the street at night, for example, and seem perfectly normal. These miraculous and fabulous things never occur among the rich, only in the world of the poor, whose lives are otherwise exceedingly drab, and whose feelings of hopelessness and defenselessness suppress everything else. Yet for this very reason, such people, in our world too, become bolder dreamers. A poor man in Eastern Europe, resigned, fatalistic, resembles most closely another such poor man—who might as well be from Latin America. In terms of their moral image, these places do have something in common. So if there is a similarity between the atmosphere of my own works and that of the Latin-Americans, the reasons for it have to be sought in the historical, political and ethnographical reality of Eastern Europe. This region, for all its afflictions and despair, is just as fertile and inspiring and irradiant (Chernobyl included, if you like) as those southern parts—its magic is just as irresistible. One may be repelled by its rude, irritable, even vulgar, and also crazy, ways, by its moral contemnation, yet its very absurdities hold one captive; it's impossible to break away. A highly ambivalent situation, relieved only by the balm of imagination, the conjuring of visions.

Are you ever homesick?

Of course I am. For another home when I am in fact at home. But for me this longing has always been a two-way street. I lived here in Budapest for a bit as a child, and have retained vivid memories of that time. So even back in Cluj, I had

kept dreaming about this city, and always had a strong desire to return. The longing now for my first home is also natural, for along with the land of my birth, the scenes and relics of a dramatic yet colourful youth are also gone, left behind in another country, in a changing and increasingly unfriendly world. So all this is perhaps no more than mere nostalgia by now, since the object of my yearnings doesn't really exist anymore. Apart from a few church interiors, nothing in Cluj has remained untouched. The illusive feeling that you are at home hits you only at night when, on a visit, you hear your own footsteps in an empty street as you slowly walk home. Home? To a friend, actually, who was nice enough to put you up for a few days.

There are few feelings I know that are more disturbing. You are reminded, inevitably, of the march of time, the shortness of what still remains, and worst of all, the loss. After I moved to Hungary, I thought I wasn't going to fall victim to this malady. For years I wasn't homesick at all for Transylvania. In fact, when I was about to visit my mother back home, I was overcome with anxiety, terror even, and fled as soon as I could, ran home, back here, that is. It was always a relief to cross the Hungarian border—partly no doubt because for a long time after my move, my last years in Romania, the rapid decline and deterioration, had remained a very depressing memory. Besides, I hadn't had a chance to travel to the West before, so I had a lot of catching up to do. My curiosity seemed insatiable; the world beyond the Leitha River had a tremendous attraction for me. In a way, I am glad it happened this way; glad that I got to know these places at a later age, places I had marked in picture albums decades ago—cities large and small, the breathtaking Alps. Thanks to my receptive heart, I have found—in a world that had seemed beyond my reach for so long—new places, out-of-the-way little nests, cozy corners, to which I keep returning.

Over the years, though, something changed. In the exile's soul, no doubt. Or it may simply be a natural process that comes with age—the perception of diminishing time, the awareness of gradual but continuous passing away turning my thoughts more often than before to scenes of my abandoned home. Nowadays I catch myself wanting to go back ever more frequently, every month, if I could. It's not Cluj so much that I yearn for, but those places that have retained their true character, their pristine glow, which I can still see in their full splendour. Nowadays, of course, it's not anxiety that's making me feel a strange pressure under my ribs but the joy of reunion, the emotions of another encounter. It happens when I get a whiff of fresh hay, or when an old man in peasant boots or a hen with a fat behind ambles across the road in front of my car. And because of the ambivalence, the whole thing becomes emotionally unmanageable.

What is at work here is a painful criticism and a bias. Whenever I am in Székely country, I get the feeling that nowhere in the world can you see the

sort of splendid cumulus clouds that gather over the Csík basin. Whereas the truth is, I've seen more spectacular cloud formations in the Caribbean or over Mont Blanc.

But when I walk over to Majális Street in Cluj and look through the lattice gate of our one-time home, I see in miniature what has happened in so many places in the region. Over the past decades, our shady, verdant garden has been turned into a bleak, grimy, oil-stained yard with a broken-down garage made of sheet metal. It's as if between two acts, they had changed the scenery. There is no nostalgia here, no illusions. The picture is grim, sobering—emblematic of the direction in which that world is moving.

We've now stepped on strange terrain, where there is quicksand and bog, and truth lurks in troubled waters and cannot be sifted and made crystal clear. The whole issue is so emotional, it's too awkward to handle. Homesickness, always a very private matter, raises the crucial question of just where home is and what it is really like, so it's better not to go into it. This emotion has a very special place in the human heart, and it is also the purest of feelings, since the object of the affection, an indifferent landscape, can never reciprocate that painful yearning. And if that yearning now worms its way into my heart, and ever more disquietingly, this too must be part of my lot in life. I am an unsteady sort anyway. In my urban existence I always wanted to be closer to nature, and when up in the mountains, I pined for the city. I wavered between the native realm and the world at large. Now I have to contend with this belated nostalgia—but that's the risk of all getaways. Yet I still feel that whoever moves away from his homeland can live anywhere. This is certainly true of me. However much I feel its pull, I could never again live in that homeland in peace. After all, there is more to that land than its imposing beauty.

Looking out the window of our Széchenyi Square apartment in Cluj, I have often felt that in the forty-three years I had lived there, the city I knew so well had completely changed. The tiled roofs were replaced with concrete; spires have been concealed by housing projects that looked used up from the moment they were built. And in those lovely rose beds on Malom Street, all you can see nowadays are discarded beer and soda cans.

If I remember correctly, one of the nobler objectives of Leninist thinking was to obliterate the differences between town and country. In Romania this did indeed happen, right before our eyes, inasmuch as once tidy Transylvanian towns today look more like gigantic villages. As a result of forced industrialisation and migration, several hundred thousand landless peasants were moved to Transylvania from the Transcarpathian regions. But these masses of people never really became town dwellers, and between the new walls, which they hadn't built and which therefore intimidated them, they recreated, with considerable success, their own peasant culture. But we know that the moment those remark-

able tillers of the soil step out of their culture and change the way they produce goods and earn their livelihood, they tend to lose their good taste, their quaint customs, their moral bearing. Our familiar, urban, middle-class way of life had disintegrated, but what replaced it was not something of equal worth, which we could have accepted and appreciated.

And in this regard, nothing positive has occurred in Romania since the historic changes of the early 1990's. In fact, it has become more and more dispiriting to think of that homeland. I, for instance, do not much enjoy walking down an avenue named after a fascist general. And I do not wish to relax under statues honouring his memory. It seems, to me at least, that at crucial junctures the job of remaking Romania did not fall into the best hands. And should I be right about this, then, surely, I am not the only one who stands to lose by it. A Romanian native of Cluj, say, of my generation, may look around with the same sense of alarm, because for him, too, the once clear outlines of the same homeland seem to be fading. Even from a distance it is sad to see that those in control of Transylvania, this rich, varied region the size of a country, don't seem to know what to do with it; neither does the general population, with their new-found, relative freedom. The concept of home, cherished by members of minorities who never left, is becoming so warped and distorted that these ethnic minorities will, I am afraid, leave this place one day without much regret. Now that the beautiful churches of the German communities are all empty, it may be the Hungarian churches' turn to lose their worshippers. In the silence that will follow, no Romanian patriot will have reason to rejoice.

I grew up as a Calvinist, but I knew exactly when the church bells were rung by the Lutherans, the Catholics and the Orthodox. And as long as I can remember, I felt enriched by this knowledge. So I cannot imagine what unearthly happiness will await this land once people like us are gone. I have a feeling that after the solemn announcement is made that the last alien has quit the country, the promised wild celebration will not take place. Instead, silence will descend, the bleak silence of dismay, in between the empty churches and on those who will remain.

What kind of changes can we expect? Life there is as difficult as ever, though many things have changed, and conditions, especially compared with the previous decades, have improved.

Things have changed and improved somewhat, no doubt about it. But the spirit of the place, its moral demeanour, the directions in which its energies are focused haven't. What frightens me is not the spectre of wholesale assimilation, but the possibility that the society in which the Hungarians of Transylvania now live will one day go beyond petty politics and artificially fuelled emotions, and turn cold and hostile for real, and a new generation will find it natural to be insensitive and distrustful toward us. And when that happens, there is no way one

can stay put. No one can live in a place in peace, and stand his ground, when he knows he is not wanted there. Dignified group survival in the long run can only be imagined under fair and balanced economic and political conditions, in a much more considerate partnership. Respect for one another's interests and values can develop only in harmony and stability, when an individual is happy enough with his lot to be receptive to his neighbour's different ways, and feel as good about that neighbour's closeness as he does about his own gifts. According to all indications, we are immeasurably far from this state. In fact, I detect processes that are moving things in the opposite direction. I see familiar, ancient apathy teaming up with latter-day intolerance to form an alliance that's full of danger. And time is running out. Little by little, Eastern Europe's desperate poverty and drabness, like a sick coating, is covering up this historical landscape; the precious relics underneath are barely visible anymore. We do not know exactly what is happening there, and know even less about what will happen. We can only surmise, from what we do know about the nature of the place and its general tendencies, that in the sluggish, concentric currents of indifference and apathy, as in a slow, whirling eddy, the mementoes of our lives there will gradually go under. ■

Translated by Ivan Sanders

Dear Mici...

An Unpublished Letter by Ernst von Dohnányi

Ernst von Dohnányi's name filled the concert halls of Europe and America to overflowing; he was a pianist, composer, conductor and teacher, whose presence had a decisive influence on the musical life of Budapest in the 1920s and 1930s. Dohnányi was born in 1877 in Pozsony/Pressburg (now Bratislava in Slovakia) in what was then the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The notable dates in his life are also major turning-points in history: 1914, 1919 and 1944 were all personally crucial to him. He came from a cultured middle-class family. His father, Frigyes Dohnányi, was a *gimnázium* teacher and an excellent cellist, who also painted and wrote music. Chamber-music was regularly performed in the family and the talented boy soon joined the adults. This was perhaps the source of the exceptional adaptability which gained him universal recognition as a chamber-musician.

After leaving school he chose the Royal Academy of Music in Budapest rather than studying in Vienna. He studied the piano under István Thomán, sometime pupil of Liszt, and composition under János Koessler. (Some years later another young man then living in Pozsony, Béla Bartók, too, came to the Budapest Academy) Dohnányi's three years at the Music Academy were a triumphal progress. He gained recognition both as a pianist and a composer. Jenő Hubay sought him as his accompanist for a concert tour in France. Two of his compositions, *The Zrínyi Overture* and the *Symphony no. 1 in F major*, won Royal Millennium prizes, and his opus 1, the *Piano Quintet in C minor*, was praised by the elderly Brahms.

"Studies completed with outstanding success" were followed almost at once by important concerts: audiences in Vienna, Berlin, London and Boston were

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enthusiastic about his playing. He achieved further fame as a composer, winning the Bösendorfer Prize for a one-movement version of his Piano Concerto op.5. At the age of twenty-eight he joined the staff of the Berlin Königlische Musikhochschule. His very advantageous terms of engagement made it possible for him to continue as a concert pianist and to compose to his heart's content, while at the same time providing a solid livelihood for his family.

Ten years later, as 1915 passed into 1916, Dohnányi returned to Hungary.¹ At first he taught composition and piano at the Academy of Music, and then acted as Director for a few months from February 1919. At the same time he became principal conductor of the Philharmonic Society Orchestra. His employment at the Academy, however, was soon terminated and years were to go by before he was able to rejoin that establishment. In the course of the 1920s he undertook numerous concert tours abroad, performing as both soloist and conductor. At the same time he remained an active participant in the musical life of Budapest; it may be seen from programmes that in one season he appeared on the concert platform a hundred and twenty times. In those years, as Bartók put it, his name was truly synonymous with the musical life of the capital. In the early '30s Dohnányi was a great musical force: he held master classes, was Director of Music for Hungarian Radio, principal conductor and numerous decorations, among them the Corvin Chain, followed his appointment as Director of the Academy of Music, from 1934 onward ennobling him *ex officio* to be a member of the Upper House of Parliament. The organisation of the first International Liszt Competition, won by his talented young pupil Annie Fischer, was also linked to his name.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, a difficult political and cultural situation faced the ageing musician. His private life too was in crisis, and he was aware that he could not find a solution to his anxieties in Hungary. In the autumn of 1944 he left the country, never to return. For the remaining fifteen years of his life he had to contend with financial and moral problems: he was listed as a war criminal² and although he was officially and reassuringly cleared within a short time, ever more preposterous 'unofficial' accusations pursued him, making it impossible for him to perform in public and making it very difficult for him to earn a living.

In 1948, in the hope of a more reliable income, he left Europe, first for the Argentine, then, to accept an invitation by Florida State University, settling at

1 ■ The reasons for this were practical. On the outbreak of World War I, as a German citizen, he was conscripted into the Territorial Army for military service, but wished to have no part in any war. In Hungary too conscription awaited him, but he was exempted from active service. His German citizenship was only terminated at the end of the 1920s.

2 ■ The charge read: "intellectual work aiding and assisting the Arrow Cross and the continuation of the war. A letter by the Ministry of Justice (Ref.: 32.941/1945 I.M) shows that his name no longer figured on the revised list of War Criminals and had been erased from the earlier list. In 1947, however, the People's Prosecutor's Office issued a warrant for his arrest stating that "as Director of Music of the Radio he significantly contributed to the use of Hungarian musical life as an instrument of right-wing propaganda." (*Kis Újság*, Oct. 17th 1947)

Tallahassee. He remained a university teacher for the rest of his life. He taught and performed with the wise serenity, inexhaustible energy and unquenchable will that had always characterised him. Death too came to him in the saddle: in New York to make a recording he caught a chill and after a few days' illness died in his eighty-third year. In the early 1960s the letters and other items that had remained in Hungary were donated to the Music Collection of the National Széchényi Library—in accordance with his wishes—by his widow and his sister.

The bequest contains a unique number of original documents: among others, autograph manuscripts, photographs, letters, programmes and reviews. Apart from the music manuscripts, probably the most important part of the collection are the approximately 600 letters, which, with the exception of a few, has remained unpublished to this day.

Mária Dohnányi (Mrs Ferenc Kováts), known as Mici, was Ernst von Dohnányi's eighteen months younger sister. Dohnányi was particularly close to her. Their correspondence goes back to their childhood, the earliest surviving letter dated 1883, the last 1958. The tone of the letters was always intimate, playful yet fatherly, throughout a lifetime, to start with reporting summer adventures, then whatever happened at the Academy of Music, finally on Dohnányi's life in Austria and overseas.

Éva Kelemen

Neukirchen am Walde, 12[?] November [1]945

Dear Mici,

Your letter of 10 September only reached me in the last few days via Marcsa.³ Thus it's only now, more than six months later, that I've learned of the awful blow that has struck us. The news was all the more painful for me as I'd been sure that Matyi⁴ was somewhere in Bavaria, in the American zone. The last letter that I had from him, in which he wrote about his new marriage, reached me in Vienna at the end of March. From that I inferred that he must have been somewhere near Sopron at the time, and I was certain that he had escaped with most of the army into Germany. That opinion was confirmed by a major whom I met in early April at Prambachkirchen, and who said that Matyi had been seen heading for Passau. I asked people to look out for the lad, but for obvious reasons without success. (I'm very sorry for poor Elza⁵, who has gambled her whole

3 ■ Dr Mária Buchinger, favourite pupil of Dr Ferenc Kováts, Dohnányi's brother-in-law. She was an outstanding pianist in her youth, and lived in the Argentine during the 1980s.

4 ■ Mátyás Dohnányi was the composer's son by Elza Galafrés, his second wife. He served in the Hungarian Army during the war and, in April 1945, died of typhoid in a Soviet PoW camp near Székesfehérvár. His mother identified the body on the basis of the ragged pullover on him. In February 1945 the young man married his second cousin Erzsébet Szlabey *en deuxième nocés*.

5 ■ Elza Galafrés, Dohnányi's second wife.

life on this one card, and will scarcely find any consolation. Other than in dear little 'Totányi Márta', whom it is to be hoped that you'll soon have the pleasure of seeing.⁶) As to the rest of your letter, that's not very edifying either, apart from your handwriting, which filled me with delight, as I'd had absolutely no news and didn't know whether you were all dead or alive; and to tell the truth I've been very worried, because I'd heard how much Buda had suffered. What has happened is dreadful, and if, as a follower of Spengler, I was prepared for the death of our culture, I still hadn't thought that it would come so quickly and that we ourselves would be ruined like this. Because one can always patch things up, but that will never lead to recovery. Broadly speaking, Austria has come off best; it may be, in a manner of speaking, reckoned among the victorious countries. And apart from the big towns it did not suffer during the war. A place like Neukirchen does not even know what war is. It's just gone on with life as usual these six years, and even now has seen hardly anything of the occupying forces, who, furthermore, are doing everything for Austria's benefit (often to the detriment of the Hungarians). I don't know whether you've been receiving my letters, but apart from the present one (dated 10 September) I haven't had a single one from you. So I'll write once again about myself at some length, in the hope that this letter will really reach you.

When Vienna became seriously threatened we headed west, where we hoped to reach American or British occupied territory, on Easter Monday, 2 April, in two cars belonging to Colonel Frankovsky.⁷ (By then we considered the war to be lost.) Of course, we were able to take only very little luggage with us, and so most of our things were left in Vienna (where, as we've learned, they're still safe.) We met Frankovsky in Vienna, where he [...] ⁸; from there we came up here to Neukirchen on 10 April. A very large number of Hungarians were already here, and one heard more Hungarian in the street than German, so that we felt quite at home. The village is in delightful country, at an elevation of almost 2,000 ft., between Linz and Passau. Settling in hasn't been easy, and we've lived in three different places; eventually, after two moves, I found a pleasant room in which I now live. My landlord is a former Austrian gendarme, with his wife and daughter. They are decent, honest, almost pedantic people, nice to live with. I began working at once. I'd finished my symphony⁹ while we were still in Vienna, shortly

6 ■ "Márta Totányi": Márta Dohnányi, Mátyás Dohnányi's daughter by his first wife.

7 ■ Rudolf Frankovsky remained in close contact with the Dohnányis from this time on. He became a sort of secretary: he helped in arranging material affairs, but if necessary obtained fuel or smuggled letters. In the early 1950s he too moved to the USA, to Chicago. In accordance with his wishes, in 2000 his adoptive son donated his bequest to the Dohnányi Papers of the Music Collection of the National Széchényi Library.

8 ■ Approximately two lines are lost here.

9 ■ The Second Symphony (op. 40), first performed on November 23rd 1948, in London. Dohnányi reworked it in the US, this second version being first performed by the Minneapolis Symphonic Orchestra under the baton of Antal Donáti.

before we left. Here, for the time being, I've been working on something that didn't require fresh inspiration: I've taken out the *Cantus Vitæ*,¹⁰ brushed up the German translation once more and made a piano reduction of the score. In my spare time I've been walking, which has been a particularly great pleasure all through the summer, as the region is quite exceptionally picturesque. Some days I walk fifteen or eighteen kilometres. I've picked up another job too. As the church organist had been called up and the job was being done, dreadfully badly, by a woman, I sat down at the organ on the very first Sunday and by so doing quickly established a local reputation. (To the village's credit, it must be said that the difference was noticed at once.) The music that we used to have was quite extraordinary. The band consisted of a violin and a cornet, and the choir had no tenors. Amongst the sopranos (altogether about four) there was one outstanding voice, an innkeeper's daughter, but with a lamentable sense of rhythm and pitch; in addition, of the two contraltos one—the wife of a locksmith—is very musical and reliable, but has a harsh voice. The setting in use was a good sort of village Mass, already arranged so that it could be performed with parts missing. I soon improved this situation; I disposed of the two-part band, and with the help of some Hungarians trained the choir to sing a capella, so that when the parish priest returned from prison (he had been serving two years for listening to the English radio) he was simply amazed and thought that he was in the capital. Of course, *faute de mieux*, I could only put on Masses by Reimann, Schöpfl, Zangl and similarly obscure composers. But we did a nice a capella Mass by Schubert too. Now that the Hungarians have gone I'm reduced to only village people again; but perhaps even so I shall find an acceptable solution.

