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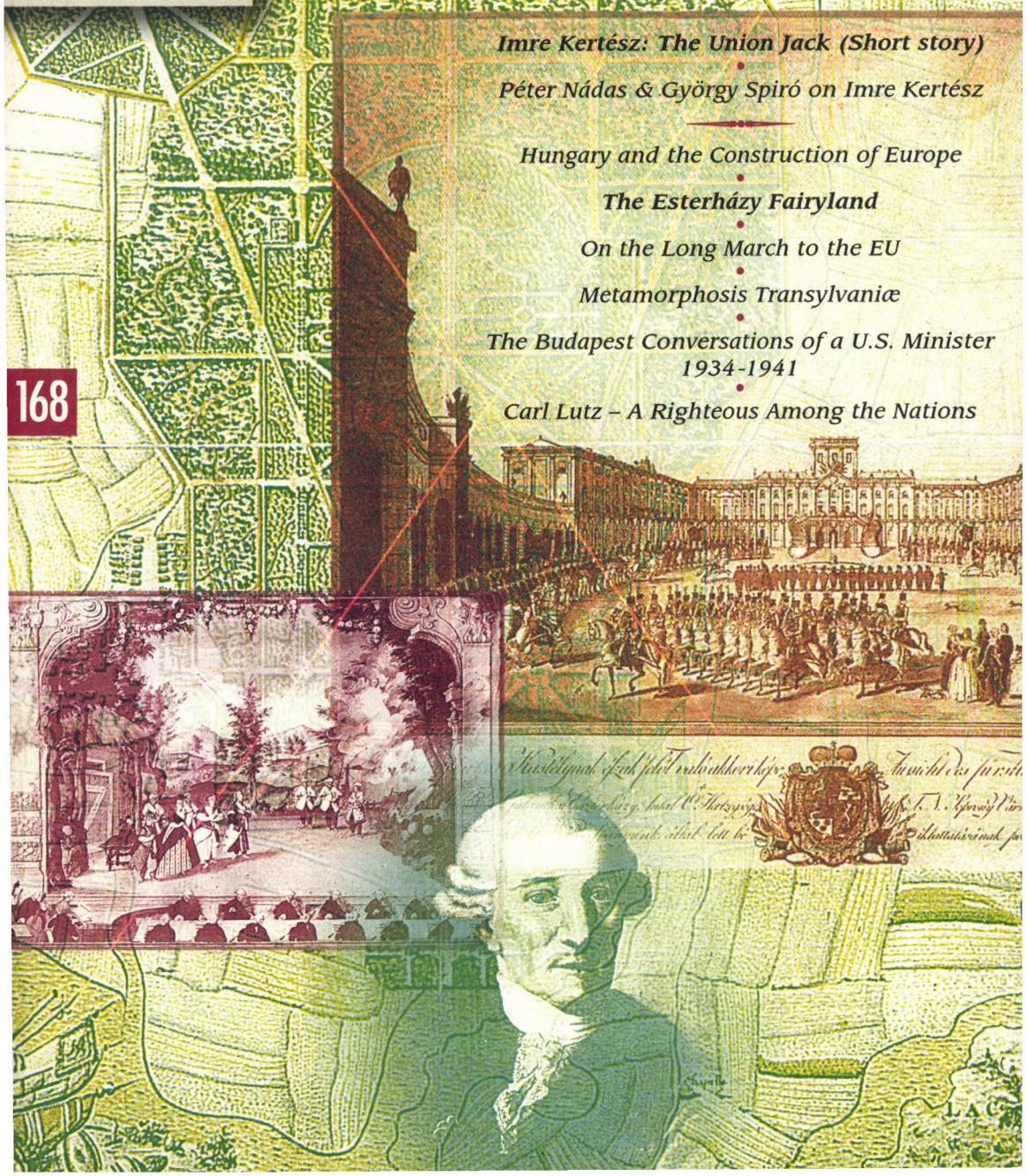

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HQ *169, the Spring 2003 issue, will in part be devoted to the work of the poet and author Gyula Illyés (1902–1983), on the occasion of his centenary and for the twentieth anniversary of his death.*

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Imre Kertész

The Union Jack

(Short story)

"before us fog, behind us fog, and beneath us
a sunken country"
(Mihály Babits)

If I may perchance wish now, after all, to tell the story of the Union Jack, as I was urged to do at a friendly gathering a few days—or months—ago, then I would have to mention the piece of reading matter which first inculcated in me, let's call it a grudging admiration, for the Union Jack; I would have to tell about the books I was reading at the time, my passion for reading, what nourished it, the vagaries of chance on which it hinged, as indeed does everything else in which, with the passage of time, we discern what, whether it be the consequentiality of fate or the absurdity of fate, is in any event our fate; I would have to tell about when that passion started, and whither it propelled me in the end; in short, I would have to tell almost my entire life story. And since that is impossible, in the lack not just of the requisite time but also of the requisite facts, for who indeed, being in possession of the few misleading facts that one deems to know about one's life, could say of himself that he even recognises right away his life, that process, course and outcome (exit or exitus) which is so totally obscure to himself, to himself above all; so probably it would be best if I were to begin the story of the Union Jack with Richard Wagner. And though Richard Wagner, like a persistent leitmotif, would lead us with uncanny sureness, by a direct path, to the Union Jack, I would have to broach Richard Wagner himself at the editorial office. That editorial office exists no more, just as the building in which that one-time editorial office was then (three years after the war, to be precise), for me, for a while, still very much in existence exists no more—that one-time editorial office full of gloomy corridors, dusty crannies, tiny, cigarette-choked rooms lit by bare bulbs, ringing telephones, bawling, the quick-fire staccato of typewriters, full of fleeting excitements, abiding qualms, vacillating moods, and later the fear, unvacillating and ever less vacillating,

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Imre Kertész
was awarded the 2002 Nobel Prize in Literature "for writing that upholds the fragile experience of the individual against the barbaric arbitrariness of history".

which seeped out from every cranny, as it were, to squat over everything, the one-time editorial office that had long since *not* conjured up long-bygone editorial offices, at which in those days I was obliged to turn up at some execrably early hour, something like seven o'clock every morning, say. With what sort of hopes, I wonder?, I mused aloud and publicly in the friendly gathering which had been urging me to tell the story of the Union Jack. The young man (he would have been about twenty) whom, through a sensory delusion to which we are all prey, I then considered and sensed to be the most personal part of my self I see today as in a film; and one thing that very likely disposes me to this is that he himself—or I myself—somehow also saw himself (myself) as in a film. This, moreover, is undoubtedly what renders tellable a story which otherwise, like every story, is untellable, or rather not a story at all, and which, were I to tell it in that manner anyway, would probably drive me to tell precisely the opposite of what I ought to tell. That life, that twenty-year-old young man's life, was sustained solely by its *formulability;* that life lumbered along, with its every nerve-fibre, every fitful effort, solely at the level of *formulability.* That life strove with all its might *to live,* and in that respect stood in contrast, for example, to my present striving, hence also my present formulations, these incessantly miscarried formulations, colliding incessantly against the unformulable, grappling—naturally, to no avail—with the unformulable: no, the striving for formulation, then and there, was actually aimed at keeping the unformulable—namely, the essence, which is to say this life, drifting, grinding and stumbling along in the dark, lugging along the burden of darkness—in the shadows, because that young man (I) could only live this life in that way. I made contact with the world through reading, that epidermis around the layers of my existence, as through some form of protective clothing. Tempered by reading, distanced by reading, obliterated by reading, that world was my fallacious but sole liveable, indeed, now and again, almost tolerable world. In the end, the predictable moment arrived when I became a lost cause for that editorial office, and thereby a lost cause for... I all but said for society too, but had there been a society, or rather if what there was had been a society, then I became a lost cause for what passed for society, for that horde which now whimpered like a whipped dog, now howled like a ravening hyena, always greedy for any provender that it could tear to shreds; I had long been a lost cause for myself, and I almost became a lost cause for life as well. But even at that rock bottom—at least what, at the time, I supposed to be rock bottom, until I got to know depths that were deeper still, ever deeper, depths that were bottomless—even at that rock bottom the formulability was retained, the camera setting, one might say: the camera lens of a pulp thriller, for example. Where I acquired it, what its title was, what it was about, I have no idea. I don't read thrillers any longer, ever since, in the midst of reading one thriller, I suddenly caught myself being utterly uninterested in who the murderer might be; that in this world—a murderous world—it was not only misleading and actu-

ally outrageous, but also quite unnecessary for me to fret about who the murderer was: everybody was. That way of formulating it, however, did not occur to me at the time, some forty years ago, perhaps; it was not a formulation that would have seemed of any use to my strivings at that time, some forty years ago, perhaps, as it was merely a fact, one of those simple—albeit obviously not entirely insignificant—facts amongst which I lived, amongst which I had to live (because I wanted to live): it was much more important to me that the main protagonist, a man with an exciting job—a private eye, maybe—had the habit, before embarking on one of his deadly dangerous enterprises, of always "treating himself" to something, a glass of whiskey, or occasionally a woman, but sometimes he would make do with an aimless, headlong spin along the highway in his car. That detective novel taught me that a person needs pleasure in those rare intervals in one's torture sessions: until then I would not have dared to formulate that, or if so, then at best as a sin. In those times, deadly dangers were already menacing in the editorial office, deadly boring dangers, to be quite precise, but no less deadly for all that, ever fresher ones every day, albeit the same ones every day. In those times, after a short and utterly inexplicable temporary hiatus, food coupons were again in use, most notably for meat, though quite unnecessarily as it happened—most especially for meat—since there were insufficient meat stocks to justify the reciprocatory gravity of issuing coupons for meat. Around that time, next door to the editorial office they opened, or re-opened, the so-called Corvin Restaurant, which is to say the so-called Corvin Restaurant in the so-called Corvin Department Store, where (the store being under foreign ownership, or to be more punctilious, in the hands of the occupying power) they even served meat, and without meat coupons at that, although the meat was on offer at double price (in other words, they asked double the price that would have been asked for elsewhere, had meat been on offer anywhere else); and around that time, if the prospect of a fresher, deadly boring deadly danger lay in wait for me at the editorial office, usually in the form of one of those otherwise so splendidly styled "staff conferences", on such occasions I would "treat myself" beforehand to a breaded cutlet in this restaurant (very often out of an advance on my salary for the following month, since the institution of the advance, obviously as the result of some oversight, still remained operative for a while, everything else having long ceased to be operative); and however many and whatever sort of deadly boring dangers to life I might have to confront, the awareness that I had 'treated myself' beforehand, the awareness of my foresightedness, my secret, even my *freedom* that inhered in the couponless breaded cutlet and in the advance on my salary that I had procured to pay for it, about which nobody besides myself could have known, except perhaps the waiter (but then he knew only about the breaded cutlet), and perhaps also the cashier (but then he knew only about the advance)—that helped me through every horror, every ignominy, and every infamy visited on me that day. For

around that time the everydays, the everydays that stretched from dawn to dusk, were transformed into systematic ignominies that stretched from dawn to dusk, but how they were transformed into that, the formulation—or series of formulations—of that otherwise most certainly noteworthy process no longer figures amongst my remembered formulations and so, most likely, did not figure amongst my formulations at the time either. The reason for that, obviously, may be that my formulations, as I have already noted, served solely for the rehearsal of my life, for the bare sustenance of my life that stretched from dawn till dusk, whilst they looked on life itself as a given, like the air in which I am obliged to breathe, the water in which I am obliged to swim. Quality of life as an object of formulation was simply left outside the scope of my formulations, as those formulations did not serve to gain an understanding of life but, on the contrary, as I have said, to make life liveable, or in other words, to avoid any formulation of life. Around that time, for example, certain trials were grinding ahead in the country, and to the questions of the friendly gathering that had been urging me to tell the story of the Union Jack, the pressing, badgering questions of this gathering, mustered mainly from amongst my former students, and so from people mostly twenty to thirty years younger than I, though by that token no longer quite so young themselves, heedless to the fact that with their very questions they were interrupting and distracting me from telling the story of the Union Jack—so to those questions as to whether I, as it were, had "believed" in the counts of the indictments laid out at these trials, whether I had "believed" in the guilt of the accused and so on, I replied that those questions, and most particularly the question of the credibility or incredibility of the trials, did not even cross my mind at the time. In the world which surrounded me then—the world of lies, terror and murder, as I might well classify that world *sub specie æternitatis,* though that does not even begin to touch on the *reality,* the *singularity,* of that world—in that world, then, it never so much as crossed my mind that every single one of those trials might not be lies, that the judges, prosecutors, defending counsels, witnesses, indeed the accused themselves would not all be lying, and that the sole truth which was functioning there, and tirelessly at that, was not the hangman's, and that any other truth would or *could* function here except the truth of arrest, imprisonment, execution, the shot in the head, and the noose. Only now did I formulate it all so trenchantly, in such decidedly categorical terms—as if then (or even now, for that matter) there had existed (or exists) any solid basis for any sort of categorisation—now that they were urging me to tell the story of the Union Jack, and so I was obliged to tell it all from the viewpoint of a story, to attribute significance to something which has only subsequently acquired significance in the public mind—that bogus awareness raised to the status of generality—but which in the reality of those days, at least as far as I am concerned, had only very slight, or an entirely different, significance. For that reason I cannot assert, for example, that I would have felt morally outraged,

say, in connection with the trials that were grinding ahead around that time: I don't recall that I felt that, and I don't even consider it very likely, if only because I did not have a sense of any morality whatsoever—either within me or around me—in the name of which I might have been outraged. But all this, as I say, is to massively overrate and overexplain what those trials meant for me—for a self whom I now see only from a great distance, as on some faded, shaky and brittle film—because in reality they barely grazed my consciousness; they signified, let us say, a gelling of the constant danger, and with that, of course, of my constant disgust, a heightening of a danger that might not yet have been threatening me directly, perhaps, or to express myself poetically, a further darkening of the horizon, in spite of which, however, it was still possible to read, if there happened to be something to read (*Arc the Triomphe,* for example). What affected me was not so much the morality of the trials that were grinding ahead then, but rather the influences that ground along at the level of sensibility; hence, the reflexes evoked from me were not moral, but rather those acting at the level of sensory organs and neurological paths—mood reflexes, one might call them, like the aforementioned disgust, then alarm, indignation, fleeting scepticism, general disconcertment, and the rest. I recall it being summer at the time, for instance, and that summer had announced itself from the very onset with an almost unbearable heat. I recall that during that unbearably hot summer it had occurred to somebody in that editorial office that the "young colleagues", as it was phrased, ought to partake of some higher, theoretical indoctrination, as it was phrased. I recall that on one especially hot evening of that very hot summer, a bigwig in the editorial office—a party first-something, a party bigwig, a bigwig held in general terror, a bigger and more senior bigwig than the senior editor-in-chief himself, though, as far as his authority went, one who was held in a fair degree of hiddenness, if I may be allowed the Heideggerian paraphrase—imparted to us "young colleagues", as it was phrased, this theoretical indoctrination, as it was phrased. I even recall the room in which the lecture was held, the now no longer existing room, the vanished site of which is itself now built over, the so-called "typing pool", by which is to be understood the typewriters, the female typists who operated those typewriters with a furious clatter, the writing desks and ordinary tables, chairs, commotion, countless telephones, countless colleagues, countless sources of sound, all of which, that evening, had already been silenced, removed, tidied away, and transformed into a pious audience, duly seated on the chairs, and the lecturer who was indoctrinating them. I recall that the double-leafed balcony door was wide open, and how much I envied the lecturer for the frequency with which—by the end, virtually every minute—as if by way of punctuation marks to the lecture, he was able to step outside to cool off on the vast balcony, not stopping until he reached the balustrade, where, leaning out over the parapet, he would look down each time into the steaming chasm of the Grand Boulevard, and each time, in the stifling

room, I too thought longingly of the dust-choked, leafy boughs of the roadside trees, perhaps just stirring in the twilight air, the passers-by sauntering beneath them, the dilapidated terrace of the Simplon (later Simpla) Cafe opposite, the clandestine streetgirls clacking by afresh, far from clandestinely, on their high-heeled shoes towards their beats in Népszínház or Bérkocsis Streets. It was all the more conspicuous, though only later did I attribute any significance to it, that at the end of the lecture this bigwig, face burnt red as a lobster, sweat pouring from his brow, and literally trembling—from the effort, I supposed at the time (if I supposed anything at all at the time)—was in no great hurry to get down to the street; quite the contrary, he was hardly able to tear himself away from us, addressing several of us individually, until at long last we were rid of him, and I too was able to step out onto the balcony and, with a sigh of relief, look down at the street where, at that very moment, the bigwig stepped out of the building and, at that very moment, out of a black car that was idling by the pavement jumped two ominously helpful men to assist the bigwig most eagerly, but perhaps a touch insistently, into the black car, whilst in that unexpected hush which sometimes falls for a brief moment, like a climax or an orchestral pause, to interrupt the din of the city in the settling twilight at the end of each unbearable day the nightmarish lights of the street lamps suddenly lit up. It will come as no surprise to you, mature, cultured people that you are, I said to the friendly gathering, mustered mainly from my former students, which had been continually urging me to tell the story of the Union Jack, to learn where that black car took its victim, or that the bigwig had been continually spying down from the balcony on the black car waiting down below, hoping, for a while, that the black car was not waiting for him, then as time passed—during the lecture—slowly ascertaining beyond any doubt that it was indeed for him that the black car was waiting, and after that ascertainment all he could do was spin out the time, that is, as far as he was able, delay the moment of departure, the stepping out from the entrance gate of the building; as for me, however, I hardly know what surprised me more, and of course more disagreeably: the encounter four, five or six years later, on what was then still a tree-lined Andrássy (and later Stalin, Hungarian Youth, People's Republic, etc.) Avenue, with a battered, half-blinded, broken old man, in whom, to my great horror, I recognised the erstwhile bigwig, or the "*ad-hoc* meeting", as it was called, that was convened in great haste at the editorial office the day following the balcony scene, in the course of which I was obliged to learn certain things, each more absurd than the last, about this bigwig, who, just the day before, had been a figure of general terror, general homage, general creeping and crawling. These absurdities were brought to our attention now by the hysterically twitching ravings of a pampered youth, now by the incomprehensible outpourings of rage from the senior editor-in-chief himself, a being who, in his mortal terror, had been reduced to some primeval human condition, a pulsating amoeba, a mere existential jelly, and had

stayed utterly transfixed in that reduced state, yet who only the previous day, scared rigid, had kow-towed and smarmily crept and crawled in the presence of the selfsame bigwig. It would be utterly impossible, and utterly beside the point, for me to recall this man's choice of words, more absurd even than his absurd assertions: they consisted of a farrago of allegations and abuses, protestations, excuses, insults, pledges, threats and the like, expressed in the most extreme manner, not shrinking from the use of animal names, with the names of canine beasts of prey prominent amongst the abuses, for instance, and dragging in the language of the most bigoted religious sects amongst the pledges. Now, I would be very curious to know whether the friendly gathering that had been urging me to tell the story of the Union Jack was able, even dimly, to imagine that scene, as I asked them to do at the time, since I myself, sadly, do not possess the requisite powers of evocation or means of expression; however much they may have nodded, strained and tried, I am sure that, in the end, they were incapable of it, simply because it is quite impossible to imagine such a scene. It is impossible to imagine how a grown-up man, well into his forties, who eats with a knife and fork, wears a necktie, speaks the language of the educated middle-class and, as senior editor-in-chief, can lay claim to unreserved trust in his faculty of judgement, impossible to imagine how such a man, unless he were drunk or had suddenly gone off his head, could all at once wallow in the mire of his own fear and, amidst spasms of twitching, squawk streams of such patent nonsense; it is impossible to imagine such a situation occurring, or rather, since it did occur, it is impossible to imagine how such a situation could have occurred; and finally, it is impossible to imagine the situation itself, the scene and all of its details: that group huddled together facing the ranting buffoon, the group made up of us, grown-up men and women in their thirties, forties, fifties, and even sixties and seventies, reporters, stenographers, typists, technicians of every sort, who listened in consternation, with earnest-looking faces and without a single objection, to those near-meaningless ravings that belied all common sense, reason and moderation by their self-negating anger, their veritable paroxysm of self-negation. Let me reiterate: the question of the credibility or incredibility of the words and the accusations—words more fitting to a pulp thriller and accusations reminiscent of mediaeval chronicles of heresy, which went far beyond the orbit of critical judgemen—did not so much as cross my mind at the time, for who could have made any judgement there, apart from those who did the judging? What sort of truth would I have been able to perceive there, aside from the truth of that ludicrous and, in essence, childish scene; oh yes, aside from the truth that anybody might be carried off, at any time, in a black car, aside from that, in essence, again plain childish, bogeyman-truth. Let me reiterate: the only thing sensed by that stupefied, irresolute, twenty-year-old young man (I), torn between his unremitting horror and his unremitting itch to laugh, was that the person who only yesterday had still been a bigwig there was today fit only to be

abused with the names of canine predators and to be taken off anywhere, at any time, in a black car—in other words, all that he (I) sensed was a lack of permanence. And now, before that friendly gathering which had been urging me to tell the story of the Union Jack, I was unexpectedly moved to declare that maybe morality (in a certain sense) is nothing more than permanence, and maybe people create conditions that can be designated as a lack of permanence for no other reason than to prevent a condition of morality from being established. If this declaration, which was uttered at the dining table, may of course seem exceptionally slipshod, and probably, indeed quite certainly, untenable under the much more considered circumstances of writing, I still maintain that there does at least exist a close connection between *seriousness* and permanence. Death, if we constantly prepare for it in the course of life as the true, indeed—as a matter of fact—sole task that awaits us; if we rehearse for it, so to speak, in the course of life; if we learn to see it as a solution, an ultimately reassuring, if not satisfying, solution—is a serious matter. But the brick that happens, by chance, to drop right on our head is not serious. The hangman is not serious. Odd, though, that even someone who has no fear of death fears the hangman. All I intend by all this is to describe, inadequately as it may be, my state, my state as it was then. The fact that, on the one hand, I was afraid, whilst, on the other, I was laughing, but above all, in some sense, I was confused, I might even say I reached a crisis point, lost the refuge of my formulations; my life, maybe due a quickening of tempo or *dynamics,* had become ever more unformulable, hence the sustainability of my way of life ever more questionable. Here I have to recall that professionally I was—or ought to have been—pursuing a formulation of life as a journalist. Granted, that a journalist should demand a formulation of life was a falsehood in its very essence: but then, anyone who lies is *ipso facto* thinking about the truth, and I would only have been able to lie about life if I had been acquainted, at least in part, with its truth, yet I was not acquainted, either in whole or in part, with the truth, this truth, the truth of this life, the life that I too was living. Little by little, I was therefore recategorised in the editorial office from *talented* journalist to *untalented* journalist. From the moment that I slipped, for a while at least, out of the world of formulability, and thus the sustainability of my way of life, the events going on around me—and hence I myself as an event—disintegrated into fragmentary images and impressions. But the camera lens which captured the jumbled images, sounds, and indeed thoughts was still, agonisingly and irreducibly, *me,* only it was a me that was growing ever more distanced from my self. The diabolical wooden spoon had once again scraped the very bottom of the human soup in the cauldron of *so-called world history* in which we all stew. I see myself there, in depressed listlessness, at meetings that stretch out to dawn, where the hounds of hell yap, the whip of *criticism* and *self-criticism* cracks on my back, and increasingly I just wait and wait for when and whither the door will open through which I shall be ejected

who could know where. Before too long I was to be stumbling around in rust-tinted dust beneath the interminable labyrinth of pipes of a murderous factory barrack-complex; bleak dawns smelling of iron castings would await, hazed day-times when the dull cognitions of the mind would swell and burst like heavy bubbles on the tin-grey surface of a steaming, swirling mass of molten metal. I became a factory worker, but at least it was possible, bit by bit, to formulate that afresh, albeit only with the vocabulary of adventure, absurdity, mockery and fear; that is, with a vocabulary congruent with the world around me, and in that way I more or less regained my life once more. That I would have a chance of re-gaining life *fully,* indeed that a *full life might be possible* at all—but now that I have already lived this life, now that what still remains of this life (my life) may also be considered as already lived, I must formulate it more precisely, indeed absolutely precisely: that a full life *might have been* possible—that is something I only began to suspect when all at once, after the formulations of adventure, I unexpectedly found myself, dumbfounded and fascinated, face to face with the *adventure of formulation*. This adventure to surpass all my adventures, however, I have to broach, as I remarked in my preamble, with Richard Wagner, but Richard Wagner, as I have likewise already signalled, had to be broached at the editorial office. When they first "took me on" at that editorial office, when I started going to work, day after day, at that editorial office, when, day after day, I telephoned in to that editorial office from the city hall (having been assigned to that column, the "City Hall column") the latest city hall news, indeed reports, I always formulated this aggre-gation of facts, and not yet entirely without reason, as "I am a journalist", since appearance and the activity that engendered that appearance, truly did permit me, by and large, so to formulate it. In my life that was the period of naive formulations, of unbiased formulations, when my way of life and its formulation did not yet stand irreducibly opposed to one another, or in an opposition that was reducible solely by radical means. What had carried me into that career, and therefore into that editorial office, was a formulation, a book I had read, that—above and beyond the necessity of making, so to say, a "career choice", and yes, above and beyond my irrepressible longing—I might cast off the shackles of parental harassments and a childhood prolonged by education. My stints as a commercial traveller in wines and in building materials having been brought to a close by laughable results, indeed quite simply with the result that I became a laughing stock, then attempts at the printing trade or, to be precise, typesetting, merely introducing me to the experience of futile torment and monotony, quite by chance—if such a thing exists, though I personally do not believe it (that is to say, chance)—a book came into my hands. This book was a formulation of the life of a journalist, a Budapest journalist, moving about in Budapest coffee-houses, in Budapest editorial offices, in Budapest social circles, pursuing relationships with Budapest women—more particularly, with two women, one a lady, referred to only by the name of her

French perfume, the other a girl, a poor, simple, honest creature, palpably finer than the lady with the branded perfume, because she was endowed with spirituality but had been born to be oppressed, thereby evoking perpetual twinges of social and metaphysical conscience, so to say—a totally false and falsified formulation, but one that, if memory serves me right, was presented with genuine longing, and thus genuine force of conviction. The book told about a life, a world, that could never have existed in reality, or at best only in formulations, the sort of formulations for which I too was later to strive, for purposes of the sustainability of my way of life, formulations which draw a veil over a life that is unformulable, that grinds ahead in the dark, stumbling about in the dark, lugging the burden of darkness—in other words, over life itself. That book about that journalist, and thus also, to some extent, about journalism itself, had no inkling about journalism in the disaster era, or about disasters at all; the book was *light-hearted* and *wise,* or in other words, an unwitting book, but a book that exercised a fateful influence on me with the allure of unwittingness. The book may well have lied, but, as I recall, it certainly lied honestly, and it is highly likely that I needed just such a lie at the time. A person always lights upon the lie he is in need of just as unerringly and just as unhesitatingly as he can unerringly and unhesitatingly light upon the truth he is in need of, should he feel any need at all of the truth, that is, of winding up his life. The book presented journalism itself as a sort of happy-go-lucky pursuit, a *matter of talent,* and that accorded fully with the totally absurd and totally unwitting fantasies I span at that time about leading some sort of happy-go-lucky but still somewhat intellectual life. I soon forgot about the book in some respects, but in others, never; I never re-read it, it never again came into my hands, and in the end the book itself went missing somewhere, somehow, and I never looked for it again. Later on, however, as a result of discreetly exhaustive probing, I came to realise that the book could have been none other than one of the works of Szép; more than likely, though this is just an assumption, since I have not corroborated it for myself, his novel *Adam's Apple.* And now that I had mentioned the book that influenced my life so profoundly, with the peculiar determinacy of dreams of a revelatory nature, after some hesitation I also revealed to the friendly gathering where they had been urging me to tell the story of the Union Jack that the author of that book, Ernő Szép, without my being aware that he was the author of the book (by no means one of the most significant of his life's works maybe, if indeed truly significant at all), around that time, that is to say when not only had the disaster long been undeniably visible, present and palpable, but nothing other than the disaster was visible, present and palpable, and, apart from the disaster, nothing else functioned, Ernő Szép was pointed out to me, a so-called "cub reporter", on one or two occasions, in the erstwhile so-called "literary" coffee-houses and cafés which still existed at that time, albeit only as disaster coffee-houses and disaster cafés by then, of course, into which strayed only shadowy figures seek-

ing some warmth, temporary shelter, and temporary formulations. And on one or two occasions—perhaps even two or three—I, the "cub reporter", was even introduced to Ernő Szép (who naturally never recalled my earlier introductions), purely for the sake of being able to hear him introduce himself with the phrase that has since attained legendary, nay, mythical status: "I *was* Ernő Szép." At this juncture, I proposed a minute's silence to the friendly gathering of my former students who had been urging me to tell the story of the Union Jack. Because, I told them, as the years and decades pass not only had I not forgotten that form of introduction, it actually came to my mind with increasing frequency. Of course, I said, you would have had to see Ernő Szép, you would have had to see the old chap who, before you would have been able to see him, *was* Ernő Szép: a tiny old chap who seemed to be relieved of his own very weight, swept along the icy streets like a speck of dust by the wind of disaster, drifting from one coffee-house to the next. You would have had to see, I said, his hat, for example, what was once called an "Anthony Eden" hat, of a shade that had evidently once been what was called "dove grey", which now teetered on his tiny bird's head like a battle-cruiser pummelled by numerous direct hits. You would have had to see his neat, hopeless-grey suit, the trouser legs bagging on to his shoes. Even then I suspected, but now I know for certain, that this introduction, "I *was* Ernő Szép," was not one of those habitual disaster jokes or disaster witticisms of this disaster city which, in the disaster era that had by then undisguisedly set in, were generally believed and accepted, because people could not believe, because they did not know or want to believe or give credence to anything else. No, that introductory form was a formulation, and a radical formulation at that, a heroic feat of formulation, I may say. Through this formulation Ernő Szép remained, indeed became the essence of, Ernő Szép, and at the very time when he already only *was* Ernő Szép; when they had already wound up, liquidated and taken into state ownership every possibility by which Ernő Szép had once still been permitted to be Ernő Szép. Simply a lapidary formulation of the actual truth condition (the disaster), couched in four words, which no longer had anything to do with wisdom or light-heartedness. A formulation which lures nobody towards anything but with which nobody can ever be reconciled, and by that token a formulation with a far-reaching resonance—indeed, in its own way, a creation which, I will hazard a guess, may survive all of Ernő Szép's literary creations. At this, my friends and former students started to mutter, some of them sceptically objecting that anyway the oeuvre, as they called it, is "irreplaceable", as they phrased it, and moreover Ernő Szép was at that very time gaining a new lease of life, at that very time people were starting to re-read and re-evaluate his works. I knew nothing, and in this instance once again did not even want to know anything, about this, since I am not a literary man; indeed, for a long time now I have not liked, and do not even read, any literature. If I search for formulations, then I usually search for them outside literature; if I were to strive for

formulations, I would probably refrain from formulations that are literary formulations, because—and maybe it suffices to leave it at this; indeed, there is truly nothing more that I can say—literature has fallen under suspicion. It is to be feared that formulations that have been steeped in the solvent of literature never again win back their density and lifelikeness. One should strive for formulations that totally encapsulate the experience of life (that is to say, the disaster); formulations that assist one to die and yet still bequeath something to posterity. I don't mind if literature, too, is capable of such formulations, but what I see more and more is that only *bearing witness* is able to do this; possibly a life passed in muteness without being formulated *as a formulation.* "I came amongst you to bear witness to the truth"—is that literature? "I was Ernő Szép" —is that literature? Therefore—and only now do I notice it—the story of my encounter with the adventure of formulation (and at the same time with the Union Jack) does not start, after all, as I originally supposed, with Richard Wagner, but with Ernő Szép; in either case, however, one way or the other, I have to and had to start with the editorial office. In the editorial office to which my fantasy, influenced by Ernő Szép, had borne me—under external circumstances ready, as ever, to comply with steadfast fantasy—in that editorial office, then, on a briefer and more condensed trajectory, so to say, though of course without leaving behind an intellectual trail of any kind, I trod the very same path that Ernő Szép had taken, from the unwittingness of wisdom and light-heartedness up to the "I *was* Ernő Szép"-type of formulation; all that I found on the site of the alleged erstwhile Budapest was a city that had tumbled into ruins, lives that had tumbled into ruins, souls that had been tipped into ruins, and hopes trampled underfoot amidst those ruins. The young man about whom I am speaking here (I) was also one of those souls, stumbling around on the way to nothingness amidst those ruins, although he (I) at the time still construed the ruins merely as some kind of film set and himself as an actor in that film—in any event, some splenetic, some acerbically modern film that was fraudulent in an acerbic and modern manner—a role that, being based entirely on the illusion seen from the auditorium, and oblivious to all disturbing circumstances (that is to say, reality, or the disaster), he (I) formulated as "I'm a journalist". I can see the young man on drizzly autumn mornings, the fog of which he inhaled just like the rapidly evaporating freedom; around him I can see the set, the blackly glistening-wet asphalt, the accustomed bends in familiar streets, their expatiations into the void over which the swirls of thinning fog gave hints of the river; the dank smell of the people who waited with him for the bus, the wet umbrellas, the boarding plastered with garish advertisements which concealed the wartime rubble of a ruined building, and on which site today, forty years later, another ruin stands, a peacetime ruin, the wartime ruined building having been replaced by a peacetime ruined building, a decrepit, eight-storey monument to total peace, corroded by premature death, patinated by atmospheric pollution, vandalised by every

sort of squalor, theft, neglect, infinite provisionality and futureless indifference. I can see the stairway up whose stairs he will hurry before too long, with that sense of security that delusion-driven people have which had impelled him (me) to declare "I'm a journalist"—with a certain sense of self-importance, in other words, which even the stairway in itself nurtured, that already long non-existing stairway, which at that time, however, hinted at an unambiguous reality, the reality of *real* editorial offices, *late* journalists, and *one-time* journalism, and the mood and reality which embraced all this; I can see the lame porter, the so-called "errand-boy" or, more accurately, office messenger, that singularly crucial person, who in those days was still so singularly crucial merely due to the singularly crucial services he rendered, hobbling nimbly between the rooms of the editorial office as he fetched and carried manuscripts and galley-proofs, and performed trivial but indispensable errands as zealously as he was ready to act as a lender of last resort for cash loans (at low interest), if the worst came to the worst; a person who only later on turned into an all-powerful, implacable, unapproachable Office Assistant, wrapped in the pelt of his arrogance, of the sort familiar to us solely from Kafka's novels and, to be sure, so-called *socialist reality*. On one such early-autumn morning, no, it was more forenoon already, most probably around the time of the gradual decrescendo from the clamorous chords of going to press, the "deadline", in those languid moments of slackness that derived from a certain sense of what could be called satisfaction, it so happened that one of the stenographers in the editorial office raised with me the question of which theatre I wanted free tickets for. The stenographer—I still remember him today: his name was Pásztor, and although he was at least fifty years older than me, I, like everyone else, called him Wee Pásztor, since he was a diminutive, exquisitely dapper little chap, with his neat suits, fastidious neckties, French-style footwear, one of those *parliamentary stenographers* who had been left discarded here in an era when Parliament had long ceased to be a parliament, and stenography was no longer stenography in an era of ready-made texts, off-the-peg texts, prefabricated, pre-digested and meticulously censored disaster texts—this stenographer, then, with his rounded little eunuch's paunch, his bald egg-head, his face reminiscent of carefully ripened soft-cheeses, his little eyes shifting anxiously in their narrow slits, therefore required especially tactful handling, all the more so as he was hard of hearing, something of a paradox, to put it mildly, for a stenographer, and as such—when in prisons and diverse penal institutions in the selfsame city, indeed only a few blocks away, the numbers of people standing in corridors, hands behind their backs, faces turned to the wall, were already starting to multiply rapidly, when summary courts were churning out their sentences at full blast, when everybody outside prison walls, everybody indiscriminately, could be regarded only as a prisoner released on indefinite parole—he continually fretted that his deafness, which everyone knew about, might accidentally be exposed, and he might be sent into retirement: this

stenographer, then, was the one who used to keep a record of the claims and entitlements to free tickets of the so-called fellow workers in that editorial office. I can still recall the ambivalent surprise that caught the young man, whom, as I say, I sustained and felt myself to be at the time, in the wake of the stenographer's accosting me at all, for on the one hand, he (I) had no heart for going to the theatre, simply on account of the disheartening plays that were performed in the theatres, whilst on the other hand, he was entitled to regard the mere fact of being accosted as marking the end of his apprenticeship, his coming-of-age as a journalist, so to speak, since those free tickets were earmarked exclusively for fully qualified and paid-up so-called colleagues. I recall that we pondered the miserable options for a while with honest, one might say fellow-suffering scepticism—he, an old man simplified to his trivial practical fears, and I, a young man with more complex and more general anxieties—during which our gazes, so foreign and yet so intimate, communed for a few seconds. There was one other choice: the Opera House. "*Die Walküre* is on," he said. At that time I did not know the opera. I knew nothing at all about Richard Wagner. All in all, I knew nothing about any operas, had no liking for opera at all, though as to why not, that would be worth reflecting on, but not here, not now, when I really ought to be telling the story of the Union Jack. Suffice it to say that my family liked opera, which may make it somewhat easier to understand why I didn't like opera. What my family liked, though, was certainly not the operas of Richard Wagner, but Italian opera, the pinnacle of my family's taste, I almost said tolerance, being the opera *Aida.* I grew up in a musical milieu—insofar as I can call my childhood milieu a musical milieu at all, which I cannot, because I would call my childhood milieu any other milieu but a musical milieu—in which the sort of remarks that were passed about Richard Wagner, for example, were of the kind "Wagner is *loud,* Wagner is *difficult,*" or, to mention a remark made in connection with another composer, "If it has to be a Strauss, then make it Johann," and so forth. In short, I grew up in a milieu that was just as stolid in respect of music as it was in every other respect, though that did not leave my taste completely unscathed. I would not venture to state categorically that it was exclusively the influence of my family, but it is an indisputable fact that, up until the moment when I got my ticket to Richard Wagner's opera *Die Walküre* from the stenographer Pásztor in that editorial office, I liked instrumental music exclusively, and I disliked any music in which there was singing (excepting the Ninth Symphony, and by that I mean Beethoven's, not the Mahler Ninth Symphony, which I got to know later on, much later on, at just the right time, at a time when thoughts about death started to present themselves, when I was making an acquaintance with thoughts about death, indeed, what I would have to call a process of familiarising myself with, if not exactly befriending, thoughts about death), as if in the human voice alone, or to be more precise, the singing voice, I saw some kind of polluting matter which cast a poor light on the music. All the musical precursors

of which I partook prior to hearing the Wagner opera had been purely instrumental precursors, chiefly orchestral, which I got to at best sporadically, primarily through the agency of that exceedingly testy old man at the Music Academy, known to every student or student type, who, due to some eye defect, wore a perennial look of distrust but, for a forint or two pressed into his palm, would let any student or student type into the auditorium, testily ordering them to stand by the wall and then, as soon as the conductor appeared at the stage door leading to the podium, would direct them in a harsh voice to any unoccupied free seats. It would be fruitless for me to muse now over why, how, and on what impulse I came to like music; it is a fact, however, that around that time, when I was still not yet able to call myself a journalist, when my perpetually problematic life was perhaps at its most problematic, because that life was at the mercy of my family, a family that was already on the point of breaking up around that time, and subsequently, during the disaster era, broke up completely, to be dispersed into prisons, foreign countries, death, poverty or even, in the rarer cases, prosperity, a life from which already then, as ever since, I was constantly obliged to flee; it is a fact, therefore, that even then, as little more than a child, I would have been unable to tolerate that life, my life, without music. I think it was that life which prepared me, or in truth I should say rather that life which *rehearsed* me, for the disaster-era life which ensued not long afterwards, palliated as it was by reading and music, a life comprising several separate lives that played into one another's hands, each able to annihilate the others at will, yet each holding the others in balance and constantly offering formulations. In this sole respect, purely in respect of this balancing, the balancing of small weights, my seeing and hearing *Die Walküre,* being receptive to *Die Walküre,* being pounced upon by *Die Walküre,* undoubtedly represented a threat in a certain sense: it cast too big a weight onto the scales. What is more, that event—Richard Wagner's opera *Die Walküre*—had an impact like a street mugging, a sudden attack for which I was unprepared in every sense. Naturally, I was not so uninformed as to be unaware that Richard Wagner himself had written the librettos of his operas, making it advisable to read through the texts before listening to his operas. But I was unable to procure the libretto for *Die Walküre,* any more than Wagner's other librettos, a state of affairs to which the pessimism induced by my milieu, and my lassitude induced by that pessimism—a lassitude that was always instantly ready for renunciation of any kind—no doubt also contributed, though to be completely fair I should add that in the disaster era, which happened to be the era in which Richard Wagner began to interest me, Richard Wagner was actually classified as an undesirable composer, and thus his opera librettos were not available for sale, his operas were generally not performed, so to this day I don't understand and don't know the explanation for why *Die Walküre,* of all his operas, was being performed, and with a fair degree of regularity at that. I do recall that some sort of so-called programme booklet was on sale, the sort of

disaster-era programme booklet which, alongside (disastrous) synopses of other operas, ballets, plays, marionette shows and films, also provided a five- or six-line synopsis of the 'content', so to speak, of *Die Walküre,* out of which I understood nothing at all, and which presumably—though this did not occur to me at the time—had been deliberately contrived in such a way that nobody should understand it; in truth, to hold nothing back, I was even unaware that *Die Walküre* was the second piece in an interlinked tetralogy. That was how I took my seat in the auditorium at the Opera House, which even in the disaster era was still an exceedingly agreeable, indeed splendid, place. What happened to me is what came next: "...the auditorium was plunged into darkness, and the overture commenced with a wild cadence down below. Storm, storm... Storm and thundery ardour, tumult in the forest. The bluff command of the God rang out and was reiterated, distorted by anger, with a compliant crack of thunder on its heels. The curtains whisked open as if blown asunder by the storm. The pagan hall stood there, the glow of its hearth in the dark, the towering outlines of the ash tree's trunk in the middle. Siegmund, a pink-cheeked man with a meal-coloured beard, appeared in the timber-framed doorway and leant, harassed and exhausted, on the door-post. His sturdy legs, swathed with animal pelts and thongs, carried him forward with tragically shuffling steps. The blue eyes beneath the blonde brows and the blonde curls of his wig fixed the conductor with a broken, almost pleading look; then at long last the music receded, paused, to allow the tenor's voice to be heard, which rang bold and true though dampened by his panting for breath... A minute passed, filled by the eloquent, singing, portentous stream of the music, a flow which surged onwards to the head of the events... Then Sieglinde entered from left-stage... which resounded low down as a profound, winding song. And again their looks became immersed in one another, again the deep melody unwound longingly down below in the orchestra..." Yes, that is how it was. Try as I might to follow it, straining my ears and eyes to the utmost, I understood not a single word of the text. I had no idea who Siegmund and Sieglinde were, who Wotan and the Valkyrie were, or what motivated them. "The end was approaching. A huge vista, a sublime purpose opened up. Everything acquired an epic solemnity. Brünnhilde slept; the God rose above the rocks." Yes, whereas I stepped out of the Opera House on to Stalin Avenue, as it happened to be called at that time. I shall not attempt—naturally, it would be pointless to do so—to analyse right here and now the so-called *artistic impact* or *artistic experience;* in essence—to resort, against my better judgement, to a literary simile—I went around in much the same way as the main protagonists in *Tristan and Isolde* (another opera by the same composer, Richard Wagner, which at that time I knew about only by hearsay) go around after they have imbibed the magic potion: the poison had penetrated deep within me, permeated me through and through. From then onwards, whenever *Die Walküre* was performed, as far as possible I would always be seated there, in the auditorium, for

apart from the auditorium of the Opera House, and the sadly all too sporadic performances of *Die Walküre*, the only other refuge that I found where I might occasionally shelter myself, if only with an all too fleeting fugitiveness, around that time, during that period of general, which is to say both public and private, disaster, was the Lukács Baths. In those two places, immersed in the pure sensuality of the then still green, hot-spring water of the Lukács Baths and in the both sensually *and* intellectually very different ambience of the ruddy gloom at the Opera, every now and then, in lucky moments, I would become aware of a presentiment, unattainably remote of course, of the notion of a private life. Even if such a presentiment, as I have already mentioned, was fraught with a certain implicit danger, I could not help sensing its *irrevocability,* and I was able to place my trust in that solid sentiment as in a kind of *metaphysical consolation:* put simply, even in the lowest depths of disaster, and in the lowest depths of consciousness of that disaster, I was never again able to carry on living as if I had not seen and heard Richard Wagner's opera *Die Walküre,* as if Richard Wagner had not written his opera *Die Walküre,* as if that opera and the world of that opera did not subsist as a world in the disaster world. That was a world I loved; the other I had to endure. Wotan interested me; my editor-in-chief did not. The enigma of Siegmund and Sieglinde interested me; that of the world which was really around me—the real disaster world—did not. It goes without saying that I was unable to formulate all this for myself so simply at the time, since it was not, nor could it be, so simple. I suppose that I conceded too much to the terror of so-called reality, which thereafter appeared to be the inexorable reality of the disaster, the one and only, unappealable, real world; and although for my own part, of course, I was now—after *Die Walküre,* through *Die Walküre—unappealably* aware of the reality of the other world as well, knowing of it, as it were, only in secret, in some sense with an illicit, and thus incontrovertible, but nevertheless guilty, knowledge. I suppose I did not yet know that this secret and guilty knowledge was in fact a *knowledge of my self.* I did not know that existence always sends word of itself in the form of secret and guilty knowledge, and that the world of the disaster was in fact a world of this secret and guilty knowledge raised to the point of self-denial, a world which rewards only the virtue of self-denial, which finds salvation solely in self-denial, and which is therefore—however we look at it—in some sense a religious world. Thus I saw no *connection* of any kind between the disaster world of *Die Walküre* and the real disaster world, even though, on the other hand, I had unappealable cognisances of the reality of both worlds. I simply did not know how to bridge the chasm, or rather, to be more accurate, split consciousness, which separated these two worlds, just as I did not even know why I should feel it was my task—and a somewhat obscure, somewhat painful, yet also somewhat hopeful task at that—to bridge that chasm or rather, to be more accurate, split consciousness. "...He looked into the orchestra pit. The sunken space was bright against the au-

ditorium and a hive of industry: hands busy fingering, arms bowing, swollen cheeks puffing, humble, assiduous mortals performing in the service of a work of great passionate force, this work which was manifested up above in childishly sublime guises... A work! How did one make a work? A pain stirred in his breast, a fervour or yearning, something like a cloying sorrow—for where? for what? It was so vague, so humiliatingly unclear. He sensed two words: Creativity... Passion. And whilst his temple throbbed fierily, a craved-for insight: creativity is born of passion and in turn assumes the form of passion. He saw the pale, exhausted woman clinging on the lap of the fugitive man, he saw their love and distress, and he felt: this was how life had to be in order to create"—I read those words like somebody who was reading for the first time in his life, like somebody who was encountering words for the first time in his life, secret words that spoke to him alone, interpretable by him alone, the same thing as had happened to me when I saw *Die Walküre* for the first time in my life. The book—Thomas Mann's *Wälsung Blood*—was about *Die Walküre,* as its very title divulged; I began reading it in the hope that I might learn something about *Die Walküre* from it, and I put the book down in a shock of amazement, as if I had learnt something about myself, as if I had read a prophecy. It all fitted: *Die Walküre,* the fugitive existence, the distraughtness—all. I ought to note here that between first receiving *Die Walküre,* my first engulfment by *Die Walküre,* and my first engulfment by this little book years—suffice it to say, years full of vicissitudes—had passed by; so, in order to clarify my assertion that "it all fitted", I shall be obliged at this point to digress slightly, to give at least an outline of the circumstances in which I was living at the time, all the more so that I too may find a steady bearing in the weft of time and events and not find I have lost the thread of this story, the story of the Union Jack. This book—*Wälsung Blood*—came into my hands after my wife-to-be and I, with the assistance of a good friend of ours, one fine summer morning traversed half the city, from the former Lónyay, then Szamuely and today once again Lónyay, Street with a four-wheeled tow cart, on which were piled, to put it simply, the appurtenances of our rudimentary household. This happened in the nick of time, since the lodgings in Lónyay (or Szamuely) Street that my wife-to-be and I had been inhabiting, had by then started to become unbearable and uninhabitable. I had become acquainted with my wife-to-be in the late summer of the year before, just after she had got out of the internment camp where she had been imprisoned for a year for the usual reasons—in other words, for no reason at all. At that time, my wife-to-be was living in the kitchen of a woman friend from earlier days, where the woman friend had taken her in, for the time being, because somebody else happened to be living in my wife-to-be's apartment. That certain somebody, a woman (Mrs Solymosi), had taken over the apartment immediately after my wife-to-be's arrest, under extremely suspicious—or if you prefer, extremely usual—circumstances, through the intervention of exactly the same authorities that—essen-