Meanwhile, the Americans passed through in early May. Later a squadron of cavalry came too, but they were here for only eight days. This place is fortunately so hidden and out of the way that even during the war there were hardly any troop movements here, and no bombing at all. We had a lot to do with the Americans in particular, especially Icyke,¹¹ who acted as official interpreter for the Hungarians and made much of the Hungarian cause, which naturally was a thankless task. She had to travel a lot too, by car, naturally. We've made a huge number of acquaintances, meeting among others the Governor of Upper Austria, General Reinhart, at whose house I actually played at an evening entertainment when I was conducting the Bruckner Orchestra in Linz. I conducted them three times in Linz and once at St Florian; that was their last performance, because after that their members were scattered to the four

10 ■ *Cantus Vitæ*. A symphonic cantata in five movements (op. 38). The setting of texts is taken from Imre Madách's *Tragedy of Man*. This monumented work, so far unpublished, was twice performed in Budapest, on April 28th and 29th 1941. A German version he worked on between 1945 and 1947, had its première in Tallahassee, Florida, on February 2nd 2002.

11 ■ Icyke: Ilona Zachár, Dohnányi's future wife.

winds¹². The reason for that was Austrian chauvinism; 90 per cent of the orchestra were Germans from the Reich, so out they went! But it was a great pity, because—as I told the General—the orchestra was first-class even by world standards (it had been formed with the best musicians in Germany at the start of the war). It was a real joy to conduct; I also played Beethoven's *Emperor* Concerto without a conductor. That all happened in July; then I was wanted on the radio in Salzburg; I was to open the festival performances. It was all being discussed, and I was just getting ready to go for the first rehearsal, when my 'compatriots', who hate me so—which is mutual—put a spanner in the works,¹³ the affair caused quite a stir, English and American newspapers took it up,¹⁴ the General took my side, but it was all no good: I wasn't allowed to conduct in Salzburg! The pack won't leave me alone now; my 'arrest' is being announced on Hungarian radio for a second time, which is just their wishful thinking, and let's hope that's what it remains. Unfortunately Reinhart has gone back to America in the meantime, but his adjutant [...] ¹⁵ was the consequence. That is, the Americans¹⁶ sent up a piano, which was a great joy to me, because even in Vienna I had to do without an instrument. Being without for so long meant that I got down to practise with an enthusiasm that I hadn't felt for a long time. I've written four piano pieces (the fifth is now in preparation)¹⁷. Unfortunately, however, I have no music, so now I'm arranging to borrow my repertoire a bit at a time from the Linz Konservatorium (unfortunately, they only let me keep it for a short while), and I'm trying to memorise it so that I shan't need music.—And there's the likely prospect of a concert. Bubik¹⁸ is the 'official' concert-organiser in French-occupied territory, Tyrol and Vorarlberg, and has got me an invitation to Innsbruck. As the mails are in a criminal condition, and

12 ■ The date of the first concert was 6 July 1945. A brief account of the occasion appeared in *The 65th Halbert Division Daily Newsletter* of 7 July under the headline *Dohnányi Concert Gets GI Applause*.

13 ■ The Hungarian expression is literally 'spat in the soup'.

14 ■ Among others the 11 August 1945 number of *The 65th Halbert Division Daily Newsletter* under the headline "Dohnányi Cleared of 'Crime' Charge".

15 ■ The adjutant: Captain John Kirn, a bank manager in civilian life. A mutual sympathy existed between the elderly musician and the young soldier. Kirn already helped Dohnányi in Austria to clear up "all that crime charge business". Once home in America he did all in his power, financially as well, to smooth Dohnányi's way as quickly as possible. He thus provided a large loan to help finance Dohnányi's journey to the Argentine and his final move to Tallahassee.

16 ■ In the first days of November 1954 Dohnányi, to his great surprise, met again the American soldier who had delivered the piano. It happened that the soldier was in the audience at a lecture that he gave in Milwaukee. He learned that his name was Concle.

17 ■ *Six Piano Pieces* (op. 41). Dohnányi completed them in January 1946, and repeatedly played them in public that summer, thus on June 15th in Linz and later, in the course of July in Graz and Bad Gastein.

18 ■ Árpád Bubik, the impresario. He later settled in the Argentine and founded a concert agency in Buenos Aires. In the spring of 1948 Dohnányi travelled to the Argentine on his invitation, in the hope of being able to make a living there. Bubik's generous three-year contract was, however, not worth the paper it was written on as he was unable to pay even the fees due for the first appearances.

here inside Austria letters take two or three weeks, I've sent Frankovsky to Innsbruck to discuss the necessary arrangements (Frankovsky is at present my 'secretary'). I'm interested to see what he can achieve and whether I shall go or not, as in Salzburg. Frankovsky has already been to Graz (British territory) as well on my behalf, and from there slipped over clandestinely into Hungary and actually went to Budapest. If I'd known [he was going] I'd have given him a couple of lines for you. He's planning to go back to Budapest and then will take this letter, a copy of which I shall also send via Marcsa. Thank God, we can keep in touch after a fashion, even if letters are taking a long time at present (two weeks from Vienna).

Some weeks ago, as I was practising, to my great surprise Ede Kilényi¹⁹ stepped into my room in major's uniform (promotion is very rapid among the Americans). He's stationed in Munich and is administrating musical affairs there. He'd learnt about my case and wanted to get me cleared. Perhaps he'll be able to do that with the Americans, which would suit me perfectly. All the same, I have no plans to return to Hungary at present.

My idea, to which Fate actually drives me in any case, is to spend the winter here in Neukirchen, working. For the moment I'm not thinking any further ahead. I hope, too, that I shall soon be left in peace; I've done quite enough running around. It's difficult and complicated organising things from this remote village. We have permission to stay here, praise be; now I must see about another car (everything is taken from Hungarians), and if that doesn't come off I shall make the best of it, in winter it wouldn't be much use anyway, because here the snow is sometimes up to the upper storey, and for days on end one can't get out into the street. The nearest railway station is nine kilometres away, at Peuerbach, and that's what I need a car for here. The administrative centre of the Gau is Grieskirchen, some thirty kilometres from here. Linz is about fifty kilometres, an hour by car, four or five by train.

Living is not expensive. With all the will in the world one can't spend money because there's hardly anything to buy, and if there is then it's very cheap. Recently I bought some writing paper and some shoelaces and paid 38 pfennigs. Rationing, very wisely, has been retained. The food supply is sufficient, if not very ample, but at all events there's no need to die of starvation. There isn't much meat about, but there's no shortage of potatoes and bread. There's beer, 35 pf. a *krigli*. The peasants, however, have everything and so one can get a lot of things in exchange for tobacco or cigarettes. As none of us smokes we save up our tobacco ration, in addition to which we've still got tobacco that we brought from Hungary and cigarettes that we got from the Americans. We've got fuel too, hopefully enough. So in any case we're better off than we could be in Hungary.

19 ■ Ede (Edward) Kilényi had been a pupil of Dohnányi in Budapest and became a colleague in Florida. He served in the American army from 1942. He left no stone unturned in his efforts to clear Dohnányi's name, hearing countless witnesses. See also Bálint Vázsonyi: *Dohnányi Ernő*. Budapest, Zeneműkiadó, 1971.

By this time almost all the Hungarians have left, and the village is silent and dead. The elderly Sachars²⁰ wanted to go home, but they dithered for so long that they're finally stuck here and now they can't go back. It's a pity, I'd have been pleased to see them go, because Gyula is so depressed that what Icyke has to put up with is almost unbearable (I don't have much to do with him).

I think I've written most of what can give you an idea of my situation. Now I'd like the same from you. Likewise I'd be interested to know about the music situation in Budapest. What's happening at the Academy, the Opera, the Radio. How are the Manningers²¹, Viktor Papp²² and his family, etc., etc?

It was very sensible and useful of Elza to turn Széher út into a family home. When a proper government comes into power I'd like to give my papers to the museum. In return Elza might perhaps receive a small annual income from the state. Of course, that'll have to wait until decent people are in charge of musical affairs.

My warmest greetings to the Szlabey²³ and my condolences to Elza. Many hugs to you and Feri.

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I'm also sending this letter to Marcsa in Vienna. ✎

20 ■ Gyula Sachar was Ilona Zachár's father, Dohnányi's kinsman.

21 ■ Dr (of medicine) Vilmos Manninger and his wife Júlia were old friends of Dohnányi and neighbours in Széher út, where the Dohnányis used to live.

22 ■ Viktor Papp was a music critic. He published a biography of Dohnányi in 1927.

23 ■ Dr (of medicine) Ernő Szlabey was Dohnányi's first cousin. He and his family moved into Széher út in November 1944 at the request of Elza Galafrés, Dohnányi's wife, and he ran the hospital that functioned in the house from 1945–50.

Alan Walker

Dohnányi Redeemed

Ilona von Dohnányi: *A Song of Life*. Edited by James A. Grymes.
Bloomington, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 252 pp.

Between the two world wars, Ernst von Dohnányi (1877–1960) was the most influential musician in Hungary. For a time he held simultaneously the posts of Director of the Liszt Academy, Conductor of the Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra, and Director of Music at Hungarian Radio. Aside from being a prolific composer of music in all genres, he was also a matchless pianist, an inspiring teacher and an administrator with a national vision for his country. Before his arrival on the scene, in the early 1900s, music-making in Hungary remained at a parochial level (gifted young Hungarians generally sought their musical training abroad), but with Dohnányi at the helm, the music of Hungary began to attract international attention. Bartók, Kodály, Leó Weiner and other Hungarians of that generation all owed their early starts to Dohnányi, who featured their music on Hungarian Radio, conducted it at home and abroad, and placed his unrivalled piano playing at their disposal. When he was at the height of his powers he was performing more than 120 concerts a year—solo recitals, chamber music, concertos—in Budapest and elsewhere.

Bartók spoke the truth when, writing in 1920, he declared: "Musical life in Budapest today may be summed up in one name: Dohnányi". On the occasion of Dohnányi's 60th birthday, the *Pesti Napló* went further and declared: "Listen to us, for we are celebrating Ernst von Dohnányi, who is ours, and whom we have given to the world."

In all the circumstances it is extraordinary that until now there has never been a large-scale biography of Dohnányi in English. With the publication of Ilona von Dohnányi's narrative, *A Song of Life*, all that has changed. Ilona was Dohnányi's third wife, and this remarkable tribute to her husband fills the void with conspicuous success.

For the last eleven years of his life (1949–60) Dohnányi lived in Tallahassee, Florida, where he had been offered the post of Artist-in-Residence, and Head of the Piano Faculty. Ilona had long nourished the idea of writing the biography of her celebrated husband. Now that he had reached his twilight years (he was seventy-two years old when he settled in Florida), she thought it important to put the main

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outlines of his fabulous career on the record, especially since he was still under pressure from his political enemies in Hungary, who never lost the desire to destroy him. We will come to that later.

She embarked on this labour of love by conducting a series of interviews with Dohnányi over several years, in Hungarian. Her original notebooks, containing a careful record of these conversations, are presently in the possession of her son Julius. Ilona was a gifted linguist (she spoke five languages), and was known as a prolific writer of books and articles, including short biographies of Bellini, Donizetti, Rossini, and Robert and Clara Schumann. She was therefore well equipped to write a biography of Dohnányi, whom she knew intimately for the last 23 years of his life. Her Hungarian notebooks later became the basis of her typescript, prepared by her in English, which she deposited in Florida State University Library in 1960, shortly after Dohnányi's death. The archival records show that she had tried to find an American publisher for the book at that time, without success. For the detailed documentation of Dohnányi's professional activities from the early years, of which Ilona had no direct knowledge, she relied on a collection of twenty-six scrapbooks, which had been assembled by Dohnányi's American family with scrupulous care. Much of this precious material was smuggled out of Hungary during the 1950s by Dohnányi's sister Mitzi, one sheet at a time, enclosed between the leaves of her many airmail letters to her beloved brother. It was the only way to get this unique material into America during the Cold War. The documents go back to his twelfth year, and consist of concert programmes, reviews, photographs, newspaper articles and the like. A selection of this material illustrates the book, and some of it has never before been pub-

lished. Particularly appealing is a photograph of Dohnányi, Bartók and Kodály, taken in 1900 at a Budapest fair, depicting this gifted young triumvirate in carnival mood. Dohnányi is about to hit an aggressive Kodály over the head with a guitar, while Bartók cowers between them holding an ethnic instrument of indeterminate origin. The picture is a useful reminder of the camaraderie that always existed among these three great musicians.

How accurate is the text? Let Ilona herself reply.

I learned the facts from Dohnányi. This made my work somewhat difficult, because Dohnányi did not like to talk about himself. Nevertheless, he insisted that I write everything down without adding any fiction or colouring it in any way.

We are told that Dohnányi himself read most of the chapters and approved them.

After his death the typescript languished in the library of Florida State University for 40 years. It was left to Dr. James Grymes, the founder and director of the recently established Dohnányi Archives in Tallahassee, to edit the typescript and prepare it for publication. The main problem was Ilona von Dohnányi's English, which was her fifth language, and required some revision. While providing her with somewhat more elegant English than she herself had been able to command, Dr Grymes has been careful to keep her own "voice" throughout her prose. He has also corrected those purely factual errors that inevitably creep into work of this kind, written more than seventy years after some of the events it seeks to portray, and published more than forty years after the text itself had been completed. As an additional precaution, Dr Grymes sought the help of Edward Kilényi (an American pupil of Dohnányi, who had studied with him in Budapest and later became his chief

teaching assistant in Tallahassee), and Dohnányi's American granddaughter, Helen McGlynn, whose memories of Dohnányi went back to her childhood in the 1930s. Not only students of the composer's life and work but all Hungarians owe Dr Grymes a debt of gratitude. He has published an irreplaceable document, one that will serve as the official story of Dohnányi's life until a full-scale scholarly biography appears. The book's title, incidentally, is drawn from Dohnányi's magnum opus, *Cantus Vitæ—A Song of Life*.

The book throws much light on a number of obscure corners of Dohnányi's life. Two in particular attracted my attention, one private, the other intensely public.

Like many other admirers of the composer, I had never been certain of the exact circumstances under which he met his third wife. Ilona first encountered him shortly after his 60th birthday. It was the summer of 1937 and Dohnányi was world famous. Her parents were giving a dinner-party to which they had invited a number of prominent people, including Dohnányi and his second wife, Elsa Galafrès, the celebrated actress. So many other guests were swarming around him that Ilona could not even get near enough to introduce herself. "After supper," she later recalled,

I felt two palms being gently pressed against my eyes from behind me. A man's voice I had never heard before asked mockingly, Guess who I am? Puzzled, I wheeled around to find myself face to face with Ernst von Dohnányi. There was a smile on his lips and in his bright blue eyes as he looked at me. He gently took both my hands and, patting my flushed cheek, murmured, You resemble your father, my dear... I recognized you immediately.

It was love at first sight, for her at any rate. She was 27 years old—33 years his junior, unhappily married with two small

children, and on the point of leaving her husband. Her name was Ilona Zachár, and she lived an isolated life on a country estate owned by her spouse. If she was vulnerable to Dohnányi's famous charm, he was at that moment just as vulnerable to her. His marriage to Galafrès was dead in all but name, and Ilona Zachár soon realized it. Was this the catalyst that drove her a few days later to telephone Dohnányi at the Liszt Academy and seek an appointment? The reason she later gave was that she needed a regular income to support herself and her family, and she hoped that Dohnányi might be able to find her a job, perhaps with Hungarian Radio. She herself admits that her bold approach "displayed tremendous audacity." Imagine the scene. She was ushered into Dohnányi's office by his secretary, Kálmán Isov. Liszt's Chickering grand piano dominated the room. Oil-paintings of past directors gazed down at her from the walls—including Mihalovich, Hubay and Franz Liszt. Some leather armchairs lent the place a bureaucratic atmosphere. Dohnányi was sitting at his desk working on some official papers. Everything was in stark contrast to the easy celebration a few days earlier, in the home of her parents. He rose to greet her in a somewhat stiff and formal manner, as befitted a Director. He was clearly puzzled. "Is there anything I can do for you?", he asked, in a polite but reserved voice. She told him she needed employment. "Why do you need a job?", asked Dohnányi. "Is it your intention to abandon your life on the estate?" It was a fatal question, indicating that Dohnányi knew more about her private life than she had realised. Ilona, already nervous at the situation in which she found herself, now poured out her heart to him about the unhappiness her marriage had brought her. Dohnányi offered her some words of comfort, and as they parted he kissed her gently on the

cheek. "Although it was a casual kiss from a respectable uncle to his niece, my heart warmed and I knew that he liked me," she later observed. Dohnányi explained that there were no openings at the Academy and he had no power to make staff appointments at the Radio, but he would do his best to help her. Despite her linguistic skills he advised her to study the more practical crafts of typing and stenography, and search for a job as a secretary. She followed his advice and eventually secured a high-paid position at the Manfréd Weiss airplane factory. An intimate relationship with Dohnányi soon followed. She had meanwhile moved back into her parents' home in Budapest with her two children, and on Sundays Dohnányi would visit her there and take her and the children to the park, to the zoo, or to a restaurant for dinner. He hated duplicity, and this romantic attachment, which had occurred so late in his life, might have brought much remorse in its wake had fate not intervened. He developed a thrombosis in his right arm. Unable to practise the piano or to conduct, and forbidden by his doctor to engage in any physical activity, he moved into the spa of the Gellért Hotel where, almost immobile, he embarked on a fresh study of the musical scores of his beloved Mozart, Beethoven and Schumann. He was also free to receive as many visitors as he wished, including Ilona, away from the watchful eyes of Elsa Galafrès. After three months he was completely cured, but he decided to stay at the Gellért and rent a permanent room there. He gave up everything that he had loved in his former life—above all his house on Széher Street with its beautiful garden that he himself had planted. It was entirely typical of Dohnányi that he surrendered the entire salaries he received from the Academy and from the Radio to his family. He kept only his fees from his concerts. Ilona tells us that she never once heard him utter a single word

of regret about what he had given up. He seemed perfectly content in his hotel room, returning to the house on Széher Street only when he needed to retrieve one of his precious books from his large library, or, more rarely, when he was obliged to use one or two of its spacious rooms to hold an important reception.

The other issue on which the book is revealing is the highly public matter of the false charges brought against Dohnányi at the end of World War Two. The rumour that he had collaborated with the Nazis during the Horthy regime were set in motion by a group of disaffected Hungarians who wanted to destroy his reputation in the West; they were mainly second-rate musicians who thought that their careers had been hampered by Dohnányi during his twenty-five-year period as "musical dictator" of Hungary. They succeeded beyond their wildest dreams, and their charges pursued Dohnányi to the grave, even though he was officially exonerated, first by the West and then by the Hungarian government itself. The story reads like fiction, but it is fact. In the summer of 1944, as the Russian army closed in on Budapest, Dohnányi and his new family sought refuge in the country home of Ilona's parents in Gödöllő, about thirty kilometres from Budapest. Because of his enormous power and prestige (aside from all his other positions, Dohnányi was also a Member of Parliament), he was besieged by people wanting his support and protection. He signed every petition and application put before him, thinking only to help the supplicants. An official piece of paper bearing the signature of Dohnányi was as good as a passport, given the chaos into which Hungary was fast sinking. He saved many people from the labour camps, including Jenő Sugár, the Jewish head of his publishing firm of Rózsavölgyi, who man-

aged to escape to Italy. He also helped people to leave Hungary who were later denounced by the Russians as enemies of the state. How many petitions he signed is unknown, but at least some of those signatures came back to haunt him. And when the Russians finally occupied Budapest, in early 1945, they had more than enough evidence to try to have Dohnányi arrested. People were executed for less. Quite unwittingly he had laid the groundwork for his own prosecution and became a perfect example of the old saying: "No good deed should remain unpunished."

By the time that Budapest fell to the Red Army Dohnányi had fled Hungary. Realizing the catastrophe that was about to envelope his native land (he could already see the smoke rising from the burning buildings of Budapest's suburbs from distant Gödöllő), he hurried back to Budapest, collected a few belongings, and made his way across the Austrian border, first to Vienna and eventually to the relatively peaceful surroundings of the village of Neukirchen-am-Walde. With him were Ilona and the two children. The last person to whom he said farewell on his way out of Budapest was his sister Mitzi, to whom he was exceptionally close. This nightmare journey, which was undertaken with hardly any food and no money, is described by Ilona in graphic detail and forms one of the most moving parts of the narrative. During those first months in Neukirchen-am-Walde, Dohnányi used to play the organ in the local village church for the Sunday services in exchange for the food which the villagers gave him and his family.

There is evidence that Dohnányi thought his sojourn in Austria would be temporary, and once the war was over he would be able to resume his life in Hungary. That never happened. Hungary, under its new Communist masters, made it clear that it did not want Dohnányi back,

except as a prisoner. Three accusations were levelled against him: that he was a Nazi collaborator, that he was anti-Semitic, and that he was anti-Communist. Only the last accusation was true. He was anti-Communist all his life. (It is often forgotten that Dohnányi had left Hungary once before, during the brief Communist regime of Béla Kun, in 1919.) What compounded Dohnányi's difficulties was that as a member of Parliament he had attached his signature to the newly-formed Nemzeti Szövetség (National Association), like many other good patriots in Parliament. This document was directed against Russia. To those who ask, Why did Dohnányi leave Hungary?, the answer is plain. Had he remained he would have been executed.

Dohnányi now worked hard to clear his reputation. Since Neukirchen-am-Walde fell within the American Zone of Occupation, it became the job of the American Army to inquire into the false charges the Russians were making against him. By one of those extraordinary coincidences, his old pupil Edward Kilényi had meanwhile become an intelligence officer in the American Army, based in Munich. When he heard of the charges, Kilényi made it his special task to disprove them. He visited Dohnányi in Neukirchen, and there was a warm reunion. Thanks in large part to Kilényi, Dohnányi was officially cleared by the American Army, and with his innocence established they permitted him to give concerts in the American zone of occupation, but to military personnel only. Dohnányi needed clearance from another source entirely before he could be allowed to concertize before the general public in Austria and, by implication, abroad. This only came to light when his appearance at the Salzburg Festival in 1945 was cancelled, "because of his War Criminal activities". That damaging directive had come from the office of one Otto Pasetti, Music Officer

for the American Zone in Austria, whose self-appointed task appears to have been to restore the musical life of that nation to its former glory. Dohnányi decided to travel to Salzburg to have it out with Pasetti. The confrontation took place in August 1945, in the office of the Mozarteum. Pasetti had been given plenipotentiary powers by the Americans, and he abused his authority. He was Tyrolean by birth, and had only recently been made an American citizen. Like many such people after the war, he was a small man suddenly made large by force of circumstance, and, in his case, by the elevating title "Music Officer for the American Zone". It was Pasetti's job to see that former Nazi collaborators were excluded from taking part in the musical life of Austria. He almost made a profession of standing in Dohnányi's way, blocking every attempt to have the famous musician exonerated so that his concert career in Austria and elsewhere could resume. In retrospect it is clear that this little man did not want to offend his Russian counterparts. Dohnányi now handed Pasetti a letter from Lt.-Colonel Robertson, an American Army officer who had got to know Dohnányi well, which declared that the composer had been cleared by the Americans and was already giving concerts for the American Army in Austria. Pasetti read the letter, and then turned to Dohnányi saying: "This has nothing to do with me. I am building a new Austria, from musicians of reliable reputation, not like you with your highly unsatisfactory political background." It was one of the few occasions on which Dohnányi lost his temper.

"Of what am I accused?" he demanded, his eyes blazing. Pasetti, who was not used to being questioned himself, started to wilt under Dohnányi's glare. "There is a whole pile of accusations against you", he stammered.

"I want to know them", stormed Dohnányi.

"That is out of the question", replied Pasetti. "I cannot talk about them to you or any of your friends."

Dohnányi persisted. "I want to hear at least one of the accusations."

There was no reply. Our Music Officer for the American Zone had temporarily lost his tongue. In icy tones Dohnányi went on to tell the small bureaucrat before him that there was absolutely nothing in his past that he would change, that if he had to do everything again (which would presumably include signing the anti-Russian declaration as well) he would act exactly as before. That seemed to get Pasetti's attention. "We are allied with the Russians", he shouted. "Those who are against them are our enemies. I could arrest you now for this remark." At that, Ilona came forward and tried to approach Pasetti herself, but Dohnányi grabbed her arm saying: "Come, there is no reason to stay. We are only wasting our time." This was the theme on which untold variations were to be played in the years to come. The accusations were always nameless, nothing was ever specific, everything was left deliberately vague. It was like wrestling with phantoms.

Of all the false allegations levelled against Dohnányi, it was the one alleging anti-Semitism that he felt most keenly. Jews had always been among Dohnányi's most prominent students at the Liszt Academy, and he had awarded a greater proportion of scholarships to them than to any other group—purely on musical merit. Among his Jewish students were Edward Kilényi, Annie Fischer, Endre Petri, Iván Engel, Andor Földes, Jenő Zeitingner, Lajos Heimlich, György Ferenczi, and György Faragó. The charges that he was anti-Jewish reached an absurd and sinister climax in October 1945 when it was alleged by the Hungarian government that he had "handed over sick Jewish musicians to the Gestapo." Dohnányi later discovered that

this particular calumny had been started by a Jew whom he had earlier helped to get released from a labour camp in Hungary, a revelation that wounded him deeply. It was yet another matter for his nemesis, the indefatigable Pasetti, to investigate, one more delay on the way to Dohnányi's "rehabilitation."

In an interesting letter from the Hungarian violinist Tibor Serly, written in defence of Dohnányi in February 1949 (and included with several others in this book), the point is made that "*not one Jewish musician of any reputation living in Hungary lost his life or perished during the entire period of World War II*" (Serly's italics). It has meanwhile been proved conclusively that when the Nazi racial laws were introduced into Hungary, in the early 1940s, and a "star chamber" was set up within the Liszt Academy to purge it of its Jewish students and faculty, Dohnányi obstructed it at every turn, and made it unworkable. Far better known is the fact that in 1944, after the Germans had occupied Hungary, he disbanded the Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra rather than purge it of its Jewish players.

Not the least intriguing feature of this book are the Appendices. Two of them contain letters in support of Dohnányi, including a moving tribute from his Jewish colleague Leó Weiner. They also present a selection of documents dealing with the political storm raging around Dohnányi, including original documents from Pasetti, Kilényi, Sugár, Tibor Serly and others. Another Appendix contains the texts of two very fine lectures by Dohnányi, published here for the first time and which deserve to become widely known, the first on Sight Reading and the second on Beethoven's Piano Sonatas. Finally there is a complete Catalogue of Works, compiled by James Grymes.

This Catalogue raises what is, perhaps, the most important point of all. It is as a

composer that Dohnányi's claim to posterity will rest. His music has been routinely dismissed by some as "old-fashioned". The term is meaningless and has no place in the critical lexicon, where it continues to serve as a substitute for thought. It is used by those who misguidedly base their theoretical picture of music on the scientific model, and particularly on the development of technology—where each stage is considered a step towards the next one. But this analogy is surely false. Art is not science. Scientific inventions may supercede and even replace one another, but works of art do not. The language of music is there to express something. The only question that matters is: "Does it succeed?" Why would one need to know the date before answering such a question?

In any case, the music shows every sign of outliving its critics. A long-awaited revival of Dohnányi's music is now upon us. And nowhere is this in greater evidence than in the composer's native Hungary, where it has recently enjoyed a strong recovery. Dohnányi has meanwhile had a street named after him, close to the Liszt Academy. And in 1990 he was posthumously awarded the Kossuth Prize, one of Hungary's highest distinctions.

"Dohnányi is ours!" When the *Pesti Napló* issued that proclamation, sixty-five years ago, it had no portent of the dreadful events that were soon to overtake Hungary and Dohnányi himself. Those words have unwittingly turned into a challenge. Hungary now shows every sign of wanting to heal the breach that Hungary alone was responsible for creating. How far is it willing to go? A subsidy in perpetuity for the newly established Dohnányi Research Centre in Budapest would be a good beginning. History teaches us that it is never too late for a nation to bring about a reconciliation with its greatest sons. •

Kristóf Csengery

L'Allegro, Il Penseroso and Il Moderato

The Pianists Zoltán Kocsis, Dezső Ránki and András Schiff

Some believe in fatal coincidences, others just shrug when it comes to a peculiar constellation of stars. The 1960s and '70s witnessed an explosion in Hungarian musical performance: a number of gifted young pianists made their debut in this period; thoroughly trained musicians, they changed the standards by which performance was judged in Hungary and they significantly raised those of criticism. Three musicians stand out among them whose reputations already pointed beyond the boundaries of Hungary thirty years ago, and they have since assumed truly international dimensions: Zoltán Kocsis, András Schiff and Dezső Ránki. All three celebrated their 50th birthdays within the past two or three years. This prompted the Hungarian classic music channel, Bartók Rádió, to broadcast a series called *Pianissimo!!!*, a selection of the three pianists' concert appearances and radio recordings from the '70s to our own day. The 152 weekly broadcasts, which began in December 2001 and will continue until December 2003, present rare performances picked from some 250 recordings. Listening to this fascinating archival material has been an inspiration for the present reviewer to outline the portraits of the three musicians as part of an attempt to systematise experience and impressions gathered over several decades.

School

Three great periods in Hungarian music education can be identified. The first, from 1875 to 1886, is associated with the aging Franz Liszt, the second in 1928–44 with Ernst von Dohnányi, and the third from the 1960s to 1983 with Pál Kadosa. Around these three masters evolved musical workshops of a distinctive

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atmosphere, which led to the emergence of a group of disciples of a pregnantly marked profile—a school. Ránki (1951), Kocsis (1952) and Schiff (1953) all studied with Pál Kadosa (1903–1983). A pupil of Kodály, Kadosa the composer belonged to the modernist-neoclassical school of the first half of the 20th century. In the postwar period, he became one of the senior Hungarian musicians who were politically also acceptable. As a pianist, he was heir to the Liszt tradition: he studied with Arnold Székely at the Budapest Liszt Academy, and Székely, just as Bartók, was a pupil of István Thomán, who had been taught by Liszt himself. Those who remember the atmosphere in his class all stress Kadosa's broad horizon and gentle, tolerant personality, which respected autonomy: his was an attitude that did not stress a single method and did not regard technical perfection as of paramount importance (Kadosa was not one of those piano teachers who regularly demonstrate their ideas on the instrument), but offered circumspect and tactful guidance to the pupil to search out his own ways.

Two outstanding teachers of chamber music at the Academy contributed to the development of Kocsis, Schiff and Ránki, complementing Kadosa's efforts: the pianist Ferenc Rados, a wonderful Mozart performer, who was still appearing as a soloist in the '60s–'70s, and the composer György Kurtág, a phenomenal teacher of chamber music, who had his great creative period still ahead of him. Kadosa inspired openness and a feeling of freedom in his pupils, they acquired sensitivity from Rados and a perfectionism from Kurtág, the spirit of being never satisfied. These three teachers were joined by a conductor, Albert Simon (1926–2000), whom those in charge of music in Hungary had sidelined and who withdrew into the Academy as into refuge in the late '60s to head orchestral practice. In this capacity, he had several concerts and made Hungaroton recordings with the young pianists as soloists (mainly of Bach and Mozart concertos). The militant personality of Simon, who never shunned conflict, conveyed a message of rebellious nonconformity to Kocsis, Schiff and Ránki: in his view, a work was never ready and finished and only work in progress existed. This approach was in complete opposition to the rigid frames within which the music industry operated.

Launching a career

Oddly enough, the youngest made the first start: it was Schiff who was something of a child prodigy. In 1968, at the age of 14, he won the national *Who is good at what?* talent competition that was annually run by the then one and only Hungarian television channel. It was a nationally watched programme in socialist Hungary with amateur magicians, mimics, pop singers, actors and folk ensembles competing for the attentions of the judges and the public. For this early, non-official start (preceding his Music Academy studies) Schiff paid with a delay in the launch of his official career: a few years later Kocsis and Ránki made it as professional musicians earlier than Schiff. The careers of Kocsis and Ránki

are underlined by competition victories: Ránki won the Schumann Competition in Zwickau in 1969, Kocsis was placed first in the Piano Competition of Hungarian Radio in 1970. However, competitions—obvious means for young musicians to attract attention—were not typical of them. There were no more after the above mentioned in the case of Ránki and Kocsis; Schiff took a 4th place at the Moscow Tchaikovsky Competition (1974) and a 3rd at the Leeds International Piano Competition (1975). Keeping away from competitions is probably an early sign of their stature; there were others in Kadosa's class who showed more enthusiasm for this way of seeking recognition.

From the beginning, the Hungarian public saw Kocsis and Ránki as twin stars, hardly able to utter either name separately, while Schiff was marked off from the other two. The long and unmarred friendship between Kocsis and Ránki also found expression in collaboration in music—they often performed works for four hands or two pianos. Did the public realize the difference between the two personalities at the very beginning? It did, and it did so decidedly. Within a year or two of his debut, Kocsis was turned by the Hungarian media into the first star of classical music in socialist Hungary, a performer of the classical repertoire, whose level of recognition and popularity was on that of pop musicians. This was unprecedented, and was no doubt due to more than his musicianship. Contributory factors were his radicalism, his willingness to shock, his extroverted and charismatic personality. Ránki was the opposite even at the outset (they complemented each other and this contributed to their success): Ránki was characterised by calm and moderation; contrary to Kocsis's centrifugal energy, he was motored by centripetal forces.

Prior to his move to London (1979), Schiff's career was overshadowed by a feeling of being misplaced: audiences, the press and the community of musicians had distributed the roles too markedly, and Kocsis and Ránki fitted them too snugly to leave room for a third. In this cast, Schiff had no possibility to develop his own image. His only chance was to play better than the other two. Schiff, however, was not inspired by the intellectual climate of the Hungary of that time which made him lethargic. In retrospect, one may say that it was right to honour Kocsis and Ránki (typically at the same time) with the most important Hungarian distinction for artists, the Kossuth Prize, in 1978—which Schiff did not receive. It is strange, however, that he had to wait until 1996, to be awarded.

Influences and examples

What was the playing of the three pianists like thirty years ago, in the early seventies? Listening to their LPs and radio recordings, one can detect both the common features and the differences—the former being perhaps more numerous. First of all, there was a new instrumental standard: the insistence on flawless execution that was ignored in earlier decades that emphasised inspired

musicality and the poetry of playing instead. The playing of young Kocsis and young Ránki is clearly interreferential in this regard. Schiff's instrumental performance was also up to the strictest standards, but it was not characterised by inappealable perfection, the hallmark of the concerts of Kocsis and Ránki for many years. Peculiarly (and quite understandably) Schiff stepped over his shadow in terms of instrumental technique, when he had done so musically: it is hardly an exaggeration to say that in the years after leaving Hungary, Schiff underwent a metamorphosis when placed in a real competitive situation. The eternal third man back in Hungary turned into one of the (if not the) most original musicians in that international pool of pianists which is capable of peak performances both musically and instrumentally on every occasion.

There were other common features in the playing of the three pianists, apart from high technical standards, already in the '70s. These included the ideal of a bell-like clarity; the cult of the plasticity of melodic lines; the drive to give transparency to the sound and the related polyphonic approach which tends to interpret every work as a system of independently moving parts; a flair for sharp accents; the recognition of the importance of structural articulation; the multitude of unusual tempi often contrary to tradition. In short, they aimed at originality, at reinterpreting old scores with a fresh eye. Some people had the impression at that time—and many more now in retrospect—that all this often resulted in an overstrained, nervous flickery and mechanical piano music. At that time, however, it had revolutionary significance: it brought something radically new and electrifying after the inarticulation, drabness and romantic sentimentality of the mainstream of piano playing. These features always applied most pregnantly—sometimes excessively—to Kocsis, while Ránki's moderation and a classic sense of balance had largely modified and polished them even in his early period. In this respect, Schiff was closer to Kocsis: Ránki's attack and piano tone was more peaceful and apparently more traditional than Schiff's.

The question arises as to what may underlie this assertive manner of playing and ideal sound, and what influence the three musicians were elaborating in those years. Obviously, the strongest influence was that of Glenn Gould, whose impact was powerful on Kocsis and Schiff; Ránki's performance was more strongly and intricately influenced by pianists such as Sviatoslav Richter and Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli. (By a twist of fate, it was not Ránki—who is one of Richter's most devoted admirers and who collects all his available records—but Kocsis who had an opportunity to perform chamber music with the master in 1977, although his personality is far less compatible with Richter's than is Ránki's.) Through Kocsis's mediation, Gould became all but a cult figure among Hungarian musicians (had it not been for Kocsis as catalyst, he would never have exerted such a strong influence on Hungarian musical culture). Kocsis, who nearly expropriated the discovery of Gould for himself in the Hungarian mass media, was considered for a long time as the disciple and

heir to Gould. No doubt this opinion was justified at that time by both his instrumental perfection and musical radicalism, as well as the non-conformism and versatility of his personality.

Musician and repertoire

Young Kocsis was quite single-minded: in a manner of speaking you could say that, in his early years, Bach, Bach and Bach were his three favourites. With time came the dominance of the true Bs: the early pillars of his repertoire were Bach, Beethoven and Bartók. One may add Mozart, and most recent contemporary music from Kurtág to László Vidovszky. (He included Vidovszky's avant-garde piece for prepared piano, *Schroeder's Death*, in a 1977 piano recital in Budapest, otherwise playing Schubert, Chopin, Liszt's Wagner transcriptions and Ravel to a subscription series audience, causing quite a scandal.) He kept cautiously aloof from the romantics for a relatively long time; Chopin, of course, appeared quite early, but the conquest of the 19th century was not one of the early tasks Kocsis set himself. Certainly, in the early '70s no one thought that Zoltán Kocsis, an elegant and choosy jungle predator who devoured only flesh, would become an omnivore going as far as Grieg, Rachmaninov and Kreisler.

There are three composers, three areas of the repertoire in which Kocsis was, or rather still is, a specialist. Concerning Bach, a peculiar process could be observed: Kocsis, who treated Bach at the beginning as his daily bread (his exemplar Gould is also remembered primarily as a Bach interpreter) and played *Die Kunst der Fuge* on record (Hungaroton, 1984) gradually retreated from this familiar field and finally abandoned it. Searching for the causes, one may spot a single case in which the historicist performance of early music certainly influenced Kocsis's thinking. In the early 70s this trend had hardly any resonance in Hungary, but by the mid-80s the Hungarian concert platform had also admitted it. Having a subtly refined ear and advanced sense of criticism, Kocsis must have felt challenged by the two different performing practices. His answer was not to play Baroque keyboard music at all. (N.B.: he did not play Baroque keyboard music before either, except for Bach. Ránki sometimes played a little Handel.)

The other speciality of Kocsis—the alpha and omega of the pianist's life and his unimpaired triumph—is Béla Bartók. Bartók's music was always at the centre of his attention as his early recordings of the Piano Concertos nos. 1 and 2 (Hungaroton, 1972) show; this interest has outgrown his activity as pianist, immersing him into the study of the oeuvre. In 1981, the year of the Bartók centenary, Kocsis was an acknowledged Bartók specialist, whose aspiration is to render a definitive account, which is based on a scholarly reading of the score, the findings of the recognised authorities such as László Somfai, who is in charge of the Bartók Archives in Budapest. Over the past decades, Kocsis not only played Bartók but has also written about him, edited archive recordings of

Bartók at the piano, conducted Bartók works and in recent years he has also contributed to the Béla Bartók Critical Edition, now in progress. He had recorded Bartók on the Hungaroton label, and Bartók's complete works for piano solo and piano and orchestra, recorded with Philips in recent years, is one of the peaks of his career. A similarly old and strong attraction, documented by the new Philips discs alongside old Hungarian recordings (also differently orchestrated), ties Kocsis to a third composer he renders with the competence of an authority: Claude Debussy.

It is most intriguing that the experience that blocked Kocsis's relationship with Bach liberated the other great Bach pianist, challenging him to dispute and experimentation instead of retreat. András Schiff has always played Bach, something he did not give up no matter how powerful an impact the concerts and discs of the historicist school had. He appears to have incorporated certain period characteristics in his Bach concept, which is as fresh and exciting as ever. It is generally maintained that an attitude to the repertory is determined by creativity, interest and energy. Schiff's omnivorousness was not the reaction to an earlier ascetic attitude. Schiff has from the outset approached the repertory with a searching, weighing, associating mind. Since his great return at Christmas, 1986, he has naturalised in Hungarian concert life the thematic concerts and projects long popular in the West. He played complete series (all piano sonatas of Schubert); inspired ruminations by his astonishing pairings (Bach and Bartók, Schubert and Janáček); pointed out hidden parallels and connections (in his series *Chopin and his Models* he played Chopin confronted with Bach, Scarlatti and Mozart compositions). His interest encompasses Baroque and classical music, romanticism and recent compositions alike. In the 90s he showed in chamber music performed with Heinz Holliger, Bruno Canino and others that he was open to most recent music as well. His rendering of Bartók is momentous, though not that of a specialist and not governed by a wish to provide an overview of the whole oeuvre.