tially without any verifiable reason, indeed on no pretext at all—had arrested my wife-to-be. Practically the moment that she learned of my wife-to-be's release, that certain somebody (Mrs Solymosi) immediately requested my wife-to-be (by registered letter) to have the furniture my wife-to-be had unlawfully stored in the apartment that rightfully belonged to *her* (Mrs Solymosi) instantly removed to the place where they were currently lodged (which is to say, the kitchen of the woman-friend from earlier days who was taking her in, for the time being). When later, thanks to a protracted legal action, but above all unpredictable circumstances—a lucky stroke let's call it—my wife-to-be got her own apartment back, we discovered, amongst some abandoned odds and ends, books, and other junk, pegged together with a paper clip, a bundle of paper slips covered with the pearly letters of a woman's handwriting, from which I don't mind quoting a few details here, under the title of, let's say, "Notes for a denunciation" or "Fragments of a denunciation", purely as a contribution to a legal case-study, or even to an aesthetics of the disaster, as follows: "She has lodged various complaints against me at the Council and the police, that I illegally moved into the apartment and stole hers... She imagined she could scare me with her slanders, and I would give up the apartment to her... The apartment has been allocated definitively; there is no space for her furniture in my apartment... *Furniture:* 3 large wardrobes, 1 corner couch, 4 chairs... She should put them into storage, I am under no obligation to keep them after what is already 11/2 years..." There follow a few items of data that would appear to be reminders: "17/10/1952 application, 29/10 allocation, 23/11 apartment opened up, inventory taken, 15/11 move in, 18/11 ÁVH [State Security], Council = ÁVH, ÁVH 2x—no response, Rákosi's secretariat... In September 1953 Mrs V." (i.e. my wife-to-be) "Mrs V. a.m.... Asked her by reg. letter to remove furniture... Have to keep my own furniture in cellar because I'm $\sqrt[\text{dirty}]{\text{looking}}$ after her stuff... Her wardrobes are crammed full of clothes, under ÁVH seal, can't be aired... She claims she doesn't have an apartment and is lodging as a guest. Does that mean she doesn't need the things in the wardrobe? The woman puts on a good act and is quite capable of sobbing, if required, but I've had enough of that, and I won't tolerate her furniture in my apartment any longer either—". So we had had to spend the disaster winter that lay before us, which was ushered in at the very start by temperatures of twenty to twenty-five degrees below zero, in various temporary shelters, including the aforementioned kitchen of the woman-friend from earlier days, a spare room of distant relatives, surrendered on a very explicitly temporary basis, an exceptionally charmless sublet room, made especially memorable by its ice-cold toilet on the outside corridor, and so on, until a miracle—admittedly, all too temporary as it turned out—in the shape of Bessie, a former snake charmer and her Lónyay (or Szamuely) Street sublet apartment, dropped into our lap. It doesn't matter in the slightest now how and why this miracle occurred, but it would be wrong to leave out of this story—the story of the Union Jack—the earthly mediator of this

heavenly miracle: a grey-templed gentleman, known as Uncle Bandi Faragó in the cafés and night-clubs around Nagymező Street, who, somewhat flashily for those times (the disaster times) and the occasion (the disaster), used to wear an aristocratic, green hunting-hat, a short sheepskin coat, and English-style tweeds, had a complexion that, even in the deathly pale winter, glowed with a permanent suntan, and besides that, allegedly, pursued the exclusive occupation of a professional conman and adulterer, as was indeed confirmed decades later when, from a newspaper bought out of sheer absent-mindedness (since the so-called news was of no real interest to me), I was silently and genuinely shocked to learn about his death in a well-known common prison, where, allegedly, a permanent cell, his slippers and a bathrobe were set aside for him even during the days that he spent on release; and who one afternoon, in one of those cafés around Nagymező Street, one of those cheap, noisy, draughty, gloomy and filthy cafés with music, which, though they had been run down by the state as immoral, were at least heated well by the state, and kept open until late at night by the state, had become an illicit day-and-night shelter for outcasts and in which my wife-to-be and I were temporarily residing much of the time, so to say, instead of in our temporary residences, suddenly came up to our table, and, really without any prior or more direct introduction, declared, "I hear that you're looking for lodgings, my lad." Then to my apathetic admission, which ruled out all hope in advance, "But why didn't you come to *me,* dear boy?" he asked in a tone of such self-explanatory, profound and uncomprehending reproach that, in my shame, I was lost for words. Later, after we had gone to the imparted address in Szamuely Street, where the door was opened by a lady, getting on in years and—as Gyula Krúdy might have put it—of statuesque figure, with yellow forecurls peaking from under her green turban, the face slightly stiffened by heavy make-up, and wearing a curious silk pantaloon besprinkled with magical stars and geometrical designs, who, not content with a verbal reference, did not allow so much as a toe into the hallway until she had glimpsed the message written in Uncle Bandi Faragó's own hand on Uncle Bandi Faragó's own calling card; so when this lady led us, my wife-to-be and me, to the room that was to let, a spacious corner room with a bay window, the dominant furnishings of which were a decidedly oversized divan, big enough for at least four persons, a mirror placed in front of it, and a standard lamp with a shade, plastered with all sorts of obsolete bank notes (including the million and billion pengő denominations that had been in currency not so long before) that gave a mystic lighting effect, my wife-to-be and I did not doubt for one second the original purpose to which the room had been put, and it seemed most probable (and at once a clue to the miracle) that around that time, in that era of denunciations, the room's intended purpose—who knows, maybe due to a denunciation that just happened to be pending—all of a sudden did not, to be concise, seem expedient. Things may have changed by the spring, but during that winter we had the

chance to peek into our landlady's past: we could see her as a young woman, wearing an ostrich-plumed silk turban, a giant speckled snake coiled around her naked back, in some night-club in Oran, Algiers or Tangiers, which there, in that Lónyay (i.e. Szamuely) Street disaster-sublease, struck one as indeed quite extraordinarily implausible, and we could handle and ritually marvel at a profusion of relics which were every bit as implausible; later on, however, the snake charmer became despondent, and it was apparent from her increasingly consistent frame of mind that, above and beyond the hostile feelings towards people that naturally arise in one as time goes by, she was not guided by the random targets of that transcendental antipathy, after all, so much as by very palpably down-to-earth goals: she wanted to regain her room, because she had other, presumably more lucrative, plans for it. I shall try to skip the details as quickly as possible, for those details can only be related in this spirit, the spirit of formulability, which is by no means the same thing, of course, as the real spirit of those details, which is to say the way in which I lived and survived that reality; and this nicely illustrates the iron curtain that rises between formulation and being, the iron curtain that rises between the storyteller and his audience, the iron curtain that rises between one person and another, and, in the end, the impenetrable iron curtain that rises between a person and himself, between a person and his own life. I woke up to all this when I read those words: "...he saw their love and distress, and he felt: this was how life had to be in order to create." Those words, all at once, awakened me to my life; all at once, I glimpsed my life in the light of those words; those words, or so I felt, changed my life. That book, which from one second to the next swept away the haze of my formulations from the surface of my life, so I might see that life, all at once, face to face, in the fresh, startling and bold colours of seriousness, I discovered in the new (that is, repossessed) apartment, absolutely out of place, absolutely implausibly, in the manner—I remain convinced to this day—of a miracle that spoke to me alone, amongst the forgotten odds and ends, the above-mentioned denunciation slips, and, thumbed to tatters, several volumes of pulp, shock-worker, partisan and romantic novels, the latter of defunct imprints. That book, so I felt, marked the start of the radicalisation of my life, when my way of life and its formulation would no longer be able to stand in any sort of contradiction with one another. By then, the time when I had been a journalist, or even a factory worker, had already long gone; by then, I had committed myself to my seemingly boundless, but also supposedly boundless, and intentionally boundless studies, being able, thanks to a congenital organic ailment, to absent myself from my occasional jobs for months on end without running any immediate risk in the meantime that my mode of existence would, in all likelihood, qualify as a crime of so-called 'publicly dangerous work-shyness'. At that time, all this completely preoccupied me, producing in me a sense of exaltation, of *mission.* I suppose it was then that I became acquainted with the experience of *reading, reading* for noth-

ing in particular, an experience in no way comparable with the experience of reading as it is generally understood and designated, the sort of reading bouts, or mania for reading, which might overcome a person at best just once or twice in a lifetime. Around that time there also appeared a book by the author of *Wälsung Blood,* a volume of essays, in which there was the essay on Goethe and Tolstoy, whose chapter titles alone—"Questions of Rank", "Illness", "Freedom and Eminence", *"Noblesse oblige",* and the rest—were enough in themselves almost to dumbfound me. I recall that I read this book all the time and everywhere I went; the essay on Goethe and Tolstoy was tucked under my arm all the time and everywhere I went: it was with me when I boarded trams, went into shops, wandered about the streets— and so also, one especially fine early afternoon in late autumn, when I set off for the *Istituto Italiano di Cultura per l'Ungheria,* the Italian Institute of Culture, where, at the time, in my boundless thirst for knowledge, I was learning Italian, and during my passage across the city I registered, indeed, here and there, even participated, at least as an astounded spectator, in the intoxicating events of a day that was later to become memorable, a day that I or anybody else could hardly have guessed would turn into that particular memorable day. I was, I recollect, somewhat surprised when I turned off the Múzeum Boulevard into the otherwise normally deserted Bródy Sándor Street, hurrying towards the nearby palace of the Italian Institute, which had originally been built as the one-time Hungarian Parliament. The lesson, however, started at the due time. After a while, the street noise penetrated into the room, even through the closed window. Signore Perselli, the finicky, jet-black-moustached *direttore,* for whom, on his rare visits to lessons, it took no more than a blatantly clumsy pronunciation of the word *molto* to be excited into demonstrating how it should be done with Italian fluidity, with the initial o closed and the final o short, the intervening consonants being articulated with the tongue drawn back, almost like saying malto, on this occasion burst into the room, in genuinely frantic haste, to exchange a few no doubt diplomatically apprehensive words with our teacher before scurrying on to the other classrooms. A minute later, everybody was at one of the windows. In the slowly gathering dusk I could clearly see that on the left, towards the front, green rockets were being launched from the Hungarian Radio building above the heads of the darkly milling crowd of protesters there. At that very moment, from the opposite direction, three open-topped trucks turned into the street out of the Múzeum Boulevard; from above, I had a good view of the reaction unit, with the green markings of border guards, who were seated on the benches, rifles squeezed between their knees. On the back of the first truck, leaning against the driver's cabin, stood a lieutenant, evidently the commander. The crowd fell quiet, opened ranks, then roared out. It is quite unnecessary for me to evoke here the manifestly pathetically affecting words that they started to shout to the soldiers from down below, words which only at that given moment, that elevated moment of pathos, were

able to exert an effect of genuine pathos. The trucks slowed down in the dense crowd, then came to a halt. The lieutenant turned about and raised his arm aloft. The last of the trucks now started to back out of the street, to be followed by the other two, amidst jubilation from the crowd. At this moment, we, who, from an Italian diplomatic viewpoint that held itself to be above and beyond all this, had no doubt suddenly become unwelcome guests, capable of who knew what sort of emotional or other manifestations, were ordered to gather downstairs, beneath the long, neo-Renaissance vaulting of the entrance-way. The heavy, two-leafed gate was bolted from the inside with iron bands. There we squashed together, between the sounds assailing us from outside and the security guards standing by behind us, until the Institute's burly porter, evidently on some signal being given, swung the iron bands back and swiftly threw open the gate, through which each and every one of the sixty to eighty of us, on a vigorous shove being applied from the rear, found ourselves, in a trice, deposited outside, on the by now twilight street, in a vortex of buffeting sound, swirling movement, ungovernable passions and inscrutable events that teemed amidst the buildings. In the ensuing days my attention was divided between the essay on Goethe and Tolstoy and the events that raged outside; or to be more precise, the cryptic and unformulable promise which inhered in the essay on Goethe and Tolstoy, in the gradual comprehension and eventual acceptance of it, was linked in my mind, in a strange but quite self-explanatory manner, with the equally unformulable, similarly uncertain, but at the same time wider-ranging promise inherent in the external events. I cannot say that the events that were stirring externally diminished my interest in the essay on Goethe and Tolstoy: to the contrary, they heightened it; on the other hand, I also cannot say that whilst I was totally immersed in the world of the essay on Goethe and Tolstoy, and the spiritual and intellectual jolts of that experience, I *also* absent-mindedly paid occasional attention to the events that were stirring in the street: no, that is not what happened at all, I would have to say instead, however strange it may sound, that the events stirring in the street *vindicated* the heightened attention paid to the essay on Goethe and Tolstoy; the events stirring in the street during those days thereby *bestowed a genuine and incontrovertible sense on the heightened attention I was paying to the essay on Goethe and Tolstoy.* The weather turned autumnal; several quieter days ensued; down below on the street, of course, but especially on looking out from the window, I could see how much the street had changed: detached overhead tramway cables snaking between the rails, dangling bullet-riddled sign boards, smashed windows here and there, fresh holes in the pealing stucco of the houses, dense throngs of people on the pavements of the long, long street, all the way up to the distant corner, and, very occasionally, a vehicle, a passenger car or lorry, tearing by at great speed, with some highly conspicuous distinguishing marks, the more garish the better. A hurtling jeep-like motor suddenly appeared, with the British red-white-and-

blue colours, a Union Jack, draped over the entire radiator. It was scudding at breakneck speed between the crowds thronging the pavement on either side when, sporadically at first, but then ever more continuously, evidently as a mark of their affection, people began to applaud. I was able to see the vehicle, once it had sped past me, only from the rear, and at the very moment when the applause seemed to coalesce, almost solidify, an arm stretched out hesitantly, almost reluctantly at first, from the left-side window of the car. The hand was tucked into a light-coloured glove, and though I did not see it from close up, I presume it was a kid glove; probably in response to the clapping, it cautiously dipped several times parallel to the direction in which the vehicle was travelling. It was a wave, a friendly, welcoming, perhaps slightly consolatory gesture, which, at the very least, adumbrated an unreserved endorsement and, by the by, also the solid consciousness that before long that same gloved hand would be touching the rail of the steps leading down from an aircraft onto the runway on arrival home in that distant island country. After that, vehicle, hand and Union Jack—all disappeared in the bend of the road, and the applause gradually died away.

So much, then, for the story of the Union Jack. "Johnny showed unbounded pleasure at the prospect of the fight; neither he nor Brattström felt any of the anxiety that overcame me," I read during the severe winter that soon set in, during which my aforementioned ailment flared up again, so to speak, in the form of a fever of reading, or perhaps it was my reading fever which flared up again not long afterwards in the form of the aforementioned ailment. "Johnny declared repeatedly, with that delightful rolling of his r's, that the two boys would fight with utter seriousness, as befitted men; then, with a cheerful and somewhat sardonic objectivity, he weighed up the chances of victory... It was from him that I gained my first impressions of that sense of superiority, so typical of the English national character, which I later learned to admire so much," I read.

What naturally also belongs to the story, perhaps needless to say, is that several days later, on that same bend in the road, but coming from exactly the opposite direction to that in which the Union Jack had disappeared, tanks suddenly veered into sight. All but wavering in their haste, their uneasiness, their fear, they always paused for a moment at that bend and, though the road, the pavement, the district, the city, everything was by now deserted, with not a person, not a sound, not a soul to be found anywhere, the tanks, as if anticipating even a stray embryonic thought, each and every time let off a single cannon round, strictly one, before clattering onwards. Since the gun position, direction and trajectory were always the same, for days on end they always pounded the same first-floor windows, outside and eventually interior walls of the same decrepit, Secessionist-style apartment block, so that finally the yawning void looked for all the world like a corpse's mouth, gaping in terminal wonderment, all of whose tooth were about to be knocked out one by one.

But here we really do reach the end of the story of the Union Jack, this sad but maybe not all that significant story. It would never have entered my head to tell it had that friendly gathering of former students who mustered to celebrate, there's no denying it, my all too round-numbered birthday not appealed to my better nature, whilst my wife was busy outside in the kitchen, preparing a cold snack and drinks for them. For them, they said, for "younger people", there are no longer any, as they put it, "primal experiences"... they only ever know and hear about tales of heroism and horror stories, or perhaps horrific tales of heroism and heroic horror stories... that birthdays are a fine thing, but, with due consideration to my fluctuating blood pressure, my "revolutionary" pulse of at best forty-eight beats per minute, the pacemaker that I will anyway, sooner or later, find is unavoidable... not to put too fine a point on it, lest I too should take my stories and experiences, my whole knowledge of life, with me to the grave, when there are hardly any more authentic witnesses and tellable tales, and that they—a "generation", as they put it—are left here with their wealth of objective but totally lifeless and routine knowledge and facts... and so forth. I tried to reassure them that there was nothing wrong about this; that, anecdotes apart, every story and everybody's story is one and the same story when it comes down to the essentials, and that these essentially selfsame stories are really essentially all horror stories; that essentially every event is really a horror event, and even history too had long, long ago become essentially, at best, just horror history. But then how come, they asked at this point, that in the course of my own particular horror history I was able to recount spiritual and intellectual experiences of the kind that I had recounted; what had been left of the continuation of what, in the course of my account, I had called "my mission"; or had I, perhaps, given up on the "mission"; moreover, what had stood out for them from my entire story was something that, they said, they had actually always suspected and assumed about me, namely, that by retreating inconspicuously into my own narrow area of expertise, I had lived a diminished life, though I might also have pursued an intellectual existence and, if merely in my area of expertise, been creative—in other words, as they said, where and how had the "break" in my, so to say, "career" occurred. I was staggered to hear that, for it meant I had told them the story of the Union Jack to absolutely no purpose; it seems that they, the children of destruction, no longer understand, are *unable* to understand, that the devastation of total war had been turned by total peace into complete and, so to say, perfect destruction. Just one remark about an intellectual existence: even if I had happened to pursue an intellectual existence, I could only have done this at the price of self-denial, that is, I could only have pursued at best the *appearance* of an intellectual existence; thus, whether I chose an intellectual existence or I chose to forsake an intellectual existence, in any event self-denial had been the one and only choice open to me. And so, reckoning that naturally they would anyway not understand, were *unable* to understand, I tried

to explain to them that it was not at all a matter of my, as it were, "relinquishing" what I had characterised as my mission, which is to say that there should no longer be a contradiction between my way of life and its formulation, or at least not a radical contradiction. I cited that great philosopher of history, Wilhelm Dilthey, with whom I had endeavoured—so far as I could, so far as I was *free* to do so—to familiarise them, my former students, when they were still in their student years: "Understanding presupposes living, and an event only becomes a life experience if understanding guides living out of its narrow and subjective being into the realm of the whole and the general." I, so I feel, had done that. I had understood that I could only be creative here in the act of self-denial; that the sole creation possible in this world, *as it is here,* is *self-denial as creation.* I may have expressed myself extremely, but that doesn't matter, since they did not understand anyway: to that extent, and in consistent cognisance of that, I told them, I had lived, had understood and had fulfilled, if I may put it this way, the morally obligatory experience of life—life *as it is here,* and to that extent my life is a life of paying witness—so I am content. I reminded them of the formulations cited in the story, the story of the Union Jack: "I came amongst you to bear witness to the truth", and "I *was* Ernő Szép". There is no more ultimate lesson, no more complete experience, than those. As to what this is all for, what *precisely* this is for, what experience is for—that's another question, I reflected later. Who sees through us? Living, I reflected, is done as a favour to God. And whilst attention turned to the arrival of the dishes, the glasses raised and clinked in celebration of my birthday, I reflected, if not exactly with impatience but with a certain sense of expectant relief, that the more promising future which is nowadays threatened from all sides is something that I myself neither have to live through nor understand. ❧

(1991)

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

György Spiró

In Art Only the Radical Exists

I have Péter Hajnóczy, the talented writer who died of alcohol-induced liver failure in his thirty-eighth year, in 1981, to thank for Imre Kertész.

Hajnóczy was a clever, cultivated fellow, only bothering to hide that from the uninformed. In the spring of 1975 he turned up one day in the editorial offices of Corvina Press (he was in the habit of looking me up once a week to chat with me, for hours on end, in my room there), and on this occasion, having worked off his systematic trashing of my first novel, *Cloister* (entirely justified, I may say), he added agitatedly, "Now, Imre Kertész. Shit! That's the real thing! *Fatelessness.* Shit! There's the real thing! Unbelievable. That you just have to read!"

No sooner had Hajnóczy left than I slipped out into Váci utca, which in those days was full of book shops, and in the first one bought the rather slim, seemingly insignificant volume. I studied the picture of the author on the jacket: a hard-set face with the rugged features of what looked like a balding, retired pugilist in a roll-necked sweater, ready for anything, looked out at me, not head on but somewhere off to the right, the head slightly tucked in as if in readiness to trade punches.

By the end of that very same day I had read the whole book. I was bowled over, and in the ensuing days I alerted every one of my friends that this was a book they too had to read.

I waited for the critics' responses to appear. One very nice, laudatory review made it into print, along with two other well-disposed little pats on the back. Nothing else.

In February 1976 I was granted a three-week period of residence at the state-run writer's retreat in Szigliget. In the late 1940s, the leaders of Hungary's liter-

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György Spiró,

a novelist, playwright, essayist, translator and Slavic scholar, teaches East European literature at Eötvös University. He is the author of four novels, collections of short stories and numerous plays, some of which were also produced outside Hungary.

ary life had taken a leaf from the Soviet pattern book in converting one of the Esterházy family's former mansions, at the northwestern end of Lake Balaton, into a place where writers could be herded together, the more readily to keep tabs on them, in return for which the writers were superbly cosseted at next to no expense and given the facilities to work as they pleased. The retreat still operates to this day, though it could no longer be said to be cheap.

During supper on the first day, my attention was caught by a vaguely familiar, sturdy figure in a roll-necked pullover who was pecking at his food at one of the tables on the row over by the dining-room windows. By the end of the meal I had realised that he could be none other than Imre Kertész. I noticed how he interacted with his dinner companions, worthy Hungarian writers all, and could only say that his way of conducting himself was conspicuously odd. Beaming very politely at them and nodding profusely, every now and then he would let escape some declaration of wonderment. I sensed that he held them in the profoundest contempt.

As he was making his way out, I got to my feet and accosted him, "You're Imre Kertész, aren't you?" He was obliged to come to a halt. A polite grin appeared on his face—exactly the same as the one he had bestowed on his dinner companions. I introduced myself and said I had been hugely impressed by *Fatelessness.*

"Oh, really?" he asked, bowed politely, and, if that were possible, grinned even more politely at me, an impersonal face in the crowd that was so worthy of contempt, and then swept on out of the dining room.

At supper the following evening I again planted myself in his path. I could see this was irksome for him and, were it up to him, he would rather flee to the far end of the Earth. I had never tried to curry favour with anybody, writers least of all, nor did I myself accept friendships that were offered me even by well-known, established figures, with the sole exception of György G. Kardos; writers are to be read, not to make friends with. All the same, Kertész's polite, obsequious guardedness irritated me. So I said to him, "You know there is a thing or two in *Fatelessness* that doesn't come off."

That was the first time he looked me straight in the eye. He was surprised.

"What was that?" he asked.

We went out into the corridor and stood there talking non-stop for around two hours.

Over the remainder of the three weeks we did very little else but talk. Our third companion on the walks we took, liberally punctuated by huge gusts of laughter, was István Bart, then an editor with the Európa Press. Or rather, we did also do other things: Kertész happened to be working on *A nyomkereső* (Hunting for Traces), and I on *Az ikszek* (The X-es), but the main thing about those three weeks was the chance to talk with Kertész. He treated everyone else as if they were retards, according their every utterance with unqualified endorse-

ment, nodding gravely in agreement, and every now and then letting out an astounded "Fancy that!" or "Really?", whilst Bart and I, standing slightly to one side, would be well aware that at times like this Kertész was either in slumber mode with his eyes open or else laughing uproariously to himself.

At the end of the three weeks, I regretfully set off back home. Kertész stayed on: his subvention lasted up to the end of March. He was able to stay two or even three months at the retreat because he had no job and his income was zero, and in those days the authorities were still prepared to make exceptions for such individuals, extending them loans that were deducted in monthly instalments from their subsequent earnings. We parted with an agreement that I would call him as and when he got back to Budapest.

At home, I told Mari, who was later to become my wife, that I had made the acquaintance of Imre Kertész. Mari's eyes lit up, as of course she too considered *Fatelessness* to be a masterpiece.

"What kind of chap is he?" she asked.

"Hard as nails," I replied.

I called him at the beginning of April. I was a bit apprehensive that he would not remember me, but he did remember and, what is more, it was he who made the suggestion that we meet somewhere. I ventured that I was thinking of bringing along my sweetheart as well, to which he said he would bring his wife. He proposed we meet at a bench in the park at the Buda head of Margaret Bridge. Baffled and somewhat surprised though I was, that was the arrangement we settled on.

On the appointed day, Mari and I were seated on the bench when, all of a sudden, Imre materialised in an impeccable lightweight suit, as stylishly turned out as a lounge lizard throwback from the Thirties, and by his side, in a beribboned dress that had seen better days and was more suited to a teenage girl, was his wife, who, we could not help observing, seemed older than Kertész. Imre greeted us rather uneasily, whereupon we perched ourselves on the bench, one beside the other, like sparrows on a telephone wire, with Kertész and Mari at the two ends. Albina, Imre's wife, started talking. Her manner of speaking was astonishing, an inimitable mishmash of the parlance of draymen and the primmest of ladies, of the demotic and the wit of a literary salon. By the time she was into her fourth sentence Mari and I were howling with laughter, whilst Imre nervously monitored the impact. Having ascertained that we had fallen madly in love with Albina in two minutes flat, he suggested we go up to their flat, a stone's throw away in Török utca.

That was our first visit to the bedsitter that Kertész describes with such deadly accuracy in *A kudarc* (The Washout), and from that day on, for long, long years thereafter, a week would hardly pass without us basking at least once in the glory of his wit and Albina's patter. They in turn were frequent guests at our place, once our own apartment was finally completed, with Imre often using it to

do his work, as our nominal cat-sitter, whenever we went away anywhere. Albina, then working as a waitress and the sole wage-earner, had been born in Szabadka (Subotica), the main town of what is now the Serbian province of Voivodina; the daughter of a genteel family, she had been imprisoned for a time during the Rákosi era, later drove trucks, and could get by in all the major Western languages and even converse in Serbian. Whilst she conjured up culinary marvels in the tiny recess that they called their kitchen (the dishes had to be done in the bath tub), Kertész, in his most elegant (and only) tracksuit, would be ensconced on a rickety chipboard armchair, under a standard lamp, and philosophise. What wonderful conversations those were: they were all that made the Seventies and Eighties intellectually tolerable for me. With his lucid, sceptical mind, Kertész shone light on many crannies of the human past, present and future that I was not yet mature enough to see for myself. Little did I suspect at the time that one day, much later on, I would incorporate some of his stories and certain details of Albina's life (naturally, only after first having asked for and received Imre's permission) into one of my plays.

There was nothing truly literary about our friendship, for all that we often analysed the works of great writers, or rather their basic stances. We were paying calls on a great man who had a fantastic and rather wearing spouse, though one who gave herself unstintingly in the service of her husband's art, and over time the author of *Fatelessness* and the subsequent works became someone separate, for Mari and me, from Imre the person. He is at least as great a person as he is a writer, we concurred. How marvellous it was too when we also got the chance, whether at the Kertész's or at Szigliget, to meet up with Pista Kállai, the childhood friend, who has faithfully followed Imre in his passage through life, just as he has Pista. It is humanly impossible to laugh more than we did when Imre and Pista, the popular sketch-writer, launched into their spiel. You would be wrong to imagine that a great writer's life is continually wrapped up in the intricacies of *Wesen* and *Dasein*; it is more than enough to write about them. It is my firm belief that Imre Kertész was freest in that perfect isolation, in the total absence of recognition and positive critical reception. And if we are asked to imagine his main protagonist as being happy in Auschwitz, as he asserts at the end of *Fatelessness*, then he himself was at least as happy under Hungary's dictatorial régime, intellectually free of everything that shackles the mind. He adjusted his strategy in life to a catacomb existence: if that is what a man was reduced to, then he should turn it to good account as best he was able. A positive programme, this, and radical. It was from him that I heard something that very much stuck in my mind: "in art only the radical exists." Something I try to follow myself.

It used to infuriate me, however, that virtually no one else was aware that here was a great writer who was living and working in Budapest. Hungary still had a number of great writers at that time, but they were already recognised. Not Imre Kertész.

Still living then was János Pilinszky, the great poet, with whom Kertész built up a close relationship at Szigliget; still living was Sándor Weöres, one of the twentieth century's greatest poets and dramatists, though he never showed up at Szigliget, nor indeed in any other company by then. Living then, as he does to this day, was Ferenc Juhász, who might equally have deservedly had a Nobel Prize bestowed on him for the epic poems that he published during the Sixties; still living was Gyula Illyés, who was then writing the fine poems of his old age; and living then was György G. Kardos, who might likewise have become a Nobel laureate for any of his three novels set in post-war Palestine, and, furthermore, had even been acquainted with Kertész in the Budapest nocturnal underworld of the early Fifties, which no one else knew quite as intimately as they did. As a matter of fact, the times during the Sixties and up to 1972 during which Kertész was writing *Fatelessness* were a great period—intellectually great, that is to say, because life then was still unpleasant and uncomfortable in our part of the world. But there were issues for thinking people to reflect on at that time, and they were still able to snatch the time to do that. The several centuries of continuity of Hungarian thinking about art had not yet been ruptured, but Hungarian writers and poets had already tasted the successive brief periods of Stalinist oppression, the 1956 Revolution, the reprisals, and the Communist consolidation that proved the most sapping of all. It was peacetime, and yet virtually everyone led a wretched existence. People were not dying of starvation, but there was no chance for a talented person to garner much material success either. Those are times when it is truly possible to think. And people did read: there was just the one TV channel, and that too was a pack of lies.

Imre Kertész's decision to shed the trappings of a highly remunerated writer of musical comedy scripts and become a true writer is singular only in hindsight. That was at a time when, after the lifting of Stalinist era censorship, world literature all at once began to flood into Hungarian culture. From the early Sixties, in the columns of the monthly journal *Nagyvilág* (Wide World) and through the good offices of the Európa publishing house, a string of hitherto banned Western and Soviet works appeared in print, with Kafka and Camus foremost amongst those that had a strong influence on Kertész. Then there were the essays of Thomas Mann, and Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche (he was later to translate the latter's *The Birth of Tragedy*), as he pushed back in time, revealing to himself the presence of the twentieth century already in the nineteenth. It was also a time when Kertész, a passionate music-lover, was able to encounter the works of the great classical and modern composers at Budapest's Music Academy and Opera House.

Such a release of dammed-up waters can be highly inspirational for a person who is preoccupied by concerns about form. Kertész made a very deliberate decision that he was going to become a true writer, in full awareness of what that would entail. It was then, with no job and not taking on paid work (his wife,

Albina, supported both of them with her waitressing), that he began teaching himself Italian, English and German. He systematically read up everything that had been written anywhere about the Second World War and the Holocaust, diligently delving through the diaries and notebooks of the Nazi war criminals who had been sentenced to life imprisonment. Few people in the world are greater experts on fascism and nazism than Kertész. By chance, I happened to be present at Szigliget as he debated, night after night, with the distinguished historian Mária Ormos, the best of Mussolini's biographers and a thorough, unprejudiced scholar of Hungarian twentieth-century history. The insights they threw up were penetrating and, for me, surprising enough for several distinguished scholarly careers to have been built on them.

It was from Kertész that I first heard about Primo Levi and Jean Amery. Like us, he had a very high regard for the volume of short stories by Tadeusz Borowski that was put out in Hungarian, in 1972, under the title *Kővilág* (The World of Stone); indeed, there is one detail in *Fatelessness*—that there really was a football pitch at Auschwitz—for which he found corroboration in one of Borowski's stories, because although he had a distinct recollection of this, he had not seen it mentioned anywhere and had started to believe he must have been mistaken. We were unanimous too in dismissing Jorge Semprun's *The Long Voyage* as sentimental, ideologically tainted tosh.

I try to think back to what it was that Mari and I really thought back then about *Fatelessness*. It was not the subject itself, the fact that someone had written a readable novel about the camps in Hungarian. Unlike the bulk of Hungarian intellectuals, we both spoke Russian and had read all the banned authors: Solzhenitsyn, Shalamov, Akhmatova, Evgeniya Ginzburg, Nadezhda Mandelstam, Andrei Platonov, Bulgakov, Chukovski,... in short, all the giants who had produced such shattering accounts of totalitarianism and the Gulag world. But the seemingly ingenuous yet deeply ironic tone, the strange and unique amalgam of viewpoints of the protagonist as both a fifteen-year-old boy and the later adult, that Kertész perfected for himself over ten years of labour, straining for exactly the right inflection for every single sentence—that was something we had encountered in nobody else's works. One of the premises of Kertész's novel, which is that the peacetime and wartime world are structurally identical, and thus Auschwitz, far from being a tragic twentieth-century slip-up on the part of 'normal' society, was its logical consequence, is also to be found in Borowski's short stories. However, Kertész was able to delineate his hero's trajectory from a false peacetime into the camp, and back again from there to an equally false peacetime, within the large-scale form of a novel, and this further differentiates him from Borowski, the Polish genius, and his tightly organised cycle of short stories.

Of the major writers who were carried off to Nazi concentration camps, Primo Levi, Jean Amery and, soonest of all, Tadeusz Borowski, at the age of 29, were all

to take their own lives during the ensuing post-war peace. They were unable to come to terms with the fact that people had manifestly learned nothing from Auschwitz; humanity continued to rush arrogantly, uncomprehendingly and obliviously into the next atrocity, without any regard for the many millions of innocent victims. The great writer, Varlam Shalamov, whose *Kolyma Tales,* that magical volume of short stories, condenses the experiences that he had accumulated during several decades spent in the Gulag, likewise effectively took his own life, Russian-style, cracking up completely and dying as a chronic alcoholic in a Moscow old people's home. The only authors who were able to get over their horrendous experiences were those who found refuge in some kind of religious faith, whether Judaism or Communism, like Elie Wiesel or Semprun.

Kertész is the great exception. He did not take refuge in any religion or ideology, nor did he take his own life. Morality and aesthetics are indivisible, and thus he too had to think through the perspective of the loss of one's sense of identity, which he indeed did in the works that followed *Fatelessness,* the novels *The Washout* and *Kaddish for the Unborn Child,* also, for the most part, narrated in the first person singular, yet he was not tempted by thoughts of suicide. One may conjecture that his temperament was his salvation: I have met few other writers who took such transparent pleasure in the delights that life offers, whether women, food, drink, pretty scenery, good books, or good music, as Imre Kertész, a hedonist at heart, for all the decades that he spent in near-hermit-like privation, seclusion, and deliberately chosen solitude.

I count it as one of the few truly bright ideas in my life that in the early Eighties, having briefly achieved the status of a fashionable writer, I took a deep breath, wrote an essay about *Fatelessness,* and offered it to the weekly literary and political journal *Élet és Irodalom* (Life and Literature), the only platform of its kind at that time, and the one that, for want of other options, was compulsory reading for every Hungarian intellectual. The deputy editor, God rest his soul, was most reluctant to print it. The novel was not new. It had been reviewed at the time, seven or eight years previously. Besides, it was a mediocre work, the subject had been done to death. What was the point now? Still, because I was flavour of the month and very determined, grudgingly, with pained expressions all the way, they finally put it in: a couple of years earlier, or even a year later, they would not have bothered. Such is life.

The fact remains, though, I have Péter Hajnóczy to thank for Imre Kertész, and Hajnóczy was accordingly the prime mover in the slow but ever surer spread of his reputation abroad. Hajnóczy made an effort to get closer to Kertész, turning up at his flat every now and then with a bottle or two of wine tucked under his arm. What he could not have known, poor fellow, is that this was not the way to do it. He would have been better able to gain Kertész's attention by launching into some rather footling conversation about *Fatelessness* that only

the illest of wills could have gainsaid. But he, good writer that he was himself, hugely admired the great writer and was shaken off, dying not many years later of drink.

The ever-dwindling ranks of Hungary's intelligentsia, ever less widely read as time has gone by, actually slowly latched on to *Fatelessness* and Kertész's other works: as Magvető, his current Hungarian publisher, recently disclosed, they were able to put out his books in a print run of only 3,000–4,000. That is a hard fact. At the time Kertész was working on *Fatelessness,* the works of the better writers—provided they were not at odds with the régime—came out in editions of as large as 60,000–80,000; in other words, by the time he became recognised, during the Nineties, the print runs had declined to one-twentieth of their former size. Only a tiny fraction of the intelligentsia still reads literature elsewhere in Eastern Europe too, for that Hungarian print run of 3,000–4,000 would count as a major success in Poland, with a four times larger population, and indeed as a signal success even in New York.

The camp of many tens of thousands of Kertész readers that built up in Germany during the Nineties was no freak: German intellectuals still read, perhaps the last such bastion in Europe and even, one may hazard a guess, the world. Though persisting German guilt has unquestionably contributed to the success of Kertész's books in that country, it does not entirely explain it. The Germans contritely publish more or less any anti-German book that is written, but there is not a trace of anti-German sentiment in Kertész's books. Nor of anything anti-Hungarian, for that matter. He is no philo-Semite, but he is not anti-Semitic either, notwithstanding the fact that a Jewish-born, Communist director of the Magvető publishing house cited the latter as grounds for refusing to publish *Fatelessness* in the early Seventies. Kertész has gone on record as asserting, quite rightly, that *Fatelessness* cannot be bent to serve any political or ideological ends.

For all that, Kertész's career is anomalous. He introduced himself to the public, in 1975, with a masterpiece as his very first work. Once his reputation had slowly begun to be established, he began publishing, bit by bit, the various notes —some subsequently refashioned and expanded into essay form—that had occurred to him during the Sixties whilst he had been struggling to put *Fatelessness* into shape. Those non-literary notes which predated the intellectual peak of the masterpiece have since seen the light of day in several volumes, most notably in *Gályanapló* (Galley Boat-Log), and during the Nineties he has put together a couple of volumes of edited lectures and statements that were directed primarily at German readers. These include some magnificent essays, yet one has the impression that this is someone who has climbed Everest and is now putting out snapshots that were taken, not at the summit, but on the way up, at various intermediate camps.

Strange as it may seem, *Fatelessness* is Kertész's least "Jewish" work. Nevertheless, he has been obliged—not least in the light of the resurgence of

anti-Semitism in Hungary during recent years—to arrive at some kind of response to questions regarding his identity: whether he is Hungarian or Jewish, or possibly a Hungarian Jew, not to say a Jewish Hungarian, or rather a European who happens to write in Hungarian and is either just a little bit or very Jewish indeed. These are ideological and political issues which serve only to distract him from the cultivation of serious literature. Some Hungarian admirers of Kertész's art are somewhat dismayed to mark this process, seeing it as a prime example of the general retreat into which serious literature has been driven across the world these days. Whenever I get into that mood, I am in the habit of reassuring myself that Isaac Bashevis Singer was already a Nobel laureate before he sat down to write his best work, his autobiography.

Non habent sua fata libelli—books do not have their own fate. That was the sardonic inversion of the much-quoted fragment of Terentius Maurus' poetry that I used as the epigraph for my essay about *Fatelessness* nineteen years ago. Now I could not write that: *Fatelessness* has had its own fate, after all. Though some extraordinary strokes of luck undoubtedly played their part, that is nevertheless the outcome, first of all, of a concerted effort by Imre Kertész's numerous fans, above all in the West. But a big part has also been played by the indefatigable energy, supreme diplomatic tact, and unceasing solicitude of Imre's second wife, Magdi (and I am proud to have been asked to act as one of the witnesses at their wedding). It also needed the selfless support that Imre was given in launching his career in the West by his Hungarian writer friends, Péter Nádas and Péter Esterházy; it needed the efforts of his translators, editors and publishers, a string of foundations, and Sweden's Hungarian community; it needed the spreading of the word that was done by those two eminent emigré musicians, György Ligeti and András Schiff; and, perhaps above all else over the last decade, it needed Germany's literary big business, which still attracts the services of sterling people. After all, sterling people can be found in all places and at all times, even in peace-time, not just in the death camps, as Imre Kertész has so appositely remarked.

In 2002, then, the world's supreme literary distinction was conferred on somebody for a masterpiece. That may be a rarity, but it does happen. The world will not become a better place than the one that Kertész portrays in his works, let us not delude ourselves on that point. But when a fitting opportunity presents itself to celebrate, we should not pass it up. ❧

Péter Nádas

Imre Kertész's Work and His Subject

Imre Kertész's literary work, for the greater part, has always been obscured by his subject, and it will take a goodly lapse of time yet for that not to obscure it. The monstrous attempt at the total disfranchisement, dispossession and destruction of European Jewry is not the sort of story or subject that can be dealt with on a Tuesday and set aside on the Wednesday. The statute of limitations does not apply. It cannot be refashioned in hindsight, in line with the wishes of family histories, so as to be forgotten, along with other historical crimes regarded as pardonable. The collective attempt at the total disfranchisement, organised dispossession and systematic destruction of European Jewry was a consequence of the conscious intellectual efforts and coordinated mental conditioning of several European generations. Not even remotely can it be considered an operational hitch of either European or Hungarian history. There is no absolution for it, ecclesiastic or secular, nor will there be. And even if someone does not bear personal responsibility in this connection, that is not to say that he does not bear an enduring historical responsibility.

Over the past fifty-eight years, the reality of Auschwitz has become a universal touchstone for an ethical approach, for political thinking, and for legislation. It cannot be avoided even by nationalists and fascists, those who would have the greatest interest in doing so. They are obliged to dissociate themselves from the very thing they would wish to do all over again. Ethnic cleansing, mass murder and genocide no longer figure amongst legitimate national fantasies. The historical experience of Auschwitz acts as a high threshold against which every one of us, every day of the week, can individually measure off the degree and efficacy of his own personal ignorance, or the trustworthiness of his own good faith. Anyone not contemplating Auschwitz cannot contemplate God. No one can contemplate the human dragon's brood and leave out Auschwitz. Neither state

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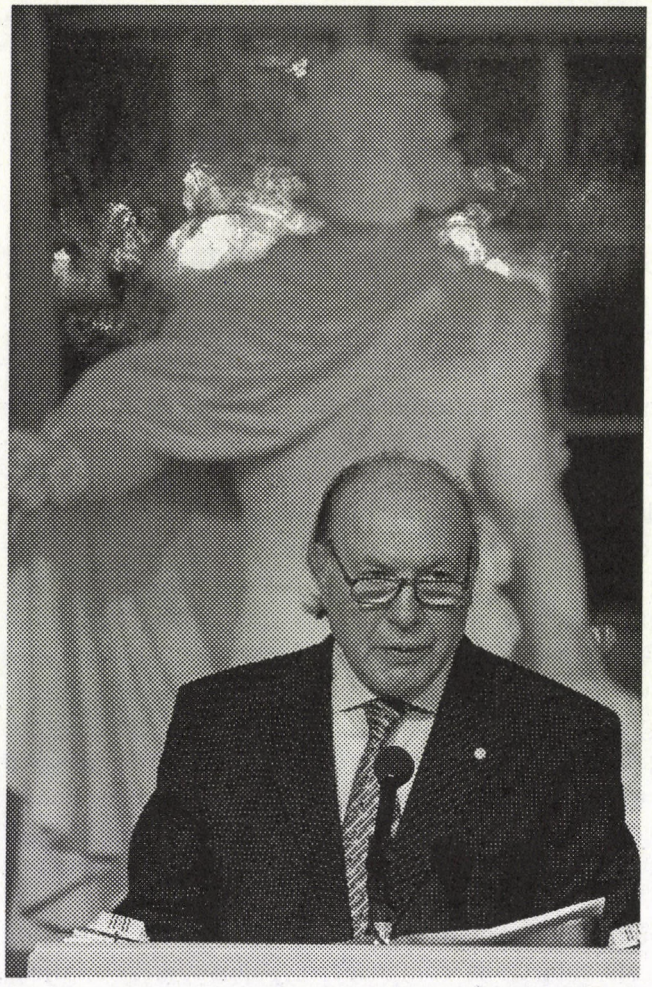
***Péter Nádas**'s*
novels have been translated into several languages, including English.



Imre Kertész delivering the Nobel Lecture, 7 December 2002, Stockholm.

institutions nor churches, neither families nor private individuals may step over this high threshold of the collective conscious. Neither those born yesterday, nor those born today.

They may, at best, not intentionally step over into the adjoining room. Even then, however, they must reckon with the consequences of their isolation.

Without Auschwitz the human image limned by European culture cannot be drawn. We see it in the Mona Lisa's coolly ethereal smile; its corpses stick out from beneath the Isenheim Altar. God is not dead. But masks, make-up, painted images, finery and shrouds are no longer of assistance to man. The several millennia-old divine image of self-veneration and self-pity really and truly vanished definitively in the corpse-burning pits of Majdanek and Sobibor, the ovens of Auschwitz and Ravensbrück, and in the goods yards of Szeged, Nyíregyháza, Debrecen, Miskolc, Pécs, Zalaegerszeg and Mohács. Christianity does not have

some other, more ideal reality, a history that is separable from Auschwitz. There can no longer be a Christian theology without Auschwitz.

Oddly, Imre Kertész's literary work is obscured not only by his subject, but that enormous subject also obscures what might be called his more intimate subjects.

His subjects are internested like some ghastly Chinese puzzle.

He recognised Auschwitz as the most profound, essential reality of European culture by looking back from the continuity of dictatorships to the one and only, beautiful Auschwitz of his own childhood. It is the great structural insight of his literary work that Auschwitz cannot be seen when viewed from Auschwitz, but from the standpoint of the continuity of dictatorships it can be looked back on as if it were a treasured memory. In a dictatorship every content of consciousness is distorted from the start. It is a painful insight to see continuity where others wish, at best, to see only a short-circuit in civilisation, the inexplicable workings of evil, or a product of chance. This conception of historical reality, of the human endowment and condition, permits no sentimental illusions either in looking back or in looking ahead to the future. Neither has it any reference with the aid of which one might place a comforting equals sign between Red and Brown dictatorships and, à la Ernst Nolte, excuse the criminal acts of one with the criminal acts of the other. What has happened today can also happen tomorrow. In the pause for thought whilst the execution squad reloads, Kertész identifies the connection, designates the points of intersection of dictatorships. He makes it clear how the Chinese puzzles of European history and human nature nest within one another.

This language, this culture, this state of order—none of this is accidental or arbitrary.

Just one—albeit indisputably a substantial—part of Imre Kertész's literary work that is obscured by his subjects is comprised of philosophical analysis. That might, in principle, have been carried out in any of the world's languages. It is intriguing nevertheless that he has chosen to carry it out in the material of a language whose concepts have barely been scratched hitherto by any spade-work of philosophical scrutiny. In a language which, at best, recognises the philosophical interpretations of other languages, but has no self-sufficient philosophy of its own. In his literary language Kertész has turned this drawback, a near-general absence of analysed and fixed conceptual substance, into an advantage. He has fashioned the surfaces of a dispassionate way of viewing things from the material of the Hungarian language. In hindsight, it can now be seen that the malleable sentence structure of Hungarian gives the language the ability to adopt a dispassionate view. In the pause of a feeling charged by two commonplaces, with a barely flinching gaze, Kertész's sentences take note of painful reality. He has thereby created a new quality for the Hungarian language's sense of reality. ❧

Tim Wilkinson

Kaddish for a Stillborn Child?

Translating is so very much a matter of individual choices and style that it is hard to comment on another's work without appearing to nit-pick. The style Imre Kertész adopts in *Kaddish for the Unborn Child* depends crucially for its effect on its weaving together of a densely poetic web of allusions and associations. It is very clearly constructed as a stream-of-consciousness text that runs together numerous strands of memory, of both personal and wider cultural significance, in setting out the reasons why the narrator chooses not to father a child. Sustaining that delicate web in the target language (English) must be a prime task for any translator who hopes to pass on an idea of its magic in the Hungarian. Even quite small disruptions or distortions are jarring.

The problems with the American translation, for me, start with the title: *Kaddish for a Child Not Born* (Nortwestern University Press, 1997) sounds and is awkward, a signal of more awkwardnesses (and worse) to come. Besides the lumpy prose, the text is so riddled with errors that one is forced to conclude that the translators were unequipped for the task—a sadly all too common event with the miserably few Hungarian works that get published in the UK or America (a long-running average of one or two titles per year).