No sign suggests that the three great pianists hold Annie Fischer among their great examples. However, Ránki's stature as musician, especially his peculiar and consistent rigour concerning his repertoire, irresistibly reminds one of the legendary pupil of Dohnányi. Just as Annie Fischer, Ránki also kept within a relatively narrow circle and—however long his career may be—he ignores what is outside. In this respect, Dezső Ránki is a direct heir to the great pianists concentrating on the golden treasury of the classical-romantic piano repertoire. It is noteworthy that he rarely played Bach at the beginning and practically never recently. (Kocsis and Ránki appear to have mutually avoided the other's demarcated areas: Ránki always kept a distance from Bach, Kocsis never came close to Ránki's absolute favourite, Schumann.) The mainstay of Ránki's repertoire includes Mozart and Beethoven, Schubert and Chopin, Schumann and Liszt. He is almost indifferent to the 20th century except for Bartók, but he sensitively se-

lects from his works, too: out of the piano concertos, you can just about only hear the third in his rendering.

All three of them—Kocsis, Ránki and Schiff—owe us a great moral debt: they do not play the piano compositions of their teacher Pál Kadosa, which still await the recognition they deserve. Schiff has already shown with his first-class gap-filling record of Sándor Veress pieces (Teldec, 1998) that he was ready to work for the latent values of 20th century Hungarian music when he had a chance. Kadosa's valuable and original compositions are also worthy of this effort. We are eager to see if the Kadosa centenary in 2003 will bring some change in the three pianists' attitude.

I want the lion, too!

Who rests content with the instrument and who aspires after more? Kocsis took pains at the very beginning to be seen not "only" as a pianist. At first he tried to couple pianism with composition. He composed, partly independently, partly as a member of the New Music Studio founded by Albert Simon and a few young Hungarian composers (Péter Eötvös, Zoltán Jeney, László Sáry and László Vidovszky) in 1970, the salient experimental workshop in Hungary in the '70-'80s. That was followed by record edition, writing, edition of periodicals (he was an editor of *Mozgó Világ*, an opposition journal tolerated by the socialist Hungary for some time in the '80s and shifted into "more reliable" hands later, and after the political change as a member of the editorial board of *Holmi*, the leading literary journal).

The decisive step in expanding his interest came with the foundation of the Budapest Festival Orchestra, an ensemble meant to stir up the stagnant Hungarian orchestral scene. It was founded by Kocsis and the conductor Iván Fischer in 1983, triggering off a beneficial storm among various interest groups in the Hungarian musical community. For nine years the Festival Orchestra worked as a non-continuous, occasional orchestral workshop giving several memorable concerts and making records. In 1992 the Budapest municipality undertook to finance it and a foundation was established to contribute to its financial basis. As one of the artistic directors of the Festival Orchestra (co-directing with Iván Fischer), Kocsis often conducted the ensemble in both its periods, but his conducting activities flourished when, in 1997, he broke with the Festival Orchestra and took on the direction of the Hungarian State Orchestra. He did so when that ensemble struck bottom: the State Orchestra, once conducted by the legendary János Ferencsik, was a stray, shattered, professionally and morally deranged ensemble when Kocsis took over. The new leading conductor, under whose baton the ensemble was renamed the National Philharmonic Orchestra—started to lobby the government to establish a financial basis and also refreshed the pool of musicians: the tough manager got rid of

useless musicians and employed new staff. A new orchestra that rested on new financial foundations and underwent a professional transfusion is artistically directed by Zoltán Kocsis. It made its debut in the Liszt Music Academy of Budapest in the autumn of 2000. His post at the helm of the Philharmony allows Kocsis to show his skills at orchestral transcriptions, verified by his Bartók and Debussy transcriptions in recent years.

All this, however, also has a price: the conductor Zoltán Kocsis nowadays rarely appears as a pianist. Sometimes one hears him as the soloist of a concerto, but he has had no recital in Budapest for many years. He keeps insisting in interviews that he still practises regularly (true, Philips keeps releasing his new records), but his recent live appearances have been somewhat disillusioning. His piano tone has thickened and lost its subtle metallic ring, and in chamber music performances he tends to impose himself on his colleagues, suppressing their parts. For the past few years Kocsis has been a conductor of significant, exciting performances, who has made immense efforts for the present and future of Hungarian orchestral music. His personality and key role in the music life compares him to the legendary all-round Hungarian musician of the inter-war years, Ernst von Dohnányi, and a student of his career will not be much mistaken if he assumes that Kocsis is aware of this similarity, and even wishes to stress it.

Kocsis is rightly admired, respected and appreciated by the public for his versatility, for composing, writing, editing, transcribing and conducting despite being a pianist. And they rightly admire, appreciate and respect Ránki for not composing, not writing, not editing records and not conducting. Being a matchlessly strong character, Dezső Ránki is walking his own path. He is only a pianist—no more and no less. Just as a wish to embrace everything has its price, so this wise modesty has its reward: Ránki's performances have become ever deeper and richer over the years. If the standard phrase of criticism—"the musician has been discovering and conquering ever newer layers of the work" makes sense at all, it is meaningful in Ránki's case. His piano tone is still clear, communicative, flexible, slender and ringing. His play is devoid of aggressiveness. His presence on the stage is reserved elegance incarnate. This applies down to the minutest details, e.g., to his reaction to applause. It often happens that no encore follows an enthusiastically received recital.

As in so many other things, András Schiff appears as the ideal alloy of Kocsis and Ránki in this respect, too. He is neither exuberant nor restrained by discipline. His relevant decisions also emanate a wise and serene balance, seeking and finding the golden mean. He refrains from composing or arranging, but sometimes he puts pen to paper to explain the conceptual background to a concert series, and it also happened (on December 21, 2000, in Budapest) that he introduced a recital with a long lecture (Bach: *Goldberg Variations*). It seems, however, that he does not attach special importance to these activities. It is not his ambition to head a large team of musicians or to build up a great conducting

career, but he founded an international chamber orchestra, called Capella Andrea Barca, which he occasionally conducts. He aims to conduct some major oratorios and operas but claims not to plan a lasting conducting career. Just as Kocsis and Ránki, he has also taught at the Budapest Academy, but unlike his colleagues, he has not given teaching up completely and he holds master classes. In 1989 he founded the Mondsee Festival devoted principally to chamber music which he was in charge of for ten years, and for some fifteen years he has decisively contributed to shaping the profile of the Schubertiade at Feldkirch. Much like Kocsis, making records is an important aspect of his career: in 1983 he contracted with Decca in London, and in recent years his renderings have been on the Teldec label. Kocsis displays a desire for totality, and Ránki testifies to asceticism. Sedateness and moderation predominate with Schiff.

At home or abroad?

When it comes to artists of the stature of Kocsis, Ránki or Schiff, the question evidently arises: which is the ideal setting for their career? Being familiar with Zoltán Kocsis's personality, one may rightly declare—however astonishing it may sound—that despite the international dimensions of his activities, his is a typical Central European, even specifically Hungarian, character on account of his explosive and contradictory traits, his involvement in public life and his foundness for facing challenges. That Kocsis, living in Budapest, has managed to become a musician of international reputation with concerts in the major cities of the world and an exclusive contract with Philips, is owed both to his extraordinary qualities and to good luck, since Ránki has failed to achieve similar success.

Ránki also tours the world, his records also come out on leading labels, yet he is not "seeded" as high as Kocsis. Many justly object, that Ránki never had such ambitions. It is, however, thought provoking that the monumental series of Philips Classics released in 1998/99—the *Great Pianists of the 20th Century*—contains discs by Kocsis and Schiff, but none by Ránki. (Apart from them, another two Hungarian pianists—Géza Anda and György Cziffra—are included; typically, two pianists who left their country and made their careers abroad. It is also typical that Annie Fischer, who had an international reputation in her time but remained in Hungary is, like Ránki, absent.)

If Kocsis can be described as a typical Hungarian musician, András Schiff's nature, mentality and artistic affinities all back his international character. Schiff is a born cosmopolitan; he is made that by his buoyancy and flexibility, independence and liberalism. The restrictions in socialist Hungary shackled him, and though the questions like "what would have happened, if...?" do not make sense, one may presume that even the intellectual climate of a democratic Hungary would also have been too stifling for Schiff. Startling as it may sound, Schiff was not a significant artist while he lived in Hungary—probably because

an extremely sensitive musician like him was mentally paralysed by the restricted horizons. Having left the country, he underwent astonishing development, converting into someone quite different, stepping over his own shadow. This he clearly owed to the incentives and inspiring experiences gained in a new, more spacious and liberated Lebensraum. Since 1986 Schiff has carefully nursed his contacts with the Hungarian public: he returns several times a year and his Budapest recitals always include major works. As for Hungarian audiences: the love and respect that envelopes Schiff at his guest performances is incomparable.

The recent past

In the 2001/2001 season, Budapest audiences had the opportunity to hear Kocsis, Schiff and Ránki on several occasions. Kocsis evidently concentrated on his orchestra, which after their debut in 2000/2001, played strengthened and at an evenly high standard under his baton. Kocsis brought with him from the Festival Orchestra to the Philharmony a programme policy aimed at enriching the repertory with specialities, throwing light on forgotten works and extending the audience's horizon with rarities. In the past season this exploratory programme planning added curiosities to the French and Slavic repertories (Bizet, Debussy, Ravel, Roussel, Dukas, Dvorák, Rachmaninov, Prokofiev). Kocsis held a charity concert on May 30th, his birthday—the 50th. It was not a solo recital this time: he played with the ingenious cellist Miklós Perényi at first, then he performed a single solo piece (Beethoven: Sonata in C sharp minor, op.27/2), and after the interval he featured first as conductor and then as the soloist of a concerto.

Schiff's major feat in the 2001/2002 season was the above-mentioned series of recitals, *Chopin and his Models*. He confronted the works of the Polish romantic composer with works by Bach, Scarlatti and Mozart, pointing out to receptive listeners the influences, analogies and, hidden connections. This cycle was notable for its choice of instruments. Schiff performed the Chopin works in the second part of his recitals on a renovated period Pleyel piano. Budapest music-lovers are eagerly awaiting the next cycle, an inventive thematic series of the last three piano sonatas of Haydn, Beethoven and Schubert.

An artist of discipline and concentration, Dezső Ránki gave few recitals in Budapest in the 2001/2002 season, presenting thoughtfully selected composers and compositions. A May evening proved memorable when he presented two Mozart concertos with the Liszt Ferenc Chamber Orchestra: one in major (K.414, A) and one in minor (K.466, D) keys, confronting the audience with the portrait of the buoyant and tragic Mozart in one evening. His major achievement, however, was a Beethoven cycle of a selection of piano sonatas in three recitals, performed in a mature and revelatory manner. Ránki's shyness and asceticism was characteristically in evidence last autumn, when his 50th birthday passed without the least public notice—most probably in accordance with his own wishes. ♣

Ideals, Dogmas, Passions

Nikolaus Harnoncourt in Budapest

On March 25th 2002, the Concentus musicus and the Arnold Schönberg Choir of Vienna performed Mozart's *Litanie Lauretanæ*, K.195, *Regina Cœli*, K.127 and Haydn's "Heiligmesse" under Nicolaus Harnoncourt at the Budapest Congress Hall, as part of the Budapest Spring Festival. The following day, on his first visit to Hungary, sponsored by Warner Music Hungary, Harnoncourt was interviewed at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences before a packed auditorium.

*

András Batta: *I know two types of Austrians: those who like Hungarians and those who do not. I am told that your own family has some Hungarian roots, so would I be right in supposing that you are among the former?*

Nikolaus Harnoncourt: My grandmother on my mother's side was Hungarian. As a child, my mother probably spoke better Hungarian than German. I myself, however, rarely heard Hungarian spoken, really only when she took us children to

Hungary in the mid-1930s. I remember her leaning out of the train window when we pulled into the station and calling out for a *hordár*, a porter. As for me, I could greet and count in Hungarian. And say the Lord's Prayer: *Mindörökké Ámen*—For ever and ever, Amen. My mother was 96 when she died, imagine that, and during the last twenty years of her life she would only speak Hungarian, not German. At the same time, I should mention that one of my grandfathers was Czech, so Czech is actually my father tongue. Most important of all, however, is the Central European *lingua franca*—that's my true mother tongue.

One comes across a number of minor Hungarian motifs in your biography. Your cello, for example, was made in Pest.

Yes, that's my prize cello. An 1848 instrument made by Johann Baptist Schweizer. Just magnificent!

Your wife, Alice Harnoncourt, was a pupil of the Hungarian violinist Tibor Varga.

Yes.

András Batta

heads the Department of Musicology at the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music. Between 1974–96 he was responsible for numerous musical programmes on Hungarian and Austrian Radio and Television. Between 1996–2002 he was an editor and author of Könnemann Publishers, Cologne.

Your autobiography mentions the great impression the conductor Ferenc Fricsay made on you as an orchestral cellist.

The greatest experience I had with him was Bartók's Second Violin Concerto, with Ede Zathureczky as soloist. I was not involved in that performance, just one of the audience. I would never have thought that an old man could still play like that. He played so unbelievably beautifully that I have not dared to conduct the work since then, because there is no way I shall come across a violinist of his like.

I am told that for your seventieth birthday, you were given a facsimile of Bartók's manuscript score of the Second Violin Concerto by Professor László Somfai, the director of the Bartók Archive in Budapest. You didn't feel the urge to make it sound? After all, it would fit in with the series of Bartók's works that you have recently recorded (Divertimento, Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta).

I shall conduct the work the moment that I find the right soloist. There are many good violinists but very few truly have the right approach to this masterpiece.

To stay with what you have already recorded, like the Music for Strings in the first movement of which every detail, not just of the fugal theme but the whole musical fabric, is so subtly audible. Is this historical music for you, just as works by Bach and Mozart?

Absolutely. The placement of the instruments on the concert platform, for instance, is precisely what Bartók prescribed. The recording was live, at a concert with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, and it had been very thoroughly rehearsed.

Your own career appears to be a linear progression, at least judging from the Harmon-

court discography: Bach, then Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and so on. But we can see that early on you immersed yourself intensively in Bartók's music. You played the Divertimento for Strings as quite a young orchestral musician.

Well, yes. Chronologies of that sort really are just ostensible. For me, Schubert's works were always vital. There could be no day without Schubert, even if he was not the first composer whom we started to record. In any event, Bach was not among the very first recording projects but the Avignon School. We played the works of composers centuries before Bach, right up to the end of the Sixties. Since then we play no works earlier than Gabrieli, but then with *Concentus musicus* we don't go much beyond Haydn either. Exceptionally we sometimes play one or another of Schubert's or Beethoven's rarely heard works. Quite apart from that, from the age of seventeen onwards I have loved all music, from Adam and Eve down to the present day. Any composition more than five years old is historical to me. Whether it's five or fifty or five hundred years—it's all the same.

Your original instrument was the cello. Why the cello?

I come from a large family. There were seven of us children, I was the third. My eldest sister played the piano—not too well. A younger brother played the violin quite well, and my father was a pianist and he also composed—very well too. He wanted me to learn to play the piano, but that didn't appeal to me because at that time (I was six) I didn't like the sound of the piano. I must have been eight when my father told me, "Learn to play the cello, because we want to play Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert trios, and we need a cellist." I sensed right away that this was my in-

strument, my sound, my voice. At that time, though, I only made music for fun; I had no wish to be a professional musician.

I understand that you didn't become a musician on account of the cello but on account of a radio broadcast: Furtwängler conducting Beethoven's Seventh.

I didn't know that it was Furtwängler. I was seventeen years old and happened to be in bed at home. I listened to the music and sensed that I was a musician. At a stroke, everything else in my life became secondary.

Not many know that Herbert von Karajan also played a big part in your life.

For ten years he was the conductor in chief of the Vienna Symphony Orchestra; he engaged me as a cellist after a series of auditions in which forty of us took part. I played the Dvorak Cello Concerto too, of course, though not the usual passage but the whole of the first movement. That just never happens at auditions. Karajan listened with great interest to the movement; my wife was accompanying me, since she is a good pianist as well as a good violinist. Karajan was a very interesting boss: you really did learn an incredible amount from him. My true training as a conductor took place in the orchestra. For seventeen years I played at the back desk, which was a very good place to be because it offered a direct view of the conductor. I played under all the great conductors of that generation. Bruno Walter too, all of them. The classic training, of course.

Intriguingly enough, you didn't try to make a big name for yourself as a cellist but kept your eye on a conducting career from the cello desk. And you started conducting quite late.

For a long time I conducted the ensemble from the cello, indeed I even conducted

operas from an instrument, the viola. The viola, unlike the cello, has quite a few rests and does not tie one down the whole time. But then I had to discover for myself that if there is a choir as well, and the orchestra is large, I was able to beat time more nimbly and effectively as a traditional conductor. Of course, I still carried on conducting from the cello desk for a long time within the *Concentus musicus*. A moment came, though, when I said I would give it up because I wasn't able to practise regularly. So in 1986 I decided to put the cello away. Over. Not another note.

Your recording of the six Bach Cello Suites sticks in the memory.

That was actually an illicit recording. I made it in my own home for an American book club. All of a sudden, amazingly, the recording started to appear in shops. I am no longer able to play the works, and even if I could, I would probably play them a little differently. But then what's done is done.

That interpretation, to my mind, is very typical of your performing personality. On the one hand, a historical approach, with Baroque dance characters, Baroque phrasing and ornamentation, and on the other, a spare but characteristic vibrato and a sort of romantic, "articulated" mode of expression. Are Romanticism and historical fidelity compatible?

Historical fidelity demands a romantic approach. Schumann once said that music itself is romantic. Nowadays we call everything sensual, Romantic. A sterile, vibratoless, ice-cold performance is not at all my idea of historical fidelity. Vibrato has existed since people first sang. The one thing that does not make sense is continuous and unremitting vibrato. But someone playing without vibrato is like a child who has not yet quite mastered the violin. If we extract the sensual content from music,

then what use do we have for it? In short, then, I don't feel there is any contradiction between Romanticism and historical fidelity. For me, historical fidelity means lively music-making.

You once said that authentic performance is no more than a living-through of the work. Does it follow then that period instruments and historical performance practice are not the prime guarantees of authenticity?

The living-through, the bringing to life, really is the essential thing, but one has to know an awful lot, starting with the right pitch. I have yet to meet a trainee instrumentalist, whatever musical academy he or she may be attending, who knew the basis for the pitch of his or her instrument. Often enough even members of professional orchestras are unaware of it, and yet it is of great importance. There should be a huge difference in the sound of an E major and an F major chord. One needs to know what makes a note, an interval, pure and what makes it impure. One can learn that. The characters of different dances can also be learned: what a polka, a waltz, a bourrée, a gavotte, is like. Those are not things that can be instinctively known. Once one has learned it, however, one ought not to give it any further thought, one should make music. Equally one cannot make music without some knowledge. It's like languages. One has to acquire a language, but whilst one is speaking one does not think about the language but about what one wants to say.

You mentioned pitch. Monika Mertl offers what strikes me as an interesting piece of information in her book about you and your wife, which has just appeared in Hungarian to coincide with your visit to

*Budapest. * She quotes you in saying that Concentus musicus adopts different pitches for different eras and composers. I made a note of them too: the 'A' tuned to 430 hertz for Mozart and Haydn, to 440 hertz for Italian Baroque music, and to 421 hertz for Handel and Bach. Among the things playing a part in the latter, I gather, are the Baroque flute and oboe that Concentus musicus has in its possession.*

It is not due to the flute, of course, but on account of Bach that we tune that way. But it just so happened that the flute did help. The tuning forks that were used to pitch organs in Bach's time resonated at between 421 and 431 hertz. That corresponds to Handel's 423-hertz tuning fork, which is still extant and kept in London. The 'A' of the Leipzig and Dresden oboes that have come down from Bach's time and circle is also pitched at between 421 and 431 hertz. (One cannot determine that with absolute precision with an oboe because the bore plays a big part in it.) The flute you mentioned, Frederick the Great's 1756 flute, which was presented to us as a gift, is supplied with seven alternative lengths for the upper portion. There is a whole tone's difference between the shortest and the longest of those lengths; in other words, that particular flute can be tuned within the interval of a whole tone. With the middle length of the set, the fourth, the pitch is at precisely 421 hertz. That is evidence, but it is not the sole basis of the tuning.

I presume you have an enormous collection of instruments. Do those instruments belong to Concentus musicus?

Why? Do you want to buy one? No, my own collection is not big at all. The only reason instruments interest me is that one

* Monika Mertl: *Vom Denken des Herzens*, Salzburg & Vienna: Residenz Verlag, 1999.

can play them. I recorded the Bach Cello Suites, for example, on a Castanieri made in Paris. Before that I had a Viennese instrument dated 1720, but I made a straight swap for the Castanieri because the latter was better. We kept on exchanging instruments until, after a protracted search, we came across a really good Baroque oboe from Bach's time. So our instruments are not for display in museum cabinets. We put all of them to use. We decided at one point that the *Concentus musicus* sound would be set by the tuning of the string instruments of Jacobus Steiner, not of that other master instrument-maker, Stradivari. It is not good to mix the two. We therefore tried to track down and acquire the very best Steiner instruments. My wife plays on the world's finest Steiner violin. We tried to match the other instruments to that. Of course, if one of the *Concentus* musicians is greatly attached to a particular instrument, we will accept that too. I might add, the ideal instrumentation is different when we play the Viennese classics and when we play Early Italian Baroque and German or Austrian Baroque.

It may also be of no small importance that the Concentus musicus holds violins in a different way from that in, for instance, Dutch or English early music ensembles, under the chin and not pressed against the chest.

That's right. Well, you know, historical performance practice is based on sources, and as everybody is aware—and I gather there are a few musicologists here in the hall today—what one reads in any given source is whatever one has already decided beforehand, whatever one wants to substantiate. It's just like with the Bible: that is cited by pacifists and warmongers alike. Now, there is documentation for holding the violin under the chin. There is a source from as early as 1640 which says

that the reason why the violinist should tuck his instrument under his chin is so it should not "hang down" and so that the violinist may easily shift the fingering from a high to a low position. But then there are illustrations in which the violinist is not holding the violin with his chin. The clincher, though, is the old instrument itself. I came across many old violins that were shut away in cupboards under Emperor Joseph II during the 1780s, when the monastic orders were dissolved. In the mid-1960s those violins were in exactly the same condition as they had been in the eighteenth century and earlier. At the place where the violinist held the instrument with his chin, the lacquer is missing on both sides of the tailpiece—sucked up by sweat and rubbed away by constant use. That could only have occurred with a chin hold. In any case, I am not dogmatic, though I do have clear ideals. My dogma is the sound. If someone plays the violin well with another hold, we can accept that.

At yesterday's concert we again experienced that Concentus musicus Wien is in every respect a different ensemble from other orchestras. That is apparent even in such formalities as the way its members greet one another at the start of a concert and take their leave from one another at the end.

Yes, there is a harmony that prevails amongst us. We have been playing together since 1953. At the very start there were just five of us. A really major crisis has never blown up.

Younger members have also come forward.

Seventy-year-olds need the imagination of twenty-year-olds. If they are any good, the youngsters become our pupils, and their pupils our grand-pupils.

What sort of experiences have you had when working with other ensembles, great

orchestras that have great traditions of their own? How are you able to harmonise those traditions with your own ideas?

As far as ensembles playing historical instruments go, I only conduct Concentus musicus. I don't conduct others because, as it were, that is my instrument, that is what I grew up with, that is where I work. Since the day is only twenty-four hours long and I have just this one single life, I work with very few orchestras. If I conduct the Vienna Philharmonic, the Berlin Philharmonic, the Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra or the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, I encounter ensembles that have their own traditions and their own ideas about pitch. Naturally, I respect those. What that means is that when I pick up the baton to conduct the same work with the Vienna and Berlin Philharmonic Orchestras, it comes to life in a different manner. Maybe even the tempi will be slightly different, because the musicians have a different temperament. What is identical, though, is a great love of music and the enthusiasm they can give to rethinking something. Not one of us wishes to play in a routine manner; we try to make even the most popular, most frequently played piece sound as if it were completely new. There are times when I make requests, being a string player myself, as to the manner in which the strings are played; there are times when I may not be happy with the timbre of the xylophone or triangle, and then we seek a new one. The essence, however, is the concurrence of temperament and tradition on both sides. That is very interesting and enjoyable. All in all, I have two general wishes. I would like to see the day when the double-bass players in all the world's great orchestras throw away the metal strings of their instruments and exchange them for gut. They have no idea, having been play-

ing on metal strings for forty years, what gut sounds like. They are incapable of bowing the proper, rasping bass that was one of the distinctive features of their instrument for centuries on end. Something has been lost for a minuscule gain. They play a bit more lightly and only have to tune their instruments twice a year. That's all. A number of double-bass players are well aware of this. My other wish would be even more difficult to fulfil, and that would be for every orchestra and opera house in the world to abandon for good that crazily high concert pitch of over 440 hertz and go back to 433 or 435. It happens anyway every third or fourth generation, and the time has come now to do it again. It puts an extraordinary strain on singers: they live and sing ten years less just because of that high pitch. And why is the pitch so high? Because intonation is only ever corrected upwards. If something doesn't sound right, they always say "It's flat!" Everyone is scared stiff of singing flat, so of course they then sing sharp. Piano makers too are panic-stricken, because the tensioning of strings is now so horrendous that they fear some day a piano is going to burst apart. If all the musical institutions in the world would stick together and force down the normal concert pitch, that might do something to help the present desperate state of affairs.

But how can that be achieved? A new movement would have to get under way...

Look here, it has been achieved ten times already over the course of musical history, the last time in the early twentieth century. Why should it not be achievable now? It would mean huge business for wind instrument makers: every instrument would have to be made anew.

When you directed the Vienna Philharmonic's New Year's concert on January

1st, 2000, we came away richer by more than one eye-opener. An orchestra that had Johann Strauss's music in its very blood...

... its mother's milk.

Its mother's milk. And then along comes Nikolaus Harnoncourt, and he makes them depart from tradition in playing the "Radetzky" March at the start of the concert, and, what is more, the original version, which no one was familiar with.

I was curious to know what it would actually sound like. I hadn't heard that version before, either. I wondered why we should play with the accustomed horn chords and other things that were not even composed by Johann Strauss the elder, and why not with the little ornamentations that are actually in the manuscript? I also checked up on the tempi, and very precisely at that, because quite precise data do exist. Back then Hungarian, Austrian and Bohemian army officers sat down together. One said, "My regiment marches at a metronome marking of 106," the other, "Mine at 108." That's a tiny difference. They also declared: "It's impossible to go into battle at that pace, it would mean certain defeat." In response, the bandmaster-in-chief of the Habsburg regiments settled on a uniform tempo. That happened at the very time the "Radetzky" March was written. I told the orchestra, "Gentlemen, I have checked back on the tempi in the Museum of Military History and other sources too." Interestingly, one of the most important of those sources happened to be Hungarian. What can be learned from that, amongst other things, is that in the side drum solo at the start of the March they originally played triplets. That makes the side drum solo a good deal harder than we have become accustomed to hearing it—indeed, one of the percussionists complained on that account.

By way of contrast, I would like to bring another, completely different work into the conversation, a work that has had a huge significance in your own life and, it would be fair to say, has a tradition: J. S. Bach's St Matthew Passion, which you last conducted just a few days ago in Vienna. I know of two Harnoncourt recordings of the St Matthew Passion, one dated 1971 and a recent one, which came out in 2001. At the time of the latter recording, you spoke evocatively about the passage where the representative of the faithful (the allegorical figure of the daughter of Zion) interprets the extended arms of the crucified Christ as being opened to embrace them (Sehet, Jesus hat die Hand / Uns zu fassen augespannt...—"Behold, Jesus has stretched out His hand to grasp us..."). That passage, like the work as a whole, with the elapse of thirty years now comes across in a fundamentally different interpretation. The older one is more lyrical, more contemplative; the newer one is more agitated, the dramatic features are bolder.

The old recording of the *St Matthew Passion* was the first performance that the work had been given with a historical apparatus. Up to then, no one had dared attempt it. It called for many woodwind instruments that had not previously been used in twentieth-century performance (oboa d'amore, oboa da caccia) and that we did not yet have any knowledge of in practice. The experiment was a huge adventure as far as we were concerned. Since we had already won plaudits somewhat before with the recording of the *St John Passion*, with the encouragement of Teldec we plunged in. We held the first rehearsals without the choir, and I remember we were so overcome with emotion as to be on the point of tears. Of course, I was well acquainted with the work, as I had played it as a member of the orchestra every year

during Easter week, but the new sound setting in truth posed an entirely new task. The work done in rehearsals was like restoring a picture: suddenly details of the work that previously had been totally obscured in gloom were clarified. That clarification also applied to the dialogue principle which forms the underlying concept of the work itself. The *St Matthew Passion* is actually a dialogue between two orchestras (and choirs), a dialogue between the faithful and those unable to believe. This was a voyage of discovery, just like when Columbus discovered America. Since then, of course, we have accumulated a vast amount of experience. Over twenty years we played and recorded all of Bach's cantatas, got to know the character of all the instruments of Bach's age, and I, for my part, devoted a huge amount of time to the work's meaning. To go back to the example you brought up just now, in the *St John Passion*, after Jesus has been crucified, the text runs: *Und neigte sein Haupt und verschied*—"And He bowed his head, and gave up His ghost." The dead Jesus is unable to hold his head up any longer, and his head droops. With Bach, that nod signifies both a negation and an affirmation of life. The text of the ensuing bass aria refers to this: *Du kannst vor Schmerzen zwar nichts sagen, doch neigest du das Haupt und sprichst stillschweigend: Ja!*—"Thou canst for anguish now say nothing, yet Thou dost bow Thy head and say in silence: Yea!" To redemption, that is. There is a similar situation in the *St Matthew Passion*. Jesus is crucified, with arms outstretched. The text here says that Jesus wishes to embrace us. The posture in death is thus charged with life: Come to my arms so that I may embrace you. In the orchestra meanwhile the bassoon negotiates the entire compass of the instrument: the space cannot be stretched out more widely. A musical symbol of the extended

arms. In fact it's a crazy stroke of genius, which Bach sets to be sung by a woman who had always loved Jesus, with the idea of imparting that example to others. One can almost feel that this woman is all but driven out of her wits under the impact of the terrible events. At the time of the first recording I had not yet understood that in its full significance. The biggest difference between the two recordings is that today I am able to elicit the work's emotional content much more effectively than I could earlier.

I would like at least to touch upon a new subject. There is one important area that we have not yet spoken about, and that is opera. I read in Monika Mertl's book that even as a child you were attracted to the stage, putting on puppet theatre performances. Another of your childhood memories is of imagining opera characters in one of Mozart's violin sonatas.

That is only possible with Mozart, of course.

I have the general impression that you are inclined to drama by temperament. That comes out even when you are conducting instrumental music.

I always knew that one day I would conduct operas. It is quite true that as a child, for fifteen years, I held marionette shows—puppets, scenery, scripts, the lot. I took it all so seriously that I would not admit anyone into the shows who was under 18 years. I was 15 myself at the time... I said that it wasn't theatre for children, it was for adults. I gave it up later on, but the theatre and musical theatre have continued to play a central role in my life. As a cellist, from 1948 onwards I would occasionally substitute for my teacher in the opera house orchestra. The first opera in which I had to play was Richard Strauss's *Salome*, under Karl Böhm. Since the

Vienna Staatsoper had been bombed, the performances took place in the Theater an der Wien, with a greatly reduced orchestra as there was not enough room. My teacher, who knew Böhm well, reassured him that I was his best pupil and knew everything just fine. As far as that went, I sight-read, and not a single note was in the right place except one that my teacher had pointed out to me earlier. That was the one that was very exposed. Later on, I played in many operas, including modern works, like Alban Berg's *Lulu*. The first opera that I conducted, being fully in charge, was Monteverdi's late masterpiece, *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*, in 1970. Whatever else, I wanted to give that work a hearing as very few people were acquainted with it then. That too was at the Theater an der Wien. I was given the best singers and the musicians of Concentus musicus. I conducted from the cello. An interesting experience, that was. We put a lot of enthusiasm into the five or six performances we gave, the audiences were also enthusiastic, but the critics were of the opinion that I should not bother with opera as I had no feel for musical theatre. I then received an invitation from La Scala, because word about the performances of *Ulisse* had reached them too. That was the first time in my life that I conducted an orchestra that was not playing historical instruments. It was so successful that they had to extend the run of performances. During that period I had very little free time, so suggested that maybe my assistant could conduct the performances, as he was a much better conductor than me. The Scala management responded that people don't make their debuts at La Scala. And yet it was me who was the absolute beginner, as after all I had never conducted any opera at all in the traditional sense, let alone at La Scala... Subsequently, of course, I did conduct operas a lot.

How did the Monteverdi cycle at Zurich come into being?

The Intendant of the Zurich Opera House, Dr Helmut Drese, went to a performance of Monteverdi's *Orfeo* that I conducted in Amsterdam. As it was, he was looking for someone to do that anyway. The next day he called me—I didn't know him personally, I just heard a very high-pitched man's voice on the telephone—and informed me that I was going to be the conductor for the Zurich *Orfeo*, with Jean-Pierre Ponnelle as director. But I don't even know Ponnelle, I told him, let me at least meet him before I accept the engagement. Dr Drese arranged a meeting. He was like a chemist: he mixed two substances, and either something would come out of that, or it would explode. In our case it was the former. I talked over everything with Ponnelle for two hours, and it turned out that we would be able to work with one another. Ponnelle was a true-born Mediterranean type, southern French, frightfully Catholic—as far as *joie de vivre* is concerned, I mean, not in the religious sense. Each of the works that we jointly interpreted was talked through note by note; I was present at every rehearsal on stage. In short, a perfect unity developed between us. But every time we had lunch we talked about Mozart. Dr Drese got to hear about that too, with the result that, after the three Monteverdi operas and the staging of Book 7 of the Madrigals, we did *Idomeneo*, and another Mozart production every year subsequently, including the early ones, such as *Mitridate* and *Lucio Silla*, right up until Ponnelle's untimely death. Meanwhile I was also doing other things, of course, with other directors: *Fledermaus* and *Zigeunerbaron* at Amsterdam, Handel operas, Beethoven's *Fidelio*, Weber's *Freischütz*, Schubert's miraculous *Alfonso and Estrella*, Schumann's *Genoveve*—I can't even list them all.

Vienna, 1987, Mozart's *Idomeneo*, conductor Nikolaus Harnoncourt. The director by then was not Ponnelle but Johannes Schaaf. We made the acquaintance of a hitherto unknown Mozart. The piece itself was a discovery, a sixth to go with the five "great" Mozart operas that were commonly known at that time. Everything that you had written and said so many times about the chiaro-oscuro technique in connection with Mozart became clear to me then. The orchestra was not separated from the audience as if by a wall, the chorus at times sang from the gallery. It was a fantastically evocative performance. A new image of Mozart was born.

Yes, that's how it was. Nevertheless, I have no wish to be constantly recreating everything afresh, just rethinking the pieces. I don't want simply to take over the ideas of my colleagues, or go into a shop and buy the score and that's that. I just can't do that. I want to think through a work, even if it has been played a thousand times before. It does not interest me whether a new image takes shape within the listener or not. I can't decide that, or rather sometimes I can, sometimes not. But that's not the object. The object is that I should offer evidence of what I know, do my duty in other words. I always do that. Even in the "Radetzky" March.

*I have the feeling, which also emerges from your writings and interviews, that Monteverdi's *Ulisse* and Mozart's *Idomeneo* lie particularly close to your heart. Is that primarily the works themselves or the hero figures?*

The works, I would say. Monteverdi's *Ulisse* is not a regular dramatic opera but an epic, and it seems to me an intriguing question whether it is possible to make opera from an epic. Monteverdi's other late opera, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, is a

genuine drama, and a hundred per cent guaranteed winner, even if it is done badly. But *Ulisse*, where there is no dramatic plot but epic events, and everyone knows what is going on, checking the opera against Homer as it were, that is an intriguing question. Mozart's *Idomeneo* is the opera that was always in the wings. "Why not *Figaro*?" or "Why not *Don Giovanni*?" I was always being asked. But for Mozart himself *Idomeneo* was "the" opera, in the fullest sense of the word. *Idomeneo* is a successful synthesis of French *tragédie lyrique* and Italian opera. I think Mozart only attempted that just once, and *Idomeneo* is the only instance where the experiment was successful. That is what fascinated me. Why was that so? What makes this piece so moving and yet still so dramatic? The "Death Quartet" (*Andrò ramingo e solo*) is one of the most beautiful and grandest pieces of music that I know! *Idomeneo* is a work in which we are able to marvel at every one of Mozart's talents. In *Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan tutte* Mozart always gave preference to one aspect over all the rest; in *Idomeneo* all the aspects are there. That, I feel, is something one-off and unrepeatable.

As an epilogue to our conversation, I would like to ask you about the future. The future for musicians, the future for music, our future.

As far as my own future is concerned, that is not going to last much longer. There is not a lot one can say about that. I would like to carry on making music for as long as my hearing is good and I have the strength, and as long as people get pleasure from listening. As to the future of the arts, nowadays I am a pessimist. More than a bit sad, actually. There is a general belief that art is merely an adornment to life, something that embellishes life a little. That is far from sufficient. Art is one of the

two pillars upon which man's life rests, in the intellectual sense. One of the pillars is purposeful rationalism and logic. Art, though, is not purposeful; art does not have a purpose but it does have a meaning. There is something in art that cannot be explained by logic; something that cannot be dealt with in Darwinian terms. It is not possible to explain the purpose of a poem by evolution. The reason why people sing songs cannot be accounted for in the same way as why people go to a shop to buy apples or bananas. People have to sing or they would cease being people. The religious will say that this is a function of religion; the non-religious will say that the blessing of the Muse is in there somewhere. The Muse too has to come from somewhere, only no one knows from where. Bach and Mozart also came from somewhere, and Darwin does not explain their existence either. But to return to why I am a pessimist: because society and politics do not regard art as important. As a result, children don't get to partake of art. The first thing that is taken out of the curriculum is art. Not just music: an approach to life through music. Children no longer sing. In earlier times every child was singing by the time he or she was five; that

was just natural. Nowadays children listen to music a lot, though it is questionable whether that is always music. The notion that only a select élite should concern themselves with art is unsound. Art is for everybody. A child cannot grow up without participating in the experience of making music. They say that a person can consider whether he or she wishes to take up playing the flute at the age of fifteen, but by then it is already too late. If someone has not experienced, along with his or her parents and companions, the necessity of music, the visual arts and poetry by the age of five or six, then that whole domain is going to sink. And if art disappears, then so does morality, and we turn into wild beasts. I perceive that danger now, and that is why I am pessimistic. Every politician and everybody who has any role at all in bringing children up should stop and think what they are doing when they remove art.

Professor Harnoncourt, I gather that Don Quixote is one of your favourite figures. Do you also feel that you are him?

No, that would be too grand for me.

For my part, and on behalf of this large audience, thank you for talking to us.

János Kornai

A Joyful Economist

Tibor Scitovsky (1910–2002)

Tibor Scitovsky, a pre-eminent figure in 20th century economics, has died. When Mark Blaug, the leading English historian of economic theory, compiled his book *Great Economists Since Keynes*, he placed Scitovsky among them, classing him as one of the true greats.

Scitovsky had a perfect knowledge of his field, but that might equally be said of many others. What distinguished him above all from other highly qualified colleagues was his originality—his ability to see with fresh eyes a phenomenon that others had already discerned or a problem that many had already addressed, and think it out in a new way. Ideas, wit, premonition and inspiration are among the qualities associated with his thinking.

As an example, let me mention a well-known creation of his, one of the intellectual tools of welfare economics, which has entered the history of theory as the Scitovsky Criterion. It is rare for an economic policy to work to everyone's advantage, or at least, not to cause loss to anyone. As a rule, there are winners and losers. The test proposed by another figure

Hungarian economics can be proud of, Nicholas Kaldor (Miklós Káldor, later Lord Kaldor), became known as the Kaldor Criterion. Are the winners willing to reimburse the losers sufficiently to make them feel they have been compensated? For instance, if a new airport is built and the noise intrudes into the lives of people around it, the value of their property is reduced. Can the noise-induced loss to the people in the district be covered by the extra profit from air traffic generated by the new airport? Scitovsky put a witty intellectual twist on this question. How big is the "bribe" with which the potential losers can deter the potential winners from their intention?

This polemic says a great deal about the outlook of Scitovsky (and in the context of this debate, of Kaldor). Social welfare is not a formal category, not a W function whose maximum we can try to attain. Behind the concept of "social welfare" stand living people, groups, conflicts of interest, and distributive and redistributive battles. A general rise in welfare does not simply entail sacrifices. It is accompanied

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for many people by suffering, upsetting of their way of life and injuries to their interests. Can these conflicts be settled in a peaceful, civilised manner, by financial incentives instead of furious demonstrations and political duels?