For some inexplicable reason, the quotation from Paul Celan's 'Death Fugue' used as a motto at the front of the Hungarian text is omitted. This is not a trivial slip, as the whole poem is the direct source of some of the most striking imagery in the text (the page references are to the American edition): not just what is in the epigraph—"...more darkly now stroke your strings then as smoke you will rise into air / then a grave you will have in the clouds there one lies unconfined" (p.16), but also lines such as "he whistles his Jews out, in earth has them dig for a grave" (reference omitted on p. 20, 27, 66); "death is a Master from Germany his eyes are blue / he strikes you with leaden bullets his aim is true" (lamely rendered, on p. 45, as "Death is a blue-eyed German maistro and magister, he may come at any time, wherever he

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Tim Wilkinson,
an Englishman, is an editor and translator who spent three years in Hungary in the Seventies, subediting academic journals. He has translated a number of Hungarian scholarly books (mainly on history) and works of fiction.

may find you, he'll take aim and he never misses"); "your golden hair Margarete / your ashen hair Shulamith" (p. 57). Kertész himself has remarked that "the Paul Celan motto was only added to *Kaddish* at a later stage, when I noticed that my sentences were quite involuntarily following the poem's rhythm of thought. Earlier on I had often read the text in the original German, because it is virtually untranslatable, and then I found that the images and metaphors of my own text were returning, time and time again, to Celan's *Fugue.*"

That is not the only puzzling omission, incidentally. At the very least, the translators seem to be bulæmics of sorts, as well as having no comprehension of what air-raid precautions might be, for on page 16 we get: *"No, indeed, the village relatives (I no longer remember how we were related, why should I, anyway, they have dug their graves a long, long time ago in the air where the smoke from their remains dissipated), they were real Jews: prayer in the morning, prayer in the evening, prayer before food, prayer with the wine...other than that, they were fine people, though unbearably boring, of course, for a little boy from Budapest. I believe the war had already started then, but as everything was still quiet and beautiful here, we merely practised darkening the windows;..."* (Try: "...no, the 'auntie' and 'uncle' (I no longer recall exactly how we were related, but then why would I recall, they long ago dug their graves in the air into which they were sent up in smoke) were real Jews, with prayers in the morning, prayers in the evening, prayers before meals, prayers over the wine, but otherwise decent people, even if unbearably dull, of course, for a young boy from Pest, their food dripping with grease, goose, cholent, and suety raisin slices of flódni. I think war had already broken out, but everything was still nice and quiet here in our country, they were still only conducting blackout drills,..."). More food aversion on pages 20–21: *"I don't want to remember, in this respect, not even in the sense of the famous *...* dipping ladyfingers into premixed spiced tea instead of the famous *...*. Although, of course, I do want to remember..."* What the hell is that supposed to mean? Someone freaking out? You might be forgiven for not noticing that this is a straightforward reference to Proust, because the actual Hungarian text runs more like: "...I don't want to remember, to dunk ladyfingers, as it were, in my cup of Garzon scented tea-bag mixture, instead of the madeleine cakes that are unknown, even as unobtainable articles, in this benighted part of the world, though of course I want to remember..."

The Shulamith referred to above is misprinted as *"Julamith"*, by the way. Nor does *"a stardust melody"* (p. 20) have quite the signification of 'Stardust Melody'. It is equally irritating, if not downright puzzling, to find (on p. 25) *"Hauthausen... Hain Street"* (did the printer runs out of m's?). Similarly, on page 30, one might just about work out what is meant by *"...he is the demon, who takes all our demonlike qualities upon his shoulders, like an Antichrist shouldering his iron cross, and doesn't insultingly escape our claws to prematurely hang himself like Stravrozin."* But might it not help if this were set into proper English? "...he is the devil who will carry all of our own devilishness on his shoulders, like an Anti-Christ bearing the Iron Cross, and will not insolently slip through our fingers to string himself up before the time, as Stavrogin did." More seriously, back on page 25, is the word *"Kistavesa"*, which any reader would be forgiven for not recognising is actually 'Kistarcsa', one of several notorious places on the outskirts of Budapest that Eichmann's SS *Sonderkommando* (and their willing

Hungarian helpers) set up as a transit camp for deporting the Jews to Auschwitz in 1944.

That leads straight to egregious mistranslations. Does it matter that the Hungarian word which in English means 'beech wood' is translated (p. 1) as *"oak forest or glade"*? One tree is pretty much like another, after all. Well, try the German for beech wood: 'Buchenwald...' (And the tree motif is picked up later, with an oblique reference to a line from one of Horace's Odes, quoted by both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche: "Why do you torture your poor reason for insight into the riddle of eternity? Why do we simply not lie down under the high plantane? or here under this pine tree?"). A similar failure of cultural bearings on the translators' part means you will probably miss the allusion to Arnold Schönberg's composition in *"...the last soma Jisroel of the Warsaw captive..."* (p. 20). But most hilarious of all is (p. 80): *"His Most Honorable Highness the Governor, dressed in a hat as large as the sea and a mysterious fringed uniform."* Anyone might guess that this refers to Miklós Horthy, Hungary's head of state from 1920 to 1944: "His Serene Highness the Regent, in his admiral's cap and that arcane uniform with the tasselled epaulets" Yes, the translators have read the Hungarian word for 'admiral'—*tengernagy*—literally as 'sea-big'.

It gets no better when it's a question of figures that one might hope were common knowledge, even in America. On page 12, for instance, we get *"I only do this as really simply a precautionary measure, as if I were, or rather, had been, a cautious, promiscuous person moving in AIDS-affiliated circles."* How does a "circle" of people affiliate to AIDS? Is it a club? Try: "...I adopt that pose merely as a prophylactic, as if I were a wary libertine moving around in an AIDS-infected milieu..."

What you're getting, dear reader, is bunkum, and not even the most astute amongst you could guess that the work of a deserved Nobel laureate was behind the original on which this travesty is based (p. 82): *"Scandal ... was the term they used to describe these inevitable, always unexpected, and, one could say, rain falls. You must imagine these... in the manner of when a drunk gentleman, after controlling himself for a while, finally gives in to temptation and falls down with a sigh, relaxing..."* The Hungarian text shows that this puzzling association of rainfall with scandal is just a figment of the translators' imagination: "Scandal... that's what they called these irresistible, always unexpected plunges into licentiousness, so to say, which you should imagine, I said to my wife, as somewhat like an inebriated gentleman, who, having kept a strict hold on himself for a good while, suddenly yields to temptation and falls down flat on the ground in relief..." ❧

Géza Mezei

Hungary and the Construction of Europe

The process of integration which produced the European Union (EU) can be described as an ambitious and highly successful example of peaceful cooperation among sovereign states. In the past half century Europe has liberalised trade, coordinated national macroeconomic policies and centralised regulatory decision-making. A single market and single currency mean that most new Western European legislation concerning commercial and financial matters now originates in Brussels rather than in the national capitals. The majority of European statesmen, businessmen and citizens believe that the EU has contributed to unprecedented wealth, prosperity, peace and democracy throughout the region.

To what, in fact, does this unifying Europe owe its existence: considerations of national security, the power of federative ideas, the ingenuity of resolute politicians, or the triumph of economic rationalism and technocratic planning? There are at least three different, but closely related, views that underpin conceptually the attempt to create a unified Europe. According to the first, the idea of European unity goes back to common cultural and religious roots, the integration aimed at surpassing the sovereignty of nation-states is essentially a teleological and normative process, which should lead to a federal Europe. In this interpretation the traumatic experiences of two world wars acted as a catalyst of unity, which had long been desired on the level of ideas, and to which the resolve of a small group of dedicated politicians was eventually conjoined.

Another approach rests on a traditional interpretation of international relations. It endeavours to position the West-European attempts at unity within the balance of power in a bipolar world. Complementing, as it were, this argument is

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Géza Mezei

has published extensively on the history and politics of Central and Eastern Europe in the 20th century and on international political institutions. Since 1992 he has worked in various functions in the Parliamentary Assembly and in the Directorate of Political Affairs at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

the third view, a functional approach, which emphasises the increasingly international nature of the quickly rebuilt Western economies; accordingly, ever closer economic cooperation is thought to have been strengthened by the demands and expectations of continuous economic growth and far-reaching technological changes. From this perspective the West-European community represented first and foremost an economic alliance, which was capable of both fending off the outside threat of Soviet Communism and of neutralising the dangers of German hegemony within it. Finally, in the post-Cold-War system uniting Europe may be considered a necessary and inevitable answer to the challenges of the "global economy," with an added strategic motivation, that of presenting the Union to the world as a politically potent entity.

Here I shall attempt to illustrate the different sources and traditions that have influenced the construction of Europe, and—at the same time—to show the changing perceptions and policies between 'Europe' and Hungary in the second half of the 20th century.

The brutal peace of 1945 and the emergence of Yalta's Europe

By the end of the Second World War it had become evident that the independence of East-Central Europe had ceased and that the whole European state system had vanished: Washington and Moscow were the real centres of power.

Another result of 1945 was that 'right-wing revolutions' became widely discredited in the eyes of the (European) masses, though the fall of Nazism in itself by no means put an end to 20th-century secular religions. On the contrary, Hitler willy-nilly became responsible for the formidable growth in the power and authority of the Stalinist Soviet Union.

What is more, the German attack on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 had returned Stalin's regime to the democratic camp, putting it on an equal footing with Great Britain and the US. Communism was again praised as anti-Fascist, and hence democratic. The great paradox of the war was that the Western democracies were able to overcome Hitler only with the help of the Russian sphinx. In the hour of the victory of the anti-Nazi coalition Moscow stood resplendent in the moral authority of its power and ideology. The triumph over Hitler made everyone forget the true nature of Stalin's regime.

At the same time, both British and American post-war planners considered East-Central Europe the natural sphere of interest of the Soviet Union, and their main political aim was to ensure an autonomous existence (for these countries) within the context of strong Soviet geopolitical and strategical influence. As the new US President, Harry S. Truman put it bluntly in Potsdam, "Nazi aggression had opened up the floodgates to the East... thanks to Hitler, we shall have a Slav Europe for a long time to come. I do not think it so bad." (Trachtenberg, 1999)

By 1945, the growing number of Soviet *faits accomplis* showed that Moscow considered the hegemony over East-Central Europe as crucial for her security. At the same time, Stalin had different agendas, pursued different priorities with regard to the respective countries: free elections were held only in four states in the Soviet-dominated part of Europe: in Finland, Austria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

The victory of the Smallholders Party and the general electoral success of the non-communist forces in Hungary attracted worldwide attention. But as early as December 1945, the historian István Bibó already maintained in a perspicacious article that "Democracy was in crisis because Hungary lived in fear."

Moscow's initial reliance on a coalition government lasted longer in Hungary than elsewhere. Yet Stalin felt it increasingly difficult "to distinguish between influence and domination... between friendly governments and puppet governments." Moscow preferred total control over them, and by 1948 Hungarian parliamentary democracy had also succumbed to the deadly embrace of the Kremlin.

The Soviet veto of the Marshall Plan and the Cominform strategy

The Marshall Plan, successful both economically and politically, probably became the best known and most influential American initiative ever. Two generations of those post-war politicians who played a decisive role in the rehabilitation of Europe were convinced that without the generous support of the United States, Stalin's henchmen would have seized power not only in Prague and Budapest, but also in Berlin, Rome and perhaps even in Paris. Stalin in turn considered the Plan a declaration of war, a threat not only to his plans for Europe, but also to Soviet–German relations. The aid plan rekindled and then fanned the dictator's suspicion of the outside world. Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov's dramatic walk-out at the Paris conference convened to discuss the Marshall proposals (2 July 1947) also had grave consequences for the hopes of a unified Europe.

The Soviet answer to the American initiative came in September 1947, when the nine European Communist Parties Stalin deemed the most important met in Poland, and their Information Bureau (Cominform) was set up. In accordance with the 'Cominform strategy,' the Communist Parties in the people's democracies sought, from the autumn of 1947, to establish invulnerable power positions, which involved the annihilation of all organised opposition, and as a result of which uniform regimes came into being throughout the region. The countries of Eastern Europe came under the complete hegemony of Moscow, their sovereignty becoming purely formal.

The Communist takeover in Prague (February 1948) and the Soviet blockade of the western sectors of Berlin (from June 1948) highlighted the image of an aggressive Soviet foreign policy, an inauspicious image which was to remain vivid long afterwards, and was instrumental in stirring those European nations which escaped Soviet control to seek an ever closer union.

Over and above the historical economic retardation of Eastern Europe, the immense development gap between the two parts of the continent is chiefly the result of the Cold War. Moscow forcefully held back the countries east of the Elbe, its own security zone, from the emerging Western economic civilization: it prohibited membership not only in the institutions that came into being under the aegis of the European Recovery Programme, but also in those that were set up in the wake of the Bretton Woods Conference (the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank).

Stalin's answer was to enforce an autarchic economy based on Soviet economic penetration and dominance, its embodiment being the Council for Mutual Economic Aid (Comecon), set up in 1949. According to certain though far from conclusive estimates, between 1945 and 1955 the Soviet Union withdrew what was the equivalent of 13 billion dollars from the occupied Eastern and Central-European countries, almost exactly as much as Washington provided for those countries which participated in the Marshall Plan. A further interesting parallel is that Austria paid 1.5 billion dollars worth of compensation to the Soviet Union, and received aid to the same value under the Marshall Plan. (Borhi 2000)

1947 marked the beginning of the systematic breaking off of all well-established economic ties between the countries east of the Elbe and the West. The fate of these countries had been sealed, before the final political assault, on the level of their economies. By the end of the Forties the private sector in commerce, industry and banking had ceased to exist and a market economy had disappeared, just as had their self-regulating societies. Once the one-party system was established and the separation of powers was abolished, their parliaments lost their functions. The economy became the servant of politics, the forced development of heavy industry, for instance, being motivated not so much by economic as by political considerations. (To appreciate the turn in economic relations, it is only necessary to consider the fact that the Soviet Union had become Hungary's chief foreign trade partner by 1949, although in 1938 it had been responsible for merely 0.11 per cent of all Hungarian imports and exports.)

The last phase of establishing Communist hegemony in the states of the Soviet *cordon sanitaire* started in 1947; in return the United States, between 1948 and 1950, extended, its policy of containment to cover politics, the economy, traffic and diplomacy in the region. The American embargo policy completed the isolation of these countries.

The economy of Western Europe, on the other hand, developed faster between 1950 and 1975 than ever before or since. This boom laid the foundation of everything that was to take place in Europe in the second half of the century. The continuous growth in welfare provisions mitigated and then overshadowed the grave and bitter social conflicts of the interwar period, thereby consolidating the political institutions of parliamentary democracy in Western Europe once and for all.

Nationalism in Europe was deprived of its driving force in a climate of ideological battle between East and West. Compelled by the Soviet political and military threat, the willingness of West-European countries to cooperate was also encouraged by a promising, common economic future, suggested as it was by a rate of economic growth that seems incredible today. Added to this were memories of the recent destruction caused by the war and the fear of an impending, even more devastating, confrontation.

Another issue to press its mark on the process of building a unified Europe was the 'irresolvable' German question. In the eyes of the Western allies, restraining German strength and firmly anchoring (the remainder of) Germany in a cooperative European framework was deemed to be essential so as "to make the Germans good Europeans not by solitary confinement but by letting them become members of a good club," as a British Foreign Office memorandum put it in 1951. Chancellor Adenauer complemented this policy by his efforts at integrating the new Bundesrepublik into the nascent community of European states, thereby protecting Germans from the demons of their own history.

It is difficult today to appreciate the boldness of the May 1950 Schuman-Monnet proposal for the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community, or even to imagine the significance of coal and steel for prosperity in Europe at the time. The suggestion of delegating powers over basic industries to a supranational coordinating agency had the added benefit of reconciling Germany's need for economic reconstruction and the French interest in national security.

Another ambitious plan for cooperation in the early Fifties, the European Defence Community, would hardly have been thought of without the Korean War, which made West-European decision makers fear that Communist aggression against South Korea would be replicated in divided Europe, especially in Germany.

Quite obviously, it was the Cold War that gave birth to unity in Europe. Beside the effect of the Soviet threat as a negative integrating force, the Iron Curtain effectively sealed off East and Central European countries from the successor states of Charlemagne's empire. The quickly rebuilt West-European economies were the most developed part of the continent (being also relatively homogenous), which offered an appropriate basis for experiments in enhanced cross-border cooperation.

Strangely enough, quite a few intellectuals in Western Europe believed Communism was the best strategy for the modernization of Eastern Europe. Though they did not necessarily agree with the rough and ready, indeed brutal methods of the Communists, they were inclined to consider their policies a significant advance when compared to interwar stagnation.

The British historian Hugh Seton-Watson in 1954 commented these far-reaching plans struck the imagination, impressing the foreign observer. He also argued that it is certain that large-scale industrialisation, public works and mechanisation of agriculture are the right remedies for the rural overpopulation and poverty and the lack of manufactured goods, which were so striking in the old Eastern Europe (Seton-Watson, 1954).

At the beginning of the fifties, the then highly influential Jean-Paul Sartre still considered Soviet Communism "the highest our age could aspire to. [He noted that] the Gulag may well be objectionable and fearful. But were we not perhaps over-obsessed by it? Is there any real reason why its existence should trouble us?"

Victory in defeat: the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and its impact

Nikita Khrushchev came out on top in the power struggles which followed Stalin's death. For a decade after 1954 he embodied Soviet policies on the international scene. The impressive Soviet initiatives of 1955—from the restoration of Austrian sovereignty to the evacuation of the Porkkala military base in Finland and then the 'spirit of Geneva' indicated a change in the relations of the superpowers and made Soviet policy appear less threatening.

The Austrian state treaty, guaranteed by the four superpowers, ended the occupation of the country in May 1955. The Central European border of the Soviet empire thenceforth ran not at the river Enns but at Hegyeshalom, in Western Hungary.

Khrushchev seemed determined to make the socialist camp more appealing to the world by giving up the doctrine of strict uniformity. The Soviet–Yugoslav reconciliation of 1955 was a landmark in this process.

The de-Stalinisation that started in 1956 was more dramatic on the fringes of the Soviet empire than inside the Soviet Union. Soon enough it affected much more than the ideological nuances of the Communist movement, leading on to the Polish October and the Hungarian Revolution.

From the perspective of power politics, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 could have become an excellent precedent for bargains with Moscow—offering at the same time an opportunity for the early termination of the Cold War, before the two hostile blocs in Europe became firmly entrenched in their positions. Instead, during the fateful days of October-November 1956, the limitations of American (and Western) diplomacy and that of the Containment Doctrine became painfully apparent. American diplomacy was caught between the false alternatives of an all-out nuclear war and doing nothing. Moreover, Western policy was ready to accept immobility, at the price of grave injustice, and thus created a model for Western attitudes towards subsequent East-European revolts against Soviet rule.

Paradoxically, the crushing of the Hungarian Revolution meant that Communist ideology lost its significance in Europe. The Soviet intervention deeply compromised the ideology in the eyes of the Western Communist Parties and

left-wing intellectuals, who thenceforth considered the Soviet Union as yet another imperialist power, rather than the fount of new wisdom. The phase of the Cold War in which profound emotions were stirred ended in 1956. The Polish and the Hungarian events put paid to the illusions that some Europeans had still entertained concerning the Soviet world.

The rise and fall of détente and the limitations of Hungarian Goulash Communism

In the Sixties De Gaulle and French politics exerted a great (and lasting) influence on the political reflexes and institutional habits of the 'Brussels Europe', which was assuming its shape in the wake of the Treaty of Rome. More and more the Community came to resemble De Gaulle's idea of a confederation, while federalists kept losing ground. The habits of thought gaining currency were the preference for intergovernmental cooperation to supranational community policies of functional integration (the so-called 'Monnet-method'). The Luxembourg compromise was also symbolic of a significant change in the spirit of the Community: from then on it was the more selfish, pragmatic approach that the member states favoured, the 'cost-benefit' considerations that they watched closely. These new attitudes came to affect more and more the atmosphere of negotiations, especially after the first enlargement of the Community.

In Western Europe the welfare state stood for a period of full employment, rapid population growth and relative social peace. Contrary to expectations, political violence was steadily diminishing after 1948. Democratic governments managed to keep Communist parties at bay without giving rise to authoritarian regimes. The war strengthened the need for social solidarity, and enduring prosperity provided the new welfare states with the means necessary to satisfy and support these expectations and needs.

Competition outside the customs frontiers of the Common Market was practically limited to North America. The US and the Soviet Union were the world's two political poles, but the two largest economic powers were America and Western Europe, or more precisely, America and the European Economic Community, as North-American companies began to favour the Six to Great Britain when it came to investment.

Fears of Europe becoming Americanised were dispersed by the second half of the Sixties. Most Europeans appeared to have outgrown their inferiority complex in relation to their overseas protector. The end of empire for the large European colonial powers did not entail their economic decline; on the contrary, Western Europe was becoming an ever more powerful agent in the world economy, at a time when American economic growth seemed to loose momentum. The federalist enthusiasm which American officials overseeing the Marshall Plan had encouraged appeared to have become a thing of the past. In Western Europe old-fashioned nation-states were stronger than ever.

Few in the 1940s would have anticipated that forty years later in all countries west of the Iron Curtain less than ten per cent of the population would be employed in agriculture, with Ireland and the Iberian Peninsula being the only exceptions. (In 1950 every third person in Spain and Portugal was engaged in agriculture; within thirty years these ratios had dropped to fifteen and eighteen per cent, respectively.) One of the most profound and most important social changes in the second half of the 20th century was the disappearance of the peasantry in Western Europe: the common agricultural policy even accelerated the process by encouraging large agricultural units (farms). Similarly, urbanisation has proved one of the most enduring legacies of the Communist policy of industrialisation in Eastern and Central Europe.

Daniel Bell's *The End of Ideology* (1960) advocated a less polarised view of politics, and social scientists in general insisted that social problems were limited in number, could be quantified and were ultimately manageable. In Raymond Aron's view: "In the affluent society towards which Western Europe is gradually moving, no political party has a doctrine as such... our society is not without its problems... but it does not have one big problem" (Vinen 2000, p. 375).

In defiance of the orderly and calculable conditions of the Western societies, the activists of 1968 celebrated irrationality, spontaneity and the three M's (Marx, Mao, Marcuse). The dramatic events of those years, however, failed to have a long-lasting effect, with perhaps the sole exception of the birth of environmental movements. The relative stability of Western Europe became strikingly obvious when Warsaw Pact tanks appeared on the streets of Prague in August 1968.

August 1968 unmasked both the bankruptcy of Soviet policy and the utter subordination of the East-European satellites to Moscow: the intervention also signaled the demise of De Gaulle's romantic if little-developed idea of a "Europe stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Urals". The idea behind this notion was that Paris could bridle the German economic giant with the help of the confederated Slavic states.

The late 1960s also brought about a second period of détente: the need to harmonise interests seemed of pressing importance both in the East and the West. The increased stability of the strategic balance and the fear of nuclear weapons on the part of both sides produced a growing number of mutual interests, a state of affairs described perhaps most wittily by Chou En-Lai as the two superpowers sleeping in the same bed, even if they dream different dreams (Fontaine 1982, p.12).

A salient trait in the history of European attempts at integration in the Seventies was what came to be called Euro-pessimism. In a radically different political and eco-nomic environment it became evident that what the federalists championed was an illusion, namely that integration would sooner or later automatically spill over from the economy and trade toward foreign policy, defence strategy and other jealously guarded preserves of national sovereignty. The 1973 oil crisis only fur-

ther aggravated disagreements within the Community. By the end of the decade the future of the EC looked dim: low economic growth and stagflation, that peculiar mixture of high unemployment and inflation, depressed each and every member state.

It is a historical irony that the real victims of the crisis that followed 1973 were the countries of 'existing socialism' and the Soviet Union. Though Western Europe was shaken by the recession, the hard years passed without serious damage. The Soviet bloc, on the other hand, had to deal not only with its inherent and ever graver problems, but also with those of the mutable and trouble-ridden world economy, which were increasingly making themselves felt beyond the Iron Curtain.

In the climate of détente, under the conditions of extending trade between East and West, the growing trade gap of the East-European countries initially seemed as unproblematic as the Western loans drawn to finance the import of modern technology and consumer goods. From 1975 it became more and more obvious that it was an illusion to believe that the East-European economies would be immune from the crises that afflicted the Western countries. The Communist regimes, which had devoted such energy to building up heavy industry in a bid for national self-sufficiency now found themselves facing new difficulties.

From 1973, government-aided credits for exports to the East amounted to one fifth of all export credits in the EEC, even though the Comecon countries took only four per cent of all exports from the Community. Hungary was the first country to avail itself of the opportunities, and by 1977 its Western credits had risen to 8 billion dollars. The elite of the Hungarian Communist party considered these loans important for the maintenance of paternalistic state-socialism, dubbed 'goulash Communism'. However, this policy (especially from the early Eighties) only worsened the crisis in the Hungarian economy, as the economy was far too inflexible to make efficient use of Western loans. It became increasingly difficult to maintain an image of Kádár's Hungary as an oasis of stability and of—if not abundance—a constantly rising standard of living.

By the middle of the Seventies the second generation of staff officers at NATO and the Warsaw Pact had been busy planning for war between them, a war which was never actually fought. The superpowers engaged only by proxy, as in Cuba, Vietnam, Africa and the Middle East, in the form of giving support to various warring parties.

It may not be by chance that John Foster Dulles was the last American statesman to speak about the 'liberation' of Eastern Europe. The new language of détente sought to dismiss ideology from world politics. The new idiom of diplomacy was enriched with reassuringly implausible bombast: it was difficult to imagine that Brezhnev was really interested in Marxist theory, or that Nixon or Kissinger truly cared for human rights.

The 1975 Helsinki Final Act sealed the West's acceptance of a division of Europe (and of Germany), and the Kremlin's again decisive say in the European

concert of nations. On the other hand, the 'Helsinki process' and mushrooming contacts between the eastern and the western parts of Europe, gradually undermined the totalitarian regimes, based as they were on isolation. The fatal dependence of these economies on Western loans left the one-party states with little leeway. To boot, the third basket of the Helsinki Accords gave new encouragement to civil disobedience and human rights movements (Charta '77).

In any case, soon after Helsinki Moscow turned out to be using détente as an instrument for expansion. And détente proved reversible. Despite arms control agreements, greater communication and economic interchange, it could not transform the fundamental postwar paradigm. Three critical elements made this paradigm durable: the military occupation of Eastern Europe (including the GDR) and the direct military threat to Western Europe and the US posed by Soviet forces; the virtual irreversibility of the Soviet-type regimes in Eastern Europe, as confirmed by Soviet military interventions, such as in Hungary in 1956 or in Czechoslovakia in 1968; and the nature of the Soviet regime itself.

At the end of the Seventies the Soviet empire seemed firm, invulnerable and everlasting. The intensive modernisation of Soviet military might was accompanied by the forceful expansion of political influence. Yet the apparent victories and successes in reality contributed more to the inertia of the empire, and produced forces which, within a decade, would initiate its fatal crumbling.

The Eighties: Recovery and hubris in the West, the slow decay of the Kádár regime in Hungary

With the accession of South European countries in the Eighties, the Community's heterogeneity became more pronounced. At the same time, member states became more and more eager to turn the integration from a 'rich men's club,' and from a homogenous, industrially developed 'community of growth' into a 'community of development,' capable of managing considerable social and economic differences. The new Community became the largest trading power in the world. The vision of a common European market, of a Europe without frontiers gave a new impetus to the twelve states. The often painful, but ultimately successful structural transition of West-European nations into post-industrial societies further increased the gap between the two halves of the continent.

The common European market—more popularly, the '1992 project'—probably owes its success to the blending of the technocratic voluntarism so typical of the French bureaucratic tradition with the pragmatism of British political thought. The stock exchanges in any event had news of the return of general optimism in the economy. The success of Reaganomics (a liberal economic policy) and Mrs Thatcher's *laissez faire* in Great Britain looked like evidence for the strength of capitalism, and that, in Ronald Reagan's words, Communism would soon end up on the rubbish heap of history.

Reagan's point of view was, of course, considered a Cold War fossil at that time in Europe. As Hugh Seaton-Watson perspicaciously noted in 1985 that several hundred thousand West Europeans who, in their own countries, are committed to freedom, look on the forty year long division of Europe as unalterable, indeed as something worth defending. Furthermore, he pointed out that if someone suggests that this division was unacceptable to more than a hundred million (East) Europeans, and therefore could not be permanently maintained, he will be accused of being a nuclear war-monger.

Remarkably, Gorbachev's 'new thinking' also contained the realization that without systemic reforms the one-dimensional empire, the Soviet Union, would irrevocably fall behind a Western Europe developing dynamically, accumulating an irreversible technological advantage and becoming more and more united behind strong defensive walls. Such a perspective was even more vexing for the East and Central-European countries. Compared to the compromised system of 'existing socialism,' the differences were all too obvious and the elites in these countries often looked upon prosperous and integrating Western Europe with the frustration of the excluded. It was at this time that Milan Kundera and other intellectuals in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary set out to find their 'lost' Central Europe, and this was when the Hungarian historian Jenő Szűcs wrote his elegant and influential study on the deep-rooted differences between the civilisations of the three historical regions in Europe.

But first and foremost, in East-Central Europe the Eighties were a decade of a multidimensional, chronic and deepening crisis. The quasi-fall of the Soviet-type regime in Poland in 1980–81 emphatically indicated the increased vulnerability of the paternalist systems of 'advanced socialism'. The Polish crisis also warned Moscow that the old, harsh modes of exercising power had become obsolete. Though General Jaruzelski's rescue attempt seemed an acceptable solution for an apparently unmanageable problem, his introduction of military dictatorship (replacing the collapsing rule of the party) held little promise for the future. It seemed as if the Soviet leaders, having amassed a colossal military might, had lost their faith in its usefullness.

As for Kádár's Hungary, what seemed to have experienced a fatal breakdown was the mechanism that had been the major socioeconomic support of this regime: the policy which tried to secure the passive loyalty of the majority of society for outdated forms of government not through abortive or half-heartedly executed reforms but by moderate, and controlable, portions of a consumer society. What lay at the heart of the troubles of 'the most cheerful barracks' (of the Soviet bloc) was again the crisis of the paternalistic state: having stimulated political and economic expectations and hopes which it was incapable of satisfying, firmly refusing at the same time calls for political reforms, the one-party state was confronted by ever graver dilemmas.

One such dilemma in the Eighties was the necessity and impossibility of economic reforms. The behemoths of the postwar forced industrialisation showed themselves as economic irrationalities, yet (at least for the ruling elite) seemed to possess a symbolic meaning. In the context of this economic policy, Western credits helped, more than ever before, the deferment of painful economic decisions. Western bankers put their minds at ease with the notion of a Soviet guarantee covering all the East-European economies, which they imagined eliminated the dangers of insolvency. (The none too holy alliance of Western bankers and Communist Party elites cast Eastern Europe into the abyss of a serious debt crisis. These nations' total debt of 6 billion dollars in 1971 had risen to 100 billion by the end of the 1980s.)

The Soviet empire, one-dimensional as it relied solely on the power of its military-industrial complex, was a peculiar formation in Europe. The mighty centre of the realm was in many respects poorer and less developed than its "colonies." It must have been conspicuous to Soviet army officers stationed in Hungary that life there was far richer and fuller than in the remote provinces from where they were recruited. Many Soviet citizens in the Eighties still lived in the false belief that the shortages of bread in Moscow or Kiev were due to exports of food as aid for their East-European 'brothers and sisters'.

There was, perhaps no better illustration of Paul Kennedy's famous theory of imperial overstretch than Moscow's efforts to practise world politics. The problems of this overextended empire only grew when in December 1979—by a disastrous move—the Soviet Union decided to intervene in defence of its puppets in Afghanistan. The Afghan quagmire was to be the Vietnam of the Soviets. The Soviet withdrawal ten years later became a crucial symbol of Gorbachev's perestroika.

The end of the Cold War and the challenges of the New Europe*

In the political quakes of 1989–90 a 'New Europe' was born: with the democratic revolutions in East-Central Europe and the reunification of Germany, the division of the continent, as induced by the Cold War, had ended—in a form and

* The expression 'New Europe' underwent remarkable metamorphoses in the course of the 'short' 20th century. It first appeared during the First World War: in the autumn of 1916 Scotus Viator, the unrelenting Scottish critic of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (R.W. Seton-Watson) and Thomas Garrigue Masaryk founded a new journal called *The New Europe*. The title was expressive of the editors' ambition in that for them a new Europe was one without the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The journal existed only for four years, during which time it could nevertheless see its goals accomplished: by the middle of 1920 the system of Versailles peace treaties was complete, and more than a dozen new states had sprung up on the ruins of the Empire. A mere decade later 'New Europe' resurfaced in the vocabulary of the National Socialist movement, meaning the continent united under German hegemony, and it didn't take long for Hitler to compromise the term for quite some time. When it gained new currency in the Nineties, it became a synonym of the continent no longer divided by the Cold War. Interestingly, East and Central-Europe, once rid of communism, had to face the troublesome legacy of Versailles again.

with a speed no one had expected. Moreover, the *annus mirabilis* of 1989 in Central and Eastern Europe was followed by a previously unimaginable transformation within the Soviet Union itself.

Gorbachev felt that a reform of the system at home and of the alliance system abroad had to be undertaken if Moscow was to play any role in Eastern Europe, that is, if power was to be retained by the party elites.

These processes were indeed based on false assumptions: the liberalisation of authoritarian systems always produces more demands for change. Obviously, a kind of 'Tocqueville effect' was at work in the changes in Central and Eastern Europe when seemingly non-negotiable demands progressively became negotiated away. Thus, the demands for continuation of Communist Party supremacy turned into multi-party elections, and the 'eternal bonds of the Warsaw Pact' simply disappeared. To the astonishment of the world, the Soviet citizenry and of the Eastern European elites and population alike, the Red Army went home.

In the wake of 1989 the world, unexpectedly though not entirely surprisingly, seemed to rediscover the German problem, so rich in paradoxes. The plan to establish the European Union as laid down in Maastricht was greatly influenced by the emotional and political effects of German reunification. Latent fears of a reunited Germany provided the supporters of federative reforms and of monetary union with important new arguments.

Ever since the unity of Germany was restored it had been obvious that furthering the Union was a means for France to offset the increased political weight of Berlin. Bound up with this was that, in the Nineties, the project of a monetary union took precedence over the enlargement of the Community and then of the Union: though there were important economic arguments (as well) for the introduction of a common currency, the idea of the monetary union was reborn in a form which evidently served political purposes. This project was obviously related to German reunification and was a unique compromise between Germany and France, formulated as it was at the time in a half-ironic dictum: the whole of Germany for Chancellor Kohl, and half the Deutsche Mark, in return, for President Mitterrand.

Yet when the idea of giving economic aid to the countries of the former Soviet bloc mooted, the differences in the interests and ideas of the Western allies soon surfaced, and the concept of a new Marshall Plan resulted only in the establishment of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The liberated countries' hopes of massive and generous economic aid, much like the post-war European Recovery Program, were frustrated. The primary reason for this seems to have been the absence of an acute sense of danger within the EU: in 1947 the United States, 'the empire by invitation' mobilised its resources and stabilised the disorganised Western economies in order to block the Soviet threat, in 1990, however, once 'the barbarians' had withdrawn from the gates, no such threat was apparent. Then the Gulf War in 1991 for some time diverted

the attention (and financial resources) of the West from the East European countries, though the latter were still in need of economic aid.

Nor did the new bank have the expected catalystic effect on investments. Despite significant economic reforms, the volume of investments in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland, the three countries best-known to Western investors, was disappointingly low. In Hungary, the most successful Central-European country, less than a billion dollars were invested by Westerners in 1990, and 1.5 billion in 1991, which may have amounted to 60 per cent of all foreign investment in the region but was less than one per cent of all foreign direct investments in the world.

It seemed to be of symbolic significance that while Western Europe contemplated new vistas of integration, and with the December 1991 Maastricht accord called for new forms of cooperation between the member states, the East showed signs of disintegration, reflected first by the birth of an independent Ukraine, then the crumbling of the Soviet Union, and the appearance of new states, and the Minsk agreement. Yet the breakdown of Soviet power and the fall of communist regimes in Europe took the West by surprise. It had accepted the status quo as an earnest of stability. Europeans, who had lived under the Damocles' sword of East–West confrontation, had to learn to live in a new world after 1989-90, where the earlier black-and-white certainties had been replaced by facts that were more difficult to comprehend and contain, especially for Westerners.

The most immediate result was that the Community found itself—practically overnight—confronted by a bunch of potential applicants for membership, aid supplicants, as well as providers of new investment opportunities. At the beginning of the Nineties Brussels seemed to have no coherent Eastern Policy, no comprehensive vision for the integration of the eastern part of the continent. There was also a danger of the Union becoming more and more 'introverted'. The end of the Cold War undermined the foundations of the Community (and with it German-French cooperation), because German reunification upset the prevailing balance and produced unforeseen economic difficulties.

In addition, new, pressing questions arose for the Community and then the Union: could the ambitious programme of economic, political and military integration be maintained in the presence of the need to find answers for the political and economic desires of the new democracies? Could the dynamic of European unification be retained without the stimulus of the Soviet threat? Could the Union become the vanguard in a process that was to unite the whole of Europe without sacrificing much of the existing cohesion and institutional discipline within the organisation?

Enthusiasm in Western Europe over the end of the Cold War and the democratic revolutions in the East was soon overshadowed by fear of mass migration and the recurrence of the nationalist conflicts of the twenties and thirties. Many

thought the fall of the communist regimes had created a frightful zone of political uncertainty, instability, chaos and civil wars, and did away with an international system which for forty years had stabilised international relations.

The momentous changes of 1989 brought independence to East and Central European countries and the possibility of democratic government, but did not really create a chance for economic recovery. The region liberalised trade, often more thoroughly than the developed countries of the West. The newly elected governments considered it an 'entry fee' to Europe to open their economies to the world.

The liberalisation of the economy was most complete in Hungary. Many think that whatever Hungary achieved during its economic transition were closely linked to this liberalisation. And whoever thinks this opening made the country far too vulnerable may be countered with the argument that without this policy Hungary could not have become the most important target area for foreign investment in the region.

A whole generation of UN development officials had in the past stood for the myth of the 'trickle down' theory. It was held that even if initially only a privileged minority takes benefit from development aid, their newly attained standard of living would later trickle down to the lower classes, and the 'demonstration effect' might encourage modernisation. There were many signs of the Washington Consensus* offering similar solutions for the welfare problems of transitional Eastern Europe. These reform suggestions reflected a dominance of the neoclassic principles of the Chicago school of economics. They relied on the assumption that abolishing elements typical of economies not based on the market, reinstating private property and a *laissez faire* market will, as it were, automatically solve the economic, and even social, problems of the transition societies.** In accordance with the idea of 'creative destruction', the economies of these countries shrank quickly, and the decline which followed the transition was in some countries greater than during the Great Depression.

The recipes of Thatcherite economic policy, which a decade earlier West-European politicians had related to with understandable wariness, were during

* This widely accepted reform programme was first offered by the IMF and the World Bank in the Eighties to the crisis-ridden Latin-American countries. The most important ingredients of this reform remedy are macroeconomic stabilization, the establishment of the new market institutions of the market and of the necessary legal framework needed for a market economy, as well as the radical liberalization of trade and prices, and the drastic reduction of State presence in economy through a massive privatisation programme.

** The most eminent critic of the Washington Consensus became Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz, professor of economics and later Chief Economist of the World Bank. Stiglitz thought the greatest fault of this policy was that it "took privatization and trade liberalization as ends in themselves, rather than as means to more sustainable, equitable, and democratic growth." Graphically, he likened the idea of economic shock therapy for Eastern Europe to someone "using a flame-thrower to burn off an old coat of house paint, and then lamenting that you couldn't finish the new paint job because the house burned down." (*The Rise and Fall of the Washington Consensus,* November 2000, www.brettonwoodsproject.org)

the transition of the Eastern economies applied at a breathtaking pace. As for investments, the Western governments made only limited commitments, letting private capital act freely. Even investments by the latter proved insufficient: between 1990 and 1993, 12.5 billion dollars were invested in the countries of the former Soviet bloc, when Singapore alone saw half that sum invested in a single year.

A future without the barbarians?

Substantially, the problem the Community had to deal with was narrowed down to how to include the Eastern and Central parts of the continent in the new international order of Europe. At the beginning of the Nineties the then President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors persuasively argued that the principal task of the Community was to strengthen its own inner cohesion, so that it could become the vanguard of the new Europe, forming its own sphere of influence. According to Delors, Europe was not to strive to build the common European house Gorbachev envisioned, but rather construct a global European village, around the Community's 'manor', itself erected on solid foundations.

It could hardly be denied that Brussels had quite a few good arguments against the speedy integration of East and Central-European countries: the economies of the former totalitarian regimes seemed incapable of catching up with their western counterparts, and there were fears in Brussels that the region would fall on Western Europe as an economic burden. The threat of mass migration also discouraged an opening of the borders.

The 1991 'Europe agreements' reflected the optimism of the early Nineties, when analysts still predicted fast and promising growth, not only in the liberated East but for the entire continent. Thus, a 1990 report of the European Commission claimed that the former Soviet bloc could easily outgrow the crisis once the suggested free-market reforms had been implemented, and that it could even produce an annual rate of growth of five per cent after 1992/93. Many thought the single European market, together with the opening economies of the candidate countries, would render more vigorous the economy of the entire continent. However, the economic transition proved much harder than previously assumed. The transition crisis of the former Soviet bloc was at its worse precisely between 1991 and 1993. In conjunction with this crisis (and not in the least independently of it) the economy of the Community entered a recessionary phase in 1992. Under such circumstances it was hardly surprising that Brussels was unable to make a substantial contribution to the stabilisation of the East and Central-European countries, to setting them on a growth path.

It took a whole year to work out the agreements between the Commission and the Visegrád Group, during which time European political rhetoric often clashed with the member states' penchant for protectionism. When it came to providing the Visegrád Group with access to markets for their steel, textiles

and agriculture, many member states gave way to internal protectionist pressure from within. In 1991 the Spanish government almost vetoed the association agreement of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary with the Community, to defend the interests of the Spanish steel industry. A bitter Jacques Delors remarked, after a demonstration by French farmers, that you cannot shed tears of joy over the liberation of the East-European nations and tell them the next day that you won't buy their products.

The prospect of the eastern enlargement deeply divided the member states: London hoped that the accession of the new democracies would slow down the process of unification, but most member states feared an ill-prepared enlargement would degrade the Union into a simple free-trade zone. Germany would have welcomed the speedy joining of the three Central European states, but other than that, was not very enthusiastic about mass enlargement. France was anxious about the economic burdens of the enlargement and its political consequences, that is, the effects of admitting Germany's eastern sphere of interest into the EU.

It is hardly surprising that that the Community initially tried to pass over all appeals from East and Central-European countries for full membership and there were many hints that in Brussels the association agreements were to be considered in the light of the Turkish example. In other words, 'the Brussels bridegroom' was ready to pledge only the vaguest of commitments for the future.

The conservative, pro status quo attitude of most member states was reflected in the proposal for a European Political Area (EPA), outlined in the Andriessen Report (1992). The Dutch Vice President of the European Commission envisaged the half measure of associated membership to be achieved through an extension of political cooperation; this idea was none too popular with the Central and East European candidates, who considered it a form of temporisation. But any cautious policy towards an Eastern enlargement would of course have been encouraged by the heated debates within the EU that followed Maastricht.

Another reason for the wariness of Brussels was that the moral and political responsibility of the Community, sounded by many in the West, was overshadowed by fears that the new democracies might become threats to security and stability. The Community decided in favour of future full membership of the associated countries only at the June 1993 Copenhagen summit, and this was when a formulation was made of the first concrete requirements applicants were to meet.

In June 1992 the European Council decided that accession negotiations with Cyprus and Malta, (countries which had applied in 1990) would be started a maximum of six months after the termination of the 1996 intergovernmental conference. The Community seemed to give precedence to the southern enlargement over the eastern. Greece was especially explicit about the impossibility of an eastern enlargement without Cyprus achieving membership. Hungary was the

first of the former Soviet bloc countries to apply for membership (31 March 1994). Even so, almost four years passed before the historical decision: in December 1997, at its Luxembourg summit the European Council declared its willingness to start accession talks with Cyprus and five of the most likely East-European candidates. "It is now the Second World War has ended in Europe," was how the Polish Foreign Minister Richard Geremek, once a leading dissident thinker, welcomed the decision.

From little to big bang: the context and the dilemmas of the Eastern enlargement

Livy's remark that the Roman Empire, after modest beginnings, grew to the extent that it began to suffer from its own size, is applicable to the EU of the 1990s. The incomparable success of the idea of a unified Europe led the EU into a peculiar trap: new tasks had to be continuously dealt with, while the appropriate institutions were still not being developed along the way.

From the end of the Nineties several closely related processes altered the Union. One of the most important of these was a transformation in Franco-German relations. The Nice summit of 2000 clearly revealed disagreements between the two, the differences between their concepts of the integration. A key issue in the future of the Union's institutions is whether Franco-German relations can return to their previous normalcy, a state that was not always harmonious but was often called exemplary.

Following NATO's 'humanitarian war' in Kosovo, there were urgent calls to increase the Union's capacity for joint military action, to make it separable from or even independent of the military structures of NATO, so that Europe could act as a power with strategic importance on the international scene, without constantly having recourse to Washington's military aid. Closely related to this, concrete decisions were made to develop a joint foreign and security policy for Europe.

The introduction of the euro as a common currency also transformed Europe at the end of the 20th century. Transferring monetary sovereignty from a national level to a European one is unprecedented. The euro, paradoxically, has come up to the expectations of its supporters at the same time as it has confirmed the doubts of its critics.

Another change of great moment is of course the planned enlargement of the Union, which could turn what has been a rich states' club into a truly Pan-European organization. In some respects, the enlargement has been part of the very essence and *raison d'être* of the Union. It was already clear in the early 1990s that the newly liberated countries in Central and Eastern Europe would eventually join, the only question being when this would be possible, given the European Union's exacting *acquis communautaire* and the still relatively low economic output and development of the countries in question.

Their democratic institutions strengthened, they were able to join the Strasbourg-based Council of Europe in growing numbers, but one of their main ambitions, apart from joining NATO, was membership of the Union. It was also obvious that the EU, in order to be able to admit many new members, would have to reform its functioning, in terms of both institutions and financing. The institutions were essentially the same as those constructed for an EU of six, at most a dozen, members, as was the case between 1986 and 1994. The finances would also have to be reviewed as the candidate countries were comparatively poor and had large populations engaged in agriculture.

On the other hand, the focus of the integration of the new democracies shifted in the second half of the Nineties, thanks to the preparation for monetary union, from the economic to security-related aspects. Or as Michael Mandelbaum put it critically, if hyperbolically: "in post-Cold War Europe the West finds it politically easier to accept the risk of nuclear annihilation in defence of Hungary than to allow its citizens to buy Hungarian tomatos."

In July 1997 the European Commission published a document called *Agenda 2000,* which recommended, beside the monetary reform of the EU, that the accession talks be started with Cyprus and five Central and East-European countries. Typically, the 'five plus one' members would have increased the population of the EU by one third, while adding only five per cent to its economic output.

The Amsterdam EU Summit in 1997 agreed on the principles of the enlargement, choosing six 'first-wave' candidates, which were considered to have developed most in their economies and politics: the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia. The 1999 Helsinki Summit—departing from the earlier 'little bang' enlargement plans for a 'big bang' variant —increased the number of recognised candidate countries from six to thirteen, by including Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Romania, Slovakia and Turkey, even though negotiations would start with Turkey only at a later, unspecified date. The Nice Summit in 2000 concentrated on preparing the EU for this further enlargement in terms of its institutions and decision-making. In 2000 the European Commission, which negotiated with the twelve candidates on behalf of the EU, announced that it hoped to conclude the talks which focused on thirty-one chapters of the *acquis communautaire,* by the end of 2002, so that a formal target date for entry could be fixed for 2004, before the elections for a new European Parliament, planned for that year. By October 2002 this forecast was confirmed by the Commission, even though the number of likely new members in the first wave had now shrunk from twelve to ten (Bulgaria and Romania were excluded from the first wave). In hindsight, it may have been simpler and more convincing to start with a small Central-European enlargement, instead of constantly delaying the large Eastern enlargement. Few people would have thought at the end of the Cold War that within a decade the EU would still have no new members from beyond the Iron Curtain.

Ten years ago most member states held the enlargement of the EU a noble consummation of the Europe project, and considered it the continent's new moral and political obligation now that the historical task of reconciling France and Germany had been fulfilled. Today most of these states are depressed by the prospect of the enlargement, and act, in the words of French political analyst Dominique Moisi, like the lazy student, who has to write an essay in a subject he is not interested in, and is consequently loath to pick up the pen.

Just as De Gaulle used to consider Great Britain's membership as the Trojan horse of the North Atlantic Organization, Paris from time to time looks upon the Eastern candidates in a similar vain. What is certainly true is that the enlargement will further increase the importance of English as the working language, and that the Central-European countries, most of whom are eagerly pro-American (some of them already members of NATO) would undermine the other traditional French objective, that of making it the EU's mission to act as a counterweight to American hegemony.