Another example of Scitovsky's innovative talent and originality was his contribution to price theory. Traditional microeconomics assumes that buyer and seller are partners of equal rank. Both the buyer and the seller make repeated attempts at price bargaining. An excessively high offer from a seller follows an excessively low offer from a buyer, and the two sides reach a symmetrical situation after successive attempts. Scitovsky introduced a pair of concepts: price maker and price taker. Few remember that this distinction derives from Scitovsky's theory. It was enough to identify, describe and name the phenomenon, and thereafter, everyone found it self-evident. "I already knew that," many said. They knew it in one sense and not in another. That is just where intellectual greatness lies. There is an important phenomenon under our noses. Everyone knows about it but no one notices it, until a truly scientific mind lights on the essence of the phenomenon and turns it into a usable tool of thinking. Scitovsky made it an important subject of price theory to clarify how there happen to be more active and more passive participants in price setting. Price setting follows different specific rules among price-making economic units from those that occur when those concerned cannot and often do not want to bargain over the price. They are forced to take the price offered because they have no alternative, or else seek another partner rather than indulge in price bargaining.

Scitovsky was not a combative intellectual revolutionary. He innovated simply by doing something different from other

people. As an illustration, let me recall the book that to my taste is his most exciting work, *The Joyless Economy*. This gives an idea of Scitovsky's radiant intellectual capacities as it were in condensed form. He "wonders" at American society. Here is this fantastically productive economy producing phenomenally rapid development and overwhelming competitiveness. This is said to be the truest embodiment of a "consumer society", where every technical change serves the higher demands of consumers. Yet somehow this is a joyless economy.

I remember having a private conversation with Scitovsky, in which, with the quiet irony habitual to him, he described a paradoxical phenomenon in the American way of life. People are constantly devising machines that spare them physical effort in their daily activity. There is no need to cut bread with a knife because there is a bread-slicing machine. There is no need to squeeze an orange because there is an orange press. There is no need to hand-grind coffee because there is an electric grinder, and so on and so forth. We move vertically by lift or escalator and make every horizontal move by car. Life really does become easier, but our muscles slacken and our organisms go soft. Then comes the work-out, physical training, if need be, with machines again, to simulate walking, cycling and the useful lifting of heavy weights, through the mechanical movements of a machine. Scitovsky in this book returns to the psychological base of economic theory. How weak and in many respects dilettante this base is, for instance in taking satisfaction to be the main criterion of joy, whereas at least as great a part or greater in the pleasure of life is played by what precedes satisfaction: feelings of preparation, stimulation and expectation of joy. The hope is often finer and more inducive of happiness than its fulfilment.

This remarkable book raises a range of exciting questions. How far do material welfare and happiness correlate? It cites surveys to show how the distribution of people declaring themselves to be happy or unhappy is fairly stable and rests little on their material standard of living. But it does depend on what the persons asked about their happiness and unhappiness think about their position in society. How do they stand in relation to others? To what extent do they gain pleasure from enjoyment of intellectual values as well as the consumption of material goods? Many cities in the United States are richer than European cities of a similar size, in terms of GDP per inhabitant or income per household. On the other hand, theatre provision per inhabitant in the latter is much higher.

Economists initially received this splendid book of Scitovsky's with some aversion. The presentation of the problem was alien to them. So was the interdisciplinary approach. That approach was a characteristic of the author. He was primarily an economist, but not exclusively an economist. Political science, sociology, psychology, history, and within the last, the history of human culture and civilization—he utilized them all. If need be, he was not backward about studying new chapters in the corpus of neighbouring disciplines. He was not merely conversant with these disciplines, for he crossed between them, opening new doors, building new corridors and bridges between isolated accumulations of knowledge. Tibor Scitovsky was a true embodiment of the Renaissance scholar, all too rare these days.

The Joyless Economy reflects well the multiplicity of its author, not just in an interdisciplinary sense, but in terms of his national and international ties as well.

Scitovsky was born and bred in Hungary and then moved initially to Britain, where he completed his studies. If he had stayed there, he would certainly have joined the House of Lords as well, alongside his three Hungarian colleagues, Kaldor, Balogh and Bauer. Instead he emigrated further, settling in the United States in 1939. He was a loyal citizen of America. He received from the American Economic Society the title of Distinguished Fellow, its highest distinction, awarded to a single economist each year. But when he wrote his memoirs, he gave the Hungarian edition the title *Memoirs of a Proud Hungarian*.* The title blends devotion to his native land and that mischievous irony at his own expense that is typical of him. It refers to one of his stories about his childhood, when he was playing in a Berlin park under the supervision of a pretty nursemaid. The heir to the throne came into the park and would really have liked to get to know the nursemaid, but he thought it would be more proper to ask the little boy who he was. Thereupon the little boy, Tibor Scitovsky, replied (in German, of course), "A proud Hungarian."

Tibor Scitovsky was a typical example of what is usually called "multiple identity". He was Hungarian, but an American citizen as well. He was European and American at the same time. European values appear in his work when he writes about America, but his American experience prompted him to write more than one of his theoretical works. His receptive intellect imbibed English culture during long years in England and French culture over a long period in Paris. He was a true cosmopolitan, who felt thoroughly at home in London, Paris, Budapest and California.

Not that he lacked historical roots. He bore a historic name. Students of the his-

*See HQ 155, Autumn 1999.

tory of the Hungarian Catholic Church will have heard of his ancestor, Prince-Primate János Scitovszky, Archbishop of Esztergom. He was the brother of Tibor's grandfather. Tibor's father, Tibor Scitovszky, played an important role in public life between the two world wars. He was a man of a conservative frame of mind, one of the peaks in his career being the position of foreign minister and the other his post of president of the largest Hungarian commercial bank. His son was tied to Hungary less by the great name and his family tradition than by the language, Hungarian poetry, music, culture and cuisine. He was glad to speak Hungarian, which he did without an accent even after sixty years abroad, searching at most for a word here and there. He assembled his library with great discrimination, not sparing himself the trouble of long searches. This he has bequeathed to the Central European University in Budapest.

At the same time, he was deeply imbedded in the United States and in the life of his profession all over the world. This multiple affiliation did not trouble him. It brought joy to him and to those who came in touch with him.

Tibor Scitovsky was a charming, sensitive man of few words who was courteous to everyone. If the concept had not become debased in Hungary, I would say he was a true gentleman. What made him that was not his background, but his inner elegance and fineness of mind. He spent his youth in one of the finest and most splendid houses in Budapest, designed and furnished with excellent taste. (It is now the British ambassador's residence.) But he was happiest making friends with the chauffeur. His con-

servative father had a son with a liberal outlook, who felt deeply the plight of the poor and disadvantaged, and as a scholar, studied the economically more backward part of the world with great sensitivity. It can truly be said of him that he had the best nursery and knew what the etiquette of dining prescribed, but when he ate fine food, he never omitted to dip his bread and wipe the plate almost clean.

We have lost more than an inspiring scholar. His death is a personal loss to many people. I had the delight and honour of being tied to him by a kind, varied personal friendship. His personality stood out for me not only through his works, but through personal meetings as well. He was a stern critic of the "joyless economy" because he was a man who could enjoy life. He remained energetic even in his mid-eighties. His wife Erzsébet, also a Hungarian, was as cheerful and ever active as Tibor. Together they went on excursions, took long journeys, ate well and enjoyed the beauty of their garden. My memories are not just of our thought-provoking discussions, but of pleasant evenings in restaurants, and an image of how Tibor and Erzsébet would tuck into their Szeged fisherman's soup and eat up their curd-cheese pasta to the last morsel of bacon.

It is a great loss also for those who knew him only from his works as a bright intellectual reflector, which could shed light repeatedly on points that remained obscure, and has now been extinguished. And for those who knew him and loved him personally, Tibor Scitovsky, the man will be irreplaceable, as a fascinating conversationalist and as a kind and attentive friend. ■

Miklós Györffy
Parallel Lives

Pál Závada: *Milota*. Budapest, Magvető, 2002, 700 pp. • Iván Sándor: *Drága Liv* (Dearest Liv). Bratislava, Kalligram, 2002, 336 pp.

Five years after *Jadviga parnája* (Jadwiga's Pillow), Pál Závada has brought out another imposing novel, this time of 700 pages, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, seemingly unfazed by the huge success of that first one (as well as the film made from it) and the expectations it inevitably aroused. *Milota* is a continuation of *Jadwiga's Pillow* in more than one way, evoking the same world and re-visiting its formal structure. Yet it is also very different. It too is set in the Hungarian Slovak community of Békés County, with even the *Osztatnis*, the principal characters of *Jadviga*, getting small walk-on roles; it too covers a historical period embracing many decades (centuries at some points); it too is a family saga and a love story; here too individual and communal destinies that accrue from disagreements between people, from their frailties, their conflicting desires and aspirations, their offences great and small, play a major—perhaps decisive—role; here too a journal-like recital, and different first-person discourses (in this case just two) and viewpoints comingling provide the novel's compositional form. In other respects,

Milota is much more extravagant, more intricate, its material and structure a convoluted assembly of heterogeneous elements in comparison with *Jadviga*.

One source of its near-impenetrable complexity is its time structure. *Milota* consists of alternating and partly complementary and reciprocal soliloquies of its two first-person characters. One of them is György Milota, who in May 1997, the present time of the story, is a 67-year-old small-town citizen of peasant birth, who by the time of the Kádár era, and so for most of his adult life, was no longer farming for a living, though both family and communal tradition had predestined him for that; he had simply tried to get along as best he could and was allowed. He had been, at various times, a supplier of black-market vegetables, a buyer for an agricultural cooperative, a warehouseman for a small industrial cooperative, a janitor for a retirement home, and, in his spare time, a beekeeper, a passion inherited from his grandfather. Sensing his imminent death, György Milota commits his life and memories to a tape-recorder in the privacy of his vineyard, confessing his sins and setting

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down for his successors all that he knows about the history of his village, of his own and other families, as well as about bee-keeping and the production of poppy seed. The other narrator, Erka Roszkos, is a 34-year-old nurse. At the same time, around Whitsun in 1997, as Milota is tape-recording his confessions, she records her diary entries or interpolates entries from earlier years into her current comments. Erka is impelled to self-confession by her wrecked life and, above all, the final failure of a great, tormented love affair. Sequestered in her hospital room, she writes and remembers, continually drinking, taking drugs, and masturbating. She is destroying herself, but before she goes she still wants to set it all down for Milota, and before her (presumptive) death she does indeed forward to him a folder of her notes.

What ties Milota and Erka together, above all else, is Erka's ultimately hopeless love for Milota's son, János. After their first break-up János, a petty provincial journalist, had married another woman and started a family, but had continued on a more or less regular affair with Erka, in secret and, at times, against his better judgement. Before becoming a nurse, Erka had run the local retirement home in the once-celebrated house of the Adamec family; old Milota had been the janitor there at the time and their acquaintance had blossomed into mutual sympathy and near-possessiveness. For the greater part of the novel, at any rate, it would seem—and far as anyone knows, the characters included—there is no more to it than that. The reader therefore has a hard time digesting and working out why these two in particular should be narrators, particularly given that they specifically address their remarks to one another from the very start.

The fact that both start off their recital and recollections at the same time, around Whitsun in 1997, further heightens the sig-

nificance of their relationship and also the reader's confusion. The latter is due to the fact that, although, at the time of recording their thoughts, both first-person narrators make great play of doing so on the same current date, not only is it impossible to establish a coherent chronology amongst the non-linear consecutive time points, it also gradually becomes clear that the two confessions, for all their appearance of being rejoinders to one another, are being generated simultaneously. Initially, judging from the mutual quotations, one has the impression that Erka wrote her own texts first, then relayed them to Milota, whilst he is responding to these with his verbal record. In reality, however, neither that impression nor its converse can be sustained. As a result, the present time of the 2 x 52 subsections that make up the four substantial chapters of the novel is presumably to be taken as representing a kind of (post-mortem?) timelessness, which Pál Závada seeks to create by a painstakingly careful but necessarily imprecise denotation of temporality.

By then one may have gathered that Erka, in all probability, is old Milota's daughter, and thus half-sister to János Milota, her lover. It also seems likely that the timelessness of the other-worldly confessions has something to do with Whitsun, or Pentecost, the feast of the descent of the Holy Ghost. However, since the novel is far removed not just from piety but from spirituality or transcendence of any kind, unless one considers the destiny that eventuates from the chance, senseless milling-around of human fates as transcendence, the symbolic significance of Whitsuntide as the deliberate central time-point would appear to be undecipherable.

Part of the time structure is the past that is referenced in the confessions; this ranges from episodes that took place a

year before the present Whitsun, with the reliving of rehearsals for an amateur dramatic production, through the vicissitudes of Erka's bygone love affairs, to Milota's recollections of the Kádár era and the legends that live on in local collective memory. In the course of the somewhat hectic and arbitrary selection of the two barely impinging narrative viewpoints, these stories and events in themselves, which take up virtually the entire novel, are not related chronologically; however, this does not confuse as the scenes, episodes, and accounts are dated, and if not straight away, they eventually find their place and sense in the story. What may confound one, at most, is that the author's compulsion to break the text up rhythmically often gratuitously splits or chops in two perfectly coherent longer passages, many of them anecdotes and short-stories or, for that matter, encapsulations of local or cultural history. Here the cloven hoof of the same authorial devilment that is detectable in the structure as a whole sticks out. Závada here has foisted his preconceived form on a body of material that resists this, simply tossing the material off in masterfully written chunks that blithely go their own way.

Whereas the principal formal feat of *Jadviga's Pillow* was to create a three-part work of intertwining and linguistically connotative texts, that device does not come off so well here. It hits problems with Erka Roszkos's texts in particular. Leaving aside the fact that here we have a nurse writing a diary in this day and age, even if she is using a computer to do so, the trouble is that the polished, high-flown, even poetic (though in places more just showy) language of Erka's diary, its well-turned, precise choice of words, a diction that employs flowery metaphors whilst retaining its poise and displaying flawless psychological perceptiveness even

in the depths of drug-induced hallucinations and depression, are not attributes one would associate with the first-person narrator but with the writer who is speaking through her. Another weakness with Erka is that she is increasingly unable to talk about anything other than the sufferings caused by her disappointments in love, or the substitutes with which she tries to dull the pain and sense of loss. Závada himself must have had a hunch that this character and her voice are paler and slighter than the other, and so has cut her utterances shorter than those of Milota. Even so, his heroine's mannerisms test the reader's patience.

This is not an anecdotal and sociographically realistic novel like *Jadviga's Pillow*. Its realistic vein unfolds within Milota's contribution, but so forcefully as to leave the sharpest impression on the reader, even though the vocal line does not seem coherent here either. Milota too lacks a personal idiom, an individualised stamp, one that would match the social and historical actuality of the stories he relates. True, he never tires of emphasising that he is a non-stop talker, writing is not his métier, so he is all the fonder of rambling, and that is supposed to explain why he fills up a pile of tapes with his talk. Those "recordings", however, are again the literarily well-shaped texts of an outside narrator. Milota's part, furthermore, is even less of one piece than Erka's, comprising a medley of materials of the most diverse character. There is no reason why discourses on the history of beekeeping or the tricks of producing poppy seed should be foreign to Milota, given his supposed character and cast of mind; the contributions to local history could just as plausibly have their place. The thing that, in the end, throws doubt on whether these really do fit in or not is that, for all that he is meant to be a simple, ordinary fellow,

Milota is the fount for just too great a diversity of material, experience and knowledge. On the one hand, he is a custodian of the memories of the more or less assimilated local Slovak community, on the other he is a picaresque hero of the Kádár era. The progeny of a better-off kulak peasant, he had one foot in Budapest, shuttling back and forth to make a precarious living as a black marketeer and, later on, as a buyer for a cooperative; with a family back in his native village, he had plunged into amorous adventures and sprees in the city. The recounting of his love for Mucika or of his absurd procurement ruses, and especially of the figure of Ferkó Valantini, his boss and crony, are, in themselves, right on the mark. Whilst reading Milota's tales about these, one becomes engrossed in the work of a master storyteller, who, through his prodigious command of detail, gives us an insight like no one before him into the corrupt world of Hungary's shortage economy during the early Kádár years. But then the narrator, all of a sudden, cuts off his story, because it is felt to be more important, come hell or high water, to carry through an abstract novel construction in which Milota's adventures, after all, have only a secondary role.

They are subordinated, above all, to the central event, described at interminable length, of an amateur dramatic society's performance at the retirement home, in which the author evidently intended that the two main voices, and the separately intoned themes they carry, should come together. At this small-town retirement home, in the summer of 1996, through the offices of Erka, the home's manager, and Milota, the janitor, the residents prepare to perform a play written by Milota's son on the basis of an unexpectedly unearthed diary (another diary!). Between 1946 and 1955, a local woman had recorded the ups

and downs of her life, taking as her starting point the more or less forced exchange of the respective minority populations between Czechoslovakia and Hungary in the aftermath of the Second World War. The play, *The House on Market Square*, is directed by Kohut, self-appointed guiding light and animator of local amateur drama, who has been preparing for his big break since the Eighties. Just by the by, he too had been one of Erka's lovers for a while, and out of the tangled net of local and Budapest links the realisation finally begins to glimmer that he, too, is most probably one of Milota's love children, and thus a half-brother to both János and Erka. That makes the Erka-János-Kohut love triangle a curse blighting the three half-siblings that is worthy of a tragedy of destiny. So totally alien to the novel as a whole is this melodramatic twist, that one is left bemused and inclined to ignore it.

The play and rehearsals are conjured up primarily through Milota's taped confessions. This is the most preposterous of the novel's incongruities, for Milota recites the entire text of the play from memory, adding his commentaries on it and on the rehearsals, even though he actually had very little to do with the whole thing. True, he too had a role, but it strains credibility that a year on from that enterprise, and facing death, he would take up what amounts to one quarter of the seven hundred pages of this book bothering with it, when, as other passages reveal, he was already then patently longing for the vineyard solitude that serves as the frame for his present taped confessions.

Závada's intention is clear enough: he would like to draw his novel's divergent elements together in the amateur production. His characters can then be confronted again with what once happened to them or their ancestors. Just as in some

sort of psychodrama, they attempt to come to terms with a shared past, project themselves into situations into which they might have been swept back then. It may be that the "play" is just not good enough, has no real dramatic pay-off, but in any event the 170 pages of Chapter 3 devoted to *The House on Market Square* constitute the novel's major drawback. Over and beyond reciting conclusions, all they really offer Milota is an opportunity to tell the story of his father and his unreciprocated former love for Zsófia Hulina, who also appears in the piece.

Not only are Milota's soliloquies protean in their subject-matter, they are one-sided. He repeatedly apostrophises his wife, Mariska, whom he supposedly loves deeply, begging her pardon for all his lapses, but this Mariska is barely present: all we get to learn about her is generalities. That in itself might be a tell-tale sign, but the fact that the son, János Milota, is likewise a fairly indistinct figure and, above all, the totally unexplored father-son relationship are blatant shortcomings. The younger Milota features more in Erka's diary, and there, from a woman's viewpoint, seems very ordinary, tentative, spineless—not exactly a worthy object of the diarist's all-consuming passion. The question, though, is whether that is a reliable picture of him.

Through certain motifs, Závada's novel seems as if it might be seeking to suggest precisely that: no reliable knowledge is possible. That is hardly hot news in (post-)modern literature, nor is the way Závada deploys this seemingly obligatory precept particularly original either. Milota keeps going on about not knowing the whole truth; his information, at times, is based on hearsay relayed through several mouths, "quotations" are in reported speech, and the suspicion that both Erka and Kohut are his children is never al-

lowed to become an explicit certainty. The timeless dimension of the confessions reinforces that sense of uncertainty. Who, after all, could know exactly what is being said in the other-world, unless it were in some conditional literary mood? And during the rehearsals for the play it turns out that actually it all happened differently anyway, and there is much that we have no knowledge of.

These relativising artifices are clumsy. The novel would make sense only if everything that the confessions speak of were real within the terms of the fiction. Not necessarily always "true", let alone the "whole truth", but real in the sense that, for the characters, it represents the one and only distinct, undoubted reality of their personal lives. Milota and Erka's life stories are only meaningful if everything that their memories recall as having happened really did happen that way, and if the novel's reality, seen from their viewpoint, largely coincides with that of the other figures referred to in their confessions. These partial truths do indeed assume shape, with spellbinding narrative art, in *Milota*—enough of them to yield several separate novels. But here, given the way Závada subordinates them, they neutralise one another rather than fit together, and to such a degree that it is hard to know what they might have become: a family saga? a biographical novel? the history of an era? a picaresque novel? a moral allegory? a metaphorical novel of a world view?