Obviously, one of the most difficult chapters of the accession talks is defining the requirements of regional subsidies. Quite understandably, extending the regional policy to the ten East-Central-European candidates produces great difficulties for the EU. The great Eastern enlargement, as planned, will produce differences in the levels of development on a scale which has never been witnessed in the EU, seriously taxing the member states' willingness for solidarity.

If Spain and the southern states are keen to retain the regional subsidies, France wants to keep the advantages of the Common Agricultural Policy, while from Germany's and Austria's perspective one of the fundamental issues of the enlargement is to reach a Union-wide agreement whether to completely open their labour markets to the candidate countries.

Another peculiar problem of the enlargement is what is called the confidence gap: the candidates have to convince the EU they are capable of applying and implementing the *acquis*. Even now there are considerable differences between the northern and southern members over this, as the latter are heirs to laxer traditions of administration. Some fear the issue would be even more acute in the case of certain post-communist countries, where the notion of an unbiased and apolitical civil service is still relatively new. Furthermore, the candidates must also give assurances to the Commission and member states that they will be able to use subsidies efficiently, quickly and without corruption.

Many think the eastern enlargement of the EU is a story full of delays, complications and bifurcations, digressions and traps—with an eventual and necessary happy ending. Could this view be far too optimistic and complacent? Whatever the case, the eventual end of the accession negotiations will not necessarily mean the end of the process. What may yet produce surprises is not only the EU's routine of ratification by each and every member state's parliament,

but also that a few of the candidates (Hungary included) have announced they will hold referendums on the accession.

Admitting new members has never been an easy decision, and each enlargement changed the dynamics of the integration process, the governing principles of the forming European community, and the nature of the rights membership conferred. With the first enlargement—especially with Great Britain's joining—the community became even more Atlantic, and the importance of free-trade reflexes grew. The southern, Mediterranean enlargement took into account strategic and political considerations of the Cold War, while producing the Union's own North-South problem. Though with the third enlargement the rich and stable northern democracies joined, which had already had strong links with the European market through the European Economic Area, it made apparent the EU's absorption problem, the fact that the precondition for all further enlargements would be institutional reform, the modification of the functioning of the Union's apparatus.

The third enlargement paradoxically strenghtened the coalition of those who favour exceptions, transitional periods and derogations. Sweden conspicuously reserved the right to choose from among the obligations—the most prominent example being its conscious absence from the monetary union. These new member states arrived without the burdens of a colonial past or regional conflicts, bringing instead various traditions of neutrality, even if the strategic importance of the latter after the Cold War is questioned by many. Though today neutrality means something else than previously, these countries—together with Ireland, though even Denmark and Greece are with them in certain issues of security policy—form a self-confident group within the Union whose place cannot easily be found within plans for a joint European foreign and security policy.

With applications by ten Central and East-European countries, Cyprus, Malta and Turkey, the EU is facing its greatest ever enlargement. In this respect the fourth wave resembles the second: the Union cleans up the geopolitical peripheries of Europe, submitting them first to reforms and then admitting them. More likely than not, the so-called Luxembourg accession structures (together with the institutions of accession partnership and the annual evaluation reports will be permanent guidelines for the enlargement of the EU for at least two decades.

This massive enlargement may influence the process of regional state-building in at least three ways. In the federalist scenario the pressures deriving from the number and diversity of the member states will bring about the creative crisis which Jean Monnet once found so important ot undertake major reforms. The unavoidable constitutional and governmental crisis of the Union will force members, if they wish to enjoy the benefits of integration, to choose between the paralyses of the institutions and the reinforcement of central authorities. Their enlightened sense of self-interest will drive them, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, to institute a leaner and more effective Commission, have the

Council taking more and more of its decisions by qualified majority vote, increase the budget of the Union and, possibly, give more power to the European Parliament.

Believers in the intergovernmental scenario and of a 'wide Europe', on the other hand, think the expansion of the Union will necessarily push it towards confederal forms of decision-making techniques, typical of international institutions, therefore gradually limiting and even eroding the domains of supranationalism. The realities of number and diversity would strengthen the European Council and the various Councils of Ministers, while weakening the Parliament and the Commission.

The third and most likely scenario leads us into less well-known territories. The Union has repeatedly proved its great capacity for putting off decisions in the face of hard choices, for letting its institutions muddle toward a uniquely mixed model of collective decision-making. This way the current, Byzantine, multi-levelled framework for decision making is likely to survive and evolve, with of course a dramatic increase in diversity.

Raymond Aron once defined the Cold War succinctly as the state when peace is impossible, war is improbable. Timothy Garton Ash paraphrased this when describing the Union as it is at the beginning of the 21st century: "unity is impossible, collapse is improbable."

Conclusions: Hungary's place in Europe restored

What was originally the economic community of six nations has changed beyond recognition by the Millennium. The Keynesian and corporatist model of the nations of a 'small Europe' underwent significant alterations during the crises of the seventies, and the single European market and the euro now encourage a new, market-centred economic liberalism. At any rate, European integration has not been a preordained movement toward federal union, but rather a series of pragmatic bargains among national governments based on concrete national interests, relative power, and carefully calculated transfer of sovereignty.

On the other hand, the contrast between the single European market, constrained as it is by the forces of global economy, and the political structures, determined by customs, cultural traditions and geography, may become even more pronounced within the Union's quasi-federal structure.

But how shall we take today what Ralf Dahrendorf called a decade ago "the obvious moral responsibility of Europe's luckier states" for the social and economic stabilisations of the states of East and Central-Europe? How can it be avoided that the Union become an internally divided, morally injured and not too efficiently functioning fortress? Does the Union's institutions have the sufficient 'institutional imagination', which could prepare them for this unprecedented new enlargement?

For forty years, Europe was built by a paternalistic political elite, which sought to heal the injuries caused by French–German enmity. It is not by chance that on the basis of their moral and political authority they were considered the founding fathers of Europe. The present generation of politicians are birds of another feather. The current tasks are, nevertheless, not in the least simpler than those after the war: the reconstruction of Europe (also) includes the extension of the Union to territories beyond the former Iron Curtain—at a time when support for the European institutions is at best fragile. Will the present generation of politicians be able to raise their horizons, and make the sacrifices that necessarily come with the enlargement (but are still controllable), or will they retreat behind the bulwark of narrow national, local or sectoral interests?

Despite the missed chances and the risk still ahead, Central Europe (and, for that matter, Hungary) belong to Europe restored: if not on moral and cultural grounds alone, then surely thanks to the look and feel of the market economies these countries have created. The Union's new Central-European members will change Europe too—redirecting at least some EU money from the continent's Atlantic and Mediterranean edges to its landlocked centre will alter not just Europe's memory of itself, but also its future look. On the other hand, the emerging multi-speed Europe, in which countries move ahead at different speeds on different issues, can make integration acceptable to the many and different European nations.

More and more, the EU will remain the only significant unifying force in Europe, even if it is uncertain where the Union's 'final' borders on the east and south-east might some day lie. Unlike other unifying forces in the past—France under Napoleon or Germany under Hitler—this is not an empire in the making, but an institution which countries join voluntarily and to whose management and multilevel governance system they make their own contribution. In this regard, the EU is the first successful post-modern multinational institution in the world, and a possible model for future global political structures.

The Union still has the aura of Europe's rich men's club and membership in it is seen as a sign of economic and political success, of having made it into established Europe. Meanwhile, during the candidacy process, the goal of membership has given stability, anchorage and direction to the efforts to reform foreign and economic policy on the part of the countries involved. Candidates are perhaps less aware that membership would not mean any automatic acquisition of prosperity but would rather imply a continuous commitment to the increasingly stringent *acquis communautaire,* as regards, for instance, the opening of markets and the reduction of subsidies.

Whenever the single market arrives, Europe's new members will have, in some respect, to endure long transition periods before fully enjoying its advantages. Austrians and Germans in particular fear a flood of new migrants. This is unduly alarmist. Most Hungarians are stay-at-homes, few would move from one

side of the country to the other, much less to Berlin, in search of a better job. Even so, restrictions on labour will remain in effect for up to seven years after accession, though Finland and the Netherlands are looking to open their borders to the newcomers sooner.

Admitting the new members to the EU club will not be the triumph hoped for by the generation of 1989. Indeed, rather than answering any cry for freedom, Brussel's bureaucrats will be busy fending off more mundane requests for subsidies and aid. Moreover, rather than welcoming the newcomers to a booming, confident club, the Union itself is experiencing difficulties, with some of its biggest economies—hamstrung by the monetary union and the stability pact—struggling for growth themselves. Hungary and the other new members may well wonder what they have got themselves into.

Yet, one reason why small states like Hungary are keen on the idea of the EU is that club members enjoy an element of equality (a veto on major issues, for one thing), which the 'buffer' countries in Central Europe have never had before. Another cause for optimism is a new sense that the EU may be turning into a club where uniformity is less stifling. Some members belong to a single currency, others to a border-free zone; still others to a tentatively emerging defence club. If the EU is becoming more varied, a multi-system affair, (but hopefully not one with first- and second-class members) Hungary and the other new members might find it easier to belong.

On the other hand, the admission of these new countries may not be as costly as some in Paris and Berlin fear. After all, Central Europe, and especially Hungary, was never as backward as the Cold War and its after-effects made it seem. Ravaged by the Second World War and what followed, the region also has a history of democracy, high culture and relative prosperity. Proper reintegration with the more fortunate half of Europe, painful though it may be, is long overdue. ❧

Gábor Karsai

On the Long March to the EU

Ten years on, the creating of a democratic, efficient market economy (in place of a planned economy of low efficiency and dictatorial traits) was still claiming victims among Hungary's citizens. Not until 2001 did personal consumption recover to its 1989 level—on average, of course. Hungarian society in the early 1990s faced an explosion of unemployment, a general loss of job security and inflation rates unseen for decades. State services steadily slipped, differences of income and wealth became extreme, public security plunged, and corruption and contempt for the law became rife.

On the other hand, there were momentous positive developments, right from the start. For one, the shortage economy and its side effects were dispelled. The new-found competition for customers, domestically and from imports, had salutary effects. So did the right to own private property and conduct business without any restrictions on size, the influx of technical and cultural innovations from the outside world, the liberating of personal and economic connections abroad; and, last but not least, the introduction of parliamentary democracy. Since 1997 the annual rate of economic growth has exceeded 4 per cent. Employment has improved, inflation has eased and consumption has been rising appreciably. Economically, Hungary has been integrating steadily into the European Union. It became certain in the autumn of 2002 that full EU membership would follow in 2004.

If the economic recession of the 1990s and other negative effects are ascribed to the changeover from a socialist to a democratic economic order, this may justify asking whether the advantages are proportionate to the drawbacks. Except that deep down, the general crisis derived from the planned economy, not from the change of system. Back in the 1970s, the increase in Hungary's foreign debt

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Gábor Karsai

is managing director of GKI Economic Research Co., Budapest. His fields of research are market-economic transformation and analysis and forecasting of macroeconomic processes, on which he has published four books in Hungarian and one in English.

was still financing overall growth, but in the 1980s it would only cover stagnation. By the early 1990s, the accumulation of debt could no longer be sustained, and a steep recession ensued. Events show how the Hungarian socio-economic system brought about by the planned economy was generally uncompetitive and that its structure suffered depreciation on the world market. Almost everyone agreed on this, but society was not confronted by the full scale of the problem until the protracted transformation supervened.

General crisis in the planned economy

Almost every country in Central and Eastern Europe underwent a grave economic crisis at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, with a concomitant and partly consequent political crisis as well. The process was rooted in a general crisis of the planned economy, which affected equilibrium, growth, structures and institutions, and extended to the mentality and set of values, the stratification, relative incomes, development goals, and education and motivation systems of society. This led up to a change of system, conducted at speeds and in depths that varied from country to country and region to region. (There is no attempt here to cover what prompted the Soviet state authorities to accept the change of system to various extents in the post-socialist and Soviet successor states, or what role the Western powers or efforts towards national self-determination played in the changes.)

Despite initial high hopes, the changeover in the economic system precipitated a recession. This was especially deep in most Soviet successor states and in the Balkan post-socialist countries, where shortcomings in their change of political systems—along with political chaos, tensions and even civil warfare—curbed or thwarted the implementation (indeed even the introduction) of essential economic reforms.

The recession was also severe, if less drastic in what became termed as the Visegrád countries. GDP slumped not only in Hungary and Poland, heavily indebted in the 1970s and 1980s, but also in Czechoslovakia (the Czech Republic and Slovakia). Recession came where there had not been any reform before the change of political system (Czechoslovakia) and where there had been many years of reform (Hungary and Poland). Nor did it make any difference whether the economic policy-makers adopted an express 'shock therapy' (Poland) or gradualism (Hungary). The recession was closely related to the collapse of Comecon and the consequent loss of export markets, coupled with the opening up of domestic markets. However, the loss of markets did not simply pose quantitative problems, it also embodied a comprehensive structural crisis. So the handling of the economic crisis—above all keeping individual countries solvent, resolving the tensions in their external and domestic balances, and curbing inflation—could not be confined simply to stabilizing measures. This handling al-

so had to be of a modernizing character, in the classic sociological sense of assimilating the country to the most advanced Western economic and social organization links and formats. Without such assimilation, it would not be possible to ensure the conditions for sustainable growth after the recession. But from that it also follows that changing the system, developing a market economy and creating the set of conditions for lasting growth is a time-consuming process; as it involves major social conflicts, it only succeeds usually after setbacks and diversions, through a specific learning process.

The conditions for lasting growth and the structures to meet the new demands of a world economy can only arise through 'creative destruction'. Nor can the destructive, conflict-inducing side of this be avoided. Although governments try to put it off in the hope of avoiding social tensions, this deferment only spreads the tensions and deteriorates the external and internal balances that are damaging to the whole economy, before leading to a renewed rise in inflation. The key, therefore, is to improve the interdependent abilities of the economy to utilize, attract and accumulate capital. In Hungary, the Németh government's moves to prepare for the changeover of the economic system in 1989–90, the Kupa programme of stabilization and reform in 1991–92 (named after a finance minister in the Antall government), and the Horn government's 1995 Bokros package can be seen as such measures. However, each of these programmes was followed by a slackening of effort related to, among other things, electoral politics, with policy-makers becoming redistributive in outlook and seeking to avoid temporary infringements of vested interests. The Orbán government of 1998–2002 had neither the incentive nor the will to continue the process of reform. The Medgyessy government that took power in 2002 seems to be returning to a line of reforms based on the evaluation of financial criteria.

The legal and institutional system of a market economy

The introduction of the constituents and infrastructure of a market economy did not suddenly start in Hungary in 1990. (The earlier moves were alluded to in the West as 'goulash communism'.) There had been constant efforts to reform the centrally planned economy from the decision to introduce the 'new economic mechanism' in 1966 and its implementation in 1968, despite some obstructions and setbacks. The last stage came in the second half of the 1980s, with the introduction of taxation reform, a two-tier banking system, and company legislation.

Hungary has introduced all the essential constituents of a European system of economic law and institutions and these are more or less functional. There are still important reforms to be made in public finance, especially in health and public administration. Still to be completed too are the processes of liberalization, privatisation and EU legal harmonisation. The gravest problems in legal security now lie in judicial implementation, not in legislation.

The deregulation and liberalization of the early 1990s meant that economic agents could decide freely and autonomously on almost all questions, including prices, wages, employment, investments and market cooperation. The sphere of state-controlled pricing was tightly restricted, and even in these cases, successive administrations relied mainly on negotiation, for instance, in the energy field. (However, that did not preclude the government in 2000 from beginning to intervene directly in the operation and pricing of the energy and pharmaceutical sectors. There are welcome signs that the Medgyessy government wishes to break with this practice.) For the commercial sector, the Interest-Conciliation Council formulates recommendations for pay increases, although these are not binding. Imports and exports of products and services have been liberalised. There are hardly any tariff barriers, and the movement of capital in or out of the country is unimpeded.

There has been a significant development in the system of economic-policy institutions over the last decade. The independence of the National Bank of Hungary is legally guaranteed. The state budget is broken up into more-or-less autonomous sub-systems and its deficit is financed on the market. The operation of financial institutions has been completely transformed. Competition has developed in commercial banking and in insurance, with large numbers of consultancy, intermediary and brokerage firms appearing. The Competition Office is in operation. There has been a substantive reform of the pension system. On the other hand, efforts to transform the agricultural sector, the health services and public education have achieved little.

The system of legal institutions for a market economy was built in Hungary with a speed and consistency exceptional in this region, but accompanied by widespread debate, essentially about whether 'excessive liberalisation' was exacerbating economic problems that were clearly and objectively great. Postponing legislation to impose financial transparency in government and the banking system and financial discipline in the business sector would probably have caused less destruction, but it would have meant less 'creation': much smaller inward flow of foreign capital, and less efficiency in the use of existing resources.

Meanwhile, the extremely serious problems in implementing the law are slow to decrease. One reason is that the legislative process was the driving force (probably inevitably), so that new institutions were often introduced before their staff and the conditions for their operation were in place. For instance, supervision of business associations by company courts was ordained at a time when there were hardly any company courts in operation. Western-type accountancy law (i.e. giving the valuer wide scope for appraisal but heavy responsibilities as well) came into force before there were enough trained auditors and property valuers. The upshot was a constant discrepancy between the law and day-to-day practice.

Tax evasion became general across society. Contract infringement, value-added-tax swindles, fraudulent bankruptcy and other abuses of the law became

socially acceptable. Legal security was further reduced by uncertainties surrounding the land registry, which only recently has been become better equipped with computers. Viktor Orbán's centre-right government (1998–2002) especially set about evading the legal procedures for public procurement. Court proceedings are protracted and judgements often impossible to enforce. (Where rights have been infringed, the plaintiff cannot hope for commensurate compensation and the defendant is not concerned by the prospective penalties.)

Corporate structure and behaviour

Excessive concentration and centralisation were characteristic of production and distribution before 1989. Most of the large enterprises had been created from artificial mergers. They practised autarky and were cushioned by a monopoly position at home. But the number of business associations and firms began to rise steeply at the beginning of the 1980s, when it became possible to found small businesses, and gained new impetus in 1989.

State ownership in the economy was still more than 90 per cent in 1990. By 2002, the ratio had almost been reversed, with private ownership accounting for 85 per cent. (Sixty per cent of this is down to foreign ownership, due to the privatisation purchases, foreign greenfield investment and these investors' greater accumulation capacity.) A similar change has occurred in contributions to GDP. The private sector produced hardly more than a quarter of GDP in 1990. This proportion had risen to above 90 per cent by 2002.

The number of companies in every category exploded after 1989, so that Hungary now exceeds the Western European average in density terms (over 8 companies per 1000 inhabitants). However, many of these in Hungary were founded simply to take advantage of tax breaks or for other reasons of necessity; these tend to behave like working individuals rather than risk-taking ventures. On the other hand, the earlier decentralization process has been paralleled in the last few years by a perceptible process of centralization. The number of large and medium-sized enterprises has been rising and sectors such as food processing, commerce, banking and insurance have seen a spate of mergers.

Privatisation strategy has changed with every government and within each period of office as well. One constant feature has been the rejection of reprivatisation, as technically impractical and politically unacceptable, and free distribution of state assets. Instead, the principle of sale at market value has been emphasised, complemented in some cases by preferential techniques that favour a particular class of purchaser.

There has been a demonstrable effect on Hungarian enterprises resulting from their access to international networks and from better performance through globalisation. Almost all the 50 biggest multinational corporations in the world have a Hungarian subsidiary. However, the successful ventures in-

clude many medium-sized and even some small enterprises. The export orientation of Hungarian industry is clear from the fact that 60 per cent of Hungarian manufacturing output in 2002 was exported (with 80 per cent of this going to the EU). The international integration of Hungarian industry is reflected in the correspondence of business expectations between Hungarian and EU manufacturing firms.

Foreign-owned companies have a stimulating effect on the economy reflected in their increasing resort to Hungarian suppliers. This process is controlled basically by the multinationals, which tend especially to prefer tested suppliers with competitive experience when they procure inputs in which they are more sensitive to quality. These large foreign suppliers, however, have an incentive to transfer some production to Hungary, which contributes to greenfield investment and later to the proportion of the client multinational's input obtained in Hungary. Meanwhile, opportunities are also provided for existing Hungarian firms to join the supply network at the bottom of the pyramid. On the other hand, some business activities are now moving on from Hungary to countries with cheaper labour. Foreign investors are exploring prospects in South-East Europe as Hungarian wages are rising sharply and as the world economy enters a more sluggish period.

The Hungarian financial sector had a strong advantage over those of the other Visegrád countries when the transformation came in 1990. The most important aspects of this was the introduction of a two-tier banking system in 1987 (to replace the state-owned 'monobank' typical of a planned economy), the passage of legislation on securities, and the 1990 opening of a stock exchange. There followed, mainly in the second half of the 1990s, consolidation of the commercial banks at great expense to the budget, before they were sold mainly to foreign investors. The international assessment of the privatised Hungarian commercial banks is good. There has been strong competition among them, especially, of course, for the best classes of customers. This competition has brought a strong concentration in the banking sector. Consolidation of the insurance industry in 1990–93—mainly to remedy the acute capital shortage inherited from the planned economy—was carried out mainly by the new foreign owners, not the state, with the costs being borne ultimately by the customers. The sector has been developing especially fast since the appearance of voluntary and statutory pension funds and may start to play an important investment role on the money and capital markets.

Reform of the public finances

It became increasingly clear, especially in the latter half of the 1980s, that the incongruity between the low performance of the (planned) Hungarian economy and the country's public spending, high even by European standards, could

not be maintained. The public-finance system was weighing too heavily on the economy. Yet no consistent reform in public finance covering the revenue and expenditure sides has taken place since the 1989 change of system. Changes of a reforming nature were made in some important fields of public finance (after several attempts) and some of them have subsequently been reversed. The changes brought a structure of four sub-systems. The central budget and the earmarked state funds, which existed before, were joined by regional administrations independent of the state administration, and for a while, by social-security governing bodies as well.

Important measures of reform have included establishment of the State Audit Office (1989) and local-government authorities (1990), placing the social-security system on a self-governing basis (1991) and 'renationalising' it (1998), the laws on the bank of issue and the budget (1992), establishment of the State Security Issuing Bureau (later the Centre for Handling State Debt, 1993), separation of social security from benefits of a non-insurance type and the introduction of performance financing into the health service (1994), the law on public procurement (1995), establishment of the Treasury (1996), radical reductions in the number of earmarked state funds (1996 and 1998), and raising the pensionable age (1996), followed by pension reform (1997). The 'renationalisation' of the social-security system by the Orbán government in 1998 certainly altered a system that was operating badly, but it failed to provide better conditions of operation. Thereafter, reforms have stalled and the role of the state has begun to increase again. Measures that ran counter to the previous principles of public-finance reform included abolishing higher-education fees (introduced in the Bokros package of 1995), making several social benefits a universal entitlement again, and setting out systematically to sidestep the law on public procurement.

The performance of the economy

Not until 2000 did the GDP of the Hungarian economy exceed its level before the change of system. A long time, but that performance was still the best by any post-socialist country. A decisive factor was the economic policy aimed at attracting capital, mainly foreign capital, through privatisation and other means. That made it possible for the branch, corporate and product structures of production and the sales market to undergo a fundamental alteration.

Eliminating excessive uneconomical capacity in industry was a necessary process. Suffering from a reduction in domestic and foreign demand for its products, industry also lost ground through increased competition from imports on the home market (while in other ways, the imports it employed were improving its competitiveness). At the low point in 1992, industrial sales were a third down on 1989. The decline in manufacturing (the key sector for economic development) ceased in 1992–3 and gave way in 1994 to increasingly rapid expansion.

The export orientation of industry increased dramatically, so that half of industrial production is being exported and more than three-quarters of the exports are going to the EU. Solvent domestic demand is tying down a decreasing proportion of domestic production. These developments show that the degree of autarky in industry has declined significantly, with concomitant increases in co-operation and participation in the international division of labour.

The growth rate of the Hungarian economy (and of industry) in recent years has tended to follow the acceleration and deceleration of the world economy, notably that of the EU and especially that of Germany. However, the level of integration achieved through the multinational corporations and the competitiveness that has extended to increasingly more sectors have allowed the Hungarian economy to develop faster than the EU average, during the upward and downward phases of the business cycle.

Agricultural output sank between 1989 and 1993 to an extent similar to industrial output, after which only a slow increase began. The ratio of active wage earners in the agricultural sector shrank from 13% in 1990 to 6% today. It is clear that agriculture has been one of the big losers in the transformation in Hungary, since the sector has attracted practically no new capital, either domestic or foreign. The agricultural economy has still not emerged from its crisis and the conditions for lasting and balanced growth are still absent. Agriculture has hardly been touched at all by the huge energies that privatisation has generally released in every other sector. The work of establishing and organising the necessary market and semi-market institutions (information systems, buying, processing, selling and servicing associations, land sales and credit institutions, systems for asserting interests, etc.) has gone much more slowly than it should have. This is for want of effective governmental support and because the rapid emergence of transparent, predictable market conditions conflicts with the interests of certain decisive groups.

There has been an explosive development in telecommunications and retailing, where enormous development and modernisation have taken place. The number of mobile phones in operation rose above 60 per cent in 2002, while the 20 per cent share of retail turnover held by large shopping malls and hypermarkets was much higher than in Germany. Liberalisation has been slow to take effect in telecommunications, but in retail trading there is strong competition among the big chains, even by international standards.

The 1990s can be divided into two distinct stages in terms of exports. In the first four years, the collapse of the former Comecon markets and difficulties of the process of changing market directions led to a 20 per cent fall in export volume, i.e. a slightly greater fall than in GDP. The period 1994–2000, on the other hand, brought an extremely rapid increase of export volume, even by international standards. The average export increment of over 18 per cent a year far exceeded the rate of GDP growth. The growth of industry then slowed markedly in

2001–2, in line with the international downturn. The foreign-trade structure of the Hungarian economy underwent radical alteration in the 1990s, as EU relations became the decisive factor in exports and imports (although less in the latter case, due to the energy imports from Russia).

Employment in Hungary fell continually between 1990 and 1996, by almost 30 per cent (i.e. by 1.5 million, leaving some 4 million employees). Two-thirds of this fall took place in the first three years. After 1996, employment rose by about 1 per cent a year until stagnation, followed by a slight decline ensued in 2002. The workforce in the competitive sector fell sharply under market-economic conditions, while the number of those employed in the budget-financed sector hardly changed.

The fall in employment is a good indicator of the speed of transformation. In countries where the reduction is small, the earlier, less competitive enterprises and many of the jobs in them have survived, and the transformation process has hardly started. Where employment has fallen rapidly and this has been accompanied by an increase in productivity (Hungary is a good example of this) the transformation, privatisation and the accompanying structural and organisational changes have taken place faster.

Investment adjusted quite flexibly to the fall in GDP after 1990, but consumption did so only after a long delay that translated into indebtedness. Hungary's investment rate, having been 21.6 per cent in 1989, reached a trough of 18.9 per cent in 1993 before beginning to rise again and exceed 24 per cent in 2000. This is not a satisfactory rate by comparison with the modernisation needs of the country. The volume of investment in 1992 was about 80 per cent of what it had been in 1989, which was not reached again until 1997. (This was about the same as the volume in 1980, due to the investment fluctuations in the 1980s.)

Dilemmas in economic policy

To simplify matters somewhat, two main opinions have been heard in recent years about the state of the Hungarian economy before EU accession, the assumed effects of entry and the strategy that Hungary should therefore be following.

One argument runs that it will benefit the underdeveloped Hungarian economy to join because of the supports obtainable above all through EU membership. On the other hand, the underdevelopment means that Hungary has to obtain as many derogations—temporary waivers of the regulations—as possible during the accession talks, because the structural backwardness of the Hungarian economy would prevent it from competing in Europe in many fields. Advocates of this would go so far as to slow down the accession to ensure that the transition was painless. They would like to see some of the supports obtained before accession, to assist in preparing for entry. This approach assigns a

smaller role in transforming the Hungarian economy to internal reforms and places greater hopes on obtaining concessions and supports from the EU.

The other view regards EU accession as a matter of vital importance. It starts from the proposition that adapting to the world economy (which for a country Hungary's size and in Hungary's location in a globalising world means adjusting to the multinationals and the EU) is the only realistic way to develop and modernise. Advocates of this view see structural adaptation to world-market demands and production systems as inescapable, irrespective of EU membership. While EU membership provides extra assistance for this (political stability and financial support), countries remaining outside will find the adaptation harder and more costly (for instance, due to the Schengen Agreement). Those arguing this case realise that the EU is also battling to retain its world-market positions, so that reforms involving reductions can be expected in some fields of EU and member-country activity, such as state ownership, welfare systems and budget expenditure. Modernisation of the Hungarian economy depends mainly on continuing to improve its ability to attract and accumulate capital, in which the advantages of EU membership can play only an auxiliary role. Those advancing this argument therefore advocate the earliest possible membership on as equal a basis as possible.

These two opposing opinions on EU accession present some fundamental issues that have plagued Hungarian economic policy for decades. Such dilemmas concern equilibrium and growth, whether capitalism or the state should be the prime organising force in the economy, whether growth should derive from market-economic reforms or stimulation of demand, and the scale and speed at which adaptation to the world market should occur. The debates are mainly in political and economic-philosophy forms, but behind them, of course, lie decisive economic and power-related interests.

Experience suggests that an economic policy of postponing reforms and stimulating demand without foundation produces not growth, but successive external balance-of-payments crises that lead to recurrent restrictive measures and major or minor reforms. However, the unpopularity of these measures leads to a subsequent unfounded loosening of economic policy and exacerbation of the balance-of-payments problems. Hungarian economic policy-making at the turn of the millennium has progressed beyond stabilisation. It has managed to establish the main institutional constituents of a European market economy. Through these achievements, it has managed to spread international confidence in the Hungarian economy. Yet economic events in 2002 show that many see chances of expanding the room for economic manoeuvre by returning to the policy based on giving a broader role to the state, arguing that financial criteria and reforms no longer merit the same attention. These ideas gained further currency because parliamentary and local-government elections were held during the year. The facts demonstrate that there is still a strong inclination in the Hungarian econo-

my—and its still young democracy and market economy—to apply policies that will damage the equilibrium of the economy. (Not that more developed countries are immune to this either.) However, there has been every sign since the 2002 autumn local-government elections that the Medgyessy government—like the earlier Antall and Horn governments at a similar stage in their terms—is intent on improving the financial equilibrium, furthering the reform process and meeting the EU criteria. ❧

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Péter Apor

Metamorphosis Transylvaniæ

(1736)

Excerpts

After the Battle of Mohács in August 1526 most of Central Hungary became part of the Ottoman Empire. An unstable, ill-defined and ill-defended area to the west and north-west of Turkish Hungary came under Austrian rule and became known as Royal Hungary, as the reigning Habsburg, Ferdinand I, had claimed the Hungarian crown on the death at Mohács of Louis II. To the east Transylvania, a Hungarian territory for more than 500 years, was relatively undisturbed; not on the line of the Turkish thrust into western Europe, it was strategically less important to the Turks than the Great Plain. Thus Transylvania developed a significant degree of independence. Its rulers were elevated from the rank of *vajda* or viceroy (which they had held under the Hungarian kings) to *fejedelem* or prince, and although nominally subject to distant Vienna and obliged to foster good relationships with the Turks—the approval of the Sultan, and in some cases his direct intervention, was needed to secure election to the throne—they were largely able to conduct their own affairs.

The independent Principality did not have a troublefree existence. Some twenty princes reigned in its 180 years, several of them only briefly. People happily forgot in the early eighteenth century that for much of the duration of the Principality there had been wars, political struggles, epidemics following military campaigns, and great loss of life—all of which had affected most of all the Hungarian population rather than the Saxons or Romanians. Nevertheless, at the same time independent Translvania became a repository of Hungarian tradition, and was preferred to Royal Hungary as the destination of refugees from Turkish Hungary. Religious tolerance was conspicuous, and cultural life showed no sign of decline. Great efforts were made to sustain schools and to found new ones, and to visit foreign universities; the best Transylvanian minds were involved in European intellectual movements, and libraries came into being. There was also a passion for building, which produced numerous fine churches and mansions in the Transylvanian Baroque, and a flowering of sculpture and portraiture.

After the failure of their second siege of Vienna in 1683, the Turks' power waned rapidly. In 1686 an allied army drove them from the old Hungarian capital of Buda, and their ejection from the former territory of the Hungarian Crown was completed in 1699 with the Treaty of Karlowitz. Even before that, however, in 1686 Prince Michael I Apaffi handed back Transylvania to the Hungarian crown, then worn by the Austrian Leopold I. This led to the govern-

ment of Transylvania directly from Vienna rather than from Buda, the incursion of large numbers of Austrian troops, and the giving of a considerable impetus to the Roman Catholic Church. This state of affairs was widely resented and the sluggish, phlegmatic Leopold made himself highly unpopular; there followed an armed rebellion under the last Prince of Transylvania, Francis II Rákóczi, which lasted from 1704 until 1711. His forces—the *kuruc*—were defeated when French and Russian support was withdrawn, leaving the Austrians firmly in command. Many Hungarians found their rule as distasteful as that of the Turks.

Baron Péter Apor's *Metamorphosis Transylvaniæ** is one of a number of autobiographical works written by Transylvanian aristocrats in the early eighteenth century, at the end of the Principality's brief period of virtual independence. Usually these give an account of the writer's life and times, and are a valuable source of historical and political detail. Apor's work, however, is different. Completed in 1736, it sets out neither to discuss politics nor even to tell the story of its author's life, though he mentions incidents enough, but rather to commemorate social practices familiar to him as a boy in the last years of the Principality, which, he fears, the influence of the *neue Mode* brought in by the Austrians may cause to be forgotten. He therefore recalls in detail—both from personal experience and sometimes quite openly from hearsay—various aspects of the aristocratic Transylvanian life of the closing years of the seventeenth century.

Born in 1676 into an ancient aristocratic family in Altorja (Turia) in the Székely region of eastern Transylvania, young Péter lost his father to the plague in the year of his birth and was brought up by his uncle, Count István Apor. This was a man of great importance in public life: *főispán* (Lord Lieutenant) of Küküllő County, he was a member of the Prince's Council and at one time Treasurer of Transylvania, and so Péter moved in the highest circles from his early youth. A Catholic, he was educated first in the Jesuit college at Kolozsvár (Cluj) and then at the Royal Hungarian University of Nagyszombat (Trnava in Slovakia, which transferred to Pest in 1784 eventually to become the present Eötvös Loránd University). There he studied law and philosophy in preparation for a career in public service, which he began in 1709, not before a period of almost two years' imprisonment on (unfounded) suspicion of involvement in the *kuruc* resistance to Habsburg rule. He served as *főispán* of Küküllő County and Chief Justice of his native region of Háromszék, himself attaining the rank of Baron.

The *Metamorphosis* was not Apor's only book. He also produced a history of his family, written in Latin and entitled *Lusus mundi* (1727); a blend of biography and history—also in Latin—entitled *Synopsis mutationum notabilium* (1749); and two collections of Hungarian poems on noble families: *Syllabus mortuorum* about persons who had died, and *Syntagma et syllabus vivorum* about those still alive. He also left a version of the *Metamorphosis* in Hungarian verse, and a quantity of correspondence. The *Metamorphosis,* however, is beyond doubt Apor's best work; such he considered it himself, and it is this that has earned him a place of honour in the annals of Hungarian literature. It remained in manuscript in family hands

* *Metamorphosis Transylvaniæ* will be published in Bernard Adams' translation by Kegan Paul, London, in 2003.

until its publication in 1863 by Gábor Kazinczy in Pest.

Nostalgia is the keynote of the *Metamorphosis*. Apor yearns for the good old days which, he knows, are gone for ever, but which, thanks to him, have not been forgotten. He gives the impression of a lost golden age in the 'fairyland' of Transylvania which ended shortly after his birth, when all was morally and materially superior to the time in which he writes.

Not all, however, is in a fretful tone. Much of the material presented is pure social history, such as the account of how a young nobleman would find a wife, with a good humoured tale of the procedure and the jokes played on the suitor, ending with a detailed account of the wedding itself. The same is true (without, of course, the humorous element) of the customs surrounding the funerals of the upper classes, and it is clear to the reader that Apor thoroughly enjoyed a nice example of the ceremonial. His accounts of traditional dress, travel and vehicles are also very detailed, while the text is punctuated by a number of atrocious puns.

This very distinctive work, then, holds a high place in the Hungarian literature of its time. The poet, novelist and essayist Dezső Kosztolányi says of it two centuries later:

> Imagine a proud but now embittered, constantly quarrelsome, crusty grouser of an elderly nobleman, who feels that the end of the world is nigh and turns his gaze inward, directs it upon the past, to the time when Transylvania was free and independent. Everything that he can see externally is shoddy, inferior and tatty. Everything that he can see internally, in his soul, is perfect, faultless, a veritable fairy dream. This is a historical work, in which he describes nothing but luncheons, dinners, notable weddings and funerals, but in its tone there is literature, poetry. That he had created something of value he suspected himself.

Péter Apor died in 1752, almost blind, and isolated from society by his incompatibility with it.

Bernard Adams

Chapter the First

The reason for these writings

Dear Posterity! I have pondered deeply whether I should write of the ancient Transylvanian ways and customs in Latin or Hungarian. At length I have resolved to write in Hungarian, the more clearly and plainly to expound those matters, and that posterity may the better comprehend them.

And the reason for these writings is that since the year 1687, in which the Austrians first came, I have seen every year more and more new ways, or as the Austrians have it, *neue Mode,* so that the more we become impoverished, the more we long after grander titles and more ornately braided attire, and can no longer eat the victuals to which our fathers were accustomed unless we lack an Austrian cook to prepare costly dishes ever more diverse; in order, therefore, that the said precious[1] customs of the time in which, as I have written elsewhere in another work, *erat pinguissimus vitulus et rarissimus titulus*[2], shall not simply fall into oblivion among posterity, I will write down what little comes to mind.

*

...to list all those that have become counts and barons since [Prince Francis Rákóczi's] rebellion would take long, for the land is full of them; I shall only write that so many of us are counts and barons that, if we conducted our counties and baronages as did the Hungarians of old, the whole of Transylvania would not be enough for us to live up to our titles.

At one time John Szapolyai[3] was a count, and held forty stone castles under the Hungarian crown; Bálint Homonnai was a count, and was the equal in men-at-arms of the prince of Transylvania; the Báthoris were counts, and raised whole armed camps; Francis Rhédei was a count, who owned a vast estate at Máramaros, because he presented one of his servants with a hundred serf families—but nowadays there are counts in Transylvania who, if they gave away a hundred serf families, would scarcely have fifty left themselves—and otherwise rewarded the men of his court so well that they could afford carriages and gilded swords; nowadays there are many barons in Transylvania who can scarcely maintain a carriage or two for themselves; far from paying for carriages and gilded swords, they slouch about with scarcely two or three ragged servants. In olden times counts and barons came of very ancient stock; I am too ashamed to record the names of those whose fathers or grandfathers guided the plough and did corvée for his landlord, for such barons indeed we have.

Although Count István Apor was my father's brother, I write without flattery, he lived like a real count; for every day there were regularly laid out eighty-eight silver dishes and as many silver plates, and they were as thick as dishes and plates of pewter; for him and his wife the table was laid with gold spoons, and

the plates were of silver, square, with a gilt rim two fingers wide. He had a silver wine-cooler, very big, into which a six-year-old child could have fitted; it was gilded [at the brim] a palm-width within and without, had been brought from Vienna and cost three thousand Austrian florins. He had land in many parts of Transylvania and used to sow five thousand three hundred *köböl*[4] of autumn wheat; he had so much wine in many places that it filled a few thousand *veder*[5], and from that he used to present not only his stepson Zsigmond Korda and the Altorja branch of the Apor family with forty or fifty full forty-*veder* barrels, but also the principal servants around him. He grazed his cattle and horses near the village of Szentjakab in the Mezőség, on the pasture known as the Boduc, and went there in the autumn, had his beasts and horse-herds driven forth, inspected them, and presented his servants with eighteen or twenty such colts as were sold for sixty or sometimes eighty forints. Every year he went to the fair in Medgyes on St Margaret's day, if he was in good health, because there he settled accounts with the tradesmen who owed him money; then he would have brought up five or six bolts of English cloth and would distribute them as gifts to his relatives and servants, to some giving seven ells[6], that is, enough for a whole mantle, and to others cloth for a *mente,* a *dolmány*[7] or for trousers. He would wear an outfit for three or four months, then would call in some deserving servant of his and present him with that entire outfit: a *mente* decorated with the best fox-fur, a *dolmány,* trousers, a hat trimmed with pine-marten that he had worn himself, sometimes with the silken girdle that he had worn over it all, everything.

He had about eighty permanent servants or more, sometimes a hundred; their wages alone, if I remember correctly, came to four thousand six hundred odd florins a year in cash, and in addition there was English cloth, fine, double-fulled London cloth for a mantle; half of their wages was always paid on St John's day[8] and the other half at Christmas to the last penny; in addition he provided his mounted servants with hay and fodder for their horses; he had fifteen permanent mounted servants, and the wages of each were a hundred florins together with seven ells of cloth; likewise he kept three trumpeters and their wages were as much, with three *ejtel*[9] of wine daily; of the others, some were paid eighty florins, some sixty, the grooms forty, the stewards thirty, the coachmen twelve and the outriders six, and in addition to each according to his station cloth for a mantle and boots.

Sometimes there were so many servants, and yet so plentifully were they provided at both luncheon and dinner, both at home and abroad, even when there were no guests at the long table, that all that great quantity of good food, cooked in Hungarian style, could never be consumed but was given plates and all to the greyhounds and staghounds. When it was time for luncheon or dinner the head cook rang a little bell that hung outside the kitchen and all the many servants would gather, so many that there was hardly room for them in the din-

ing room, and sometimes the coachmen, outriders, stablemen, cooks, kitchen servants, watchmen, guards and other such servants of lower rank could not enter. In his later years, for the sake of the Austrians, he kept a famous Austrian cook too, whose wages were a hundred Austrian florins, seven ells of London cloth, boots, two forty-*veder* barrels of wine, twelve *köböl* of wheat, three fatted pigs, and in addition oatmeal, peas and the like.

On his property at Kece alone he kept eighteen ample farm wagons, with six oxen each and thirty-six farmhands with them; his ox-stalls stood along a goodly stretch of the Maros; when the oxen were driven to water in the Maros you would have thought that the oxen of a whole village were being driven down.

In addition there was the chaplain's handsome stipend and his mantle; as his wife was a Calvinist, the same for her minister.

Apart from that of Gabriel Bethlen, you never heard such a will in Transylvania as his; for *ad pias causas* alone he bequeathed a hundred and twenty thousand forints, and in addition much more to his wife, his kinsmen and others. If only his property had remained intact; but through the rebellions of Imre Thököly[10] and Prince Francis Rákóczi he sustained losses as great as the above-mentioned wealth, which wealth, if it could have remained intact, his posterity would certainly have been lords today.

I have not written a great amount since I am his kinsman; I surely write that you may ponder much more, dear reader.

*

This is how crystal glasses first came into Transylvania, for in the olden times money was not squandered on them, and even in the Prince's house there were perhaps a dozen, said to have come from Poland, and which were considered a rarity, but crystal glasses were first brought to Transylvania in the year 1686 from Austria. Count István Apor was comptroller of the thirtieth-tax, and had commanded the assessors everywhere that if Greek merchants brought any new dutiable item it was to be sent directly to him; a merchant brought some thirty crystal glasses and the assessor, or thirtieth-tax official, in Kolozsvár sent them to István Apor; he paid the price and had them secretly put away. However, he invited Mihály Teleki, István Naláczy and other lords to luncheon at Fogaras, where he lived, and commanded that only one crystal glass, and that the most inferior, be placed on the glass cupboard. He sat down at table and asked for that glass, filled with wine, to be brought in, and said: "I wish to salute him that will accept and drink his wine and put away the crystal glass for himself". To that Mihály Teleki said: "You plot in vain, friend, for you know well that I drink no wine" (Mihály Teleki did not drink wine, but only water, and that freshly boiled and cooled in an ice-bucket, and so poured into a little wooden cup and given to him to drink; however, he is said to have liked wine, and there had been great merriment when once he had drunk wine and become inebriated; when he

was in his cups there was none better or quieter than he). István Apor replied: "My lord, I am not offering it to you, but to him that will take it from me." István Naláczy said: "Give it to me, my dear friend!" He drank the wine and gave the glass to his servant. Then a second glass was brought out from the inner room onto the glass cupboard, and that too István Apor had filled with wine and said: "He who takes this glass from me, let him drink the wine and put away the glass". Then too Mihály Teleki said again: "You plot in vain, my friend, for I do not drink wine". István Naláczy took the glass, drank the wine and gave the glass to his servant. A third crystal glass too was brought out, more beautiful than the others, and that too István Apor called for, and before he could propose his toast István Naláczy said: "Give it to me, my friend, I'll take this one too". Mihály Teleki said: "This one, God help me, you shall not take, two crystal glasses is enough; give it here, my dear István Apor, I will drink it". And he drank the wine and gave the glass to his servant. Then the glasses were brought out one by one and each time Mihály Teleki accepted the salutation, drank the wine, gave his servant the glasses one by one and they were taken to the castle, where he lived. That day there was terrible drinking in István Apor's house, such that no one was able to go home on foot, but the guests were taken home in carriages.

Gergely Bethlen used to behave in the real, old Hungarian style, and therefore was nicknamed Magyar Geci[11]; I will not describe him, but, dear reader, look at Duke Gyula in the *Mausoleum Regum Hungariæ* and write beneath with confidence Gergely Bethlen. He certainly never drank from a crystal glass, and he had once among other occasions invited guests, one of whom was actually Count Mihály Mikes, but he did not say: "Give my lord a glass of wine", but: "Sándor Gergely (he was his favourite servant), stir yourself, give my lord a little wine". It was served either in a pitcher or a goblet, for when he drank he drank deeply; Mihály Mikes turned up his nose at the wine and Gergely Bethlen said: "My lord, perhaps Your Honour desires a crystal glass". Then he began to search in his pocket, took out a worn purse which would not have been worth two *poltura*[12], took out a *susták,* that is four *poltura*, and gave it to his servant, saying: "Off you go, my boy, bring His Honour a crystal glass, because His Honour craves crystal". In that way he made fun of those that wished to drink from crystal glasses.

*

Let us move from titles to hospitality, luncheons and dinners. First of all is breakfast: coffee, herbal tea and chocolate were unheard of; if you had said to any one "Would you like coffee?" he might have taken you to mean "Go away"; "Would you like tea?" might have meant that you wished to call him *"te";* while if you had offered anyone chocolate, he might have thought, if he knew where it was, that you were offering him water from the Kacsulás stream at Kacsulátafalva in Fogarasföld; and if you offered rosolio, perhaps he would have thought that you had collected dew before dawn and were offering that, or bread baked

with rye[13]. None of those things had been heard of in the old days, but cinnamon-water was made in Brassó, and apart from that the drink at breakfast was called *aquavita,* or people drank neat brandy, which aristocratic ladies used to keep in tiny barrels, as did also noble ladies and ladies of quality, and offer especially to strangers. They would either pour the brandy into a dish and sweeten it with honey, or put in it a fig or two, or a few raisins, set it alight and whisk it in the dish with a spoon, put out the fire and drink it, and then eat the figs. Men drank at breakfast a good, delicate, bitter-sweet vermouth, and it was considered healthy, as there were no such weak stomachs as people have today.

The old Hungarian dishes were: leg of pork with horseradish, cabbage with beef, goose or bacon, or in winter with freshly-killed pork, *polyéka*[14] with beef, a sage sauce or barley porridge, but in former times it was not full of lemon juice; beef with rice, wild white carrots or parsley and thick gravy, and in summer young peas in the pod; goose with a creamy sauce, and chicken roasted with garlic, vinegar and bacon; peas, either in the pod and mixed in a dish with grilled bacon, or podded and boiled with a piece of bacon or pork until soft; the meat of a wether with lard, tarragon or vinegar and onions (this was the favourite dish of Mihály Teleki and István Apor); beef or pork with *kaszáslé*[15], and no dish was considered of old more suitable than this with cabbage to the Hungarian stomach, hare with black sauce, pike with horseradish or grey sauce, etc. Butter was never used as an ingredient in cooking, but was added to porridge when it was served, or when white bread, pancakes or pastries were baked, or doughnuts, butter was used, although doughnuts fried in freshly reduced pork-fat were preferred to those cooked in butter. Dill was used to give a fine flavour to everything.

Round tables had not been heard of, but people of quality sat at a four-sided table; this was so constructed that it could be pulled out at either end when guests arrived; if there were so many guests that this did not provide enough room, an extension was added. The table stood by the wall, and on the side by the wall were benches covered with cloth, and on the other side chairs. Meals were not taken in the French fashion, as nowadays, but luncheon was at ten o'clock and dinner at six. As ten o'clock approached the butler would lay the table, placing one or two plates at the head, cover the rolls completely with a table-napkin, then place one or two silver spoons, then set plates, rolls and napkins, as many as he thought sufficient for those at table, and keep them on the sideboard until they sat down, and then he would give each his plate and roll with a napkin.

None, however, was given a knife, but the most distinguished men had their own, which their servants kept and gave to their masters; but otherwise, however great a man was, his knife was in its sheath and lodged in his belt behind him, and when he sat down he took out the sheath, drew the knife and ate with it, and after eating replaced it in its sheath and returned it to his belt behind his back. Nevertheless, before luncheon or dinner the servant would ask for the knife, clean it and so give it to his master, and he would put it in its sheath.

Pewter plates were very rare, and people ate for the most part off wooden plates. I remember that when pewter plates became fashionable that most saintly man and great lord János Haller had some small wooden plates made and put them in the middle of the pewter ones, and so ate from wooden plates; even in the houses of great lords they ate from pewter dishes, because none but the Prince alone might eat from silver.

*

Look, Transylvanian, it is not the emperor's taxation that has brought hardship upon Transylvania, but the vain adornment of your wives and daughters. I have read the histories of both hemispheres, and in each there is moderation in the dress of women and girls, and it is only among us that I see none; do but look, what fine moderation is maintained by the women and girls of the Saxon race, foster-child of Transylvania, and for that reason its coffers are full; but just as the great ostentation of the present day has swept money out of Transylvania, so no less have useless fringes and braid and the rest on men's attire too; let us see how men went about in Transylvania of old, and how they dressed.

As for men, then, the highest ranking wore on special occasions a hat made of a pair of pine-marten skins, with a medallion on it holding an egret feather; persons of lower rank might wear a cluster of fine pearls; in summer, however, young gentlemen would also set a bunch of flowers in their hats, and place a cluster of pearls or precious stones above it. Those of lower rank wore hats of one pine-marten skin; the sons of lords wore hats with two, three or sometimes four pine-marten tails, and a plume of lanner or osprey feathers, sometimes parted in the middle, sometimes united; some wore plumes of eagle feathers, but the sons of lords wore for the most part a pair of osprey or lanner feathers in a plume mounted in gold and adorned with precious stones. Such was worn by Count László Gyulaffi when he was a High Chamberlain. But splendid above all else was when the young men set in their hats three crane-feathers in a jewelled clasp. In those days many cranes were kept in the courts of the prince, chief lords and other high-ranking gentlemen, and as cranes are mostly grey they pulled out the feathers very gently, poured wood-oil on the follicles and re-inserted the plucked feathers, which then became white. When such sons of lords, wearing crane-feathers in their hats and with their powder-flasks and sabre taches, mounted their horses which were furnished with harness dyed red with Brazil-wood and set with stones, pearls and coral, and with Turkish tassels of gold thread, and on their foreheads a costly medallion sewn on velvet (called a 'forelock-presser') with three or sometimes two crane-feathers, their feet in silver stirrups, gilded spurs, decorated with diamonds, rubies or emeralds on their boots, and behind them a servant wearing eagle-feathers and the skin of leopard, tiger or wolf, on which were great buttons of silver or gold, with a few

rows of silver chain, and before them groomed carriage-horses, variously bedecked, and the horse prancing under fine control to the sound of *tárogató* and trumpet: certainly the court of any king in Europe could have looked on with delight. And to adduce an example, when László Székely married, each of the six horses that drew the carriage that he brought for his bride had on their foreheads a clasp with a crane-feather, and on his head there were three, and the dyed Turkish horse that he rode had two crane-feathers affixed to its forehead.

The young men in particular liked to furnish their horses with bridle, breast-strap and crupper decorated with snail-shells. Those of quality used to cover their tack with tiny snail-shells, as big as beans, which were called pearl-snails, and with old, many-coloured sea-snails as big as apples at intervals. The sons of common nobility adorned their tack with other kinds of snails, which were cheaper. Great men very often wore black hats; these were of silk, and for the common nobility, of astrakhan; when a man died, such a hat was placed on his head and so he was laid in his coffin and buried; to this day when new graves are dug in the graveyard and old corpses are found such hats are revealed in decayed condition, as I have often seen myself.

*

Then when the guests of the bridegroom and of the bride's father and mother had feasted, and fruit had been removed (and the fruit was all in silver or, more often, gilded dishes; you would also have seen there all sorts of jams, Turkish and Venetian sweets of sugar-cane, and among the sweetmeats large golden pastries too), they rose from the table, the tables were removed from the hall, and the chief steward would open the dancing with fine ceremonies and bendings of the knee. In the first dance the master of ceremonies danced with the matron of honour, the bride with the groom and the best man with the bridesmaid. When these couples had danced three rounds, the second dance was that of the bride's father, who danced with her mother, and two couples of their children if they had them, and if not then the nearest couple of their relatives; after that they danced in order. After that followed the Polish *változó,* sometimes the Mouse Dance and the Hat Dance, and after those the Spade Dance, after which another two or three dances. Meanwhile the bride was taken to a separate room and there dressed afresh in a pure white gown, or if she had previously been wearing white, usually in green (though I have seen her in other colours too); take note that when she was brought out and shown the gifts by the best man she wore one gown, when she was brought to the table she wore another, and when she was taken away a third, so that on her wedding-day the bride was in three different outfits; her hair was unbraided and allowed to hang loose down her back and ornamented with a bright, narrow ribbon which also hung low. Before she had worn on her head a wreath with fine pearls and precious stones, but now a wreath of flowers was placed on her head, and thus changed she was taken out to the hall. When she

appeared the fiddlers at once struck up the bride-dance, and the bride was handed to the master of ceremonies, who took two or three turns with her and taking her by the hand led her to where her father, mother and relatives were standing, and she took her leave of them. It was often the custom that the master of ceremonies did not cause the bride to take her leave at that moment, but on the third day, when the whole wedding party was about to leave (remember here that on the first day of the wedding the bride danced not a step, but went to whom she was given and only walked). But when the master of ceremonies did cause the bride to take leave of her father and mother on the wedding-day, then she fell on her knees before them and prostrated first at her father's feet, then at her mother's, and the master of ceremonies made her take leave of them and thank them before all for bringing her up as parents and taking care of her, and for now having honourably found her a husband; with that she would kiss her father and mother's hands, sometimes their feet too, and they would kiss their daughter. Then the master of ceremonies would place her in the hands of the best man, he would dance a turn with her, and at once young men, usually six, plumed, would stand before her, each with a great burning torch in his hand, and would precede the best man, and after him a few couples would dance, immediately behind him the matron of honour hand in hand with the bridesmaid, and a further three couples. When they had danced the third round a sign was given and the young men with the torches would make for the door in great haste, almost running, the best man would lead the bride after them, the matron of honour and bridesmaid following hand in hand, and the bride was escorted to the bridegroom's bed-chamber; the best man presented her to the bridegroom, pronounced fine blessings upon them, and then the best man drew his sword and cut the wreath from the bride's head and let it slide down to the hilt, the sword being drawn (that was in order that the bride should remember that as the sword had removed the sign of her virginity, she should so conduct herself in holy wedlock that if she dishonoured that estate a sword should be on her head); then the best man bade the newly-weds good night and, taking the bridesmaid by the hand, with drawn sword and preceded by the torch-bearers returned to the wedding-hall. The matron of honour undressed the bride, and the best man danced two or three turns with the bridesmaid and then threw the wreath off his sword onto the ground and cut it into four, signifying that the bride's maidenhood was now ended; then they bade one another good night. But all this taking away of the bride and going to bed took place towards dawn; and if there were cannon, howitzers or arquebuses, these fired a mighty fusillade when the bride was taken to the groom.

*

I do not think that the honourable Petki family will be offended at this little story, as it is merely a tale of humble kindness. Young Farkas Petki was a brother of the famous István Petki; as a young man he harnessed horses to a

waggon, gathered together some women and girls of Csicsó, seated them in the waggon with himself as driver to take them into Szereda to the fair; this he did not out of lechery, for in those days every man, woman and girl was more pious than now, but to afford them a little decent entertainment and to amuse himself. There was no room left on the waggon for one woman, and she pleaded to be allowed to get on, but they would not take her, and she said to them: "You will see, you bitches, if I cannot go to the fair on the waggon you shall not go without trouble". And she secretly removed the pin from one of the wheels of the waggon; the other women laughed at her left alone to sulk; Farkas Petki as driver set off at speed, whipping the horses, the wheel came off the waggon which overturned, women and all, and all were thrown in a heap; the women that had been in the waggon shouted and screamed, but that woman laughed at them and teased them: "There, you bitches, I told you that if I could not have a place in the waggon you would not go to the fair without trouble today". Farkas Petki had another waggon brought out and this time seated her and the others in it and drove it himself in a hat with a crane-feather, and so took the women into Szereda to the fair, for all to see. Nowadays if any young lord, or even a low-ranking young nobleman, were to indulge in such an escapade he would be called mad for it.

Especially in the Székely region, when a young lord or young nobleman was merry and wished to dance, he sent down into the village and assembled the village girls, had them brought up to his house and they would dance the night away with all propriety; there was never a suggestion of the least misbehaviour.

Old István Petki's mother, Erzsébet Lázár, and the mother of my grandfather Lázár Apor, Borbára Lázár, were sisters. It happened that István Petki, that great man, called on Lázár Apor at Torja as a relation; Lázár Apor prepared to take his place at a long table, as he had many guests, and when they sat down he gave a high place to a man dressed in sandals and a coarse coat; seeing that, István Petki wondered why the sandalled, ill-clad one had had to be invited, and especially why he need be seated so high; they were very merry at table, but when they rose István Petki could not restrain himself, but called Lázár Apor aside and asked him: "*Bátyámuram*[16], why did you have to seat that terribly poor-looking man at your table, and especially so high?" Lázár Apor replied: "Because, *öcsémuram*[17], it is my custom to honour the nobility even in sandals and *zeke;* he, fallen on hard times though he is and, it is true, wearing *zeke* and sandals, is of an ancient noble family, a fine and worthy man; those that sat beneath him are those who became noble yesterday or the day before". Then said István Petki: "I have learned something from my lord cousin today". Indeed, for the rest of his life Lázár Apor recalled publicly what he had learned from his uncle Lázár Apor; and he did not merely recall but practised it. Would to God that we today too had regard to the poor worthy ancient families; but I ask you, observe how things are with the ancient families.

I will say no more of the simple ways of Transylvania before the year 1687. Perhaps you will consider the last two or three little stories ridiculous; but truly they are not for your amusement but for your edification, dear reader, if you consider them well. Therefore I wish that God may grant our land the former humility, simplicity, true brotherly love; which I certainly do not hope for as affairs are going, but which, if it came about, would restore Transylvania to its former happiness and wealth. ❧

Translated by Bernard Adams, with the collaboration of Kálmán Ruttkay

NOTES

1 ■ *azon időbeli bécsi szokás: bécsi* "Viennese" seems impossible here; *becses* "precious" offers a better reading.

2 ■ 'The calf was very fat and the title very rare."

3 ■ John Szapolyai, viceroy of Transylvania from 1511, was proclaimed King of Hungary in 1526 after the defeat by the Turks and ruled until his death in 1540. He was expelled from Buda in 1527 by the Habsburg Ferdinand I, whom the Parliament of Pozsony had elected king in December 1526, but was recognised as king in 1528 by Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent and in 1529 returned to Buda under Turkish protection. There was therefore a period when parts at least of Hungary had two warring kings. King John II, never crowned, went on to rule in the east, in a small territory from which was to emerge the pricipality of Transylvania, a vassal state of the Ottomans.

4 ■ A variable pre-metric measure of volume equal to 65, 94 or 125 litres.

5 ■ A pre-metric measure equal to 11.3 litres. The word means "bucket".

6 ■ An ell (Hungarian *sing*) is an old English unit of measurement of cloth equal to 45 inches or 114 centimetres.

7 ■ *Mente* and *dolmány* are types of embroidered jacket. The *mente* is akin to a modern car-coat, while the *dolmány* can be full-length.

8 ■ Feast of St John the Baptist, 24 June.

9 ■ A pre-metric liquid measure, 0.7 litres or rather more than a pint.

10 ■ Imre Thököly (1657–1705), a leader of Hungarian *kuruc* opposition to the Austrians in the last quarter of the 17th century and Francis II Rákóczi's step-father. In 1682 he was proclaimed ruler of Hungary by the Turks, with the title of Prince of Upper Hungary, and briefly Prince of Transylvania in 1690. He left Hungary in 1690 and died in Nicomedia (modern Iznik) in western Turkey.

11 ■ *Geci* is a diminutive of *Gergely* (Gregory).

12 ■ A small copper coin, equal to half a *garas* or three *krajcár*.

13 ■ This is a series of plays on words. Apor sees in *kávé* "coffee" a homophone of the Latin *cave* "beware, stay away"; *thé* (modern Hungarian has *tea*, but Apor reflects the German pronunciation) "tea" resembles the familiar pronoun *te; csukoláta—Kacsuláta* is rather imaginative; the herbal cordial *rosolio* (modern Hungarian *rozsólis*) derives its name from the Latin *ros solis* "dew of the sun", and the Hungarian for "rye" is *rozs*.

14 ■ A soup containing meat or offal.

15 ■ A piquant sauce made with smoked meat or sausage.

16 ■ 'Uncle-sir', an address of deferential familiarity.

17 ■ 'Nephew-sir'.

Ágnes Nemes Nagy

POEMS

Translated by George Szirtes

Between

Között

The air's enormous empty sleeves.
Air supporting birds and the whole panoply
of bird-lore, ornithology,
wings on fraying winds of argument,
the unpredictable, inconsequent
boughs that a moment of sky relieves,
trees of living mist, spiralling desire
to the topmost branches,
breathing, twenty to a minute at a time,
vast angels barnacled in rime.

The mass below. The plain with mounds
of earth, juddering, huge, immovable,
where ridges and hump-backed cliffs lie down
or kneel—geography's sculpture hall—
the vale a moment of forgetfulness where
attention wanders, and then more
masses and forms from skeletons of lime bone
to the far perimeter, a single core
of being, crumpled into stone.

Between the earth and sky.

Ágnes Nemes Nagy *(1922–1991)*
has had two volumes of poems published in English: Selected Poems, *transl. by Bruce Berlind, International Writing Program, The University of Iowa, 1980, and* Between. Selected Poems, *transl. by Hugh Maxton. Corvina, Budapest–Daedalus, Dublin. 1998;* The Night of Akhenaton, *transl. by George Szirtes, will be published by Bloodaxe in November 2003.*

Explosions in deep mountain bores.
Meanwhile the sun's transparent ores
turn stone to metal, almost to themselves,
and when beasts walk across them, their claws smoke,
and smoke-ribbons of burning hoofs
wind round and round above the cliffs' sheer roofs,
till night falls on the desert plain,
night that quenches and extends into the tight
core of what was stone, sub-zero night,
among the splitting and collapsing
of cartilage, joint, flagstone, set,
flexed in an endless
decimating unconsciousness
by white and black quotidian
lightning flashes without sound—

Between the day and night.

Those decimations and incisions,
droughts and visions,
inarticulate resurrections,
the unbearable vertical tensions
between up-above and down-below—

Various climates and conditions.
Between. The stone. The tracks of tanks.
A line of black reed on savannah border,
written on pond and sky in lines, in double order,
two dark stones with cryptographs
stars' diacritics, acutes and graves—

Between sky and sky.

The Sleeping Horsemen

Az alvó lovasok

for Lajos Kassák

December. Noon. A blinding white
snowfield broad as the hill is wide.
On the steep slope a pile of cubic stones.
Over their rounded edges, thin,
a hot white sheet of snow:
a clutch of sleeping bedouin.

Strange faces bent towards the earth
within that dark tight shrubbery,
among inverted statuary!
What dried-up line of black roots tugs
downward within the scree
with hot dark breath for company—

And deep below, below the shore
what kind of bedouin horses stare,
their shapes upwelling here and there,
as down some stable-corridor,
drumming, dumb, invisible,
their great manes like a beard-root bound
billowing freely underground—

And what movement when, sudden, they,
the hot horses of earth and clay,
with all the earth-brown tribes they bear
upon their backs, strain upward with their leafy hair,
and with one slow enormous leap
gallop away.

Ferenc Dávid–János Malina

The Esterházy Fairyland

The palace of the Princes Esterházy at Fertőd in western Hungary is best known as the place linked to Joseph Haydn, who lived and worked there from 1768 to 1790. However, that sumptious complex of buildings, its gardens, park and woods along with the settlement around it deserve attention in their own right. Prince Nikolaus Esterházy "the Magnificent", one of the most lavish art patrons of all time, there created a beautiful example of a Rococo ideal island.

Three names for the place have survived. The hamlet of medieval origin on the road leading along Lake Fertőd (Neusiedler See) from Sopron to Győr was called Süttör. The Esterházys divided the village into two: they expropriated the western part for their palace and its outbuildings, and for the housing of the palace staff. That became Eszterháza in 1765 and was renamed Fertőd in 1946.

In 1719 the Princes Esterházy von Galántha redeemed their Szentmiklós estate from the Maria Zell friars. Several villages, including Süttör, belonged to that estate. The Esterházy family's order of succession lent the estate special importance. When the Palatine Paul Esterházy, the first feoffee in entail, died in 1713, he divided his enormous estates between his two sons. The West Hungarian possessions including Kismarton (Eisenstadt, now Austria) and Fraknó (Forchtenstein) went to his elder son Michael, together with the title of Prince of the Holy Roman Empire. The younger son Joseph inherited the estates south of Lake Balaton and some possessions in Upper Hungary.

Ferenc Dávid

is Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Art History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He has published widely on the history of monument protection and secular architecture, on burgher's houses and mansions.

János Malina

is Director of the Baroque ensemble Affetti Musicali and Artistic Director of the Haydn Festival at Eszterháza.

By redeeming Szentmiklós, Csapod, Endréd, Szerdahely, Süttör and Sarród, Count Joseph Esterházy acquired an estate in the border regions between Austria and Hungary that was close to Kismarton, Pozsony (Pressburg—now Bratislava, Slovakia) and Vienna. He therefore chose a site for a palace in this area. The estate was surveyed and added to in 1719 , in the following year construction began in Süttör.

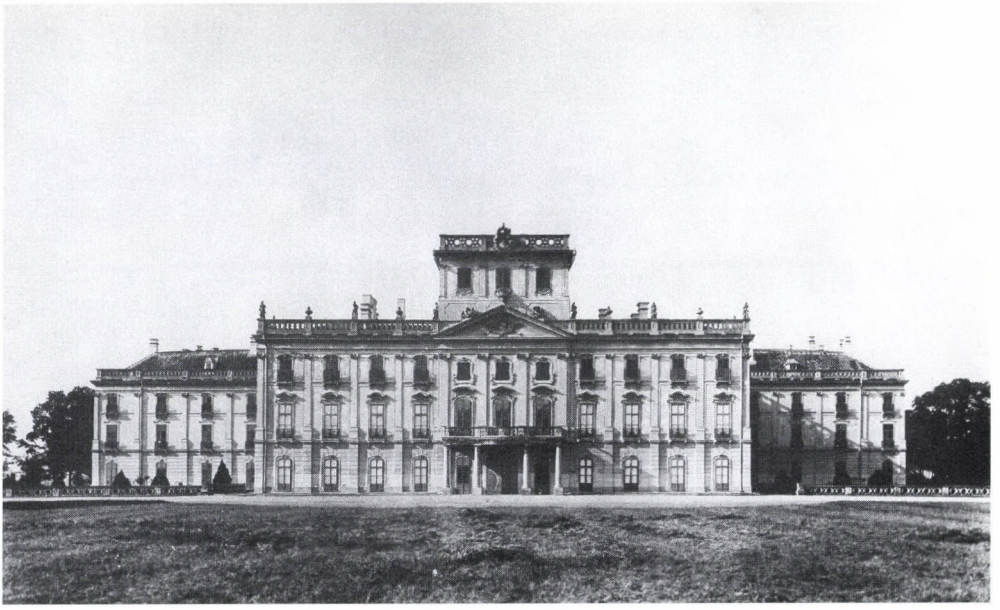
The site was surely found suitable because of the Lés Woods. It was three or four metres higher than the surrounding marshy terrain, and in the midst of the wet Hanság region, replete with reed, willows and alders, there was a forest of oak offering shelter to stags and acorns for boar, in other words ideal hunting grounds and a suitable building site. The spacious natural surroundings were taken advantage of for the siting of the building itself: the longitudinal axis was set perpendicularly to the church tower of Szentmiklós, and it was probably by design that the transversal axis, the line of the southern façade, pointed at the church tower of the neighbouring village, Széplak.

The two-storeyed building had a mansard roof. On both levels, there was a central banquet hall flanked by five rooms on either side, amounting to 20 rooms in all. The building was designed by a Vienna master-mason, Anton Erhard Martinelli, with whom Count Joseph Esterházy signed a contract on July 20, 1720. Simon Mödlhammer, a Vienna carpenter, was contracted on December 28, 1720 to make the roof.

How this first building looked is known from a painting of forty years later. It shows it with two outbuildings, a French garden, the three paths into the Lés Woods and the kitchen gardens to the west of the ornamental garden. Though the ideally laid out ensemble took a long time to come into being, its design dates from the very time of construction. The building is subtly articulated, with three projecting pavilions and winding stairs at the corners of the court. The varied window-heads of the original design jutting massively out of the façade can now only be seen in the concealed inner courts. In front of the central building two subsidiary buildings were placed to the right and left. The auxiliary wings and the central building surrounded a large *cour d'honneur.*

Construction was not yet complete when Joseph succeeded as prince on the death of his brother, nor was it complete when he himself died only seventy four days later, on June 6, 1721. At the death of Prince Joseph, the Szentmiklós domains, including Süttör, passed on to the second son. Its status thus did not change: its construction went on as the prospective residence of the Count.

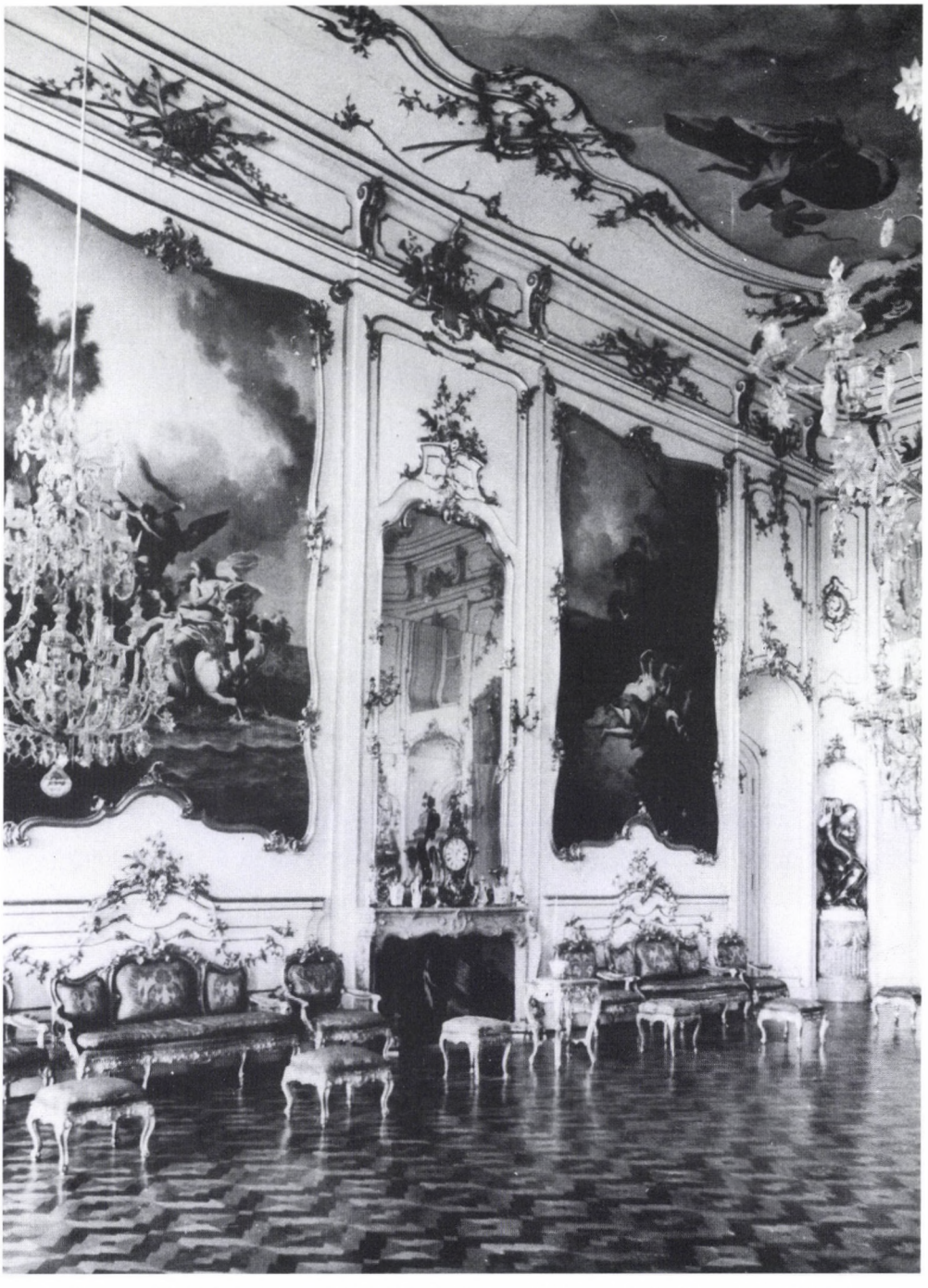
The property of the minor Nikolaus Esterházy (1714–1790) was held in trusteeship under the supervision of his mother Maria Octavia Gilleis. For what amounted to just about two decades it was she who saw to the completion and maintenance of the building. Construction proceded slowly, given that the owner would only use it when he had come of age. That it was considered important is indicated by its occasionally being referred to as Új Galánta (New Galánta) (1729, 1744) and by the fact that a chapel was added (1728, 1732). The environs were land-



The Palace of Eszterháza. Garden façade, cca 1900. Hungarian National Museum.

Gateway and principal façade, cca 1900. Hungarian National Museum.

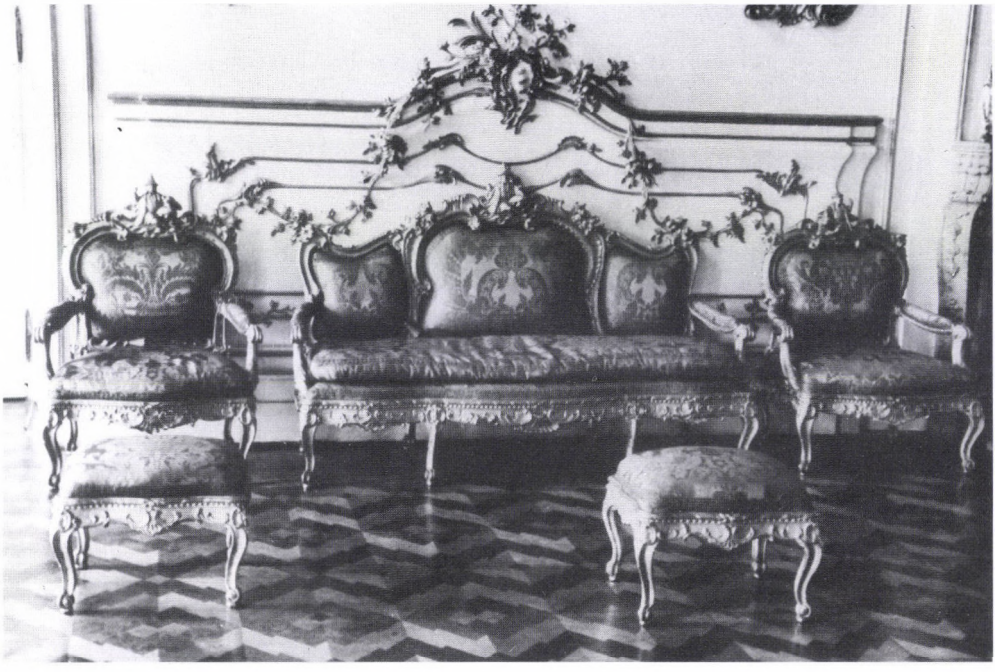
Sala Terrena. Photo by Károly Diebold, cca 1940. Municipal Museum, Sopron.

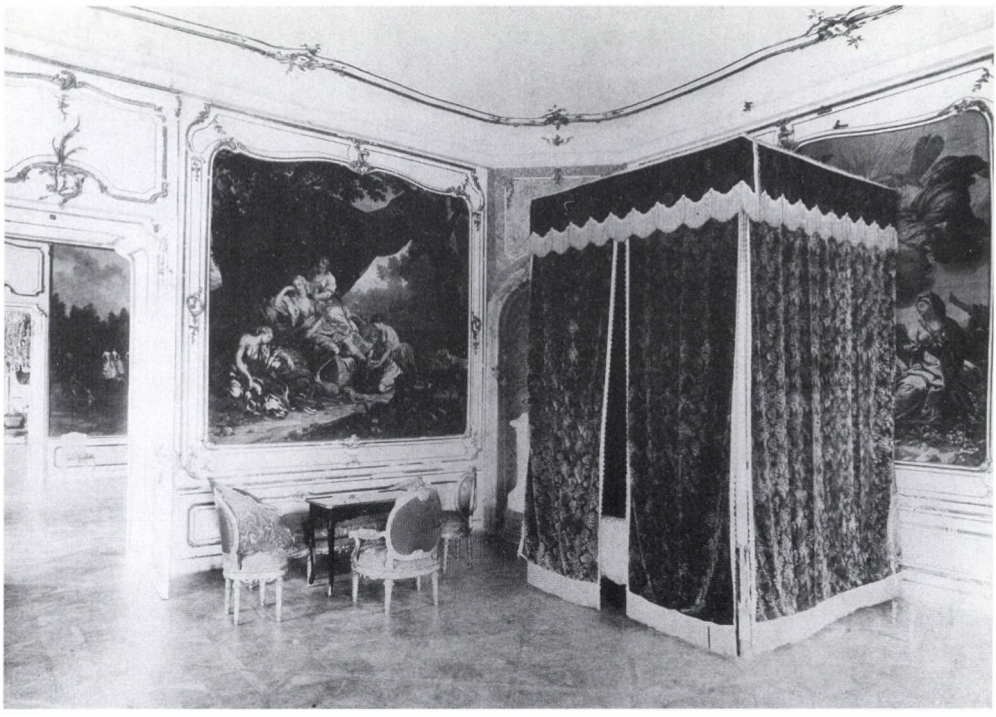


Ceremonial Hall. Photo by Károly Diebold, cca 1935. Municipal Museum, Sopron

Ceremonial Hall (detail). Photo by Károly Diebold, cca 1940. Municipal Museum, Sopron.

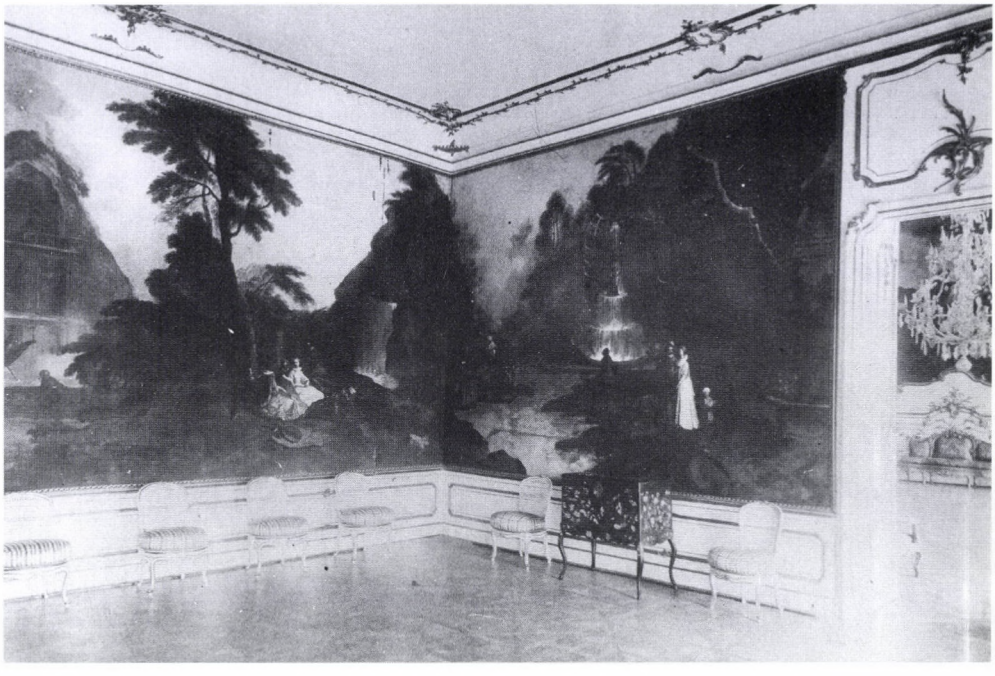
The Ceremonial Hall with one of the drawing-room suites.
Photo by Károly Diebold, cca 1940. Municipal Museum, Sopron





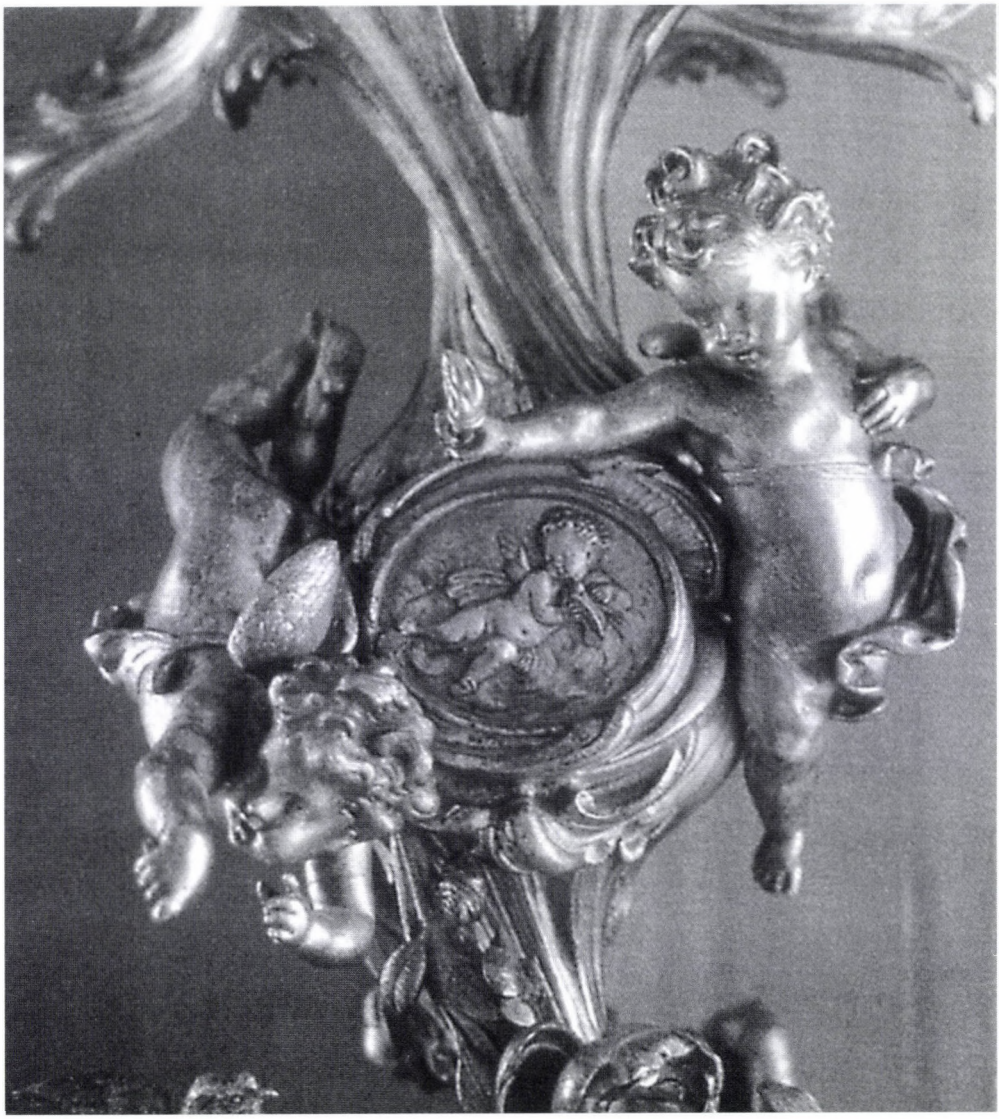
The Maria Theresa Room, cca 1894. Museum of Arts & Crafts, Budapest

Panelled room, cca 1894. Museum of Arts & Crafts, Budapest



Room with Chinese lacqueur panels. Photo by Károly Bugár Mészáros, 1998.

Candelabrum (detail). Photo by Károly Bugár Mészáros, 1998.



Eszterháza

The court d'honneur. Photo by Károly Bugár Mészáros, 1998.

Hungarian Gypsies making music in the courtyard, 1791. Hungarian National Museum

scaped: the ornamental garden, kitchen garden and orchard were mentioned as early as 1724. From 1729 new plans were made for the ornamental garden by Anton Zinner, who left the service of Eugene of Savoy to enter that of the Esterházy family.

Nikolaus Joseph, Prince Esterhazy von Galántha married and took possession of his inheritance in 1737. His military career began the next year: he won considerable rank and fame in the War of the Austrian Succession. He purchased additional land in Süttör, built roads through the woods, and bred pheasants. In the 1740s, he mostly lived in Vienna, spending in keeping with his rank—and not his revenues. That some of his expenses also went to the Süttör château is known from a list of his debts dated 1750. It was drawn up for an agreement under which his elder brother Prince Paul Anton Esterházy paid his debts on condition that Nikolaus reduced his household and retreated to Süttör. He also obliged himself to refrain from construction. 1750s documents show that he only kept his promise in part: the interior decoration of the building is mentioned as frequently as are the edifices in the garden. The fence encircling the court of honour seen in the picture, the wooden bower surrounding the palace buildings and the garden, and the double alley outside the masonry fencing date from this period.

The great turn in the life of Nikolaus Joseph came in 1762 with the early and unexpected death of his brother Prince Paul Anton, which made him master of the Esterházy entail at the age of forty-eight. Within months, a plan for the expansion of the building and a layout for its surroundings was ready. The former was drawn around 1765, the latter around 1778 by Nicolaus Jacoby (1733–1784), an Alsatian architect who entered Esterházy service in 1756.

Eszterháza was first compared to Versailles in the 1770s, and many times since. That sort of comparison is a commonplace in Central Europe: Potsdam was dubbed the Prussian Versailles in the eighteenth century, Ludwigsburg was the Versailles of Württemberg, Jan Klemens' palace at Białystok was labelled the Polish Versailles. The label refers to the palace, garden, park and housing for servants seen as a unit. It naturally presumes grandeur and sumptuous execution. Prince Nikolaus and his architect set this goal in 1762 and achieved it in ten and twenty years. The design suggests the desire of the wealthiest landowner in Hungary for a residence as magnificent as that of any territorial prince in the Holy Roman Empire, however, taking as his model not their seats but the summer residences, what the French called *maisons de plaisance* and the Germans *Lustschloss.* This idea of the layout was coupled with the Rococo notions of cultured and gracious living, which pervades not only the buildings but subdues nature to formal patterns, and creates a home for stately leisure centred on the theatre, music and the chase.

It is important to emphasise that the contemporaries did not look on Eszterháza—Nikolaus Esterházy gave this name to the place around Christmas 1765—in isolation. The Prince had a town house and late renaissance château

fort in Kismarton (Eisenstadt), a castle redolent of past wars and manifesting the dignity of a warlord at Fraknó along with a *hôtel de ville,* well-placed and properly furnished, in Vienna. In addition to, or against the background of, these, he realised "the sweetness of Hungary, the Hungarian Paradise" *(deliciae Hungararum oder das ungarische Paradies),* or, in terms of its contents, Elysium, Cythera that is the island of happiness and love.

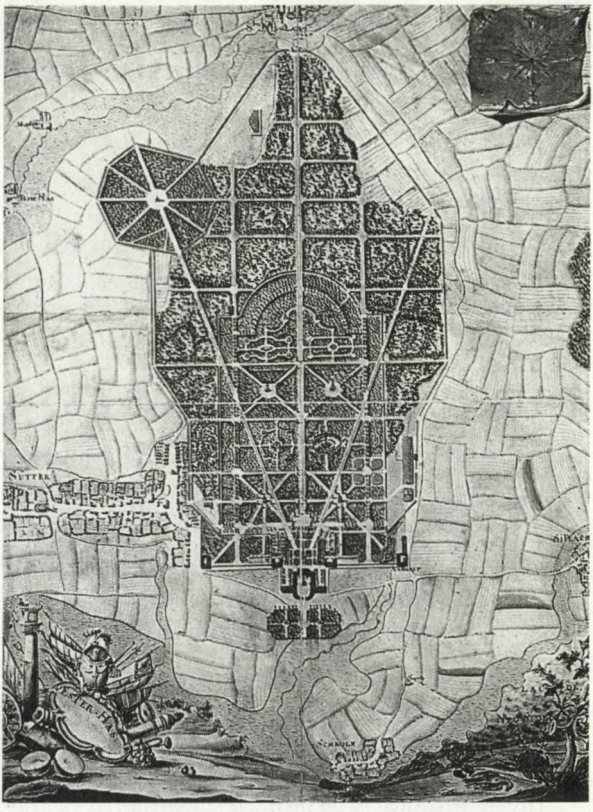
Designs for extension were prepared in the Spring of 1762. The plan was to enlarge the building with two-storied (L-shaped) wings on both sides and to enclose the court with arched horseshoe-shaped wings. The functional basis for the plan was the estate survey of the Kismarton palace. The same number of primary and secondary apartments were planned in the new palace, except that there was no provision for the estate stewards, who stayed in Kismarton. Thus, the enlargement projected a new residence; however, the centre of the Esterházy estates remained in Kismarton. The design, whose gifted architect is unknown, was carried out in three short years, between 1762 and 1764. The single-storied horseshoe-shaped wings and the two-storied subsidiary buildings were erected, with the large chapel in one of them.

The second phase of construction lasted from 1765 to 1768 when the main aim was to enlarge the old palace section. The appearance of the exterior was determined by the belvedere erected above the central ceremonial hall covered with a transversal roof of arched section, reminiscent of a dome. A similar roof structure can be found in the palace of Nikolaus Esterházy's kinsman Count Antal Grassalkovich the First, which is now the residence of the President of the Slovak Republic in Bratislava (then Pozsony). In conjunction with the extension of the centrepiece, the interior spaces were also modernised: the first-floor ceremonial hall decorations survive today, and the carved, woven and painted wall decorations of the inner rooms also date from that period. Typical details of the *cour d'honneur* also derive from this phase of construction (1765–1768): three statued fountains, and the double-armed staircase leading to the banquet hall upstairs. The interior of the lateral wings can also be dated to this phase, though furnishing was probably not completed until 1772.

In the third construction phase, in 1775–78, the palace received a third storey, thus acquiring its present appearance. The reconstruction of the palace was patterned on the model of Schönbrunn, with the invisible Italianate roofs concealed behind an attic decorated with statues and vases and the articulation of the walls with pilasters uniting two stories. That was when two extensions were added to the single-level horseshoe-shaped wings: the Prince's picture gallery on the western side overlooking Széplak and the conservatory on the eastern, the Süttör, side. There is, however, no documented description of their furnishing until much later, 1783 and 1784, respectively.

The sophisticated ornamental garden was presumably the work of Franz Zinner and had been finished long before 1762. In the first decade of Prince Nikolaus's

succession it was only modified on the fringes: the bordering hedges were pulled down and a double row of horse-chestnuts was planted to link it to the newly designed park which used to be the Lés Woods. A reshaping took place in the years following Maria Theresa's visit in 1773: the intricately subdivided, embroidered and mottled flower beds were replaced by lawns laid out in a lucid pattern and lined with flowers. In the new overall appearance of the garden, the statues on pedestals, stone vases, and old ornamental fountains acquired salient importance. The last to be built, in 1783–84, was the huge waterfall that closed off the parterre.



Nicolaus Jacoby: Design for the Palace of Eszterháza 1766–1768.
Wien, ÖNB, Kartensammlung
(Kat. Haydn after 1980).

The most extensive change in the 1762 make-over was the conversion of the Lés Woods into a huge park. The paths opening up the old deer-forest were replanted with trees, new avenues were plotted in a sweeping vue system divided into sections by cross ways, leading the inner sections via variedly designed networks of walks to clearings. The lucid geometry of the ground plan may deceive the spectator: the Woods are so large that one can stroll in them for hours; the straight avenues lined with benches and statues only constituted a skeleton from which trellised wooden gates opened onto irregularly traced paths and stalking tracks. The constructed spectacles of this regulated forest were closed off with a double avenue of trees where temples served as resting places: the temples of Diana and the Sun closer to the palace, the temples of Fortuna and Venus at the furthest ends. All four had been completed by the time of the Empress's visit in 1773. The hermitage erected in one corner of the park-forest was finished by the time of the visit of Archduke Ferdinand in 1775. The last to be built was the most famous of all the buildings, the Chinese Pleasure-House or Bagatelle (1783), which now stands in the modern-style version designed by János Sedlmayr.

An octagonal boar reserve in the outer parts of the park-forest, and a pheasant house along the Szentmiklós road were established in the 1760s. These made the great battus an integral part of life at Eszterháza.

The magnificent things to be seen were central to Eszterháza. For a start the collections in the palace: the collection of china, the large library and the picture gallery in the West Wing and continued in the Sala Terrena, whose fountains featured spouting porcelain figures representing the aquatic fauna of Lake Fertő. Upstairs the ceremonial hall displayed paintings of the love affairs of the gods, and the panoramic panneaux in the reception rooms in the garden presented various delights of the harmonious life the aristocratic company pursued in nature. The Sala Terrena was the venue for smaller concerts, sometimes short plays were presented before choice audiences in the large halls. Music and drama, however, could be performed to larger audiences as more sophisticated spectacles: the Opera House and the Puppet Theatre stood opposite each other at the sides of the ornamental garden. The Opera House was opened in 1768 with a presentation of Haydn's *Lo Speziale*: the orchestra was headed by Haydn and the theatre company moved to Eszterháza that year. The first operatic performance was held there two years later. The Puppet Theatre was completed for the visit of Maria Theresa. The Empress watched Haydn's marionette opera from a box shaped like a pagoda. In the 1770s, Haydn's music was already world famous and the buildings of Nikolaus the Magnificent Esterházy provided a worthy setting for it. The strict symmetry of the palatial garden was only modified for the sake of the opera: when in 1779 the building burnt down, a larger new opera house was built, designed by the Prince's architect Michael Stöger, seating four hundred.

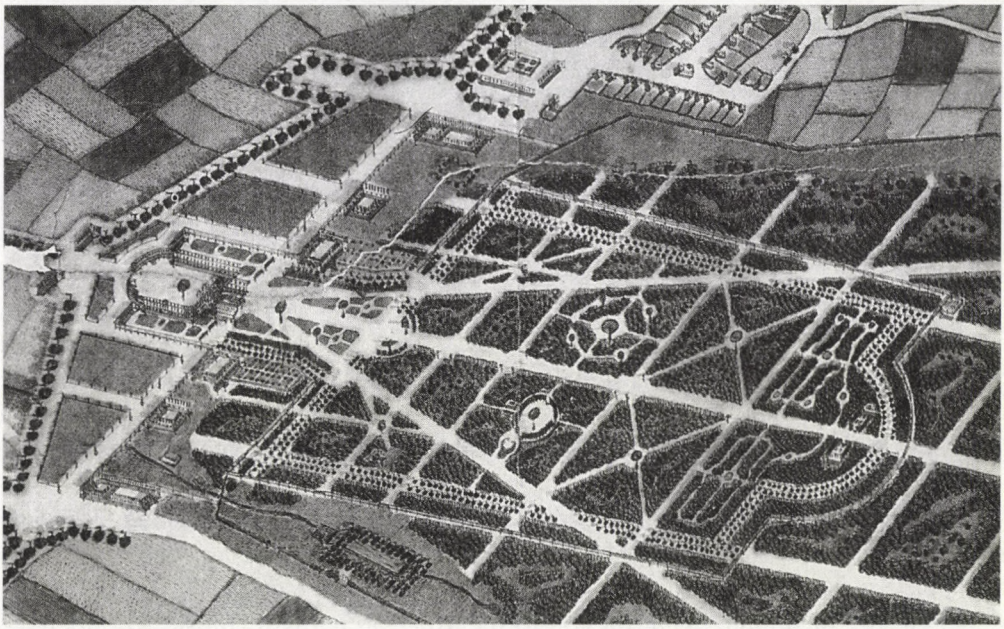
The construction of housing around the palace probably started with the expropriation of plots on the fringe of Süttör. First a straight drive was laid out along the line of the garden façade, then the road leading to the palace gate was straightened. The simple triangular groundplan is based on the differentiation between a drive and a public road.