The material of Iván Sándor's new novel, *Dearest Liv*, also encompasses decades and, in a substantial measure, also deals with the Kádár era. *Dearest Liv*, however, does not aspire to be anything but what it actually delivers: it does not pretend to be a family saga, the history of an era, a biographical or any other kind of novel, simply what it runs to, as it were: a chamber

novel, a novel about a general climate of feeling or about recollections, a first-person novel—for lack of a better term, those are the sorts of labels one might use to define its consistently executed genre. Apart from a few chapters of 'inscriptions', as the novel calls them, the protagonist here speaks directly in the first person singular, not in some faux-specific narrative setting, but in an intimate epic dimension of remembering and introspecting. László Zoltán, dramaturge for a Budapest theatre, sets down fragmentary memories and incidental impressions of a life that runs, on the one hand, through his parents, up to the time of the Second World War, and on the other, following in the tracks of the bitter resignation of an ageing, increasingly isolated man, up to the present day. It is not a matter somebody looking back on his life, but, as it were, of being simultaneously present in everything that has happened to him and other important figures in his life, above all, his mother and father and "dearest Liv".

His father had been a famed theatrical director, who hanged himself in 1944 when the Germans marched into Hungary. To the best of the son's knowledge, he had no particular reason to do this, apart from seeing absolutely no prospect of realising the artistic ambitions that, for him, were more important than all else. The boy was brought up by his mother, who, as a widely respected member of a famous string quartet, had regular concert work and performed abroad. All along, she had cherished her husband's memory, though neither being able nor even wishing to share this with her son. The young man had drifted around for some time, becoming a librarian after the 1956 revolution, then a member of a university theatrical group, with which he had managed to get out of the country in the early Seventies on a trip to Paris. There he had made the ac-

quaintance of Liv, daughter of Hungarian-born parents, who from then on became his indispensable girlfriend, or in her absence, one might say, the one solid point in his life. "Zoltánka", as Liv consistently calls him, had completed a course at the Academy of Dramatic Arts and subsequently, he became a teacher there. Partly on the strength of that, partly thanks to his late father's connections, he was familiar with the artistic life of Budapest in the Sixties and Seventies. Hungarian readers can easily identify a string of well-known actors and writers amongst the barely disguised figures, one of whom, an actor here called Gádor, a highly intellectual type and brilliant diarist, plays an important role in Zoltánka's life. The two are drawn together by the memory of the father, and Gádor, having initially served as a sort of father figure, becomes Zoltánka's friend and debating partner. They have a shared passion for the theatre: drama, and music in general are recurrent and privileged subjects of the narrator's reflections, which is justified inasmuch as most of the characters have some connection with the arts. Having said that, however, it is precisely the protagonist's "artistic"-intellectual side that is completely effaced here. The impression one gains, at best, is that—an ancillary being—he has no fully developed views or ideas of his own. If the author did not do this deliberately, then he has missed a trick; if deliberate, then the portrayal is inadequate.

As it is, the first-person hero is more a chance point of intersection for various life paths that are more striking and interesting than his own. That applies, first and foremost, to the figure of Gádor, whom the protagonist meets up with just once, in Paris, yet through his notes, and through Liv, Gádor adds several chapters' worth into Zoltánka's narration. Gádor had taken an active part in the '56 uprising with his

best friend; the latter had been killed, whilst he himself fled abroad and, after a temporary stay in Paris, settled in Algeria to become an engineer. Through the mediation of Liv, who seems likely to have also been Gádor's girlfriend for a while, Zoltánka manages to acquire Gádor's prolix notes, diaries, and unsent letters, which are inserted into the novel at a number of points and so give him a direct voice. Apart from several arresting passages of his curious life story, however, one gathers little more from these than the same futile anguish that characterises Zoltánka's own fate.

Iván Sándor's characters try to free themselves from their pasts and yet cling to it as the sole valid, tangible reality. The tragic sacrifice of the director-father sustains his widow, son and former actor colleagues even though it also means a severe, life-long trauma for them. Gádor drags along the memory of a few days in 1956 throughout his life, fleeing from it to Africa and there marrying a French girl, but in the meantime compulsively writes in Hungarian, haunted by images of his Kecskemét childhood and of the revolution. Liv's Jewish mother, also a native of Kecskemét, had been liberated from Mauthausen at the end of the war, but she never speaks of her past to her daughter and, when a memorial service is held at the camp, is unwilling to go there. Not

without reason either, for Liv and Zoltánka do attend, but the ceremony proves to be a fraud, a jarring media event, an insult to the memory of the victims.

Liv is the one healthy personality in the whole novel: she feels no need to compensate or play a role, and is dear to Zoltánka for that reason. It is not a question of loving her, merely of the irresistible spell of a compelling, autonomous personality, and the absolute necessity of occasional chances to be with her. Liv finds a place for herself even in the new world: as an employee of a Franco-Hungarian grocery business, she divides her time between Paris and Budapest, whereas by the Nineties, which in the novel are presented in a totally apolitical light, Zoltánka has grown tired and bitter, and would like to rid himself of his past, the memoirs in his chest of drawers. Let the whole lot disappear at last, putting an end to it all. Yet what would be left if we were to turf out our past from the dresser drawers? If the city that was once the scene for our life were to vanish? One of the novel's poignant moments comes when Liv notices that they have closed the *Café Celtique*, where she had met Zoltánka in Paris. "She was horrified. Like someone sensing that everything that might served to shore her up was vanishing; useless trying to keep track of it, they had shut down everything, not just the *Café Celtique*." ■

George Szirtes

The Whirlpool Below

Antal Szerb: *Journey by Moonlight*. Translated by Len Rix. London, Pushkin Press, 2001, 320 pp. £10

It is strange to be reviewing a book a second time, taking advantage of the opportunity for revisions and second thoughts. At the first time of writing, I had not read Szerb's fiction in Hungarian, only some of his scholarly writing, but I was aware of a kind of critical consensus regarding him as a figure and as an author: a precociously gifted young man who spoke several languages, had travelled widely and had apparently read his way through everything, as the publication of his *History of World Literature* (1941), at the tender of age forty, demonstrates. It was the book, together with the 1931 concise *History of Hungarian Literature*, that established his reputation. In 1934 he published his first novel, *The Pendragon Legend*, which was also popular and which employed some of his experiences as a scholar in London in 1929–30: a fantasy, composed equally of romance and parody. *Journey by Moonlight*, his second novel, was written in 1937 but appeared in English in Len Rix's translation some sixty-four years later, in 2001, in the centenary of Szerb's birth. The translation is be-

ing re-issued this year, having been as much a success in its racy and sensitive English version as it had been in other European languages.

"The literature of Hungary may be characterised, as may that of other Central European states, as the literature of anxiety," I wrote the first time round, and see no reason to change my mind about that. "There is so much to be anxious about: the security of borders, languages, status, even of ideas. Maintaining the delicate balance between paranoia and irony makes everyone twitchy: now you laugh, now you scream, now you are gone." The largeness of vision in writers like Kafka, Musil, Schultz and Joseph Roth, was the product of powerful imaginations seeking an escape route from a land of mirrors. Szerb himself had reason enough for anxiety. He was an assimilated Catholic Hungarian Jew, born into a comfortable bourgeois family, which cannot have been very comfortable in 1918 after the defeat of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and even less so in what followed: the two revolutions, the collapse and carving-up of Hungary

George Szirtes's

Selected Poems (1976–1996) was published by Oxford University Press in 1996. His most recent collection, *An English Apocalypse*, was published by Bloodaxe in 2001.

and the advent of the Horthy regime with its distrust of what it regarded as the unreliable Jewish-Bolshevik element in Hungarian society. Hungarian literature generally may articulate a historical anxiety, but Hungarian Jewish history generates some extra anxiety of its own.

Nevertheless, the career of the young Szerb describes a brilliant upward trajectory. He studied in Budapest and Graz and taught for a while in schools, but he was winning awards by his mid-twenties, and by 1933 he had been appointed president of the Hungarian Society of Literary History. He wrote poems and fiction, was among the leading figures of the second great *Nyugat* generation (*Nyugat* being the leading literary periodical of the time), broadcast on the radio, and was a popular, admired and loved literary man. He himself admired Anatole France and Aldous Huxley: his short stories were humorous, magical and ironic. His work has been described by Sándor Friderikusz as "suspended between rationalism and irrationalism", a state that is representative of some important strains of between-the-wars writing throughout Europe.

Szerb's was a brilliant, "suspended" and ill-fated generation. The poet Miklós Radnóti, other poets, critics, essayists and novelists, such as György Sárközi, Károly Pap, Gábor Halász and György Bálint, were to make a considerable mark then perish in the war. The great early century writers such as Kosztolányi, Babits, Gyula Krúdy and the humourist Karinthy had died within a few years of each other, and died relatively early, round about the beginning of the war and the next major wave was not yet ready. Their experience was to be vastly different. To be suspended was to be suspended between experimentalism and populism, between frivolity and desperation, between realism and surrealism, between aesthetic light and Zolaesque dark-

ness, and between the sense of relief that one horror was over and the sense of foreboding of horrors yet to come. In Central Europe, and in Hungary particularly, something had ended but it was by no means certain what it was that had begun.

Anxiety and uncertainty are crucial states of mind in Surrealism. Giorgio de Chirico painted a picture called "The Uncertainty of the Poet" in 1913, that could almost serve as a proto-Surrealist manifesto, and, to be sure, uncertainty runs like brilliant flashes of lightning through *Journey by Moonlight*. At the beginning of the book we meet a doomed group of childhood friends, reminiscent of Cocteau's *enfants terribles*, who are immersed in a private world of idealism, romance and play-acting. Around a mysterious faintly aristocratic brother and sister are ranged a cynical fixer who turns criminal, a beautiful Jewish boy who converts to Catholicism and becomes a saintly Franciscan monk, and the main object of the narrative, Mihály, who imagines he sees whirlpools at his feet. For the three outsiders, János the fixer, Ervin the monk and Mihály the paranoiac, the siblings offer a refuge from the middle class lives stretching before them. The brother's suicide and the sister's disappearance send them out into the world without a romantic model and they spend the rest of their haunted lives trying to find substitutes. Mihály marries Erzsi, a respectable, rich and beautiful society divorcee. They are on their honeymoon in Italy when Mihály gets off the train on a moment's errand, suffers a breakdown, and does not come back. From then on we are in an adolescent world of hallucinatory encounters. Erzsi goes off to Paris to see if she can lead an unconventional life. Freudian motifs and coincidences form the main structural devices. There is a veritable avalanche of brilliant perceptions ("In London November isn't a month," he said,

'it's a state of mind.'") articulated by people who are wholly resolved to do one thing then, within five minutes, are wholly resolved to do the opposite. The twin spectres of the doomed brother on the one hand and the bourgeois paterfamilias with his collapsing business on the other drag the protagonists this way and that.

There are various views about the political level of consciousness in the book. The action is set mostly in Italy, Mussolini's fascist Italy, though, as far as I could see, only a hint or two tells the reader as much, and the characters seem blithely ignorant of political events at large. As far as I am aware, no English or American review remarked on the contrast between the firmness of the setting and the floating, unworldly quality of the consciousness of the characters. Elsewhere, Thomas Mann and Italo Svevo are detected as influences, and the background of Italian Fascism and the rise of Nazism in Germany, are noted as "allusions". If these allusions are there, however, or so I think, it is more as influences on states of mind than as observation or comment.

For a reader coming from an English background there are some interesting resonances both with the early social novels of Aldous Huxley, such as *Crome Yellow* and *Antic Hay*, and with G.K. Chesterton's even earlier works of fantasy, like *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* and *The Man who was Thursday*. These are English twists on the "novel of ideas": amusing and observant in Huxley's case, and whimsical and romantic in Chesterton's. Whimsy, humour, romance and observation are certainly elements of *Journey by Moonlight*, but it is also possible to see it, as one French reviewer did, as *un voyage tragique*.

This darker aspect of the book, which provides its terrors and instabilities, which is never absent and, in fact, thoroughly suffuses it, sits oddly, for the stabler

English temperament at least, with its more whimsical side. The success of the book in the UK is partly due to what the poet Kevin Crossley-Holland called its sense of being "utterly in love with life". The element that comes to the fore for him is its dizzy youthful charm.

Well, it has all that. Being neither English nor Hungarian in this respect, I found the book compulsive and infuriating by turns, essentially unstable in almost every regard. It may be its dizzy precocious youthfulness and anxiety that leads it to skate, sometimes lurch, between its influences. There are elements of genuine paranoid vision, heavy surrealism, guide-book travelogue, gothic horror tale, Chestertonian fantasy, intellectual debate and an uneasy social satire. It is as if the consciousness that formed it were alive in every particular but had failed to locate itself in one place; as if the book were one vast crisis of identity. The whole thing twitches with the neurotic energy of its carefully arranged but barely joined-up parts. It is all so earnest, so up to date, so symbolic, so sophisticated, so marvellously pleased with itself and yet so unhappily and full of foreboding that you don't know whether to consume the book at a sitting or return to it in short intense patches.

Journey by Moonlight is, in this respect, a burning book, a major book, one of those maddeningly uneven firework displays that serve as much for symptom as artifact, although it is in fact both. Anxiety is the fuel that ignites it and keeps it burning. The anxiety was justified. In the course of the war that began shortly after the book was published, Szerb was dropped from radio and his *History of Hungarian Literature* was banned. He died of starvation and ill treatment at the age of forty-four in a forced labour camp in 1945. There was no anxiety about his identity on the part of those who put him there. ■

Tamás Koltai

Something Has Gone Wrong

Sándor Weöres: *Octopus avagy Szent György és a Sárkány* (Octopus, or St George and the Dragon) • György Spiró: *Fogadó a Nagy Kátyúhoz* (Inn to the Great Pothole) • *Elsötétítés* (Blackout)

The chaos reigning in the world (its apparent lack of comprehensibility and rationality), along with the predicament it puts people in, is one of the great subjects of dramatic literature. It has produced mythological works of monumental scope and social satires based on the messiness of everyday life. *Octopus, or St George and the Dragon*, written by one of the greatest of Hungarian poets and most playful minds of the 20th century, Sándor Weöres, falls into the former category. This mysterious cryptic play, described as a tragicomedy, has no precedent in Hungarian dramatic literature. Poetically inspired verse drama has not really struck roots in the theatre—one only has to consider the lack of response met by the works of the Polish romantics and symbolists, although Madách's highly successful classic, *The Tragedy of Man*, also belongs to this category. In comparison, Weöres' poetry in *St. George and the Dragon* is less literary; it could be best described as a magic theatrical show inspired by inner visions. "The End" is how the manuscript playfully finishes in English, in reference to the play's numerous links to English literature, from

mystery plays to Jacobean drama. "The End" appended to the end is a teaser, as the play does not have an end at all, just as it had neither a beginning nor a middle part; the entire play just streams along in the manner of an edited cavalcade; one is under the impression that any of the story's numerous threads could be continued at will, since the author, instead of resolving these story lines, simply cuts them after deciding that they are not worth the bother.

In Weöres's view, the theatre's task is to make "the viewers feel what is undescrivable... mainly the dissonant/consonant vibrations of the world." The storyline follows the biological stream of life. Placed in the North African city-state of Silene, it has one thread that is in the hands of Inganga, the hundred-year-old ancestral mother who founded the city from scratch and who rules it through the yearly sacrifice of a virgin to the Dragon. Octopus, the eight-armed monster, does not exist but its myth is enough to maintain order. The other thread stems from Giorgio's arrival on the scene; a commander in the army of the Roman emperor Diocletian, he has orders to subjugate Silene. His "private Christian

Tamás Koltai

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

faith" does not allow him to endorse the pagan cult, not to mention the human sacrifice. The third thread concerns the love of Isbel the virgin to be sacrificed, for her brother Lauro, the King's nephew. And finally the fourth thread relates the miraculous healing of Drinus, a feigned cripple who has risen to become a demagogue tribune.

Although the four threads are interrelated, they are not always interwoven. Now and then the fates of these figures cross, but their dramas are separate. Inganga, for example, keeps the Dragon's non-existence in secret; by the time the secret is out, she is dead, and so her character, that of the ruler with human sacrifice weighing on her conscience, is not explored in a real conflict. Giorgio's inner drama derives from the fact that, although he has converted to the Christian religion of love, he serves as commander in the army of a conquering, pagan emperor. Furthermore, in a grotesque way, he is forced to play the role of St George the dragon-slayer in the knowledge that the dragon does not exist; he kills a myth, only to replace it with another one: his own. On top of everything else, just when he realizes that the same people who have ruled under the aegis of the Dragon come to rule again, now under the banner of St George, Giorgio has to move on. By contrast, the incestuous love of Isbel and Lauro constitutes a real drama. Actually, they are the enviable victims of their own sensuality, until fate turns them into true victims. According to the logic of the legend, St George should really have saved Isbel, but he rescues the clumsy heir Uttanganga instead (thus unwittingly securing the succession of the ruling dynasty's line) all the time completely unaware of Isbel's existence. Lauro, is simply left by the author to rot in the castle's prison. The tragedy of Lauro and Isbel is on the conscience of Drinus, the dema-

gogue tribune who chafes at the couple's incestuous marriage and then perishes in the massacre, while the people effortlessly switch from the Dragon's manipulated myth to St George's manipulated myth.

To make the audience feel the connection between the events (but *only* feel) seems to be Weöres's main concern. We receive spiritual vibrations at the level of the senses, not of the intellect. There is even the feeling that the segregation of the intellect is the essential message of the vibrations; it is almost as if the distinguishing mark of Weöres's mystery was its rational incomprehensibility. The play seems to be about mankind, after emerging from the primeval myth and drifting helplessly between myths and religions, recreating itself in states that are successively more and more tragicomic and degenerate. This biological, rather than philosophical, philosophy of history is authenticated by Weöres's sensual poetry for the duration of a parable/fairytale. In *St George and the Dragon* the pulse of the iambic verse, the proliferation of the prosaic passages, and the sensual flow of events overtaking one another create a compact philosophical construction from fragments of a sensually invoked reality.

Written in the 1960s, the play was rarely performed. It is now presented by the Katona József Theatre under Gábor Zsámbéki's direction. Zsámbéki directed the play's first performance at the Kaposvár Theatre in 1972; at that time, this young company was in the vanguard of the intellectual and artistic reform going on in Hungarian theatre life. In 1979 Tamás Ascher directed the play in the National Theatre, which briefly passed into the hands of young and talented people. (Gábor Zsámbéki, who is currently the director of the Katona József Theatre, was artistic director there at the time. Both he and Ascher moved to the National from

Kaposvár. Both have since achieved international fame.) The earlier productions gave a rational interpretation of Weöres' magical, sensual existential experience, with Ascher's version appearing almost as a Brechtian parable. The bloodthirsty tyrant, whose symbolic monument resembled the triumphal columns of Soviet power, was identified with the Communist dictatorship in the audience's eyes: a monster that kills without any physical presence, existing only as a cult and an ideology. All this is no longer necessary. The movement, which brings down the occult pagan cult in a popular uprising with the help of intellectual demagoguery, orgies and St George's idealism for the religion of love, and which preaches enlightened ideas on the one hand and brings back the degenerate members of the old dynasty into power to propagate the new ideology on the other, simultaneously teaches us much about actual and general philosophy of history.

The stage set is an oval podium with a working suspension bridge above; the actors wade in a thick layer of fine gravel. With people seated on stage, the audience surrounds the podium; the actors, in turn, become part of the audience as they sit down on the stairs running along both sides of the stage, either when they are "off stage" or taking part in the action. This miniature world arena at the same time contracts and expands the virtual space of the play. It contracts it, because the author's vision encompasses entire realms: the Roman province, the crowded town scenes, the secular and religious sanctuaries complete with the monumental symbols; it expands it too, because, having severed the association between poetic imagination and its subject, it opens up the way to the poetic abstraction of the interpretation of the world. Zsámbéki's direction shows that the option of providing the play with ideological explanations and

linking it to our everyday socio-political experience, although still a possibility, is no longer necessary; on the other hand, we can discover in it the dimensions of the existential experience of a mythological kind, regardless of the fact that it is rooted in the perpetual repetition of social psychosis and the relationship between power structures, the essential feature of Weöres's play. We have outgrown parables; we are now old enough to manage allegories. Zsámbéki discarded the heraldic symbols. There are no arms of St George to replace the Dragon's; Sir Giorgio wears a small wooden cross to symbolise his faith. The idea is not materialised; the vision of Christ is merely an inner voice, the voice of God whose existence is denied even by the person who is praying to him. It is a world without Octopus or God; the monster and the Redeemer both reside within us—if at all. (The critics voted it Best Production of the 2001-2002 Season and, in the role of Inganga, Mari Töröcsik as Best Actress.)