The drive was lined by the auxiliary buildings of the palace, all symmetrically arranged. Symmetrical construction, however, was not perfectly realised: only the western side was fully built in. The eastern wing next to the parterre contained the prince's offices and the appartments of certain members of the household, while a western wing of the same size housed the Prince's guests. On the west side, up to the forking off of the Szentmiklós road, the planned layout was realised in the latter half of the 1760s: the guest house and later the music house were built on the edges and corners, with a single-storey stable and coach-house in between, which was given its individual character by an Italianate roof concealed behind an attic in the Italian style and with sculpted ornaments. Timber fences were placed between the three buildings with a sentry-box each in which grenadiers were on duty.

In the late Seventies a fourth building was added, the inn. Earlier, the inn had been in the music house, then it was allotted its own building. The urban appearance of the storied buildings was stressed by cottages for shopkeepers and artisans on regular plots along the Széplak road erected after 1778. The regularly spaced out cottages, with their gables facing the road, led right up to the church in Széplak. Their character can be sensed in the Széplak houses that function as museums today.

In the eighteenth century, there were only two buildings along the public road opposite the palace gate. These grenadiers' houses assumed their current shape in 1773–76. Their simple design is adjusted to the horseshoe-shaped wings of the palatial complex.

The roads of Eszterháza were turned into avenues by the planting of trees along them. The planting of trees at the side of roads was a novelty at the time and was widely emulated. The inner avenue was planted in 1771, almost simultaneously with the road connecting Süttör and Széplak. The outer road was straightened and planted with trees after 1773. As for the third road leading to Lake Fertő, only its debouchement was shaped. At first the symbolic function of the road was predominant: it was the extension of the central axis of the palace running from the Szentmiklós church along the central avenue of the Lés through the ceremonial halls of the palace, also constituting the symmetry axis of the court of honour. Its significance increased in 1779–80 when the dyke leading to



A bird's-eye view of the Palace of Eszterháza. 1775–1776. Fertőd, Esterházy Palace.

Pomogy was built, shortening the journey from Pozsony to Eszterháza and making it more pleasant. The first contemporarty accounts of this feat of engineering praised Nikolaus Esterházy for draining the Hanság and winning new land for tillage. It was a regulation of nature, a celestial counterpart of which was the beautifully vain layout of the avenues, park and gardens of Eszterháza.

For some considerable time, the Esterházys played what appears to have been a purposeful and concerted role in the patronage of music in western Hungary and Vienna. Count Johann Esterházy was among Mozart's patrons in Vienna. Prince Nikolaus II commissioned a mass from Beethoven for Kismarton in 1807; Count Michael Esterházy's name is associated with Liszt's debut as a child in Pozsony (now Bratislava) in 1820, which prompted five Hungarian aristocrats to fund his further studies, and Johann Karl Esterházy of the Zólyom branch of the family invited Schubert to his Zseliz château (today Želiezovce, Slovakia) to instruct his daughters in music.

The branch of the Esterházy family that was most prominent in music history came into its own in the 17th century. The first prominent representative was Nikolaus Esterházy (1583–1645) Palatine of Hungary, the first to be given the rank of Count, who was the founder of the princely branch and it was he who laid the foundation of the legendary wealth of the Esterházys, primarily through his marriages. The Emperor Ferdinand II granted the castle of Fraknó and the château at Kismarton to him after the beginning of the Thirty Years War, in the 1620s. Nikolaus, who had employed leading musicians in his former seat at Munkács (Mukačivo, Ukraine), soon began to recruit trumpeteers and drummers, singers and chamber musicians for his ensembles in Kismarton, often enlarging the orchestras later. When, however, he gave up the office of Palatine in 1636, he dismissed his musicians and when his wife and one of his sons died, he withdrew from public life.

After his death, his son László followed in his path and assembled a small band of instrumentalists. After his untimely death, the younger brother Paul became the head of the family at the age of 17. Highly talented and successful, Paul Esterházy studied at the Jesuit school in Nagyszombat (Trnava, Slovakia), acting in the college plays there. He was appointed *főispán* (Lord Lieutenant) of Sopron county at a young age and as a (pro-Habsburg) politician and general, he had a brilliant career. He took part in the liberation of Vienna and Buda, in 1681 he became Palatine of Hungary, and in 1687 he became a Prince of the Holy Roman Empire. He was able to harmonise his loyalty to the Habsburg court and his responsibilities for his country: he drew up an extensive plan to handle the urgent tasks that the country faced after the Ottomans had been driven out, in the reorganisation of public administration and home defence.

In the meantime his attraction to the arts—primarily to music and poetry—did not diminish. His prayers in eloquent Latin and his collection of poems sur-

vive. The Prince who played the virginal wrote out a list of what his repertoire consisted of: this included some eighty sacred and secular songs, popular dances, the latter including Hungarian, Polish, Slovak and other tunes.

Paul Esterházy had a salient role in the constructions at Fraknó and Kismarton, too. He had an organ built and established a church choir and orchestra in Kismarton, laying the foundations for music life of a high standard there. His greatest individual achievement in music, however, was the compilation of a collection of church cantatas, published in Vienna in 1711 under the title of *Harmonia cœlestis*. (It had been ready in 1701.) The majority of the 55 cantatas or *symphoniæ sacræ* were composed for vocal soloists with instrumental accompaniment, but there are some duets and choral pieces as well.

Paul was followed by his two sons, Michael and Joseph. The widow of Joseph and the mother of Paul Anton and Nikolaus, Princess Maria Oktavia also maintained a small musical ensemble, engaging Gregor Joseph Werner as Kapellmeister in 1728. The late Baroque Austrian composer was the first prominent musician to head the Kismarton orchestra. It was Maria Oktavia, who had a reputation as a forceful personality, who changed the language of the household from Hungarian, as it had been, to German.

Paul Anton (1711–1762) was a man of profound erudition and wide vision; he himself played the violin, flute and lute, and was a passionate collector of printed music. In the course of his extensive travels he primarily collected the works of late Baroque composers, including Vivaldi. In the Fifties, his taste underwent a radical change, and he turned towards the Classical style then on the rise. His search for scores was also aimed at providing his Kismarton orchestra with music. He had plans to perform operas and he contracted several singers and instrumentalists. He employed young Luigi Tomasini, whose subsequent studies he financed and who became the outstanding leader and violin soloist of his ensemble. Last but not least, he employed Joseph Haydn as Vice-Kapellmeister, signing a contract on May 1, 1761.

Hardly a year after the signing of the contract, Paul Anton died unexpectedly. Nikolaus Esterházy, who had resided in the hunting lodge at Süttör, moved to Kismarton as the prince regnant. He took over, among other things, the small but first-class orchestra hallmarked by the names of Gregor Joseph Werner, Haydn and Tomasini. Profoundly interested in books, in the fine and decorative arts and a passionate devoté of the chase and impressive outdoor pageantry such as military parades, lanterned garden feasts, spectacular firework displays, the new prince set straight into realising the dream of his life. From around 1766, Prince Nikolaus Esterházy the Magnificent, along with Haydn and the other musicians, began to spend more and more time at Eszterháza, at first only in the summer months. The Eszterháza sojourn kept lengthening until their time away from there, mainly in Vienna, shrank to two or three winter months. The diverse spectacles at Eszterháza, which the aristocracy hankered after and which

were extolled in laudatory poems, were always crowned by musical and theatrical productions.

The symphonies were performed in the spacious rooms of the main building. The operas and the productions by Wahr's and Diwald's theatre companies were presented in the theatre completed in 1768, and after that burnt down, in the new and larger opera house of 1781 which had its full complement of singers and orchestral players, a team of designers and copyists. Haydn the composer concentrated on symphonies in his first fifteen years or so in the Prince's service. Added to them are the concertos, divertimenti, trios and cantatas composed for members of the orchestra during his Kismarton years. Later, in Eszterháza, he had to compose many pieces that included the baryton, mostly trios, a rarity already at the time, as the Prince played this viola da gamba-like solo instrument. After Werner's death Haydn also composed masses for Eszterháza.

Productions of opera started at the end of the 1760s, relegating all other genres into the background by the late 1770s. Haydn himself composed nine operas here; at the turn of the 1770s and 1780s, however, his zeal slackened and after 1783 he composed no further operatic works at Eszterháza. Considering that between 1780 and 1790, a total of 67 operas were put on in 1038 performances (averaging two or three performances a week), it is clear that the magnitude of the musical tasks this entailed (such as adapting the scores to local circumstances, composing inserts and so on) left Haydn no time to compose for his patron.

But he composed an increasing amount for "export", breaching his original contract, soon even explicitly. According to a much-cited statement by Haydn in his old age, he felt at ease at Eszterháza—at least in the first period—because he could freely experiment there in complete isolation from the wide world, hence his art necessarily became original. But, however receptive Prince Nikolaus may have been, Haydn wanted to try out this originality in other musical forms as well. The two main genres he wrote for publication were the quartets and the keyboard sonatas. The phrase "composed in a new and special manner" featuring on the title-page of the "Russian" quartets op. 33, published in 1781, shows that it was indeed his ambition to be an experimenting and innovating composer. He regularly worked on outside commissions: in the 1780s, his symphonies were almost all composed upon request from abroad. With the growth of his fame (and corollarily, his self-esteem) the seclusion and isolation at Eszterháza became increasigly inconvenient.

The sudden death of Prince Nikolaus the Magnificent in 1790 was thus a relief for Haydn in a certain sense. The heir to the princely title, Anton, was not a lover of music, and moved his household back to Kismarton. He only arranged his installation as Lord Lieutenant at Eszterháza in 1791; however, the music provided was not by the orchestra (for it had been disbanded in the meantime) but by a Gypsy band. Nevertheless, he did not dismiss Haydn or Tomasini, and put no obstacles to Haydn's triumphs in London (in 1791–92 and 1794–95).

Anton Esterházy was followed in 1794 by the grandson of Nikolaus 'the Magnificent', Nikolaus II (1765–1833). The last blossoming of Eszterháza music life is associated with him. Nikolaus II reorganised the orchestra, particularly to satisfy his great interest in sacred music. He celebrated his wife's nameday with a newly composed mass every year. This is how Haydn came to write six monumental masses between 1796 and 1802: after composing his last symphonies he reached the zenith in yet another musical genre in the seventh decade of his life.

Costume design for Armida, *Haydn's last opera composed at Eszterháza, first performed in 1784.*

In the luxurious music hall at Kismarton, the operatic life of Eszterháza continued for another ten years or so, without Haydn. After 1802 he declined even symbolic duties with the Kismarton orchestra. He was succeeded (nominally as assistant conductor) by Johann Nepomuk Fuchs, who conducted sacred music, Tomasini, the leader of the orchestra, being in charge of instrumental music. He was followed in the role by the last prominent musician to be employed by the princely court, Johann Nepomuk Hummel, who served until 1811 when the Austrian financial crisis put an abrupt end to the delights of culture there.

The long flourishing at Eszterháza was followed by a total absence of music for over a hundred and fifty years; it might well be symbolic that in this long silence, the opera house almost totally disintegrated. It was not before the summer of 1959, the 150th anniversary of Haydn's death, that something stirred: a series of summer concerts were held in his honour. This was made possible by the reconstruction, at long last, for the anniversary of the music hall and some other parts of the palace that had been severely damaged during the war. Further decades had to pass before a coherent music life revived in the Esterházy Palace at Fertőd, to use the new name of Eszterháza. Apart from a few exceptional events, only after 1985 did music of quality return, when one or two concerts within the annual Sopron Early Music Days in June were held there. The first major step forward came in 1995 with the annual festival in July of the chamber orchestra Budapest Strings, a special feature with guest performances

by distinguished Hungarian soloists now living outside the country. In 1998 the Hungarian Haydn Society followed suit, initiating a September festival, called Haydn at Eszterháza from its third occurrence. This festival, which almost exclusively presents Haydn works (with some pieces by his contemporaries that relate to Haydn), all on period instruments, has become an occasion bringing together the world's leading Haydn specialists and for outstanding performers on period instruments. Hungarian and foreign artists mutually inspire each other and their audiences, endeavouring to offer a more varied picture of the extraodinary diversity of Haydn's oeuvre. Since the autumn of 2002, *Haydn at Eszterháza* has joined the Federation of European Festivals founded by Denis de Rougemont and Igor Markevitch in 1952. An indication of how its growing international reputation is that BBC Radio 3 will devote a three-hour programme to the festival in September 2003, including a live broadcast of the concluding concert.

In the summer of 2001 regular weekend concerts began to "make the palace ring" from early June to late August 2003, a palace which will never truly be itself without music. Following Haydn at Eszterháza in September 2003, a new series will be launched, *XY and his Friends,* which will give an outstanding chamber musician the chance to make music with his or her favourite partners on successive nights. The first host of this new series will be András Schiff.

As already pointed out, an important mission of Eszterháza—some 20 kilometres from the border to Austria—could well be to draw a more subtle portrait of Haydn for concert-goers both from Austria and Hungary. One of the least appreciated segments of Haydn's oeuvre are his operas, which with two exceptions were composed for Eszterháza. He plainly stressed in a letter that these pieces did not work as well at any other place as on the tiny Eszterháza stage, performed by that small but excellent company. On the other hand, not only Haydn's oeuvre but also the whole music life of Eszterháza is incomplete without the presence of opera, since it was precisely opera that was stressed after the late 1770s there. This has strengthened the conviction of musicians, theatre historians, art historians and conservationists that the reconstruction of the opera house—all the easier because of the surviving detailed representations and descriptions—would fill an enormous gap in the history of both this ensemble of historic buildings and contemporary European music. An increasing number of foreign theatre historians, theatrical people and architects have displayed an interest in Eszterháza's former opera house; a foreign expert has even created a computerised acoustic model of the building on the basis of the original cross sections. The Hungarian Trust for Historic Monuments has scheduled a conference for May 2003 on its history and possible reconstruction, to examine and coordinate the many different Hungarian and foreign ideas inspired by this intricate challenge.

There can be little doubt that the road that connects the past and the future of Eszterháza is musical. ❧

László Somfai

The Genius of the Place

The Fifth Hungarian Haydn Society Festival
Esterházy Palace, Fertőd–Eszterháza, 1–10 September 2002

Searching for the reasons why Haydn's music should stand out so markedly from all other music of its time for its originality, variety and inexhaustible inventiveness, it is hard to dismiss the notion that the discriminating taste of Prince Esterházy, Nikolaus the Magnificent, may have had a considerably greater role than Haydn scholars used to imagine. The chief factor may not have been that the prince, instrument in hand, was personally able to participate in the performances of chamber music: amateur music-making was part of the education of every accomplished scion of the aristocracy. What raised Prince Nikolaus above the run of his contemporaries was his intellect, his erudition and authority in artistic matters. Haydn must have recognised early on that even the very best was barely good enough for such an audience. He constantly had to come up with something new with his music, or at least perform an already well-tried formula differently, more interestingly, because the Prince and his guests would recall earlier pieces. By the standards of this tiny, discerning audience, the ticket-buying public for the concerts put on in the Viennese theatres of the day, or later on in London's concert halls, counted as merely average. I might add that concert-hall audiences at the beginning of the twenty-first century, whether in Vienna, London or Budapest, discern and assimilate less on hearing one of Haydn's works than even an average audience did back then. Not that this matters all that much, Haydn being the great master of multiple-level messages. Anyone who finds that events in a Haydn work unfold at too fast a pace does not miss out on their immediate beauty and will find his or her ears pricking up at the sound of the most striking Haydnesque surprises. But we know that Haydn offered more than that to connoisseurs—his prince, his cultivated patrons, musician colleagues, the young composers who idolised him.

The reason for bringing this up is that the rather modest audiences at the ten concerts making up what was already the fifth Haydn Festival at Fertőd-Eszterháza

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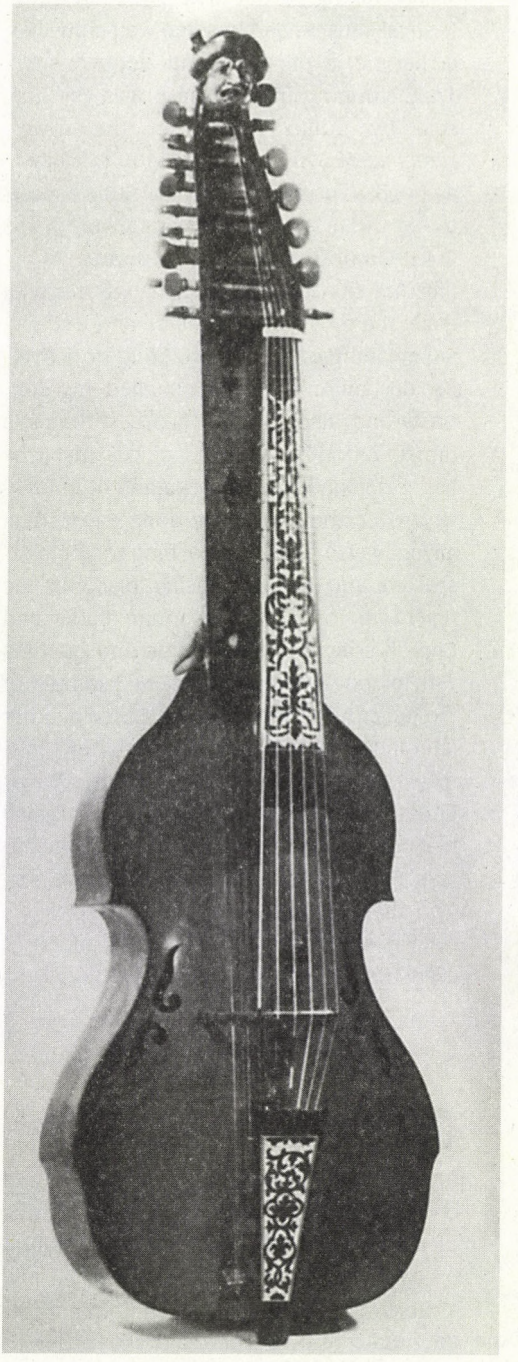
László Somfai
is Director of the Bartók Archives in Budapest and Professor of Musicology at the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music. His books include The Keyboard Sonatas of Joseph Haydn *(1995) and* Béla Bartók: Composition, Concept, and Autograph Sources *(1996).*

were able to experience, as though guests of Nikolaus the Magnificent himself, in the way elevated taste and art of a high order are formed—as few are privileged to do. One might of course think it a waste that so many masters of the renewal of Haydn playing who touch down at Vienna airport should only make it to the Western tip of Hungary and do not perform in Budapest. It is doubtful, however, whether the atmosphere of Eszterháza is reproducible in the hurly-burly of the capital's daily grind. It is not just a matter of the *genius loci,* the vital spark of the celebrated Music Hall that, both acoustically and spiritually, inspires artists who, through period performance practice, seek to create a Haydn who is no museum piece but very much flesh and blood. The aura of the Eszterháza workshop is probably not reproducible in any other location. Important as the applause of ticket purchasers in the hall at the Haydn Festival is (the bulk of them from abroad, sad to say), from the artists' point of view almost more important are the opinions of the few dozen colleagues, peers, participants in the master classes, and experts of the Hungarian Haydn Society, who straight after the concert, chatting over a restaurant table or in the palace courtyard, dish out praise or criticism and, above all, themselves learn from what they have heard.

In the workshop: period instruments and the rhetoric of performance

An inspirational workshop atmosphere pervades Fertőd-Eszterháza in a multitude of ways. To go into greater detail, I would use the example of Tom Beghin, one of the artists making his debut there this year—and the participant who was responsible for most of what was new. Beghin is a 35-year-old pianist, a Belgian, who completed his fortepiano studies with Malcolm Bilson at Cornell University, went on to earn a doctorate, and is currently a professor at UCLA. At the invitation of the Festival's programming committee, he undertook, first of all, to bring instruments. As a result, this was the first occasion on which a quartet of instruments ideal for Haydn's keyboard music had been assembled: copies of a *c.* 1760 clavichord and an Italian-style harpsichord of the late eighteenth-century, a copy of a Viennese-action fortepiano (the Haydn Festival's own instrument) and, lastly, an English-action pianoforte made in 1798. Beghin played on all four in the concerts. The single-manual harpsichord (the prime instrument for Haydn's keyboard music in all the works written up to the end of the 1770s) made a first outing in an early trio and a concerto during the Festetics String Quartet's chamber evening. In the first half of his solo recital, in the palace's ground-floor Sala Terrena, Beghin chose the amazingly intimate sound of the clavichord to perform Sonatas No. 44 in G minor and No. 32 in B minor, amongst other masterpieces, whilst for the second half, now back in the Music Hall on the first floor, he presented three sonatas from the 1780s on the Viennese-action fortepiano. The English master instrument from Longman, Clementi & Co. featured in a trio evening during which three of Haydn's grandiose 'London' Piano Trios (in C major, E major and E flat major) were played. I have been attending Haydn conferences, festivals and special keyboard meetings for a long time now, but this was the first time I was able to hear all four authentic Haydn instruments played by one and the same soloist. It is a mark of the workshop feel that Beghin himself is still undecided as to whether the instruments he tried out here will be those used in the forthcoming recording of the complete set of Haydn keyboard sonatas.

It has become widely accepted that period instruments are key prerequisites but no guarantee in themselves for bringing Haydn's music to life 'in the flesh'—for us to believe that, of all the things art is able to express in music, what we are hearing here and now is the finest, most exquisite, most intense statement that can be made about human emotions. To achieve this sort of authenticity, greater weight than before may be given to an aspect of performance that is nowadays being explored under the heading of the rhetoric of music, in some cases from the angle of interpretation, in others from that of theory. Tom Beghin is an expert in both approaches: he has published an essay, organised an international symposium, and is now planning a book on the subject; first and foremost, however, he makes known what we should know (and dare) about music performance—and about the solo keyboard genre in Haydn's oeuvre in particular—in his own interpretations. The starting-point of his interpretative approach is that compositions of Haydn's era stand in very close relation to high-flown speech, a rhetoric that rests on a long tradition of oratory that was still being taught in schools during the eighteenth century. Put in more musical terms, it is a matter of elements of performance that lie beyond the notes on the pages, of freedom of interpretation. This is not just a matter of musicians smuggling into their playing agogics that derive from modern music taste, but of their knowing and daring to apply tricks of the rhetorical trade that go back to Cicero in a way that of course still has its effect. Now, one may argue whether that requires being able to specify the different rhetorical figures, but it is hard to dispute that a rhetorically con-sidered and constructed performance has power and projection; every sound gains sense, even the individual decorations and variations built into repeats have their clear function.



A baryton believed to have been Haydn's

Of course, virtually every one of the musicians taking part at the Eszterháza Haydn Festival senses, and in some way cultivates, a rhetoric in the eighteenth-century spirit. Truly stunning in that sense was the flute solo by Ildikó Kertész in the *Adagio cantabile* of Symphony No. 24 in D major—as good as a movement in a flute concerto—in the first of the concerts given by the Orfeo Orchestra. In her performance of the first set of German lieder, Anna Korondi made the most of every shade and underlying meaning of the texts to build up a riveting declamation that marshalled big contrasts and also took on board a dramatic thrust. Amongst the solo pieces given by her fortepianist partner, Katalin Komlós—who over the years has done more than anybody else with her coaching to win a respected and crowd-pleasing place in the repertoire for Haydn's German lieder and English songs, his vocal trios and quartets with piano—gave an eloquent example of the judicious exploitation of rhetoric in her interpretations with a particularly fine, intimate performance of the F minor Variations. And in their own more restrained manner, Simon Standage from England and Jaap Schröder from Holland, the two foreign chamber-music violinists at this year's festival, showed themselves to be adepts of every trick in the rhetorical book.

Orchestral evenings

György Vashegyi, who counts as the Festival's in-house conductor and guiding light, is likewise a brilliant orator, and one of the fiery type at that. That was demonstrated in the way his interpretation brought to life every gesture of the 'Oxford' Symphony (No. 92 in G major), or the great passion with which he endowed his narrative, down to every nuance of text and music, of Michael Haydn's Requiem and Joseph Haydn's 'Nelson' Mass in D minor. Vashegyi is a defining phenomenon at Eszterháza. For what is now the fifth year, it was his concerts that embodied the kind of *Gesamtkunst* which carries the Festival. He keeps on expanding the Haydn repertoire in ever-newer directions, meanwhile bringing on his young musicians, and rightfully garnering the plaudits of the public. Following the middle-period symphonies, this year it was the turn of an early and a late symphony; after the masses, cantatas and oratorios of the period before the big break in Haydn's choral writing, he now plumped for the late masses from the Eisenstadt period. His two ensembles—the Purcell Choir and the Orfeo Orchestra—now operate with professional reliability (where needed, the latter employs additional foreign period-instrument players who are used to playing with the orchestra); he has an ideal quartet of solo voices (Mária Zádori, Judit Németh, Timothy Bench and István Kovács) who unreservedly follow his interpretation.

Right now, György Vashegyi is going through a sort of *Sturm und Drang* period. He exposes Haydn's scores with great verve but seeks to control it all himself; in doing so, however, he is inclined to overforceful dynamics and contrived tonal qualities that are open to criticism on the grounds of their acoustic effect (and possibly also their substance). He drives his instrumentalists, the sopranos of the chorus, and his soloists to the utmost, though holding the dynamic at a lower level would assist their attunement to one another, the picking up of finer inflections, and the making of adjustments on the wing. His orchestra has shown it is capable of this, I would add: the Haydn Double Concerto for violin and harpsichord, played without a conductor under Simon Standage, with Judit Péteri as his keyboard solo partner, came over in a truly fine per-

formance. Moreover, Vashegyi himself is more relaxed, flexible and intellectual when conducting a smaller ensemble. Haydn scholars could enthuse about Symphony No. 24 in D minor, written in 1764, not just because, at long last, they could hear the piece with the transparent sound of the precise size and disposition of forces for which it was written, without a keyboard continuo, but also because the interpretation itself was revelatory.

The guest orchestra this year was The Academy of Ancient Music from London, formed by Christopher Hogwood in 1973, which does not need an introduction. Interpretations of all the Mozart symphonies under Schröder and Hogwood, many other complete-edition recording projects and countless festival appearances have placed the ensemble amongst the classics of historical performance. Of course, this is no longer the same orchestra it was then: the bulk of its members are young musicians who play in their own distinctive English style with remarkable technical aplomb, love fast tempi, but lose neither drama nor wit in their interpretations when passages call for these. This is primarily attributable to the direction of Andrew Manze, violin in hand, who showed that in the professional world of period music-making these days, 19 musicians do not necessarily need a conductor to turn in perfect performances of the early and middle-period Haydn symphonies (that was particularly in evidence from the interpretations of Symphony No. 49 in E minor, ('La Passione') and No. 71 in B flat major), any more than there was in Haydn's time, when the composer himself would direct his musicians from the first violin desk.

Star-studded hours of chamber music

If I were forced to name the most inspiring concerts that were most in keeping with the spirit of Haydn, I would have to plump for two evenings of chamber music. The Salomon String Quartet, likewise from England, performed three particularly interesting string quartets—Op. 20 No. 4 in D major, Op. 33 No. 3 in C (The Bird), and Op. 74 No. 3 in G minor (The Rider)—with captivating richness of detail and matchless rhythmic vitality, despite the fact that, with their regular second violinist being ill, a young English colleague had to step in at short notice to save the performance from cancellation. The only rehearsal time they had was on the spot, to the pleasure of many, because those rehearsals in the Music Hall of the palace amounted to a postgraduate seminar in Haydn interpretation. Possibly even more miraculous was the trio recital given by an *ad hoc* grouping of a Dutch violinist, an English cellist (Jennifer Ward-Clarke) and a Belgian-American fortepianist, representing essentially three different generations of period music performers. Beghin took the lead, in accordance with the qualities of the genre (these piano trios were justly called accompanied clavier sonatas), but Jaap Schröder's violin playing was an additional delight. Even amongst period-music gurus, few are capable of the perfection of elastic bowing technique and finely honed articulation of the 77-year-old Schröder, who can call on boundless experience as a soloist, string quartet first violin or stand-up leader of a chamber orchestra in both Baroque and Classical music. ❧

HISTORY

Tibor Frank

Dreaming Peace, Making War

The Budapest Conversations of U.S. Minister John F. Montgomery 1934–1941

According to *Who Was Who in America,* John Flournoy Montgomery, formerly U.S. Minister to Hungary (1933–41), was born on September 20, 1878 in Sedalia, Missouri. The Montgomerys were Presbyterian and Anglo-Irish and claimed Norman and Huguenot descent. The minister was educated locally, graduating from the Ramsdell Academy in Sedalia. All his working life, apart from the years en poste in Budapest, was spent in the condensed milk industry. Between 1925 and 1933, and then again after 1941, he was President of the International Milk Co. He was a Freemason[1]. Montgomery lived in Vermont, in a large home, with his wife, two daughters and numerous domestics. He was not a career diplomat: he was appointed to his post as a result of the Democratic victory in the 1932 presidential elections, as a reward for loyal and lasting services to his party, which included financial support.

The American legation was originally in Árpád (today: Steindl Imre) utca in downtown Budapest, in the 5th District. It was during Montgomery's tenure of office, early in 1934, that they moved to Szabadság tér[2], where the U.S. Embassy is still located. Budapest was reckoned a minor post, with a staff of twenty-seven in 1939; by comparison, seventy were stationed at the Consulate General in Vienna, not even counting secretarial staff[3]. The Residence, home of the Montgomery family, was in Buda, at Lovas út 32.

Montgomery looked on his position as an observation post[4]. He spent much of his time collecting information. He made a surprisingly large number of contacts in his time in Budapest, the majority of which he carefully nursed. He revelled in the social life, as shown by the implied joy with which he complained to his friends. "Socially, everything is very lively here, and I am kept very busy with luncheons, dinners, teas, and goodness knows what. It gets very tiresome

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Tibor Frank
is Professor of History at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest and recipient of the Humboldt Research Award for 2002.

but it is necessary and in this business you have to keep in touch with your contacts all the time."[5] Further evidence is offered by his diplomatic reports, the care he took dictating records of his confidential political conversations, a huge correspondence, a journal he kept for two years, and a book and articles he published later. Even more eloquent is a permanent protocol list containing the names of close on seven hundred persons and their spouses invited to lunch, afternoon tea, dinner and his regular Wednesday concerts, which Montgomery compiled himself and kept up to date. The methodology would put many a modern *Who's Who* to shame[6]. Since most of the entries covered both husband and wife, well over a thousand people were involved.

It was an extensive yet closed world. The protocol list faithfully mirrors the odd, semi-feudal establishment of Hungary between the two world wars. Montgomery's contacts were primarily official, ministers and high-ranking civil servants, and of course senior diplomats accredited to Budapest. More than half the list, however, is made up of members of the Hungarian aristocracy, headed by Habsburgs resident in Hungary, including every archduke and archduchess. The extraordinarily high number of the Count Károlyis, Széchenyis, Telekis, and Zichys catches the eye. Montgomery was impressed by old names, by family trees rooted in medieval obscurity, by ceremonially dressed magnates and ancient châteaux, even if some of them now housed tenants.

The huge circle assembled by Montgomery was, however, somewhat misleading. It would seem that he provided himself with a comprehensive picture of Hungarian society. Being, however, a monoglot English speaker, he was forced to confine his contacts to English speakers and this imposed severe limitations, even though he employed interpreters on occasion. This decisively influenced his image of Hungary and of Hungarian society. His direct sources could only be the select few who in the Hungary of the time had learnt English, indeed those who were in a position to do so. This explains the large number of aristocrats in his circle, and his friendship with Anglophile politicians, primarily Tibor Eckhardt, the leader of the Smallholders' Party; hence his good relationship with Regent Horthy (a polyglot who once allegedly studied English, as a young naval officer, with James Joyce), also Kálmán Kánya, the Foreign Minister, and his deputy Baron Apor, the Prime Minister Count Pál Teleki, and an earlier prime minister, Gyula Gömbös, all of whom spoke good English, just like Leon Orlowski, who headed the Polish legation. But even those who spoke English well did not always understand Montgomery. His strong mid-western accent troubled even Kálmán Kánya, the Foreign Minister[7].

Montgomery, a sober businessman, was captivated by the reflected light of Habsburg times. Budapest between the wars was one of the most beautiful cities in Europe, and in what the historian Gyula Szekfű termed the Neo Baroque Age with pejorative intent, the magic of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy lit up once again, and for the last time.

The Regent Miklós Horthy, a landowner and naval officer, who had received his political education as aide-de-camp to Emperor-King Francis Joseph, himself lived under the spell of the Imperial Court. All that he had observed and learnt in thus serving his old master in the Hofburg in Vienna was miniaturised in Buda Castle. Horthy was spellbound by Francis Joseph, and Montgomery admired the Admiral. He was enchanted by the changing of the guard, by *levées* for diplomats in the Castle, or a mass for the diplomatic corps celebrated on the occasion of the anniversary of the enthronement of the Pope, by nights at the Opera on December 6, Horthy's name-day, by military parades, cocktail and garden parties, by soirées given by the Habsburg archdukes resident in Hungary, and by news of the Saint Stephen's Day procession on August 20 (which he missed since he spent his summers in America) and by other processions too, with ceremonially accoutred dignitaries, sparkling decorations, grand crosses and their ribbons, the rag-and-bone shop of a world that has had its day. Horthy's Hungary continued as a kingdom, thus members of orders continued to use their titles and to bear their insignia. Horthy's military bearing, disarming graciousness and irresistible charm impressed Montgomery. To the end of his life he remembered him as "a very fine person and a very wonderful man."[8]

In the Budapest of the Thirties Montgomery found the complete stage of a kingdom sans Habsburgs. A decorative admiral stood for the king at the head of a parliamentary system, something that naively reminded an inexperienced diplomat of England, which he found so attractive. The Head of State had been the last Commander-in-Chief of the Austro-Hungarian Navy; the Foreign Minister had once represented Austria-Hungary, one of the Great Powers, in Mexico; Dísz tér in the Castle recalled the spirit of the Ballhausplatz and, on occasion, of its arrogance; the better part of Hungarian diplomats had received their training in Vienna. The United States did not support a Habsburg restauration, but President Roosevelt did receive Crown Prince Otto in the White House. In his residence at Esterházy utca 24, Archduke Albrecht (and even more so his mother, Princess Isabella) sometimes also dreamt of the Hungarian crown. In the course of the Thirties the expansion of National Socialism steadily dwarfed the threat of a Habsburg restauration. Admiral Horthy, as the defender of the traditional Hungarian national interest, appeared, to this American, as someone who opposed Hitler and despised the Nazis. Horthy and his circle may indeed have opposed the Nazis, but not really the Germans. With growing frequency they shared their anxieties with the American minister in Budapest. The more the country drifted in the direction of Nazi Germany[9], the more the political class made use of Montgomery as messenger of their real or pretended anti-German feelings. Horthy, as a Hungarian gentleman and naval officer who had learnt his politics at the feet of Francis Joseph, very likely felt a natural aversion for Hitler and Nazi methods which, in his case was increasingly mixed with the wish to cover himself in the eyes of the British and the Americans when called to ac-

count after the war. Montgomery happily listened to Horthy's repeated promises concerning the de-Nazification of Hungarian Parliament. It gave him satisfaction to observe signs that the extreme right was kept in check, such as the repeated arrest of their leader Szálasi and, later, the dismissal of Béla Imrédy, the pro-Nazi prime minister of 1938–39.

For an American, the Hungarian Regent seemed to be preferable to Nazi Germany just as, earlier, he had appeared preferable to the Habsburgs—that is inasmuch as little Hungary could maintain the appearance of independence. Anti-Communism, which right from the start had been a link with Hitler, was also Horthy's favoured subject. (Horthy called on Hitler on August 22, 1936: "...it was rumoured that they discussed Communism...—'Of course, they did! Could you imagine the Regent overlooking a good opportunity like that?'"—Baron Apor, Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs remarked.)[10] After the Second World War it appeared that the aged admiral's fears were justified. Not only Hitler's Germany but Stalin's Soviet Union showed themselves to be the kind of threat compared to which Horthy's Hungary looked like paradise lost. First Horthy appeared preferable to the Habsburgs, then to the Nazis and finally, to Bolshevism.

The conservative Montgomery respected authority and felt most comfortable in the company of the like-minded, in the narrowly circumscribed circle of his sources of information. He was fondest of the always well-informed Tibor Eckhardt, and treated him as a friend[11], he looked up to that cunning old fox Kálmán Kánya[12], he liked Baron Apor who so ably packaged all bad news, and he respected the apparent wisdom of Counts Bethlen and Teleki. He was happy to note every kind of hostility to Hitler in Horthy's inner circle. He paid close attention to Count István Bethlen's alarm-raising speeches in Parliament, thus to what Bethlen said on February 9, 1938:

> ...in foreign policy I used to be the spokesman of a pro-German line, but there is one thing that is obvious to me: if a *Gleichschaltung* of political life takes place in Hungary under the aegis of the ideas of the extreme right, we will end up as the servants of Germany and not her friends. That will imply the end of an independent Hungarian foreign policy.[13]

His official sources of information presented Montgomery with a blue-eyed image of Hungary. Whatever the subject, be it Hungarian intentions concerning the revision of the frontiers, German–Hungarian relations, or anti-Jewish legislation, most of what he was told in the Foreign Ministry on Dísz tér, in the Prime Minister's Office in the Sándor Palace, or by the Regent in the Royal Palace, was brighter and more beautiful than actual reality.

What Montgomery recorded is bound to surprise those who know little about Kálmán Kánya, the Foreign Minister. This old man and experienced diplomat, a survivor of the Habsburg monarchy, moved about on the stage of European diplomacy as if he were playing with his children. "de Kánya did not like it at

all", his deputy, Baron Apor commented in 1936, "because he had to go to Vienna for a conference with two other foreign ministers, both of whom were so young that their united ages were exactly the same as de Kánya's—67. He felt as though he was compelled to talk to a couple of school boys."[14] Years before the war, Kánya never left it in doubt what he thought about the Nazis and Hitler. As Baron Guy von Hahn, a Nazi agent in Budapest tellingly put it: "Kánya was a friend of former Germany but hates the present-day Germany."[15] As early as 1935, Montgomery had doubts concerning Hitler's policies, and reported with considerable forethought:

> If Hitler were an intelligent man, de Kánya said, he would at this moment make a public announcement that he would give up Austria and thus allay the fears of Italy and reassure the world as to his intentions. He felt sure, however, that he would not do this, and he feared he might even make more dramatic moves in the future.
>
> I mentioned that Napoleon was an Italian and always felt that he didn't belong in France which feeling was back of his desire to conquer the world. I suggested that Hitler being an Austrian might in the end be as great a disturber to peace as Napoleon for the same reason.[16]

Kánya understood the devil's kitchen of German foreign policy far better than the average well-trained diplomat.

> He said "You know, they have five foreign offices in Germany; one day von Neurath is in control, then the next day it is Goebbels, the next day Goering, then Rosenberg, and then Hess. Therefore, you could never control it abosolutely."[17]

There was good reason why the Italian and German ministers were dissatisfied with the Hungarian Foreign Minister.

> The Italian and German Ministers in Budapest, Vinci and Erdmannsdorff, according to Eckhardt, are very dissatisfied with de Kanya because he has not been more active in taking the part of Italy and Germany at London, and on other occasions.[18]

As time passed, and after he resigned his office, Kánya became ever more outspoken. "Mr Hitler was not a normal person," he told the U.S. Minister on March 18, 1939. He also predicted that the alliance between Hitler and Stalin would not last.

> de Kanya said that he had yesterday read a portion of MEIN KAMPF which somebody told him bore on the question of an alliance between Russia and Germany, and he found it very amusing because Mr Hitler proved definitely that Germany never could be an ally of Russia, that it was absolutely impossible. He felt that a month would tell the story. Germany and Russia had made threats as to what action they will take in case peace proposals are refused. As they have been definitely refused it is now up to them to make good their threats. If they don't make them good in a month it will then prove that the German-Russian alliance is nothing except what can be seen on its face

—that there is no understanding which would involve further cooperation between Germany and Russia—and the way was left open for a clash of interests which might bring Germany and Russia into antagonism: at least that is what he hoped.[19]

Kánya added something important with which the Hungarian political class of the time agreed in practice.

He said there was no difference between Nazism and Bolshevism; in fact, he said, the only difference between Germany today and Russia was that it was colder in Russia.[20]

Montgomery considered this the guiding idea of a Hungary drifting into war. He thought it so important that, in the preface to his *Hungary, the Unwilling Satellite,* published in 1947, he told off his fellow Americans for leaving this out of account. This much-quoted book, much of which was based on his conversations in Budapest, was an enthusiastic apology for Horthy's Hungary. A study of the documentary evidence suggests that Montgomery truly met a political élite which was hostile to both the Nazis and the Soviets, and that these men shaped and defined what he thought about the country.

The documents which follow, the publication of which was kindly endorsed by Ms Jean Montgomery-Riddell, the minister's daughter, are a small selection of the close to two hundred conversations which Montgomery recorded in Budapest. The original spelling of the documents has been kept throughout. They will be published complete, as discovered, edited and introduced by me, in Hungarian by Corvina Press, and in the original English by CEU Press, towards the end of 2002. Ms Montgomery-Riddell generously donated the originals to the Hungarian National Library. As a valuable collection, they form a serious and unexpected additional source for the history of the preliminaries of the Second World War in and out of Hungary. For those interested in the history of U.S.–Hungarian relations, and the pre-War history of Hungary, they might come as a revelation.

* * *

Budapest, April 4, 1939

Conversation with Mr. Orlowski [the Polish Minister]

The Polish Minister has calmed down quite a bit so far as the Foreign Office is concerned and Hungarians in general. He says that while Csaky is no longer the friend of old he does not talk to him in the same way that he did; he cannot definitely say that he has actually lied outright to him, although by inference and in effect he has.

As Orlowski sees the situation, Hungary, through the insanity of Imredy, became involved with Germany and she cannot get out of it. Actually no one from the Regent down wants to go to war with Germany and are anxious to find some way to get out of their present position into a more independent one, but they don't know how to do it. He believes that they like the Poles far better than the Germans and if left to their own free choice they would stick with the Poles, and as they are now they are afraid to do anything for fear of bringing German wrath upon them. He said that Csaky thought of making a trip to Poland but the Germans vetoed the idea.

Orlowski doesn't think that the Hungarian situation is impossible. His Government is doing everything possible to induce the Hungarians and the Rumanians to make up and come to some sort of an arrangement in the way of a non-aggression pact and if this can be put over he believes that given a little time, Hungary will gradually veer towards Poland and away from Germany. As things stand now, he cannot see how the Hungarians cannot help but go to war on Germany's side, if there is a war, particularly if it started in this part of the world. He thinks the Germans got complete control of them, not because they love the Germans but because they fear them.

Orlowski said he believed that another German move would have to be made within four months, otherwise there would be a complete collapse in Germany. In which direction this move would be made he says he doesn't have any idea. He has no doubt that Poland was supposed to be the next victim but he thought that Chamberlain's statement[21] had put an end to that, although nobody could be sure.

He didn't believe that Hitler would actually move into Hungary, but he did think they would be more and more over-bearing and if neither avenue was open to them he didn't think it was impossible that Germany would decide to take over Hungary, not because they could get any more that way but for the moral effect and what they could get out of it. If they made a move in another direction there would be no point in coming here, but if Great Britain guarantees to close the doors in other directions he believes they will have to go somewhere.

I got the idea from my conversation that things are considerably improved between Hungary and Poland since my last conversation with him and that he is very hopeful that things will improve in that direction.

Budapest, November 15, 1939

Conversation with Mr. O'Malley, British Minister

The British Minister told me this morning that everything he had seen and heard since he had been here led to the same conclusions as those of Count Teleki. He saw no particular danger to Hungary for the moment. While there might possibly be in the spring, he agreed with Count Teleki that Hungary was in less danger than most of the small countries.

He explained Count Teleki's conversation with me by saying exactly the same thing had been done to him. The last time I saw him he told me Count Teleki had told him that he didn't want him to call because every time he did so it got in the papers and the Germans made a face about it, saying that he was not calling on him any more because he never got any information anyhow. However, not long ago Countess Teleki invited him to tea and he went up and found no one there but the Prime Minister who had proceeded to talk quite freely and fully contrary to any previous experience. In other words, paralleling both the circumstances and volubility of the Prime Minister in my case. He thought that both visits were the result of a growing conviction on the part of Hungarians that the war was going against the Germans and that it was better to be more friendly and more open with the Allied Powers, and also America since that country might have much to say about the events of the future whether she entered the war or not. He said it was true no such experience had happened to the French Minister but that this was natural because the Hungarians didn't trust the French but they did the British and Americans.

Budapest, December 11, 1939

Conversation with Mr. de Kanya, former Foreign Minister

Mr. de Kanya told me that he had many friends in Germany, since he spent a good part of his life in Vienna and had been Minister in Berlin;[22] that he was constantly seeing various of these friends or hearing from them in an indirect way that all his information was to the effect that conditions in Germany were very bad indeed, and that the morale of the people was not too high.

He said that all in all most of his friends insisted that Germany was without doubt going to win the war; nevertheless, most of the time they talked in a manner which showed they hadn't the slightest bit of confidence in Germany's ability to even survive as a nation because they always indicated fears for Germany being cut up, turned Bolshevik, or other suggestions which were a little more frantic, and even told him confidentially they saw no way out. He said that only last week a very prominent German (he added, a man of good position who was

conservative and trustworthy) told him that in his opinion if Mr. Hitler didn't do something either in the way of an offensive within six weeks, there would be a revolution, and that if this offensive didn't turn out to be a military success there would be a revolution anyhow. de Kanya said he could hardly believe this. Nevertheless, he doesn't believe, as Count Csaky and others do, that a revolution in Germany is impossible. He thinks that the Soviet move has disturbed a lot of Germans and that the more responsible elements are now thinking more of ways and means to protect themselves against the Soviets than they are of winning the war.

de Kanya says his German friends, without exception, pretend to believe that the French have no heart for the war that they are driven into it more or less by the British; and that they can separate the French from the British in time, after which they can finish off the British. The principal worry of most of them seems to be if they can hold off the Bolsheviks for this to happen.

de Kanya says some day he is going to give the story of his conversations with Hitler to the world. At the present time he cannot. When they are published, they will show that in every conversation he had with Hitler, Hitler never lived up to any promise he made. He said that conversation with Hitler was unilateral, since Hitler did all the talking. Every time he saw him he broke out in a lot of statements as to what he was going to do for Hungary, such as restoring the ancient kingdom; even in a small matter he definitely told him that Pressburg[23] belonged to Hungary, that he would see that the Hungarians got it; and that when the time came he ignored his promise entirely, as he had all the others.

de Kanya said that when the Regent went to Germany, Hitler spoke to him about the possibility of a war, and the Regent told him that it would be a mistake to go to war with England since due to her great sea power she was a very difficult country to defeat. He said Hitler instantly became furious and began to scream and yell at the Regent, and that right in the midst of his screaming the Regent held up his hands and told him in no uncertain terms that he was the Head of a State and he didn't expect to listen to any conversation addressed in such a tone and that unless he spoke to him in the language which one Head of a State used to another he would immediately return to Hungary. He said Hitler instantly caved in, and after that was very sweet to the Regent all the time he was there. Ribbentrop blamed de Kanya for this incident. He said de Kanya put him up to it, etc.

Budapest, November 8, 1940

Conversation with H.S.H. The Regent

The Regent received me with his face wreathed in smiles and almost jumped up and down with apparent joy in telling me how happy he was over the reelection of President Roosevelt. He said he and Madame Horthy had sat up to the early hours of the morning of Wednesday trying to get the election results and

that they were both terribly disappointed because they got nothing. However, now that the election was assured they were very happy because they believed in everything President Roosevelt stood for, and he felt that his reelection was the first bright thing that happened in many months and meant so much to the entire world.

The Regent told me he wanted to write a personal letter of congratulation to the President and asked me if I would send it in the pouch. In the meantime he said he would be pleased if I would wire the President that he was delighted at his election. I said to him, "I don't know, you know our codes are broken down and somebody may decode the message." He said "I don't care if they do."

After disposing of the election the Regent told me that he had something very interesting to tell me in great confidence. He didn't want it repeated to anyone. He said that a man who had been a liaison officer with him in the last war and was now one of the high ranking German Admirals had been to Budapest lately and had asked for permission to call.[24] As he was at Godollo he sent word for him to come down there and do some shooting. The man accepted with pleasure, and they had a very fine hunt. He said that he purposely said nothing to him about the war because he didn't want the man to think he invited him down there for the purpose of pumping him. As the man was a rather silent man and said very little, he was therefore surprised when after the hunt the man said, "Admiral, you know the navy hasn't changed at all in Germany. All the other forces are different, but the navy is just the same as before the war. We must be grateful to Hitler for the fact that he has done so much for the navy, but we and Japan both have made one very serious mistake, that is, not with the navy, but our Governments and the Japanese Government thought that the air arm could take the place of the Navy. That has proved to be a great mistake. The British navy is still intact; it is a wonderful navy. It is just as true now as it was in the last war, that the Power that commands the sea will win the war." The Regent said he didn't say anything but he was naturally pleased at this statement because it agreed with his own ideas.

I spoke to the Regent about Eckhardt and Bethlen going to America and England. I told him the idea and he thought it might be a good one. He said he would speak to the Prime Minister about it. I then brought up the subject of our Military Attaché[25] and told him all about it, and said that if the Foreign Office would tell us the truth we wouldn't have to go rooting around for information. He said he didn't know why the F.O. didn't tell us the truth, he couldn't understand it. I told him something of my position vis-à-vis the Foreign Minister, and asked him if he received copies of the letters of our correspondence.[26] At first he said no, and then when I called it to his attention he said he had and remembered it, but said Csaky is just afraid of the Germans, absolutely frightened by them and does all these things because he is so scared. I didn't contradict him, but I told him Csaky was making my position rather difficult. The Regent

said to me, "Anything that happens now, no matter what, come to me." I said, "I cannot come to Your Highness." He said, "Then call up Captain Tost[27] to take the matter up with me." He said, "I am still here; in fact, more in charge than appears on the surface. We had to let the German troops come through,[28] for after all they said they were coming through to protect the oil fields, but we absolutely refused to let them make a base here, and I don't intend to do it. Further, I am going to kick the Nazis out of Parliament." I said, "What will Germany say to that?" He said, "I don't care, I am going to do it now or later. In fact, I wouldn't have them in Parliament at all because that would be the simplest solution. In times like this Parliament is dangerous, but I don't want to ape the dictators. I don't want to have them think I am going to have their form of government. I am going to have a Parliament, but am going to kick the Nazis out."

The Regent told me that he had issued a new order to the Army that no one was to engage in politics in any form, upon penalty of immediate dismissal, that every officer had to sign a statement acknowledging the receipt of this order, and he felt that this would have a decided effect, particularly as he had dismissed a lot of officers who had engaged in politics.[29]

Budapest, February 13, 1941

Conversation with Prime Minister Count Teleki

Count Teleki told me at lunch the other day that every morning when he got up he pinched himself to see if he was still here, and then he said, "Well, thank God, another 24 hours have gone by and nothing has happened." Every 24 hours, he said, that passed by was just that much gained. He had no idea what was going to happen. He wouldn't be surprised at anything. He couldn't see any use of having a lot of theories as to whether the Germans would take over the country or what they would do. He just had to be prepared for the worst, and if it didn't happen he would be grateful.

I told him that I understood the German Minister was calling on the Regent and I supposed he must want something. He replied, "Want something? They want something all the time. Not a day goes by but von Erdmannsdorff doesn't call on somebody and want something." He refused 90% of all requests but he always had to give him something, so little by little they get more and more. If the war lasts long enough they will gradually get everything except, we hope, there will be something left when the war finishes, although they may come some day and take the rest in one gulp. However, they were as diligent as they could be in putting up as stiff a resistance as possible. For example, he said, about two weeks ago they had trouble getting enough engines, or possibly there was engine trouble he said. Anyhow when the troops got to the border there was no engine to pull the train, so the commander proposed that they unload their

equipment, get in it, and go on to Rumania that way. The Hungarian officer in charge told him that he was sorry, but his instructions were to let the trains through but not troops and if they started to walk the troops the Hungarian frontier guards would have to fire on them no matter what happened. That was the orders they had. Teleki said this officer was on very good terms with the Germans and told them in a nice way. Nevertheless, they waited for the train and didn't try to march across. He said this was an illustration that they did go to extremes if necessary to protect their sovereignty, but that they were always compelled to make concessions and couldn't refuse everything. Now and then they had to give them something, but as they made so many requests and were always after the same thing over and over again it was a difficult situation.

He told me emphatically that the story that he had made any request in connection with me was absolutely untrue, and he couldn't understand how such a thing could have originated, that he was terribly sorry to see me go as he considered me one of his oldest friends and a good friend of Hungary. ❧

NOTES

1 ■ *Who Was Who in America*, Vol. 3 (Chicago: Marquis—Who's Who, 1960), p. 610.

2 ■ John F. Montgomery, Diary (unpublished), January 19, 1934. Hungarian National (Széchényi) Library.

3 ■ J. F. Montgomery to Geeorge Creel, May 22, 1939, John F. Montgomery Strictly Personal Correspondence, 1937–1939. Hungarian National (Széchényi) Library.

4 ■ John F. Montgomery: *Hungary the Unwilling Satellite* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1947, repr. Morristown: NJ: Vista Books, 1993), p. 11.

5 ■ J. F. Montgomery to A. S. Fedde, January 17, 1935. Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT. Montgomery Papers, No. 353, Vol. VII , Box 4.

6 ■ J. F. Montgomery to Robert English, May 23, 1938, Robert English to J. F. Montgomery, June 13 and July 26, 1938, J. F. Montgomery to Robert English, July 25, 1938. Montgomery Papers, *op. cit.*, No. 353, Vol. V, Box 3.

7 ■ András Hory: *Bukaresttől Varsóig*. Pál Pritz, ed. (Budapest: Gondolat, 1987), p. 403.

8 ■ J. F. Montgomery to Mrs. Guy [Ilona] Bowden, August 18, 1954. Courtesy of Mrs. Ilona Bowden, Hungarian National Museum, Budapest.

9 ■ Gyula Juhász: *Magyarország külpolitikája* 1919–1945 [The Foreign Policy of Hungary] (3rd ed., Budapest: Kossuth, 1988), pp. 136–256; Mária Ormos, *Magyarország a két világháború korában* [Hungary in the Era of the Two World Wars] (Debrecen: Csokonai, 1998), pp. 147–230; Ignác Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century* (Budapest: Corvina–Osiris, 1999), pp. 196–204.

10 ■ John F. Montgomery: Conversations, Apor , November 3, 1936. Hungarian National (Széchényi) Library.

11 ■ John F. Montgomery: Diary, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

12 ■ Footnotes to the MS series "Personalities," p. 4. John F. Montgomery, Confidential Papers, Articles. Hungarian National (Széchényi) Library.

13 ■ Hungarian National Archives, Parliamentary Committees, Vol. XIX, pp. 341–342. Quoted by György Ránki, *Emlékiratok és valóság Magyarország második világháborús szerepéről* [Memoirs on and the Reality of Hungary's Role in World War II] (Budapest: Kossuth, 1964), p. 46.

14 ■ John F. Montgomery, Conversations, Apor, November 3, 1936.

15 ■ John F. Montgomery, Conversations, Hahn, November 12, 1935.
16 ■ John F. Montgomery, Conversations, Kánya, March 28, 1935.
17 ■ John F. Montgomery, Conversations, Kánya, December 1, 1937.
18 ■ John F. Montgomery, Conversations, Eckhardt, November 6, 1937.
19 ■ John F. Montgomery, Conversations, Kánya, October 4, 1939.
20 ■ John F. Montgomery, Conversations, Kánya, March 18, 1939.
21 ■ On March 31, 1939, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain declared in the House of Commons, that "In the event of any action which clearly threatened Polish independence ... His Majesty's Government would feel themselves bound at once to lend the Polish Government all support in their power." (Quoted by William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich. A History of Nazi Germany.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960, p. 454).
22 ■ Before becoming Hungary's minister of foreign affairs, Kálmán Kánya was Hungarian minister to Berlin between 1925 and 1933.
23 ■ Bratislava, Pozsony
24 ■ Probably Admiral Wilhelm Franz Canaris (1887–1945), head of the German *Abwehr,* a participant in the plot to assassinate Hitler on July 20, 1944. Canaris was tried and executed.
25 ■ U. S. military attaché Richard C. Partridge witnessed the passing of a German military train around Szolnok. He was accused of spying but Horthy was asked to intervene and the case ended with a Hungarian apology. (John F. Montgomery, *Hungary the Unwilling Satellite,* op. cit., pp. 143–4).
26 ■ Reference to an intrigue possibly aimed at the recall of Mongomery.
27 ■ Aide-de camp of Regent Horthy.
28 ■ On September 30, 1940 the Hungarian government agreed to the crossing of Hungary by German "study" troops towards Romania.
29 ■ On October 28, 1940 German agent Otto Braun reported to Berlin that high ranking officers, such as Lieutenant General Barabás, Lieutenant Colonel Juhász and others were being dismissed in Hungary. Ránki György et al., eds., *A Wilhelmstrasse és Magyarország. Német diplomáciai iratok Magyarországról 1933–1944* [Wilhelmstrasse and Hungary. German Diplomatic Papers Concerning Hungary 1933–1944], (Budapest: Kossuth, 1968), p. 546.

Tibor Hajdu

Yours Sincerely, János Kádár

Tibor Huszár (ed.): *Kedves, jó Kádár Elvtárs! Válogatás Kádár János levelezéséből 1954–1989* (Dear Comrade Kádár! A Selection from the Correspondence of János Kádár, 1954–1989). Budapest, Osiris, 2002, 871 pp.

As a by-product, so to speak, of his biography (only the first volume of which has appeared to date), Tibor Huszár has published Kádár's selected correspondence in a book which, along with the index, runs to well over 800 pages. Important and instructive it is too, for not only interested readers but also historians and political scientists who deal with this period will be able to pick up much from it that had hitherto been kept from them.

Making any selection is hard (I have published several volumes of correspondence myself, so I can heartily sympathise), and the more voluminous the assortment that has to be picked from, the harder it gets. What makes it even more difficult is the fact that Kádár's secretariat functioned also as a national complaints office, so a petitioner could never know if his or her request would actually reach Kádár. The editor is in a position to know, and, as a general rule, he rightly prints only letters to which Kádár himself responded. But then again, the reader might fairly ask why, if Huszár publishes the perforce buttery covering letters that several dozen writers and artists sent, along with a copy of their latest work, to the person who might be able to help or, more importantly, block publication of future works, then why does he not publish all of them? Those whose letters have been exposed to public gaze might justifiably object to being made butts of ridicule when their colleague X or Y escaped. One might raise further methodological issues of this kind, but it is more important to establish that this is a very good selection because it makes available a huge number of astonishing and hitherto unknown letters that are both typical yet also fill gaps in our knowledge of Kádár and the eponymous era. Even the most thorough of treatises can be no substitute for this sort of documentation: the letters themselves are not abbreviated or otherwise 'edited', they reproduce their writers' style in all the original awkwardness as they strive to supply what they wish to convey with a suitable preamble and garnishing. A gifted novelist is able to achieve the appearance of originality, but readers are still keen to see the genuine article. They get

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Tibor Hajdu's
books include A magyarországi Tanácsköztársaság *(The Hungarian Soviet Republic, 1969) and a biography of Count Mihály Károlyi.*

that in plenty here, the only question being whether they have the stomach for it.

The volume gives no support to the notion, fairly widespread nowadays, that Kádár was the great Hungarian politician who is crying out to be recognised in a monument to the twentieth century (there is, in fact, a left-wing movement pushing for a Kádár statue), nor to its converse: the customary image, touted by the right-wing press, of the evil lieutenant who sustained an evil régime. What can be discerned between the lines of these letters is the bored face of a mediocre, uneducated man, who had no desire to better himself, avoided the company of creative intellectuals and, indeed, unfamiliar company of any kind, did not like travelling either, showed little interest in new developments or innovations, and whose thinking too moved within narrow confines. That is in no way to diminish his political merits—that in place of the ravings of the highly cultivated, clever and versatile Rákosi, who held even his own followers in perpetual terror and uncertainty, he produced a state of peace and boredom, to the considerable satisfaction of the petty bourgeoisie that makes up the majority at all times and in all places. The era found in him a man in its own image, whilst he understood his role and played it well. Not that he strove to project himself as any more than what he was: on the contrary, Khrushchev and Brezhnev, or the mala fides-neighbours mistrustful of anything Hungarian, could rest assured, they had no reason to fear him, of all people. The speeches he made at meetings of the leadership or confidential conversations show him to have been much more astute than do his terse and evasive letters.

This is an almost completely one-sided correspondence. For the most part Kádár is only responding, and briefly at that, to long letters addressed to him. It is much less usual for him to turn to somebody; after all, he was able to communicate face to face with those he was most likely to interact with, his own more intimate entourage. To whom, then, did he write on his own initiative? To Soviet and other foreign leaders, or to the Soviet ambassador, when he wanted something from them. On rare but unavoidable occasions, to old acquaintances to offer condolences or congratulations. Or if they turned to him indirectly, as when the state President István Dobi drew his attention to an article written by a seriously ill Béla Kovács, former Secretary General of the Smallholders Party, who had spent eight years in the Soviet camps:

> ...as I read the article... I thought of the Béla Kovács who you were 13 or 14 years ago. I am not ashamed to write that it seems to me there must already have been more good features in the Béla Kovács of that time than we, Communists, were able to see in you. For it could only have been with the help of those good features that you were able to do what, alas, all too few people are able: you triumphed over yourself, over what had been the bad features within yourself in earlier times, that is, over what bound you to the past, the old world. I know, as few others know, how peculiarly hard were the years, how peculiarly hard the circumstances, under which you did that. What I also like about the writing is that it speaks in the tone of a self-assured and self-aware man. I offer you my congratulations on your article, not out of courtesy but from the heart, with inner delight. It saddens me to hear about your health problems... (23rd February 1959)

An odd chime with that is a letter Kádár wrote *in response* to István Kovács, an old companion in the illegal Communist Party, when the latter grumbled over the minor posting he, a once powerful member of Rákosi's Politburo, had been offered:

> You are still over-inclined to belittle people as well as posts. According to you, perhaps

> the manager of the Adria Silk-Weaving Mill does not even work for Socialism... For many years you held a position like few other sons of the Hungarian people: you were able to evolve your capabilities to the fullest extent, you were able to show what you can do to the fullest degree. You did so, and many saw that, nor have they forgotten it either! What is your complaint, then? For my part, I have not forgotten, even now, the István Kovács who you once were, back in the conditions of illegality—a man I esteemed highly. It seems, however, that you yourself are the one who buried and forgot that former better self many years ago. But then don't blame us but yourself for that. (21st April, 1960)

The dismissive tone of that letter is no doubt motivated by Kádár's bitterness that his old friend, when an influential member of the Party leadership, had not raised a single word against his, Kádár's, imprisonment, but more significant is the full awareness of power that can be sensed from the very style of the letter. Breaking its own imposed time limit of starting in November 1956, the volume prints two important letters from Kádár to Rákosi, dated 1954 and 1955. Huszár likewise makes a big point in his biography about those letters that tell us how purposefully Kádár, on his release from prison, strove for power, and, one could add, how naturally he adopts an uncharacteristically humble tone with Rákosi (as he was to do later on with Khrushchev and Brezhnev), the holder of power. Then, when he himself is in power, how equally natural his air of superiority is towards those who have fallen from grace—whether that be István Kovács or, later on, the former Social Democrat György Marosán, or his own confidant and chief of his secretariat, József Sándor.

That awareness of power is even more evident when he adopts a tone of superiority in responding to people such as the great writers Gyula Illyés and László Németh, or Gyula Ortutay, the distinguished ethnographer, the rector of the University of Budapest, and quondam minister of culture, whom he might well have felt were not nobodies. All the same, there is a change when it comes to his relations with intellectuals, and that denotes a certain stylistic shift as well after he had proclaimed the "he that is not against us is with us" slogan. Considering that he had heaped insults on Ortutay in 1960 and 1961 for supposing, when he was Secretary General of the Patriotic People's Front, that the Front should support Tibor Déry, the ex-Communist novelist who was jailed after 1956, Gyula Illyés and other 'politically dubious' writers ("you squirmed [then] like a grass-snake when they tread on its tail"), or the way he merely sent word to the philosopher György Lukács in 1960, when the latter wrote personally in hope of getting clearance to publish his works: "insofar as he feels his creative freedom is not assured in Hungary, the PB [Politburo] sees no obstacle, in the event he should seek to leave the country, to his submitting such a request to the competent state bodies" — by 1970 he was already thanking Lukács for the book the latter had sent him, even congratulating him on the award of the Goethe Prize, and moreover addressing Déry as his "honoured friend".

More than just a stylistic change, a change of substance in his thinking can also be discerned during the Sixties and Seventies. To quote one of the most important of these from a letter he wrote to Willy Brandt, the German chancellor, with the knowledge that although Kádár too, in his younger days, had been an active member of the Social Democratic Party in pre-war Hungary, he had long harboured an antipathy towards its sister parties and their leaders:

> I consider the way in which relations between Communists and Social Democrats have evolved—as was already touched upon in the course of our discussion in Budapest—to be an issue with historical repercussions. The specific experiences of the past decades have likewise convinced me of the benefits of collaboration, as well as the harmful consequences of confrontation, of carrying on a political fight against one another. It is my firm opinion that the most fundamental problems that humanity is confronted with will not be soluble without cooperation between the two great tendencies in the labour movement, especially in a European context... the concerted or parallel actions of our parties, however, can in my judgement bring us closer to a solution to the flash points that threaten the existence of human civilisation... (31st July 1978)

Whom, if anyone, did he truly admire outside politics? Lajos Kassák, the working man turned great avant-garde poet, writer and artist, for one. There was one occasion when Kádár gave him a hearing, helped him put on an exhibition of his abstract pictures, and even went to view the exhibition. He also grinned and bore a clear reference on the part of the composer Zoltán Kodály. After the 1848–49 Hungarian Revolution and anti-Habsburg War of Independence had been defeated, Kodály pointed out in an uncompromising missive

> ...they did not persecute writers, even though János Arany, Jókai, Vörösmarty and Bajza had all been more or less active supporters of the Kossuth government... the Horthy régime removed only those, myself included, who had taken on leading positions in 1918-1919. Sympathisers were allowed to carry on working because without them the entire educational apparatus would have ground to a halt. (21st October 1959)

This was a rare instance when Kádár's reply was longer than the letter he had received.

> Fair enough, you are a conservative, it seems we are unable to win you over to the idea of Socialism. You are acting in the interests of people who are politically opposed to us. Fair enough, you have the right to do so, your protégés are all Hungarian citizens, and provided they do not break the law, even former members of the religious orders are entitled to legal protection.

He even goes as far as to express his personal respect:

> During the mid-Twenties I was a pupil at Wesselényi Road Boys' Civic School [in Budapest]. I had no ear for music, nor I suppose much of a voice either, so I did not become one of the choristers. Yet even with my child's understanding, I still grasped a little of the great and splendid thing that you and Mr Borus, the music teacher you were supporting, managed to achieve with the school's renowned choir.

It is the infrequent recollections of his young days like this that are, perhaps, the most appealing aspect of Kádár's letters. Let us look at a different kind, one from amongst the letters that Kádár exchanged with friends from boyhood and his time in the labour movement, which the volume brings together in a separate section. Djordje Herceg, possibly Hungarian by nationality but in any event a former partisan in the Vojvodina, on seeing pictures of Kádár in the newspapers, found something familiar about him. He writes that in 1944, during the third year of a sentence he was serving in the military prison on Conti Street in Budapest, a Hungarian prisoner with a similar face who liked to play chess had also been there, and had joined with him, later on that year, when a group escaped on a death march on which they and other prisoners were being driven westwards. Four of them had headed towards Buda and met up with a group of Gypsies

who had given them something to eat. Two, he and Kádár, had then gone on ahead: "Not long after we ran into a patrol. One of the men was in soldier's uniform, the other was a civilian who belonged to the Arrow-Cross Organisation. The comrade from Budapest had an I.D. card on him, so this was where our paths separated. I was locked up by the Arrow-Cross lot. I heard nothing more about the comrade."

Kádár answered soon afterwards:

> ...you ask whether I am the same as that Budapester who, in the autumn of 1944 at Nyergesújfalu, along with yourself and a few other prisoners, escaped from the march that was evacuated under military escort from the Conti Street prison. I am one and the same! The event in question happened in the first half of November 1944. The incidents you refer to attest to a good memory, and for my part, on the other hand, they identify you. Quite clearly, we were the two who made that escape together back then. You did well to write. This way at least I too know, after so many years, that you also managed to get safely back home and are alive to this day... Back then, I made my way on foot to nearby Dorog and from there got to Budapest on a morning workers' train... (5th December 1977)

The editor has also formed a few other separate thematic groups from the otherwise chronologically ordered letters. Those collected under the heading 'Political Friendship' are chiefly the correspondence with György Aczél, who carried out his functions of controlling ideology, culture and science with remarkable manipulative abilities and political acumen. Under 'Private Correspondence' are the letters exchanged with his natural father, his step-brother and relatives on his father's side (Kádár was a love child whose father refused to recognise his paternity and paid no child support), and between 1954 and 1964 with his wife. The latter were closely analysed by Huszár in Volume 1 of the biography.

The same age as Kádár, but a good deal narrower even than him in her education and range of interests, Mrs Kádár was nevertheless very similar to him in her way of thinking, her political views, and her desire for a modest life. Her letters amply document that it was not mere chance that Kádár—a taciturn man who cherished his solitude and refrained from marriage—not from women—until he was 35—found in her a partner whose company he was able to tolerate up to the very end of his life. She was not a chess partner, just a silent companion. Whenever they were apart, they would relate the day's events: Kádár's card-playing sessions into the small hours, his hunting adventures, described with much expertise, what he ate (he preferred simple fare like goulash, tripe, savoury scones):

> Vilma [their cook] took care of me in her customary manner. She cooked bouillon, veal stew, goulash and the like. At 7:30 this evening I had a lordly meal (mushrooms and egg). She came down again at 10 o'clock and gave me a plate of very tasty, non-fatty jellied meat with a cup of tea. She asked me to pass on her greetings (23rd January 1959)

Not a word about politics or social life.

Mrs Kádár's letters are even less interesting, with one exception. On 31st October 1958, there is a dramatic opening —"Dear János, I turn to you as a comrade. Many sleepless nights have preceded these lines..."—before she divulges, in a document that feels more like a memo, that despite having been a trade-union member back in the 1930s, and even having attended Trade Union College, she had never been assigned to an appropriate post,

"when I saw the positions into which people who are a good deal shallower than myself in both intellect and character have managed to work their way." She was passed over at first because her husband was in prison, then because her husband was the Prime Minister:

> If my personal affairs are not resolved in a manner that allows me to presume that I have been rehabilitated, I shall write to the Political Bureau... I have dutifully held my peace for years because you are my husband. How long, I beg you, can this go on? And why am I still only a shadow?... let us not beat about the bush, you have never lifted a finger for my sake. Out of party-mindedness and largesse. (31st October 1958)

From 1945 until her husband's arrest Mrs Kádár had worked for the State Security Office, the ÁVH, in subordinate positions such as one of the anonymous screeners of letters in the mails. After 1956 she had similar duties as a censor in the Information Office, though now in increasingly more responsible positions, which I mention only because it is typical of Kádár's ties to the political police, under their changing names, for all his own bitter experiences at their hands. He took great care that the 'organs' should not gain the ascendancy, as they had in the Soviet Union or Romania. After consolidating his power around 1962, with the dismissal of those in the Party hierarchy who had compromised themselves the most deeply, he made sure that the Minister of the Interior and his deputies should be political lightweights, though knowing all along that they were nonetheless his most solid buttresses of support. The correspondence shows that, in the last resort, the leaders in the police and judicial apparatus who were discarded after 1956—Tibor Pőcze, András Tömpe, Sándor Feri (the latter two close friends) as well as others—were the ones who had been urging a radical purge, whereas he protected 'useful dolts' like Ferenc Nezvál, a cobbler-turned-Minister of Justice (than whom I have rarely seen anything more ignorant going about on two legs). Milder, more tolerable and more orderly it may have been than under Rákosi, yet Hungary remained a police state during the Kádár era —which is why we continue to tread on moral minefields to the present day.

Letters of disclosure and denunciation came in thick and fast from other areas too (the editor no doubt had to exercise discretion there), and here I must express a particular debt of gratitude to Tibor Huszár, on behalf of may fellow historians, for clearing up one specific matter, albeit not of wider public interest. In 1979, a biography by György Borsányi of Béla Kun—the leader of Hungary's short-lived 1919 Soviet Republic, who eventually fell victim to one of Stalin's purges in 1938 during his subsequent exile in the Soviet Union—appeared in the shops, only to be withdrawn virtually overnight. A respectable scholarly piece of work it was too, though to modern eyes little short of an apologia: it said a lot of good things about Kun, and only as much of the bad side as was absolutely necessary to stick to a semblance of truth. We never knew who had initiated the ban, with many suspecting that it was the Soviet embassy, though groundlessly as it now turns out: those responsible were Kádár's chess partner, Sándor Szerényi, a former Comintern cadre who had endured a spell in the Gulag before returning home, and the historian Miklós Kun, Béla Kun's grandson, who has become a highly critical Kremlinologist since the 1989 change in régime:

> I found to my continually renewed consternation, that the book contains many pas-

> sages in which its treatment of the underground struggle of the KMP [Communist Party of Hungary] is influenced by factional literature that was condemned in the past by the Comintern's Executive Committee, indeed is guided by pronouncements of the Horthy régime and of 'modern' anti-Communist journalism and historiography...,

writes Miklós Kun.

> Since the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party there has been no example in the international labour movement... of a Marxist publishing house assembling so many negatives... about a founder of the party, one of Lenin's immediate colleagues. (6th June 1979)

Borsányi was not punished—that thought did not even occur to Kádár—and indeed he was allowed to remain at the Institute of Party History; all that happened was that his book was put on ice for a while. Some years later, with reference to the impending centenary of Béla Kun's birth, Miklós Kun once more offered his services:

> Just in the period since I sent my letter to you, Comrade Kádár, four publications have seen the light of day, in various organs, that touch on Béla Kun's activities with what may be called a negative approach... (18th February 1984)

The offer found no takers, either with Kádár himself or within his circle. By 1984 they really had other sorts of concerns on their minds: the critical position of the economy and its attendant phenomena. Amongst the warnings along these lines, I would highlight a letter from the sociologist Professor Sándor Szalai which deals with the Gabcikovo-Nagymaros Danube barrage, appending a detailed critique that he had elaborated with his team: "You... need to be aware *now* what sort of politically explosive material is hidden away here" (26th April 1983). (Szalai, a leading Social Democrat, had been imprisoned in 1950, the very period when Kádár was Minister of the Interior, but after 1956 he regained his professorial status, membership of the Academy, and so on, as if nothing had happened.) To quote from Kádár's answer:

> Twenty years ago we would have seen the concerns of men of science in this connection, we would still not have gone this deeply into the matter. Now, insofar as it lies in our hands, we have slowed down the work so that we may take it out again at a slightly more tranquil time... (29th April 1983)

A tranquil time never did come, and for all that this reply does show that the ageing Kádár still had some appreciation of the problems of the economy and society; when he was no longer capable of solving them.

The style is the man, the saying goes. That notwithstanding, Kádár the man and politician was better than his style. There is many an example amongst politicians about whom the contrary is true. ❧

"The cause which obliges me to live here"

Letters between Kádár and Kodály

In a speech he gave in the city of Győr on August 20th 1959 János Kádár, who had been put in power by the Soviets in the wake of the crushed 1956 Revolution, urged further normalisation. This offered an opportunity to the composer Zoltán Kodály to voice his own justified complaints on behalf of Hungarian musicians. Kodály was highly respected and well known for always speaking his mind, regardless of the circumstances; Kádár's reply, however, calls for explanation. What I have in mind is not his zealous desire to educate the populace or the naive atheism of his letter, nor, in the knowledge of the facts, is it necessary to deny that in the years immediately after 1956 an identity between the idea of the people and that of Socialism was a deeply felt cliché for a man like him. It is clear that the primary purpose of the letter was the making of an offer. Kádár meant it to be a political gesture. The respect, going back to his boyhood, due to "the great composer, the great teacher of the nation", must be taken to be honestly meant. In the autumn of 1956 Kodály had become a symbol of national resistance. The first performance, in September, in the Károlyi Gardens, of his choral work: Rise Up, Magyars! *(Talpra magyar!) had served as a demonstration. In the days of the Revolution, the newly founded Petőfi Party proposed Kodály as the chairman of a National Supreme Council which would act as Head of State. In the light of a knowledge of all these facts, Kádár interpreted Kodály's favourable reaction to the Győr speech as a chance for reconciliation. The polemical—and hence honest—key of his letter aimed to serve this intention.*

The letter, it must be said, was conceived at a stage in the years when the mechanism of retaliation still operated, but when Kádár himself was increasingly aware that it could not be continued.

Tibor Huszár

Tibor Huszár,

a professor of sociology, who is working on a biography of Kádár, is editor of a selection from the correspondence of János Kádár, reviewed by Tibor Hajdú on pp. 125–131 of this issue.

Zoltán Kodály to János Kádár

September 1, 1959.

Dear Comrade Kádár,

When reading your Győr speech, I got stuck on the following sentence: "In general, we have stopped exchanging and removing people."

Well, the point is that the Cultural Ministry has not stopped this at all; on the contrary, they have just started to do so in earnest. And to an extent that is decidedly damaging to the cause of popular education.

The Lorántffy Street Music School has for years been a model school, praised lavishly by our own and foreign experts; the new, and musically illiterate, headmistress is now systematically ruining it. She first transferred Irma Bors, the teacher who was the life and soul as well as the founder of the school, without question the foremost specialist in the country, and whose teaching has been observed by the Music Academy's teacher trainees since 1942 (even though she was still a nun then); she was sent to a school where there are only two music classes a week and no practical training for teacher trainees, and where she earns 500 forints less than she did in her previous post. In addition, the headmistress also fired three of the best qualified teachers, in each case without any serious excuse or accusation.

By doing this, she has ruined the school.

Ultimately, intellectual capital is part of the nation's wealth, and mismanaging it like this is a crime similar to the irresponsible squandering of material resources. How can you build a country when those who are able and willing to engage in valuable work are not supported but constantly hampered?

Pál Járdányi's[1] dismissal from the Academy of Music is another case in point. He is an outstanding composer and teacher, and whoever will follow him in that position will not be able to fill his place. Again, no serious explanation was given.

Sadly, the Ministry of Culture's conduct seems to be in keeping with tradition. Békéstarhos is still vividly remembered. György Gulyás, who won first prize with his choir in Arezzo this year and in Britain last year, had succeeded, thanks to vigorous effort and considerable initiative, in setting up a musical school with boarding facilities, which—according to the evidence of its visitors book—drew as much admiration as does the Lorántffy now; the ministry looked askance at it and, although the Planning Bureau added a fine concert hall, it abolished the school with one stroke of the pen. Now it is an institute for the mentally handicapped. The concert hall stands abandoned.

As a result, Gulyás fell ill; years later he embarked on a similar project in Debrecen, supported by the local authorities but continuously hampered by the

1 ■ Pál Járdányi (1920–66): composer and ethnomusicologist, one of the best of his generation in both fields.

central administration. The result is there for all to see. But think of all the energy unnecessarily wasted in the process!

It is difficult to build up a country in this manner.

I would like to draw your kind attention to these seemingly trifling matters, which nevertheless have profound consequences both for teaching and for public opinion.

Yours sincerely,
Zoltán Kodály

MOL M-KS 288 f. 47/725. ő.e.— Autograph.

János Kádár to Zoltán Kodály

October 15, 1959.

Dear Professor Kodály,

Please forgive me for the delay in replying to your letter of September 1. One of the reasons behind the delay was that I needed time to gather information on the matters[2] you raised. For some time now, I have been trying to find a quiet hour to write to you, because there were other matters that I wanted to discuss with you as well.

To go into too much detail is unnecessary on my part, since my understanding is that you have already been informed directly by the Ministry of Culture regarding the cases of both Járdányi and Irma Boros (sic!). Frankly, I think that in the Irma Boros case there could have been another, more prudent solution than removing her from the Lorántffy utca school. But that has already been done. The problem has partly been remedied in the sense that she now teaches in a music school again, although not in the same one. I personally saw something written by Irma Boros, in which she expressed satisfaction regarding the settlement of the affair. You are also right about the Gulyás case, or the abolition of the Békéstarhos music school. But you are wrong to blame it on us, when you should obviously know that neither I nor those at present in charge of the Ministry of Culture can be held responsible in this particular case. As to Gulyás's current situation, not only is he allowed to work in peace, he actually enjoys constant support from the government officials concerned, who support his concerts abroad.

The situation is different regarding the dismissal of Professor Járdányi, and your protest against it was, in my opinion, unjust. I can stand by what I said in my speech in Győr. I can still confidently claim that in the past two and a half years we have refrained from the senseless and unjustified exchanging and removing of people on a massive scale. But you must allow a little more time for

2 ■ György Aczél, the first deputy of the minister of culture at the time, informed János Kádár in a letter on September 12, 1959 on the issues raised; this document supplements the letter.

us to see to it that this new spirit reaches every nook and corner of the social life of the entire country. What's more, you can help us speed up the process and ensure that it endures. What we want to achieve is to reduce not only the number of unjustified dismissals and transfers, but also the number of justified ones.

Professor Járdányi's dismissal had a cause, and a very serious one, too. He was the one who, in the course of a quiet discussion, expounded his views on our system and one of these opinions, not the most reactionary of them, was praise for the Bach period[3] at the expense of our system. For a public servant to say this against the state and the system that runs the institution in which he teaches was a little too much.

We, Communists, fought against the Horthy regime when it dismissed professionally highly competent people from their teaching posts because they opposed the system and sympathised with Communist ideals. I repeat, we fought against that, but we never suggested there was anything surprising about it. We were not at all surprised to find that the Horthy regime had no intention of keeping its enemies on its payroll and had more sense than to trust these same people with the education of the young. Someone must make Professor Járdányi and his likes understand that they make a huge mistake when they credit the people of our system with less sense than they do the administrators of the Horthy regime. Let's say no more about that.

But I want to write about other matters, too. I was greatly astonished last year, when I read the interview you gave to the Győr County newspaper. What surprised me there was that you had a few words of praise for our struggle and for some of the measures our government had taken. And now I once again was amazed to see that you pay attention to the speech I made in Győr. Incidentally, I am grateful to you for your letter, regardless of the point that I cannot agree with everything you write. My view is that the person who addresses criticism of our regime to us is an upright man; who helps our cause.

I would like to speak openly, as one human being to another: I have known you for a long time, and there is much in your thinking that I cannot understand.

During the mid-Twenties I was a pupil at Wesselényi utca Boys' Civic School. I had no ear for music, nor I suppose much of a voice either, so I did not become one of the choristers. Yet even with my child's understanding, I still grasped a little of the great and splendid thing that you and Mr Borus, the music teacher you were supporting, managed to achieve with the school's renowned choir. I first saw you in the school and learned to respect you at the age of ten or twelve. Before the country's liberation I learned as much about you as a young worker not directly concerned with music but committed to the people's

3 ■ Bach period: an era of oppression in the aftermath of the 1848/49 War of Independence, lasting until 1859, when Alexander von Bach, Francis Joseph's infamous interior minister, was dismissed.

cause and interested in culture was able to under the abominable Horthy regime. That made me respect you even more. Still in the first half of 1945, I attended a Communist gathering addressing cultural issues in Csengery utca where I saw you and later heard you speak up against the Germanism dominating Hungarian working-class culture. That greatly pleased me.

Later on, however, my unequivocal admiration for you became somewhat confused. As fate had it, I became a Minister of the Interior. You came to see me about a former nun whose two cows, her private property, had been confiscated along with the property of her dissolved order in Somogy County. Then I intervened on her behalf—this is not the reason why I have bought it up now—but I did so not for the sake of the cows or the former nun, but for your sake. I continue to respect you for the tremendous work you have done to enrich the musical culture of the Hungarian people and also for your great contributions to it. But my respect was no longer unequivocal, because by then I stood against your conservative and—forgive me for my frankness—occasionally reactionary political views.

Ten years have passed since then and much has changed. I have nothing but respect for your untiring efforts in musical culture, for your upright humanity. And also, for the love and selfless care which you showed in accompanying your wife on her painful journey to her grave.

However, my respect is made less unequivocal by the fact that, for some curious reason, of the people you spoke for, ninety per cent stand against the people's democracy, and not many less were monks and nuns, because you have a conservative worldview.

I would certainly not like you to misunderstand me. I know that you are a religious person; nothing could be further from my intention than offending you in your faith. Fair enough, you are a conservative, it seems we are unable to win you over to the idea of Socialism. You are acting in the interests of people who are politically opposed to us. Fair enough, you have the right to do so, your protégés are all Hungarian citizens, and provided they do not break the law, even former members of the religious orders are entitled to legal protection. In accordance with our laws, as well as in line with our intentions and conscience, we shall intervene in all similar cases, since it is also in the interest of our system that whenever a mistake is made, it be corrected.

I have no problem with that; there is something else that concerns me in connection with you. Metaphorically speaking, every man has an account book somewhere, where the balance of one's intentions and acts is drawn. You believe it to be kept somewhere up in Heaven; my conviction is that it exists in people's minds and consciences. I cannot deny your love for the Hungarian people nor that your life's work has given so much to Hungary's musical culture. Our people belongs to you, but it also belongs to me, a Communist. Today Hungary is building a socialist future and it is quite apparent that you do not

sympathise with the socialist road along which our people proceeds. How can you regulate, in good conscience, your conduct and acts considering the fact that the people you love so much follows a path that you cannot accept in your heart and mind? My suspicion is that, no matter how much you have given to the Hungarian people, you haven't given as much as you could have.

I have no intention to win you over to, or "lure" you into the Marxist camp. Simply on the strength of my position, I can see it more clearly how much more we and our people will have to stumble on this socialist road of our new life. At the same time, I am deeply convinced that this is the only road for the Hungarian people to take in order to achieve the richness of life and culture, which—of this I am certain—you too wish for it to attain.

You have risen to a vantage point in human life, from where it is possible to see great vistas of both the past and the future, provided, of course, that one is prepared to look further than one's nose. You saw the mud of the past, you saw the savage destitution of the people and the ruins we inherited at the dawn of 1945. How can you possibly fail to see how much our people has progressed in 15 years?

In my opinion, you ought to show greater responsibility in your political and social appearances—and what I have in mind here goes beyond public meetings —so as not to take back anything from the people of what you have given them in such profusion in the field of culture. It is your noble obligation to help millions of workers and peasants bury the dark past once and for all. So that the children of our people can live in peace and happiness in the future—and have reason and occasion to sing.

This is not a request; this is simply one man's reasoning put to you, because I believe that a person, no matter how great he is, cannot help the people build socialism out of civility. It can only be done as a great honour and happiness experienced in serving this cause with a humble heart and to the best of one's abilities.

My best wishes to you. If I have offended you inadvertently with this letter, you should remember that I was led by the best of intentions and by the great respect I hold you in.

Yours sincerely

J. K. (initialled in his own hand)
János Kádár

MOL M-KS 288 f. 47/725.—Typewritten copy

Zoltán Kodály to János Kádár

October 21, 1959.

Dear Comrade Kádár,

I thank you for your swift and thorough reply, which I did not expect to receive any earlier: my own Minister has still not replied to one of my earlier letters.

If there is a great need for some continuity anywhere, it is in teaching. The great People's Education campaign last summer stirred me to pick up my pen. The conservatoire in Győr has seen the appointment of its seventh director in 13 years.

Irma Bors is especially happy to be able to devote all her time to teaching (she has 29 lessons a week), having been released of the burden of being the deputy headmistress. The headmistress had taken the word "deputy" to mean that Irma Bors should do all the work instead of her.

I simply ask you, who is more damaging to the system? A former nun—incidentally, the best in her profession—who teaches with "a religious devotion", thus bringing joy to children's lives by introducing them into the miracles of music, or a puffed-up and musically illiterate headmistress, who spends her day in representing, making phone calls, terrorising children and parents alike, exercising power in the name of the state, whose irregularities are overlooked and who is absent from school during the examinations—staying abroad on bonus holidays—while ruining the school's reputation by removing its best teachers; in a word, someone who is generating hostility among the public towards the Party.

Naturally, I had no intention to blame the closure of the Békéstarhos school on the present leadership, I was merely concerned that the same spirit that had led to it then, might be on the rise again.

Járdányi's views were presented to you already in a distorted form. Now even the Ministry of Culture looks at it in a different light. He merely made a reference to the historical fact that after 1849 they didn't persecute writers, even though János Arany, Jókai, Vörösmarty and Bajza had all been more or less active supporters of the Kossuth government. It is in the interest of the current regime that the faults he additionally pointed out be corrected. In the classroom he never digresses from his subject-matter. The effect that his removal exerted on the students was precisely the opposite of what the authorities had anticipated. This was primarily so because it implied the lowering of professional standards at the Academy: the standard of his successors' work came nowhere near to that of his teaching, and ultimately the students stand to lose. Furthermore, Járdányi is typically a social-minded person, who always gets involved in other people's problems, who is always eager to help others, and who completely accepts the ultimate objectives of the socialist system.

The Horthy regime removed only those, myself included, who had taken on leading positions in 1918–19. Sympathisers were allowed to carry on working, because without them the entire educational apparatus would have ground to a halt.

And now please allow me to make a few comments in connection with that part of your letter, which concerned my person. I saw it clearly as early as 1918 that the socialist road was the only way to deliver our people, which I knew better than anybody else, thanks to my decades of village exploration and my intimate relations with the people. We could have gone further ahead on this road already in 1918, had we not made enormous mistakes. After 1945, I hoped that our progress would be steadier and more balanced. But how could the people trust a leadership which one day has a bunch of people in high positions executed and shortly afterwards orders their exhumation and rehabilitation?

It made me sad as I watched the Party cutting the tree under itself. A reactionary would have gloated. Whenever the opportunity arose, I spoke up, but never on behalf of individuals; I was always concerned with the common good, which was of course manifested in the life of individuals.

You recalled the case of the nun's cows. Let me remind you that this was merely a side issue in the case of József Perczel, who had been arrested without cause or formal charges. I think that if we lived in a state under the rule of law, this should never happen. My impression was that you acted in that spirit. This was why I watched your subsequent career, or the fragmented information leaked about it to the public, with empathy. In every single case I can show that I acted for the public good, rather than out of personal interests. In Irma Bors's case, too, I spoke up not to defend a former nun but to protect the cause to which I devoted my entire life, the cause which obliges me to live here, even though I could live elsewhere in perhaps more settled circumstances; and it is perhaps understandable that I get irritated whenever I see the people's musical education placed in jeopardy. Unfortunately, those who like to take it out on individuals do not always realise that they actually harm the cause itself.

It is only natural that the persons on whose behalf I have spoken were usually not Communists: they do not need me to speak for them. Nevertheless, this, too, happened. When Révai[4] refused to award the Communist Ferenc Szabó[5] with the Kossuth Prize, I was the one who explained to him that Szabó was the worthiest of all the candidates. I did that not on personal considerations, but in the interest of the prestige of the Kossuth Prize. It was too bad that the decision-makers did not always take into account the special committees' well-considered views.

In religious matters I happen to agree with Goethe: "Those who practise the sciences and the arts also practice religion; those who don't should practise reli-

4 ■ József Révai was Minister of Culture in the said period (1949–1953).

5 ■ The composer Ferenc Szabó received the Kossuth Prize in 1951. Between 1958 and 1976 he was the Director of the Academy of Music.

gion." For this reason I tacitly condemn the mounting persecution of religious persons in the past couple of months. They want to curb the waywardness of the younger generation by instructing them in the subject of "moral studies". But morals are not to be taught, they have to be practised. And when they asked what the difference between a Communist morality and the Ten Commandments was, no satisfactory answer was forthcoming. There are, however, people with more sense: recently a leading Communist declared at a teachers' conference that if one lives by the laws of one's religion, that does not necessarily make one an enemy of the system. Since this is exactly what I think, I am perhaps not a reactionary after all. My "account book" is in my conscience. I cannot forget the religious feelings of my childhood, although I do not strictly observe the rules of the Church.

As far as I know, I never spoke on behalf of any enemy of the system. But I repeat: I raised my voice only for causes and on matters of principle, not for persons. Therefore, it is an optical illusion to think that I only side with reactionary people. (This was Comrade Rákosi's[6] observation.)

I believe that in building socialism it would be better to rely on honest people, rather than on unrelenting suspicion and the shoving about of people. For example, the folk music research team at the Academy has recently drawn a lot of criticism for not having a single party member in it. Who is to blame if there are no Communist folk music researchers? If there were any, and if they were competent, I would have invited them to join long ago. Purely through the means of scholarship, the team's work thoroughly serves the Party's objectives.

I must confess that I see it as one of the system's faults that a lot of people still work in positions where they shouldn't, and that the words of malicious spies count for too much. For example, I have reason to believe that my latest speech at the Popular Front meeting was presented to you in a distorted form, as one of the participants gave a twisted account of it to someone else immediately after the meeting. Let me tell you exactly what I said there and why I said it: The debate was about Péter Simon's essay.[7] Originally, I had no intention of speaking but when none of the five speakers speaking before me said anything about the essay's main deficiency, but all painted a rosy picture of the life of the Hungarian minority living in the surrounding countries instead, I asked the following question: How should we fight against rampant chauvinism around us, if we kill off the remaining little national awareness that some of the Hungarians still possess? The essay lacked what the governance of the previous ten years

6 ■ Mátyás Rákosi (1892–1971): "Stalin's best disciple", whose reign between 1949–56, in various top posts, was linked with terror and the personality cult.

7 ■ Péter Simon was a lecturer at ELTE University. He prepared the draft resolution for the October 2, 1957 session of HNF OT (National Council of the Popular Front of Hungary), entitled "The Tasks of the Popular Front in Fighting against Nationalism". Zoltán Kodály was the 8th (last) speaker. (No minutes were taken, but the names of the speakers were recorded on the back of the resolution's last page.)

did: an understanding of, and the love for, the Hungarian people. This was what I said, but since there was no tape recorder or stenographer, people can relate it however they want to. I think that the government would not retain Miklós Zrinyi's[8] name in the designation of the military academy and correction centres, if it did not agree with him in that "we are not inferior to any other nation". That is not the same as saying that we are superior to them. But if we cannot show as little pride as that, we are lost.

I am especially grateful for the frank tone of your letter. I was honoured, rather than offended, by your detailed criticism. I am glad that you can perceive the final aim of my efforts; in my opinion, one can work on the material and spiritual betterment of the people only simultaneously, or if anything, the spiritual should come first, so that people know how to handle the material prosperity that follows. The Belgian workers, for example, who were the first to succeed in their struggle for higher wages, consumed 1/2 kg meat a day, eating themselves sick and coming to an early death.

Finally, here is a separate petition: As you wrote it in your letter, you recalled Endre Borus (Adyliget, II. 1 Kossuth L. utca). He and two others have to make ends meet on a pension of 1500 forints, but that is not their main problem. An evil couple were moved into the attick of their small house in Adyliget by the Council, and their hostility has twice put Borus into hospital with coronary thrombosis. Despite a court order, they cannot get rid of their tormentors. The principle underlying this request could perhaps be that the People's Democracy should not tolerate that one of its deserving workers should have the last days of his life turned into hell. If you could find a way to intervene in this matter, you would make the remaining years or months of a man worthy of a better fate very happy, indeed.

Budapest, October 21, 1959.

Thank you and my best regards

Zoltán Kodály (signature)

MOL M-KS 288 f. 47/725—Typewritten copy

6 ■ Miklós Zrínyi (1620–64): the greatest Hungarian poet of his time, leader in victorious battles against the Turks and in national politics; author of important treatises on European politics, the fight against the Turks and Hungary's future.

László Karsai

Carl Lutz–a Righteous Gentile

Theo Tschuy: *Becsület és bátorság* (Honour and Courage: Carl Lutz and the Jews of Budapest). Miskolc, Well-Press 2002, 224 pp.

Theo Tschuy's book documents one man's struggle in Budapest in 1944 to save as many people from the Nazis and their Hungarian accomplices as possible. Lutz fought a heroic battle against the German and the Hungarian authorities and against his superiors in Berne, who were only concerned about preserving Swiss neutrality, and against the British authorities in Palestine, who favoured the Arabs and were indifferent to the fate of the Jews to the point of anti-Semitism. Lutz was virtually without weapons in his struggle, and as Theo Tschuy's well-documented book illustrates, his position was further weakened by the seemingly pointless squabbles amongst his own protégés, the Zionists.