Social satire is represented by the comedy *Inn to the Pothole* in the Bárka Színház. The author is the well-known novelist and playwright György Spiró. Actually, it is an adaptation: the popular 19th-century play, *Liliomfi* by Ede Szigligeti, "became the victim" of an implaceable historical examination. The original play is a light-hearted comedy. It is about a young man who runs away from his stern uncle and joins a troupe of strolling players. He falls in love with the daughter of an innkeeper; unfortunately, her father wants to marry off the girl to the wealthy but slightly dimwitted son of a Magyarised Austrian hotelier from Budapest. The lovers employ various schemes to forestall the marriage and acting plays a pivotal role in these stratagems, as Liliomfi and his jesting friend assume various disguises to play

pranks on the misguided father. In the end love naturally conquers all.

Spiró noticed that the play, which was written in 1848, had its première in December 1849. Between these two dates the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence against Austria took place and were crushed. The leading generals of the Hungarian army, along with the Prime Minister of the first responsible Hungarian government, were executed on October 6, 1849, just a little over two months before the première. In commemoration of the martyrs of Arad, October 6 has ever since been observed as a day of national mourning, the symbol of ruthless oppression. Finding it slightly grotesque that the National Theatre decided to put on stage a comedy in such a gloomy period, Spiró slightly repainted Szigligeti's rosy picture of contemporary reality. In other words, he produced, on Szigligeti's behalf, a new *Liliomfi* in an attempt to evoke contemporary conditions through the critical eye of an observer today, in an ironic and perhaps slightly cynical manner. In this version the main character is not simply an actor in love, but also a former officer serving in the defeated army, who is now forced into hiding. His friend, too, is a former revolutionary. From time to time, gendarmes in search of rebels raid the inn, which is cut off from the outside world by a snow storm. To give a boost to business, potholes were dug outside the inn (hence its name). Informing the police and wearing disguises are the norm. The characters wear disguises, wigs and makeup as members of a conspiracy and, also, not just to take part in an intrigue. After a while it is no longer clear who hides behind a disguise, whether a man or a woman, and what he or she wants. Everyone plays the part of someone else; the men swap identities and court each other's brides, while the girls seem just as receptive to courting as the charac-

ters are in *Così fan tutte*. Frivolity, insincerity and moral decay prevail.

Spiró depicts a moral and political chaos, a crisis of values and social disintegration, turning the accepted norms upside down. Szigligeti's "true Hungarian innkeeper" is a cowardly opportunist here, and the funny-looking foreigners, who in the original play speak with a strong German accent, speak impeccable Hungarian, in Spiró's version giving vent to the loftiest national feelings. However, the cutting edge of the social satire is somewhat blunted by the proliferation of gags, and the absurd humour and the rapid fire of puns, along with the mediocre musical inserts, steer the play in the direction of comedy. László Keszeg's direction only enhances this drift, and so what we are left with in the end is hardly more than a run-of-the-mill light entertainment.

György Spiró's other play, *Blackout*, is related to another, much more recent tragedy in Hungary's wayward history. The entire story takes place on July 24, 1941, the day the so-called Third Jewish Act was promulgated. (This law stripped Hungary's Jews of all legal protection in Hungary, after the country's alignment with the Third Reich.) In a certain sense, *Blackout* is a triangular drama. The characters—the husband, the wife and the husband's friend—say as much themselves, when they describe their relationship as a classical bourgeois triangle. The couple, with a four-year-old daughter live in their own villa in Budapest in complete harmony. As the wife puts it, "I do not know another couple or family with an emotional, intellectual and financial background as firm as ours." This might have been so before that ominous day in July, when the husband declares that he wants a divorce. He is a Jew who has converted to Christianity; this means that even though his wife is from a

Christian middle class family with noble Hungarian ancestry, their daughter will qualify as a Jew if she happens to marry a quarter or a half-Jew. The girl's life can only be saved if they get a divorce; the woman then marries a thoroughbred Christian who can adopt the girl and all three go abroad—Gentiles will get residence permits somewhere—and stay there until the clouds of the unforeseeable (or rather, pretty foreseeable) future will clear and the restrictions on the sale of the villa, already seized as Jewish property, will be lifted. On visiting the couple on the husband's invitation, the prospective new husband (one of the wife's earlier admirers, a former landowner who gambled away his estate and has now been reduced to being a "Budapest cad") knows nothing about the plans in which he is supposed to play such a pivotal role. The big question of the play is whether they will be able to reach an agreement, when this issue is raised first between the two men and then between the three of them, while it is still possible to do something, while they are still in a position to make decisions, as the husband puts it.

Blackout is not a psychological drama in the realist mould. It does not follow the psychological motivations and the conventions of conversational pieces. This becomes clear from the basic instructions at the beginning. Spiró does not name his characters other than Man, Woman, Friend and he does not place them in an organic milieu; he does not allow them to eat, drink, smoke, dress and undress, move about, touch each other (save a few instructions to this effect); he does not provide furnishing for the villa (three armchairs, an empty coffee table and a floor lamp constitute the entire set); he does not allow any special effects, voice recordings or projections. In his words, he does not allow any "pseudo actions." The only de-

vice left to the actors is verbal expression: an elevated, rhetorical speech (although the language is plain), with its own edited, essayistic, prose based on the rhythm of thinking, which separates the characters from reality, placing them into a vacuum. The characters condense the intellectual and emotional content of their own closed world in comments of varying length; they do not cut into each other's speeches, they do not engage in proper dialogue: their speeches are the direct manifestation of their existential quintessence.

Blackout is like a Corneille play. It has several layers. The first is the personal drama, which leads to the emotional breakup through the acceptance of the divorce. The Woman is above all else a pleasure-seeking, emotional/sensual creature whose pagan love for her husband forces her to follow him everywhere; the Man is a scrupulous, rational being guided by the clear-headedness of the survival game. In the end they both discover that they were not meant for each other after all, as they previously thought. This has nothing to do with the platitude of a horrendous age destroying relations between people. The age can only bring to the surface the essence: the difference between the two mentalities—illusions about the Christian middle class and the rejection of these illusions. The Jewish Act forces the Man to recognise that, contrary to his earlier belief, he is not "embedded in his country's elite", in other words, anything can happen from this point onward. The Woman denies this for personal reasons, eventually spilling out all her arguments, which induces the Man to commend the Woman to her "future husband" with the following words: "I have to inform you that the woman you are going to marry is an anti-Semite." There is no sense in considering whether or not Spiró is authentic. It is not individual psychological motifs that are at

work here; encoded in the two characters are the arguments for and against—about the causes, techniques, manipulations and social psychology of anti-Semitism, both historical and actual. This constitutes the second layer of the play, which is the product of the author's vigorous mind processes, the moving collection of his thoughts on social psychology, philosophy of history and—I venture to say—anthropology.

The third layer is direct actualisation. *Blackout* is a contemporary play, not a historical drama in the abstract sense. It suggests that the causes and purposes of keeping the "Jewish question" alive have not changed. The Man's deliberations make this apparent at several points. But Spiró is not content with this much; in two brief scenes he adds an epilogue, in which we learn about the Man's survival on the one hand and the finalisation of the marriage between the Woman and the Friend in Argentina on the other. This is the play's most vulnerable part: small realism after "Corneille", with the sole purpose of let-

ting us know, via two further characters, the Father and the Son, about the birth of the new, post-war "democratic" scum, and also about a rather surprising development whereby the Man, whose foresight was so impressive earlier on, has shown himself susceptible to the new age's illusions. It is not the idea but its exposition that leaves much to be desired. Spiró should either have developed the idea fully in a second part or should have left out the epilogue altogether.

László Marton's direction in the Pesti Színház keeps close to the text. Everything here depends on the actors who do their best, despite the fact that contemporary Hungarian theatre is not very strong in pure verbalism: they lack the natural manners of British actors, just as the elevated style of the French and the awkward matter-of-fact interpretation of the Germans. Even so, there is tension in the auditorium: underneath the conversational surface the audience experience the confusion resulting from our failure to resolve this crisis of conscience at a social level. ■

Erzsébet Bori

The Unquiet American

István Szabó: *Taking Sides*

István Szabó is rightly regarded as one of the most versatile of directors. He started filming in the 1960s, when he completed a highly personal, poetic and mildly ironic trilogy, inspired by the liberating influence of the French *nouvelle vague*. *Álmodozások kora* (The Age of Daydreaming, 1964); *Apa* (Father, 1966); *Szerelmesfilm* (Love Film, 1970) was a trilogy which brought him European renown. Narrated in the first person from the viewpoint of the main character (who can be regarded as the director's alterego), these stories combine to provide a portrait of an entire generation, the one that was born during the war in Hungary and reached adulthood under the Kádár regime.

The trilogy hallmarking Szabó's next period—*Tűzoltó utca 25* (25 Firemen's Street, 1973); *Budapesti mesék* (Budapest Tales, 1976); *Bizalom* (Confidence, 1979)—enlarged the scope both in space and in time: it analyzed the parents of that generation in the broader context of entire communities—a town's population, or the nation. With his next three films Szabó stepped out of Hungary and onto the international scene without severing his

Hungarian roots. The Mephisto trilogy (*Mephisto*, 1981; *Colonel Redl*, 1984; *Hanusen*, 1988), made as German-Hungarian co-productions, addressed themes with a European outlook, while set within the Central-European region. The various stories take place in Germany and in the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy, while the trilogy as a whole studies the genesis of the region's cataclysms in recent history.

Mephisto won the Oscar for best foreign film, which opened up new opportunities for Szabó. From that time onward he was welcome to the international world of cinema, making English-language movies with an international crew and film stars for an international market—including the trans-Atlantic audience. The list is opened with *Meeting Venus*, 1991, which was a peculiar mixture of autobiography and genre. The next one in the line was *Sunshine*. It was a novel experience for a Hungarian audience: a Hungarian story related by a Hungarian director, it featured foreign actors who spoke in English. The film about us was meant for a broader audience. Despite the oddness of this situation, the film was a great success in Hungary.

Erzsébet Bori

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István Szabó's third English-language movie, *Taking Sides*, is set in occupied Germany immediately after the second World War. Major Steve Arnold has come to the American zone of Berlin with orders to rule on the appeal submitted by a conductor charged with collaboration and hence barred from practising his profession. His superior's position on the case was quite plain: unlike many other famous artists, Wilhelm Furtwängler, who was regarded by many as the best conductor in the world, had chosen to remain in his country throughout the war. A celebrated and privileged artist of the Third Reich, he had legitimized Hitler's regime. In the eyes of the victorious powers he was an ideal candidate for a show trial. On the other side, Major Arnold seems the ideal person to carry out this task: an insurance investigator in civilian life, he fought through the war and his record showed him to be a persevering and dogged man dedicated to his work. Notably, he had never before heard the name of Furtwängler; he is a plain American who would not be in awe of the apostle of high art. The major has two assistants, one of whom he explicitly asked for. The young German secretary, Emmi, is the daughter of a Colonel Straube, who had been executed for plotting against Hitler. His other assistant is First Lieutenant David Wills, a young Jew who had fled Germany to seek refuge with his American uncle and who has been serving as liaison officer between Major Arnold and the cultural committee of the Allied Powers in Wiesbaden.

The major sets out by gathering background information and interrogating the musicians of the Berlin Philharmonic. The resulting information is conflicting, the testimony provided is biased. It is almost as if the musicians have conspired; they all speak in tones of the greatest respect about their conductor, who never joined

the Nazi Party and who used his privileged position and good connections to save Jewish lives and help the persecuted. The investigation is unduly prolonged; Furtwängler is impatient as he is unable to work and is living on charity; on top of that, he has influential friends among the Allies. There is a Russian general, for example, who in civilian life was the director of the Pushkin Museum and who would be all too happy to relieve the Americans of the burden of Furtwängler. Even Arnold's two closest associates are drawn into the opposite camp: they are both great admirers of Furtwängler's and, besides, Emmi's German feelings are offended by the major's summary judgment and black-and-white worldview. Arnold's cause already seems all but lost when the British discover the secret archive of the police ministry's officer responsible for the cultural institutions. The archived files reveal who were party members and who were the informers in the orchestra. To achieve his aim, Arnold is willing to team up with the devil. He offers a deal to the second violinist, who had previously praised his former boss to the skies but now starts pouring out grievances along with some damaging anecdotes about Furtwängler: about the maestro's perverse jealousy of Karajan, about a music critic dispatched to the frontline and about his womanizing and illegitimate children. But all this is overblown gossip and simple human weaknesses that have no bearing on the main issue.

Major Arnold comes face to face with Wilhelm Furtwängler on two occasions. During the first interrogation he does everything he can to humiliate the musician, about whose guilt he has no doubt; however, the artist, who believes in his innocence, leaves with head held high. By the time they come to meet again, the major already knows that he is not able to substantiate the charge of collaboration

and that Furtwängler will not be tried. In frustration and vengeance, he heaps accusations on the conductor, true and false alike; confronted with his human weaknesses rather than political and criminal accusations, Furtwängler leaves the scene broken in spirit. The dogged American has lost a case but can still feel himself morally victorious.

Or can he indeed? With his head slumped, the great Furtwängler is walking down the stairs of the hallway in the huge imperial public building, when the triumphant sounds of the Fifth Symphony in Wilhelm Furtwängler's celebrated recording fill the hall, played louder and louder. In defiance of his superior, First Lieutenant Wills plays the record as a last placatory gesture with the message that the world does indeed need his art.

On this occasion István Szabó uses material that has already been tried and tested, a successful play by the English writer Ronald Harwood, *Taking Sides*, which the author rewrote for the movie. Usually the attempts to transfer from stage to screen result in static movies heavy in dialogue, either set in the two or three locations of the original play and thus forgoing the spectacle of the cinema or else illustrating the story with picture postcards of the period. *Taking Sides* ventures outside the closed world of a trial in camera, although this not always turns out for the better. If from nowhere else, we have learned from the movies (for example, Rossellini's masterpiece, *Germany: Year Zero*) what state of abject poverty and humiliating deprivation Germany and a ransacked Berlin had fallen into. The flea-market shown in Szabó's film is a jolly little place in comparison, where people select gramophone recordings from catalogues and where they can buy gramophones or bicycles, depending on how

they chose to spend their time. Because of the frantic pace of construction that began after the city's re-unification, it is now impossible to shoot a historic film in Berlin, as not even in its easternmost corner are there any buildings in ruins to be found. The outdoor scenes illustrating contemporary conditions were shot in a studio and if anywhere, Babelsberg should know how Berlin looked like at the end of the war. Unfortunately, in some instances the scenes filmed in the countryside also fail to produce the desired effect: the idyllic tête-à-tête between interrogator and his Nazi informer in a rowing boat does not strike one as lifelike. Nevertheless, we must see that Szabó had no intention to shoot a period movie; he inserted in the story some archived clips, which serve to both authenticate and alienate. The real drama takes place inside the characters, and that is where Szabó is on home ground and where the cinematographer Lajos Koltai excels. And it is also here that we come to acknowledge the importance of the casting. Just as with Klaus Maria Brandauer, largely unknown outside the German speaking world (who played the main character in the *Mephisto* trilogy), Szabó has shown himself an excellent judge in casting two actors in the main roles whose internal and external qualities, personality traits and intensity of feeling closely corresponded with their characters. The courtroom scenes are dominated by close-ups: faces expressing sudden changes of emotions and passions, glances and trembling hands. I am quite convinced that Harvey Keitel hurled his own questions, accusations and charges at Stellan Skarsgård's head, who in turn was probably not entirely sure whether Wilhelm Furtwängler had conducted himself in good faith, with complete honesty and courage during the Nazi years.

István Szabó has set a trap for his audience. Here we have a successful play written for the middle-brow audience, which poses heavy questions and fashionable problems in a rather superficial manner. (One might even ask whether it was right to call the play's central character Furtwängler at all, when you consider that the drama mixes fiction with genuine biographical information. In this regard we can refer back to *Mephisto*, in which a fictional character was created based on an actual German actor.) This film, too, is open to criticism for being over-explicit and nudging the audience too much; here it is sufficient to cite the Russian major's character, who delivers all the lines routinely associated with the intellectual elite in a dictatorship (this is probably not for those viewers who have ample experience in this regard). But this is beside the point. What happens here is that viewers of all sorts, on both sides of the Atlantic, are being presented with most of the arguments ever produced as regards this problem—politics contra art, improving/subverting the system from the inside, withdrawal, commitment, cooperation, biding time, all the possible ways of active and passive resistance in a dictatorship, soft or hard—and, when everything has been said, we still do not have the ultimate answer. We are left to our own devices to make the decision and this is much more difficult than one would have thought at first sight. (Herbert von Karajan, who made a brilliant career as a very young man in the Third Reich, was a member of the National Socialist Party. In the Soviet zone of occupation he was barred from practising his profession for a year, but afterwards his career took off in a big way, and he was held in high esteem all over the world. Richard Wagner, whose works von Karajan conducted with outstanding success in Nazi Germany, died in 1883, not living

long enough to learn that in Israel he was labelled as a "proto-Nazi" and his music was banned.)

István Szabó's film is about making choices—about the choices made by all the characters, both main and episode, historical and fictional, and also about the choices made by viewers and artists alike. It is about free will and choices made under duress. Which side are you on? This is a question independent of time and place, which is frequently asked of us, and by us, in the course of our lifetime. But here in Central Europe this is the first time after a very long period that a generation could grow up for whom this personal choice is not a matter of life and death made under the coercive forces of history and politics. We must take notice that in this English-language movie, distributed all over the world, István Szabó addresses his message to us, Hungarians, delivering it with the most effective means the cinema has ever known.

The United States and Europe share one great experience: the Second World War and the Holocaust. *Taking Sides* presents this theme powerfully and with great empathy from the viewpoint of the average American citizen, who made enormous sacrifices in the interest of victory. Here is this "crude" American from the insurance business, totally oblivious as to who Wilhelm Furtwängler is; the amazing accomplishments of European high culture leave him cold. He has no idea what it means to live in a dictatorship, as the only dictator he has ever seen was in a Charlie Chaplin movie. Like a bull in a china shop, in he barges and has the audacity to meddle in our personal affairs. More than anybody else, he is the one whom the (Central) European viewers have to confront (the film's Hungarian title means confrontation). In several places, Szabó

inserts a shocking clip from a newsreel: a bulldozer moving, instead of a pile of earth or rubbish, a mountain of corpses, which a proud and vain nation "manufactured" with the active assistance or tacit approval of other civilized nations. It is a deeply disturbing sight. And it is in connection with this mass-murder on an industrial scale that we are appealing to our American major for a differentiated judgment.

The film begins and ends with passages from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. The opening pictures show Stellan Skarsgård in the role of Furtwängler, conducting the symphony in a cathedral to a Berlin audience of civilians and soldiers, while outside the Allied air force is bombing the

city. It is a faultless exposition, which immediately puts us in the picture as to the location, the period and the people we shall be dealing with. The epilogue appended to the film is an archived documentary showing the real Furtwängler first conducting the Fifth in front of a German audience and then, after the performance, shaking hands with Goebbels, who is sitting in the front row. Next we see Furtwängler reach into his pocket and do something with his hand. A powerful blow-up reveals what he is actually doing. He is squeezing a handkerchief in an attempt to rub off the handshake. We do not know whether he succeeded. ♣



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History

The train arrivals and departures in this city depend entirely on us, explains the railroad president menacingly, so we'd better get acquainted with the idea that if they say

Documents

so, this train of ours will only leave tomorrow, or the day after, or never. He's a big side of cantenkerous bacon, proposes a last toast, waves the interpreter to silence and focuses his hypnotic gaze on us, the two Hungarians, yes,

Fiction

we are the only ones left who have to be convinced of something, we are the last pillars of obstinance, who refuse to succumb, even though it would be so easy, and why don't we do it, it would cost us nothing, mourning

Poetry

a little for those poor war heros. Suddenly he stands up, on which everyone scrambles up after him, this is how we continue, with glasses raised high. He slowly steps

Essays

towards us, tears trickle from his eyes, I think he's forgiven us, and without further ado, attempts to smooch the Hungarian translator girl. Then he turns to me, looks me over and says: yong boi.

Reportage

Applause. A group photo. It's four-fifteen, our train has probably left, and I'm smashed.

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