There were many things you could say about Carl Lutz, but up until 1944, the fact that he would be remembered in some of the history books as a man who successfully resisted the barbarity of the Holocaust, could not be surmised. He had come a long way. He was born into a poor family in the Appenzell Vorderland, a picturesque, hilly region in northeastern Switzerland in 1895. Since his family could not afford to pay for a university education, he emigrated to the United States in 1913 at the age of 18. He spent long years as a factory worker and as a clerk in Granite City, an industrial town near St Louis. His fate took a turn for the better in the summer of 1920, when he became an English-German correspondent at the Swiss legation in Washington. He found favour with his superiors and what started out as summer work turned into life-long employment for Lutz. As a minor official of the Swiss legation he nevertheless earned enough to pay for a university education. He attended evening classes at the George Washington University and earned his degree. As his biographer quite rightly points out, it was probably there that Lutz acquired the informal style of work that was characteristic of Americans, but contrasted so sharply with the Swiss style of rigid and bureaucratic rules and regulations. He spent many years working for his country

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László Karsai

is Professor of History at the University of Szeged and author of, among others, Holokauszt *(2001). The above is the Afterword of the Hungarian edition of* Carl Lutz und die Juden von Budapest *(1995) by Theo Tschuy. A shorter English version exists entitled* Dangerous Diplomacy: The Story of Carl Lutz, Rescuer of 62,000 Hungarian Jews *(2000).*

in the USA. He was a consular agent in Philadelphia for eight years before being transferred suddenly to Palestine in 1935.

Theo Tschuy's biography of Lutz is courageous and sincere. It does not circumvent the fact that the protagonist was born into a pious Methodist milieu where his adoration of Christ combined almost naturally with a considerable degree of anti-Judaism. In Palestine, when he met Orthodox Jews wearing kaftans and earlocks for the first time in what must have been rather too large numbers for his liking, his feelings were rather mixed. Most of the Jews had emigrated from Poland and Russia to escape the pogroms there. This is how Lutz described his first impressions:

> Their idea of personal hygiene fits in well with the eastern millieu. They still don't seem to be aware of the curse that fell on them for betraying the Messiah.

Lutz put similar thoughts in writing when he first saw Orthodox Jews praying at the Wailing Wall:

> They all mourn the destruction of the Temple, the fall of the Jewish empire, that is. But none of them has shed tears of sorrow because they disowned Jesus, the true Messiah of the Jewish people, and continue to do so.

Lutz was a Christian who despised Jews, but the first pogroms he witnessed awoke compassion in him towards his fellow human beings. He called the Arabs who were killing defenceless Jews indiscriminately gangs of robbers.

At that time, in the second half of the 1930's, Lutz was still a sincere admirer of Mussolini's Fascist and Hitler's Nazi regimes. It was only when the Second World War broke out that a real turn in his relatively uneventful life as consular agent in Palestine came about. For a few weeks he organised the disbanding of the German diplomatic corps in Palestine, helping German diplomats escape from what—for them—suddenly became hostile territory under British mandate. Many of the Nazi diplomats remembered his efforts with gratitude, which stood him in good stead in Budapest in 1944, when he was engaged in saving Jews.

After a brief spell of service in Switzerland, Lutz was first transferred to Berlin and then, a few weeks later, in January 1942, to Budapest. During the war, neutral Switzerland represented the interests of most of the Allied nations who were at war with Germany and Hungary (Sweden acted for Soviet interests). Therefore, Lutz was afforded rather luxurious conditions when he arrived in Budapest. His offices were located in the American legation building in Szabadság Square, which houses the U.S. embassy even today. His residence was in the Castle district, in the residence of the British minister. The poor boy from rural Switzerland, the manual labourer from St Louis had every reason to think that he had indeed got pretty far—and that it was all his own doing.

Prior to the 19th of March, 1944, the German occupation of Hungary, Lutz was already occupied with saving Jews, even if this was not the most predominant amongst his activities as vice-consul. The British authorities in Palestine were willing to grant entry permits to a certain number of Jews, and the Hungarian authorities were inclined to provide exit permits to those in possession of a Palestinian immigration permit. Thus, the chosen few (around ten thousand people, according to new sources uncovered by Tschuy in Swiss archives) received passports and were allowed to travel to Palestine by boat after crossing Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey. It was the Jewish Agency for Palestine which passed the Palestinian immigration permits on to Zionists in Budapest, who

were in day-to-day contact with Lutz, as one of the representatives of British interests.

But all this was to change completely with the German occupation of Hungary. The Germans were intent on deportations and mass killings, and the Hungarian authorities proved to be efficient and, at times, unequivocally keen supporters of these methods. It was at this time that Vice Consul Lutz realized that he was facing evil incarnate. Thus, his heroic battle against the German and Hungarian authorities for the lives of the Jews began. His superiors in Berne abandoned him almost completely during his struggle. Despite the fact that after Stalingrad, El-Alamein and Kursk, opening a new front in the Alps was the last thing on the Germans' mind, they were still preoccupied with the issue of preserving Swiss neutrality. Switzerland's policy on refugees during the Second World War was characterised not so much by fear of the Germans as by traditional xenophobia, considerable anti-Semitism, bureaucratic inclinations and apathy towards the fate of the persecuted in general.

Theo Tschuy speaks reproachfully of the accusation that has been levelled against Hungarians in some previous books on this subject, namely that, unlike the Danes, the Hungarians could not be counted on to show collective resistance against the Germans, and that they had no intention of saving the lives of the Jews. Those who allege this are inclined to forget about a few historic events and examples. The Danes surrendered to the Germans in 1940 without so much as firing a shot. In return, the Nazis stationed only a relatively small occupation force in the country of their Arian-Viking neighbours. It must be said, Denmark had not shown much tolerance for the Jews during the previous centuries. They numbered less than 8000 in 1943, including those who had fled to the country from Germany since 1933.

There were approximately 800 000 Jews in the Hungary of 1941. The Danish Jews had an escape route open to them; at that time, Sweden was less keen on collaboration with the Germans than it had been before, and was willing to open its borders to a few thousand refugees. In Hungary, however, Edmund Veesenmayer, whose description by Tschuy as a demonic personality possessing the power of Himmler or of Hitler himself is significantly exaggerated, was actively engaged in assisting the work of Adolf Eichmann and his detachments in carrying out the final solution. The entire Hungarian state machinery, 20 000 gendarmes, thousands of police officers, civil servants, railway workers and soldiers, numbering around 200 000 in total, took part in purging the Jews from the country. The majority of Jewish men were members of forced labour units. In this situation it would have been impossible to organise a revolt or even escapes among the Jews, especially since the majority of Hungarian Jews refused to believe the reports about Auschwitz, even in 1944.

Lutz attempted to make use of the only option that was open to him. In theory, the British authorities in Palestine had authorised the mass influx of Jews from Hungary. Prior to the 19th of March, 1944, the Hungarian authorities were inclined to allow a few thousand Jews to leave the country. What is more, probably to Lutz's surprise, Veesenmayer apparently even agreed to 7000–8000 Hungarian Jews receiving exit permits. This was when the frantic manufacturing of documents began, and various passes of safe conduct *(Schutzbriefe* and *Schutzpasse)* were made out in large numbers. Those lucky enough to be entered on the lists received documentation and a letter of safe passage, stating that their name appears on the register of those leaving the country. Unlike Jenő Lévai, the first historian to deal with

the Holocaust in Hungary, Tschuy does not conceal the fact that during the issuing of the safe conduct passes, there were serious disagreements between Lutz and Raoul Wallenberg, who only arrived in Budapest on the 9th of July, 1944, after the mass deportations have already taken place in the countryside. From the perspective of international law and diplomacy, Swedish letters and passes of safe conduct were just as worthless as the Swiss ones. The holders of Swedish papers were not granted permission by the Germans to leave the country either under the Sztójay government (May 22–August 29, 1944) or the Szálasi regime (October 15, 1944–April 1945).

After the war, instead of decorating him or at least promoting him to minister, Lutz's Swiss superiors ordered an investigation into his activities involving the alleged mass forging of documents. Tschuy does not mention it, but it remains a fact that Lutz had spoken out about the mass forging of Swedish documents even before 1945. He had informed the Hungarian authorities about this late in the fall of 1944, perhaps in the hope that the Arrow-Cross men would pay less attention to the Swiss passes of safe conduct, which had appeared in rather excessive numbers. Incidentally, despite Lutz's claims, Swiss documents were easier to come by than Swedish ones. At the Emigration Department of the Representation of Foreign Interests in the Swiss Legation's "Glass House" in Vadász Street, the Zionist forgers were continuously manufacturing these documents. Lutz did nothing to prevent this, even though he was fully aware of what the brave Zionist resistance fighters were up to in the slight and at times the wholly illusory protection of diplomatic extraterritoriality. These were people who did not take up arms and did not want to die a glorious death. Instead, they decided to add to the confusion until units of the Red Army liberate Budapest.

Of course, the mass forging of documents had a detrimental effect on the value of all passes of safe conduct, to the point where a person's life was in great danger if they were found to be in possession of a Swiss Schutzbrief. On the other hand, however, it is also true that the Arrow-Cross men sometimes executed the holders of the most genuine papers on sight, whilst at other times the most primitive counterfeits worked to save lives.

If Ferenc Szálasi was really no more than a raging lunatic intent on eliminating or murdering all Jews, as Theo Tschuy claims, then it is difficult to comprehend why he allowed Lutz, Wallenberg, the Nuncio Angelo Rotta, Friedrich Born, the Budapest representative of the International Red Cross, Giorgio Perlasca, the Italian diplomat and others engaged in saving the lives of the Jews to set up the "international" or "protected" ghetto in the vicinity of Szent István Park and Pozsonyi Road. If Szálasi's only goal was the deportation or mass execution of the Jews, then why did he halt the deportations in November 1944 and authorise the creation of the huge ghetto around Dohány Street? The answer is rather simple. The Arrow-Cross leader longed to be recognised by the neutral countries as the legitimate head of state. This was the most potent weapon in the hands of people like Lutz, Wallenberg and their colleagues. As long as diplomatic recognition was important to Szálasi, as long as he was hopeful of receiving not only *de facto,* but also *de jure* recognition for his regime, Hungarian authorities continued to tolerate diplomatic deceptions with the help of various safe conduct documents.

In the spring of 1945, the Soviet liberating/occupying forces arrested two Swiss diplomats and carried them off to Moscow. They were freed a year later in return for the release of former Soviet prisoners of war

who had escaped to Switzerland. Meanwhile, Lutz and his colleagues were ordered to leave the country. Theo Tschuy's consternation is perceptible when he records the fact that Lutz's superiors refused to accept so much as a report from him, and kept the activities of their offical in Budapest a secret from the world. What is more, it was not only the Swiss authorities who showed a complete lack of appreciation for Lutz's heroic, brave and exceedingly efficient deeds. The fate of the Jews during the Second World War was shrouded in universal indifference and silence until Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem in 1961. After rejecting the post of consul in Baghdad that was initially offered to him, Lutz ended his diplomatic career as consul in Bregenz in 1961.

Just as Tschuy's account of Lutz's childhood and early years is convincing, so is his description of the career of his protagonist after 1945 succinct. The last few pages are devoted almost entirely to events that prompt sadness. The people in Israel, who owed him and his colleagues their lives, felt gratitude and affection towards him. A street was named after him in Haifa as early as 1958. But since the Swiss authorities refused to acknowledge, let alone honour what he had done for the Hungarian Jews in 1944–45, Lutz tried to achieve international recognition himself. He lobbied for a Nobel Peace Prize, engaging in a lengthy correspondence. Yad Vashem only honoured as Righteous Among the Nations relatively late, in 1965. According to Hungarian archival sources, at the beginning of the 1960's Lutz also contacted the Hungarian authorities, arguing —quite rightly—that he had placed more houses under Swiss or international protection than Raoul Wallenberg had done, but still had not had a street named after him. It was only after his death that he received a tiny plaque near the Great Synagogue in Budapest.

To the historian, the quarrelling over the number of Hungarian Jews actually saved, which has been going on for the last few decades, seems utterly pointless. The members of the Zionist resistance claim that they had saved the more than 100 000 people who survived in Budapest. At the Wallenberg commemorations it is regularly asserted that the martyred Swedish diplomat saved tens of thousands persecuted people. According to those who wish to clarify the role of the historical Churches during the Second World War, the Jews were hidden in churches, monasteries and convents. Szálasi's supporters point out his approval of the creation of the Budapest ghettos. But the murderous rampage of the Arrow Cross only ended with the appearance of the Red Army.

Theo Tschuy accepts the notion that after 1945, the extermination of the Hungarian Jews was hushed up in Hungary. In reality, however, thousands of articles, essays, diaries, memoirs and books appeared in Hungary and all over the world between 1945 and 1948 and after 1956 about the Holocaust in Hungary. The Nobel Prize awarded this year to Imre Kertész points to the quality of Hungarian literary works on the subject, not to mention the scores of historical works discussing the Holocaust, which is unparalleled in the whole of Eastern Europe. This specialist Hungarian-language bibliography has now become richer with a new and important work by a Swiss author. One can only hope that as a result, many will become acquainted with the life of a man who demonstrated that it is possible and worthwhile to rise up against the tyranny of evil, even in the darkest of times. ❧

András Gervai

A Screen Moralist

József Marx: *István Szabó*. Vincze Kiadó, Budapest, 2002. 434 pp. Illustrated.

Apart from Miklós Jancsó, István Szabó is the Hungarian filmmaker best known abroad, showered with festival awards and prizes. Still, the surprising yet revealing fact is that the last time a book was written on him was nearly a quarter of a century ago. Since the publication of that tiny volume, only a collection of his interviews has been published, in 1995. Therefore, József Marx's large and lavishly illustrated book, which comes complete with ample notes—printed on the margin of the large pages—stills, family photos and documents, etc., and lists Szabó's short films and works for television as well, fills a huge gap. He traces Szabó's career film by film, discussing the stories, the conflicts and the personality of the main characters, to reveal the hidden connections between the different films and motifs that enrich one another much as a dialogue. In order to enable us to understand the intellectual and professional milieu in which the films were made, and the forces that opposed or helped him, Marx has placed Szabó's career and works in a broader context. He provides an overview of the Hungarian social, economic and political conditions and interconnections that determine the artists' maneuvering space, providing a detailed picture of the problems and power relations in the movie industry.

Marx knows this world inside out, as he has worked in it for several decades. For a while he was a scriptwriter at Budapest Stúdió, one of the workshops within the single Hungarian movie company producing feature films; next, between 1975 and 1986, he headed Objektív Stúdió, before being appointed as deputy director of the film company; after that, for a time, he was in charge of the Film Institute. He knows Szabó intimately, they worked together for twelve years. Marx was the Hungarian producer for *Mephisto* and Szabó was deputy director of Objektív Stúdió right until the early 1990s. (He resigned, because he disapproved of management methods; in specific, he objected to the way in which young directors were denied real opportunities to make films.)

András Gervai

is a journalist, critic and editor. In the early 1990s he was a correspondent for The Jewish Chronicle *of London. He is the author of three volumes of interviews and one of essays. A radio and television programme maker, he also has one documentary movie to his credit.*

The author's earlier positions and his close association with Szabó do not provide only advantages. Marx appears to feel obliged to demonstrate his unequivocal (and somewhat biased) loyalty to Szabó. All those who have ever written or said anything unflattering about Szabó or his films (mainly critics but also some influential directors in days of old) come in for their share of vitriolic comment. Still, this is a very useful book, regardless of the occasional apologies and biases; it reveals a great deal about Szabó's work and about the history of filmmaking during the Kádár era and the period following the democratic transition.

Earlier Szabó had declined to provide details of his private life, which makes everything that we now learn about his childhood and youth all the more important. He was born in 1939. On his mother's side, he descended from a family of Austrian Jews bilingual in German and Hungarian. His father's family, the Szabós, moved to Tatabánya, a mining town near Budapest, from Nyitra in the old Upper Hungary, now in Slovakia. His doctor grandfather introduced healthcare in that region. His father, who practised as a surgeon in the same town, died at the end of the war. Their death, especially the death of his father, was a prolonged trauma for Szabó, which left a mark on his films.

He was admitted to the Academy of Theatrical and Cinematic Arts immediately after finishing secondary school—along with eleven others out of 800 applicants. Some of his classmates went on to become prominent in the Hungarian new wave, among them Judit Elek, Pál Gábor *(Vera Angi),* Zoltán Huszárik (*Szindbád*), and Ferenc Kardos. They had an outstanding teacher in charge of their class in the person of Félix Máriássy. He instilled in them good taste, the right attitude and high morals. For Szabó, he was something of a surrogate father. (It shows the warm and undying feelings he had towards his former teacher that, in 1989, when on Ingmar Bergman's invitation he became one of the twelve directors founding the European Film Academy, he proposed the name for the Europe Film Award: it is the Felix.)

His career had an unusual start. Thanks to János Herskó, who was the director of the studio where Szabó spent his apprenticeship, the film company made an exception in his case and waived the ten-year period during which young directors had to work as second and first assistants before their first opportunity to direct a movie. In 1964, at the age of 25, he directed *The Age of Daydreaming,* admittedly not without some complications, as only the fifth version of the script was approved. Lyrical in tone, the film, which was about the young generation's problems in settling down and starting out on a career, and also about the inflexibility and wrongheadedness of the older generation in opposing them, and which was heavy with history, shared the Silver Sail Award at the Locarno Film Festival.

The director's private mythology and his own generation's experiences are explored in *Father* (1966) and *Love Film* (1969–1970). The former earned him the Special Award of the Locarno Festival and the Grand Prix at the Moscow Film Festival, as well as a prize in Acapulco, where it competed against works like Luis Buñuel's *Belle de jour* and Antonioni's *Blow-Up.* The tempestuous history of the 20th century is captured through the memories and dreams of ordinary people in *Fireman's Street* (1972–1973) and later in *Budapest Tales* (1976). In Marx's opinion, one ought to notice something that the contemporary critics tended to overlook: in these films Szabó consistently portrayed Jewish characters, stories and motifs. In *Budapest Tales* the signs of fatigue and repetitiveness began to show;

the initially original and inspired themes and style become spasmodic and rigid. The psychological chamber piece set in the Second World War—in the words of a critic who discovered something very important—"is not only a summing up but also a step forward..., because it opened the way for a more concise and more logical interpretation of the world."

With his next work, the Academy Award winning *Mephisto* (1980–1981) a new period began for Szabó. The decidedly personal tone, which had been so appealing at the start of his career, was replaced with the legends of private history, the episodes from Hungarian history, broad and spectacular tableaux and a treatment of East-Central European traumas presented through personal lives. From that time onward, Szabó examined various aspects of the same problem, delving deeper and deeper into the human soul. He is interested in the relationship between individuals and the authorities, trying to pinpoint the moment at which an honourable compromise ends and opportunism, even when it is justified by seemingly reasonable arguments, begins: in other words, how a person loses his autonomy.

The first part of his trilogy, *Mephisto,* documents the process in which a talented and thoughtful man in Nazi Germany, an actor named Hendrik Höfgen, renounces his integrity step by step in an effort to move up in the world, until he reaches a state of complete moral decay. The true talent of Colonel Alfred Redl, an intelligence officer in the Austro-Hungarian army, was for blind obedience, which guaranteed him continuous and swift promotion. His tragedy—if it can be called a tragedy at all—lay in the fact that he served a system that was willing to sacrifice him without a moment's hesitation. The film *Colonel Redl* (1984) had a mixed reception in Central Europe. In Germany it received the Bundesfilm-Preis, the award for the best movie of the year. In Austria, by contrast, it provoked a scandal: several periodicals accused the film of bringing the country into disrepute—just as Redl had done earlier on—and one of the co-producers, the superintendent of ORF, disclaimed all connections with it. Through his extrasensory perception and telepathic, clairvoyant and hypnotic powers, the hero of *Hanussen* (1987–1988) makes a brilliant career in Germany going Nazi. According to Marx, Höfgen is an opportunist, Redl is a subordinate and Hanussen is a presumptuous person "who, unlike the other two, doesn't fall; he simply destroys himself."

The Oscar he received for *Mephisto* brought instant fame for Szabó, launching his international career. After that he only made one other Hungarian film, although some of his movies had a Hungarian partner among the western investors. Szabó has proven to be attractive to producers, because his films can be distributed in any part of the world with a profit. He can do something that most of his Hungarian colleagues cannot—for reasons due to either professional snobbery or aristocratism or lack of talent. He can entertain people at a high standard, mediating values, orienting and forcing people to form an opinion.

In one of his interviews he revealed that he wanted to engage in public therapy through his films, which he regarded as different ways of making people feel secure. This aim is apparent from works produced around the time of the democratic transition in Hungary. In his *Meeting Venus* (1990) he was interested in the sacrifices individuals and the community as a whole had to make for the common goal; he also explored the ways in which democratic systems function and the final moment when they break down. The location is the Europe opera house in Paris, which

is at the same time concrete and manifoldly symbolic. As well as being the microcosm of an intellectual and artistic workshop full of contradictions and conflict, the opera house is the symbol of the—anything but smooth—cooperation between the members of the European union, a term very much in the focus of public interest.

The film is based on Szabó's experiences at the time when he directed *Tannhäuser* in the Paris Opera. The artists and the technical staff were on strike and Christoph von Dohnányi, the conductor who had originally singled him out for the task, walked out on the project before the premiere. (Incidentally, in the 1990s Szabó directed *Boris Godunov* in Leipzig and *Il Trovatore* in Vienna, the latter of which sparked off a scandal by its actualisation. Also, at the end of the decade, he directed *Three Sisters,* an opera by Péter Eötvös in the Budapest Opera, who had composed the score for his first movie and who subsequently made his name internationally.

In 1991 the first time after more than a decade, Szabó again chose a Hungarian subject. Two young female secondary school teachers of Russian have to undergo "retraining", and depicting their ordeals Szabó shows the life of those who became the losers in the great changes this society underwent. *Sweet Emma, Dear Böbe*—Marx simply calls it a masteriece—is perhaps the most moving report on the moral and existential consequences of the changes. The film won a Silver Bear at the Berlin Festival.

The most momentous project of the 1990s was *Sunshine* (1998), which received three Felix awards. It tells the story of a Jewish family's social assimilation, their successes and private lives over three generations. Through individual lives, the film in fact examines the assimilation of Hungarian Jewry, ending in its 20th-century tragedy, but also the question—one that comes up in almost all of his movies—of how far one can go in surrendering one's integrity in the process of self-realisation and identification with the existing regime.

Szabó remains a Hungarian filmmaker through and through, as his statements and, even more importantly, his subjects and approach reveal. Although he was existentially unaffected by the Hungarian movie industry's structural, financial and moral crisis after the changes, he, too, felt the effects. (The film studios faced grave financial difficulties: in 1992 litigation was started against their largest and most important base, the Róna [formerly Lumumba] Street studio. By the middle of the decade, the studio of documentary films had been abolished; today, there is a bus terminal in its place. The Pasarét Street studio was also pulled down, where Alexander Korda had once shot his early films. The distribution of films also changed fundamentally; American movies flooded the market and the audience turned away from the Hungarian cinema: within a decade, they lost 99 per cent of their audience.)

Although Szabó's suggestions were ignored, and although he received no invitation at all to work in Hungary throughout the 1990s, he took no offence. Instead, he stayed away from the professional infighting and mud-slinging while preserving his commitment to his colleagues and the cause of the Hungarian cinema. Whenever he was able to persuade his producers, he shot his movies partly or entirely in Hungary (for example, *Sunshine*).

Szabó managed to go through a successful transformation halfway through his career: he was able to convert his talent without selling out his principles. For a while now, he has been listed among the finest directors. In Marx's opinion—and it is not difficult to agree with his judgment—his art constitutes one of the most characteristic and yet loneliest values in Hungarian culture. ❧

Tamás Koltai

Cavalcades of Metaphors

Pál Békés: *Visz-a-víz* (Vis-à-vis) • András Forgách: *A görény dala* (The Polecat's Song) • *Hazámhazám* ('Mylandmyland').

History, fate, politics, even workaday existence may be the objects of metaphorical representation on the stage. A play stands for itself but also acquires additional significance, gains general validity and becomes charged with symbolic meaning. The dimensions of seemingly simple things are thereby expanded, winning extreme expressive form, there for us to cream off as added theatrical resources. Grotesque or absurd portrayals, a blurring of boundaries between genres, the enhanced use of spectacle, music, and movement—all help us to look behind the appearance of phenomena. As Lucifer declares to Adam in Imre Madách's romantic verse drama, *The Tragedy of Man,* we obtain the means to see with "spiritual eyes".

Pál Békés's *Visz-a-víz,* draws inspiration from the great nineteenth-century romantic revolutionary poet Sándor Petőfi, specifically from the closing lines of his poem 'The Tisza', in which the eponymous great river *"Roaring and howling over the dyke it whirled, / Greedy to swallow up the whole wide world"* (transl. by W. Kirkconnell). The catastrophic experience of the disastrous flood, terrifying though still within the bounds of realism, is outstripped by the metaphorical image inherent in that apocalyptic vision of the flooding river. The power of the image is biblical, invoking Noah and the Flood, with all its implications, including that of mankind being condemned to die for its sins. Something of the kind comes through in Budapest's Studio "K" Theatre production.

The play starts as if it were a story about a straightforward flood—ordinary enough to give the impression of being true to life, an appropriate starting-point. In reality, though, it is a trap—or a vortex, to keep the metaphor going—in which, once caught in it, we become prisoners, unable to extricate ourselves, and gradually find ourselves in an irrational milieu that transcends the horizon of everyday life. By the end of the play, it is not just furniture and houses that float away on the flooded Tisza but also crocodiles, Mongol yurtas, the Hungarian House of Parliament and the twin towers of the World Trade Center—while arrows and prehistoric reptiles dart about in the air above.

How do we reach that point? What kind of transgression, sin, degeneration leads

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

to this apocalypse? The play begins with an innocent situation or, rather, two innocent situations: through an inspired *coup de théâtre,* the play is set in two localities concurrently. One part of the audience watches one setting, the other, the second, then, after the intermission, they swap places. As a result, the actors have to perform the piece twice over for the audience to be able to see it in its entirety. The two locations are on opposite banks of the river: a holiday home converted out of a peasant's cottage, and a snack bar on the dyke facing it—or *vis-à-vis* (hence for non-Hungarians the most obvious interpretation of the play's untranslatable punning title, the straight Hungarian meaning of which is something like 'waterborne'.) The snack bar is the setting for a group of thirty-something men, ex-school classmates, who have met here (and with a stranger passing that way) so that one of them can carry out a long-held plan to fly across the Tisza by means of a primitive glider. In the cottage are five women: two sisters, who (through thick and thin) are wives and lovers to a couple of the men on the far side, and three others driven there by the flooding. The sources of conflict are, first, revelations in both locations of mutual cuckolding, then second, amongst the men, the bringing to book of the suspicious stranger and an old, long-forgotten bet, and, amongst the women, the sisters' bickering over money and the jealous squabbling of a lesbian couple. None of this seems sufficient for what is to come, the apocalypse that engulfs the conflicts.

The author's intention is to show that, embroiled in petty affairs and the battles, (within the family, emotional, out of jealousy, to make ends meet or to reach life's mundane goals) we fail to notice the annihilation threatening our very existence. Those at the snack-bar, now turned into a floating island, are indifferent to the absurd world that is swept away past their very eyes: almost to the last moment they are preoccupied with their own trivial arguments. The women too only become alarmed when flying reptiles begin to thud against the windows. The message is plain, and one that is easy to go along with: if not that mankind is on the brink of its own destruction, then at least that it is threatened by all kinds of calamitous ideologies, age-old social diseases, dictatorial manipulations. It is art's privilege to magnify or distil that danger, to portray the end-game (cf. Beckett), through aesthetic means. The logic of the aesthetics of *Visz-a-víz* is that quotidian trivialities are transformed all but unremarked into an oppressive, irrational, surreal vision (as in Kafka, let us say). However, what the play lacks is precisely that transition from realism to surrealism, from the tritely grotesque to the philosophically absurd. The steps by which the end of the world unfolds from the inner world of the characters are missing, because the external catastrophe does not fall on the innocent but evolves from within us, is propagated with our assistance and out of our impotence, our habit of just spectating from a window—until it engulfs us and carries us off.

The two halves of the double play reflect one another. Each is puzzling in its own right. The theatregoer needs to be able to evaluate continuously what is seen on stage, whilst in the second part there is a need to relate back to the first, since the connections between the characters, and the synchronicity of the two parts, are only revealed retrospectively. One of the amazons shoots an arrow at one of the aerial monsters, and it transpires that it is this arrow that strikes one of the characters on "the other side" as a Tartar arrow. That example alone is proof of what classic works demonstrated long ago, that slapstick is not incompatible with absurd humour and

philosophical substance. The piece has few other bravura moments, however. By and large, it remains bogged down in the petty realistic incidents, and so the timid lurches into bizarre absurdity, leaving the audience puzzled.

Tamás Fodor's direction devises settings of perfect realism but has a harder time in striking the right tone. There is too much naturalism, too little of the grotesque and absurd, or in other words, of theatrical distancing. At times the spectator is able to overhear what is taking place in the other auditorium (the sound-proofing is imperfect) and thus tempted into trying to set up a synchrony between the two parts. The experience of the symbolic flood, moreover, is less than overwhelming.

Fodor has been the manager of Studio "K" for more than thirty years. Three times over that period he has had to start from nothing, three times set up an ensemble afresh, and even more times find new premises for the company. In the early Seventies, when the idea of alternative theatre was still practically unknown in Hungary, he directed two legendary productions, one of Büchner's *Woyzeck,* the other of Genet's *The Balcony.* In the former he did not separate actors and audience, the action being staged in a single, common cellar space and spectators following the events from scene to scene in different parts of the constricted area. The venue for the Genet production was actually two apartments in a tenement block, with the audience shuttling between one room and the other via an outside corridor overlooking a courtyard, so that by the time they had returned to the previous space a new set was ready and waiting. Since then, Studio "K" has weathered many trials, being forced to give up a whole string of *ad hoc* performance venues. More recently it has been able to boast of "its own" miniature performing space in the form of a musty cellar, with the option on using a second, similarly small location, if needed (which is how they have been able to offer the two sites needed to perform *Visz-a-víz*). The attempt to represent a metaphorical cavalcade of the world in such "mouse holes" is, undeniably, one of the paradoxes on which theatre subsists.

The most recent Studio "K" production, likewise directed by Tamás Fodor, is of András Forgách's *The Polecat's Song.* This takes on no less a subject than a conspectus of history's great ideological purges, show trials, and attempts to break individuals down by torture (the performance genre, in an ironic twist on the Theatre of Cruelty, is labelled as *tortura dell'arte*); it is based on *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich,* written by the Serbian author Danilo Kiš in 1976. At its centre stand the show trials mounted in the Soviet Union from the 1930s through to the early 1950s, but there are excursions in both time and space to the Russian Bolshevik Revolution, the Spanish Civil War, and even the medieval persecutions of Jews. It could thus be described as a history of suffering in which the ideological machinery of whatever authority happens to be in power mercilessly crushes the individual's freedom of conscience and sovereign rights of decision. The torture portrayed is always conducted on behalf of some form of ideal, the representatives of which exercise power and thus feel entitled to take sacrificial victims. The victims are innocent: a Christian convert who reverts to Judaism in the Middle Ages, a naive Communist picked out as a defendant for a show trial in the modern age. Epochs, ideas and victims are replicated onto one another, thereby producing a sort of historical montage, the typical roles of which are identical—and, of course, played by the same actors. That identification is logical

but bizarre, and the reiterating historical rite is accordingly part horrifying, part comical. The series of book burnings, phone tappings, interrogations, mental and physical torturing, and judicial murders places everything that we refer to as historical development in a tragicomic refracting light.

Paradoxically, all this is played out by ten actors in a handkerchief-sized performance area. The only props on the bare stage are stands of metal shelving elements, which serve variously as a prison bunk, a ship, or a scaffold. Witnesses who are due to be interrogated tumble out from a metal changing-room locker. Some of the characters are portrayed by actors animating marionettes. The tones of the different settings are modulated by acoustic effects and by the music of Tchaikovsky. The play is narrated by actor-director Tamás Fodor himself, who, as the cruelly cynical state-security section head, formulates the goals of dictatorships as "Producing from a million pure souls a *tabula rasa* on which we shall inscribe history."

The recent Hungarian past appears as a circus cavalcade in the Krétakör Színház (Chalk Circle Theatre) production of *Mylandmyland.* (This is the repeated opening phrase, here provocatively rolled into a single word, of the eponymous hero's principal aria in the emblematic central section of *Bánk bán,* a national opera by Ferenc Erkel composed around 1848, to a libretto that drew on József Katona's drama written in the early 1800s.) It is a tall order to alert anyone who has not lived through the thirteen years that have passed since the collapse of Communism in Hungary, the so-called "change in régime", to everything that happens in the circus ring in which this production is largely set (provided by the Metropolitan Grand Circus, that stands between Budapest's Zoo and the neighbouring Funfair, with its merry-go-rounds, big dippers and Ferris wheels). Led by director Árpád Schilling, himself not yet thirty, Krétakör is the youngest and, alongside the József Katona Theatre, most exportable of the theatre companies now operating in the country. The company receives support from international foundations, festivals and theatrical institutions, and has presented some of its earlier productions in Paris, Avignon, Berlin, and Rome, and some of them were even premiered abroad. At present it has no permanent home in Budapest and thus has to find premises for each of its productions. The world premiere of *Mylandmyland* was thus staged at the Théâtre Bobigny MC93 in Paris, and the production will be touring a string of cities in France, Switzerland and Spain up until June 2003.

By no coincidence at all, the first Hungarian performance took place on 23rd October, 2002, the anniversary of the 1956 Revolution, as Krétakör has laid down an explicit policy of timing its premieres to national holidays, with the aim of heightening the political topicality of its productions. "Theatre has been in huge upheaval in Hungary over the past thirteen years," Schilling has commented on the historical period embraced by this production, "because prior to that it knew exactly how to deal with politics, and on what side it should stand. After that it was nonplussed, unsure about that aspect, and stories about private life became the new focus of interest, until a period again came round when it seemed worthwhile to make a politicised theatre once more, but that has mostly happened surreptitiously, by reinterpreting classical plays..." Krétakör's production, by way of contrast, refers to specific events from the past decade or so in which we Hungarians, well-known politicians and "anonymous civilians"

alike, participated. For all that, everything and everybody is recognisable, the staging itself is stylised, proceeding with the devices of the circus in the form of a succession of turns from clowns, acrobats, animal tamers (and animals), etc.—all enhanced by a potpourri of parodies of opera, operetta and folk music supplied as background music by a band perched over the ring.

This is a series of mischievously self-deprecating, taboo-breaking provocations directed against the arrogance of the powerful, bootlicking deference, nationalism, xenophobia, hypocritical clericalism, slavish kow-towing to the West, and inferiority complexes which seek compensation in an overweening sense of mission. Representing the national colours are three symbolic figures—Red, White, and Green—in whom it is possible to discern three former prime ministers of the post-Communist era, their actions and mannerisms being caricatures of the individuals concerned. Equally getting a deserved comeuppance are the pseudo-democrats thrown up by "socialism" who exploited the ideals of the "change" to feather their own nests, building up their own coteries of willing clients. The western European sense of superiority, humbugging with the emblems of NATO and the EU and eastern European provincialism are both made to look ludicrous. One sees the surfeit in which the political élite indulges, on the one hand, and the country's ingrained poverty on the other; rampant consumer advertising along with the disfranchised poor reduced to devouring their own birthright; the idiocy of folklorism, historicism and operetta reality along with the failure of freedom to guarantee a basic quality of life.

The production is a salutary example of the kind of demythologised self-examination that has long had a place in the cultures of more level-headed nations. A charivari confected with Rabelaisian mockery and gusto from aesthetic canvas, fairground brashness, and a plebeian view of the world. The actors work with remarkable precision, choreographic discipline and devotion, reaping the dividends of careful preparation, maintaining their individuality even as they blend into the ensemble. Especially rewarding is the high ground of morality and conscience that the play secures with its attack on ideologies, which allows it to deliver its jolts to society. Some, not seeing it quite that way, have accused the production of vilifying the nation. At the very least, then, it has brought the breath of lively controversy into the theatrical life of the country. ❧

Erzsébet Bori

The Big Leap

Gábor Herendi: *Valami Amerika* (A Kind of America); Bence Miklauzic: *Ébrenjárók* (Sleepwalkers); Sándor Cs. Nagy: *Aranyváros* (Golden City); Dániel Erdélyi: *Előre!* (Forward!); Kornél Mundruczó: *Szép napok* (Pleasant Days)

Every year, not long before the annual Film Week, Hungarian critics award prizes for the previous year's best productions. This year—there is no precendent for this—Sándor Simó, professsor at the Theatre and Film University, received a posthumous award as producer for taking up a venture which, in the prevailing circumstances, can be called heroic: launching the careers of all his graduating students with full-length feature films. In 2001 Szabolcs Hajdú's *Difficult Issues,* and Ferenc Török's *Moscow Square* surprised the industry and audiences with their successful débuts. This year *Forward!* directed by Dániel Erdélyi, *Sleepwalkers* by Bence Miklauzic and *Hukkle* by György Pálfi, were presented to the public as first films worthy of note, to say the least. Nowadays there are also young people starting in the industry who were not in Simó's class. (As we were going to press, *Hukkle,* by György Pálfi, won the European Film Academy's Fassbinder Price in Rome. —The Editor.)

In years gone by, one could tell a first film at first glance by its modest budget. Relations and friends worked on home-made productions of low-budget and no-budget works, in the company of some of the best actors, as it had become accepted practice to take on roles with budding directors as a favour.

It is a striking change, that today's first films do not make a show of their lack of funds. Gone are the days of making films on a shoestring by moonlighting. And this is not only the case with films backed by many sponsors, such as Gábor Herendi's feature film, *A Kind of America,* a box office hit which broke all Hungarian records.

Herendi started out making commercials and video clips in order to put himself to the test in features, like so many of his well-known colleagues and not in vain, it seems. It is apparent that he came to the profession from the industry and preferred well-trodden paths. *A Kind of America* is a genre film and a sure-fire success. Herendi has designed a modern and extremely cool "uncle from America" story, in which we follow the adventures of three brothers in modern day Hungary, a marketing director, a commercials director and a useless younger brother, a story which he tells in a series of humourous episodes. The young

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Erzsébet Bori
is the regular film critic of The Hungarian Quarterly.

man in commercials has set his heart on making a feature film from his own script; an American producer is willing to put up half the money, but he will have to raise the rest himself. But in the frantic quest for the money (and the film) he nearly loses his wife, the rich American turns out to be a pathetic Hungarian fraud, who in the end runs away, not with the director's wife, but with the marketing director's blonde bimbo, who everyone thought was dumb. The source of the humour is to be found in two places: the nether regions of the body and the mass media. The director has learned from commercial television that to guarantee success, one must build on the elements and stars already tried and tested in other programmes and refer to commercials that everyone knows, soap operas and cabaret hits. But we must not be unfair. The film is full of good parts. Besides the yuppies, there is the bookworm fool of a younger brother, a real live blonde bombshell on two legs, an americanised Hungarian flirt, a voluptuous female Undersecretary of State, and a cleaning woman who consumes space cakes while watching Brazilian soaps. The actors play their parts happily and this in itself can win the day for a film. And one really cannot accuse *A Kind of America* of not being well-written and directed.

Bence Miklauzic can also be proud of his well-written film in this crop of first films. The story suggests a convoluted and surreal film, which is not so surprising, given that it takes place in contemporary Budapest. Sándor, the decent accountant, Anna who works in a tobacconist's and Bandi, the young man who enters into a futile battle with the vicious Electricity Board, are unique characters in the Budapest night. They are accompanied by a motley crew consisting of a sleazy manager, country relations, an alcoholic doctor, a boorish policeman, good-humoured electricians, guests at a medium-sized party and many others besides.

This too, is a genre film from the *After Hours* category, a tale which can be spun out as long as one likes, but is almost impossible to finish. The recipe: take a few interesting characters, throw them out into the night of the big city, stir them into some idiotic situations, make their paths cross, then let the music play. By the time you run out of ammunition, the one-and-a half hours will be up anyway, the sun will rise and everyone—director, characters and audience—will be very tired and go home. But you must keep dancing till dawn, keep up the clever ideas and the momentum, no sitting down, no stopping, not to mention falling flat on your back.

Sándor gets thrown out of his job; after a little wavering, he approaches the problem positively, jumps into his mobile home (made with his own hands) and it's off to the Adriatic—needless to say, he doesn't get far. Anna, who earns her living by advertising cigarettes, also loses her job, but this is the least of her problems. For one thing, unlike the filmmakers, she already knows that advertising tobacco has been prohibited, for another, she is busy trying to raise a relatively large sum of money in one night, (but two digits fewer than the cost of shooting *A Kind of America*), for her boyfriend's début as a DJ. Things are only complicated by her older brother (a peasant bungling everything in the capital, a hopeless case from the sticks, as Budapest city folk imagine), who has chosen this moment to lead the stray young girl home.

Meanwhile, Sándor is caught by the police, Anna's boyfriend drags the brother to a techno party with grass, girls and whisky, thus distracting him from the noble cause of uniting the family. Throughout all this, there is aggro with the electricity. Mysterious power cuts create problems

for a community, and the hero of the day, Bandi, single-handedly confronts the Electricity Board which has gone bankrupt and is thus giving the tenants an even grimmer run around. The characters are born losers without exception, all sorts of trouble, damage and accidents happen to them on this one night, but finally a miracle occurs, and then there was light. The script is full of twists and turns and weaves many threads, leaving none unfinished. Márton Miklauzic, the cameraman, did not take as his starting point the fact that all cows are black in the dark, but that there should be many different kinds of light in the night; *Sleepwalkers* is an object-lesson in lighting. And a more than promising first film. There must be serious work in it, but it was made so cleverly and with such a light touch, that we glide over the mistakes. This might be the worst night in the characters' lives, but it is not in the audience's.

In another first film, *Golden City* by Sándor Cs. Nagy, time does not rush by so rapidly for the audience. The signs of a modest budget are visible in this small production made in an independent workshop: the minimalist art, the few locations and actors, the thin story. It is about the fact that we are strangers on this earth, the ex-policeman, for example, is a UFO, the Ukrainian prostitute is from Golden City, but we succeed, more or less, in pretending they are real human beings. Though we too, are only human beings. The epic credibility of the story stems from the fact that there is a Milky Way in Miskolc, (allegedly there are many in other places, but maybe they are called something else). In my opinion, Cs. Nagy and Gábor Marosi, the photographer of the black and white pictures, have squeezed everything they could out of this material and this money: a large scale science-fiction film, made on one forint! Let them try doing that in Hollywood.

Dániel Erdélyi started his careeer with a historical film, *Forward!*, which takes place in the now vanished political system of the last century, called Socialism. Does anyone still remember it? Zoli and Miki are classmates in a secondary school in a working class district and best friends. The parents do not approve of the friendship, since Zoli's father, a scruffy intellectual, is opposed to the system and expresses this by producing samizdat publications, while Miki's father is the powerful local party secretary. The conflict between the Kutas and Kerekes dads is reinforced by their rivalry for the favours of the beautiful, young teacher. The terms are pretty unequal: there is a whole system with the complete armoury of the soft dictarorship behind Kerekes; Kutas can count himself lucky to get away without a prison sentence.

The director himself wrote the script, which was a mistake. His characters are ten-year-old children in the Hungary of the eighties, from which we might deduce that he knows what he is talking about, since he himself was ten years old in 1983. The way he describes it though, is not from personal memory, but from some confused and half-digested history book; he would have done better using the samizdat paper *Beszélő* (Speaker), which was launched in 1981. The behaviour of the party secretary might have been typical a decade earlier and the production of illegal publications was not quite like *Forward!* represents it somewhat vaguely. But in essence, Dániel Erdélyi is right. For contrary to all rumours, this is not a precedent for *Moscow Square,* nor is it a funny or satirical film, in which we laugh as we bid farewell to our past. *Forward!* is a sad film. It is exactly as depressing, bleak and tacky as the Eighties decade itself was. Gergely Pohárnok's im-

ages evoke the atmosphere so accurately, that they make the viewer shudder. It is reassuring to think that this is just a film, that at the end, the lights will go up and we can walk out of the Eighties unscathed, into the far from cloudless present.

Kornél Mundruczó is the youngest of the directors and hardly out of film school, but I still would not dare call him a hopeful beginner. His is an unusual career. For example, he has again not waited his turn, for the far from well-oiled Hungarian machinery to transform his idea into a film. In our part of the world this can mean eight years instead of two, which is really quite drastic. But Mundruczó, born in 1975, has produced two feature films in three years and in between several shorts which have won prizes both at home and abroad; among them *Day after Day,* which later proved to be a preliminary study for *Pleasant Days.* Or the other way round: *Pleasant Days* attempted to find out whether the perfect small format of *Day After Day* could be transferred to a feature film three times its size.

Péter is allowed home on a visit from reform school. He goes to the laundry where his older sister Mária works, but it is closed; he enters the building from behind and witnesses a dramatic scene: an unknown young girl gives birth and Mária buys the baby from her. Péter is soon released; he moves in with his sister and goes back to his old job, at János's car breakers, where they trade in spare parts from stolen cars. And he again meets the girl who sold Mária the child: Maja is the mistress of a well-to-do businessman but the baby is by someone else, Ákos. Three young men wrestle over the same girl, who is still almost a child and does not know herself what she wants. But it's not as if the others knew either. This is not a many-sided love affair of sophistacted intellectuals with revealing discussions and conflicts of conscience. Péter and his cohorts exist on a level which is beneath society, talk and culture; we have seen such films before, but we have got used to hopeless poverty going hand in hand with this plight, almost de rigueur. Mundruczó's characters have no worries regarding finances or housing. Péter has money and a car. He would like to go to the seaside. He is just waiting for his passport to arrive. They might carry on vegetating like this forever, but the original sin that ties them to each other, giving birth in secret and discarding the baby, buying it and untruthfully calling it one's own, finally leads to tragedy.

Pleasant Days has weeded out the contrived and posturing dramatic elements typical, in some instances, of a first film *(This I Wish and Nothing More)* and also stylistic inconsistency, since Mundruczó has no special narrative form or style. The point of this kind of filmmaking is that the written story must be hidden. Every step must come from the characters' personality, even more so from their temperament, their guts, with the inevitablity of natural events. So casting is crucial: the actor must be completely identical with the character, because there can be no question here of the motivation being explained at a certain point in the story. Just let there be no reflection. The audience has time to think when it leaves the cinema. If all this succeeds, it delivers a very effective punch, but it has to be carried out to extremes bordering on the impossible. *Pleasant Days* only falters once, but in the worst possible place: the youngster presumably falls in love with the young girl and wants to take her with him. But he loves his sister too; it is the most important relationship in his life. Maya would go with him, but first she would like to get her child back. She digs in her heels. The boy responds with violence and

brutally rapes her. This is not gratuitous violence; we have to arrive at this point and it is precisely the critical five minutes beforehand that the film fails to work out successfully.

It seems that Mundruczó always has to be on a razor's edge; his films are violent, but his feeling for drama and style save him from naturalism. He starts the film impudently in a laundry with quick, hard cuts, a birth on a sheet spread out among bundles of laundry and clothes-racks, a bloody baby and an umbilical cord cut with scissors—not wanting us to wonder who fathered the child or how it got there; we only ask ourselves this question later in any case—we become eye witnesses to the dramatic, illegal act and we are helpless as the events drag us along. So that next time we can be privy to a clumsy idyll in the same location: the sister places her brother in an enormous washing machine and rubs him down.

Péter finally gets to the sea. It is like the sea in *Les Quatre Cents Coups* to look at, but the viewer does not feel liberation, only emptiness. Who knows what the boy feels, perhaps even he himself does not know.

We should also include in this new generation György Pálfi and Szabolcs Tolnai, also born in the Seventies, (their excellent films, *Hukkle* and *Face Down* were reviewed in the previous issue), a few years older than the rest, but already proven directors. The last time such a multi-faceted and strikingly talented group started out on their careers, was in the early Sixties. They became part of film history as the Budapest School. ❧

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir,

In the course of my article "Dohnányi: A Tribute" (*HQ* 167, Spring 2002), I inferred that the young Dohnányi's relationship with the much older Emma Gruber went beyond the piano lessons she had engaged him to give her. My remarks were based on a very detailed interview I conducted with Dohnányi's biographer Dr Bálint Vázsonyi in Washington D.C., in November 2001. Dr Vázsonyi has meanwhile informed me that there is no firm evidence of an intimate relationship, and that he was sharing with me a hunch based on years of dealing with the minutiae of Dohnányi's life. I unwittingly metamorphosed his hunch (never intended for publication) into a fact.

I regret it if my comments presented Dr Vázsonyi's views in a false light.

Sincerely,
Alan Walker
McMaster University
Ontario, Canada

I am not a literary man; indeed, for a long time now I have not liked, and do not even read, any literature. If I search for formulations, then I usually search for them outside literature; if I were to strive for formulations, I would probably refrain from formulations that are literary formulations, because—and maybe it suffices to leave it at this; indeed, there is truly nothing more that I can say—literature has fallen under suspicion. It is to be feared that formulations that have been steeped in the solvent of literature never again win back their density and lifelikeness. One should strive for formulations that totally encapsulate the experience of life (that is to say, the disaster); formulations that assist one to die and yet still bequeath something to posterity. I don't mind if literature, too, is capable of such formulations, but what I see more and more is that only bearing witness is able to do this; possibly a life passed in muteness without being formulated as a formulation.

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