The Hungarian Quarterly

Volume 44 • Spring 2003 • €14.00 / $12.00

169

The Hungarian Quarterly

First published 1936

The Hungarian Quarterly
formerly *The New Hungarian Quarterly*
8 Naphegy tér, Budapest H-1016, Hungary
Telephone: (361) 375-6722 Fax: (361) 318-8297
e-mail: quarterly@mail.datanet.hu
homepage: http://www.hungary.com/hungq/
Published by The Society of the Hungarian Quarterly
Printed in Hungary by AduPRINT, Budapest,
on recycled paper

HU ISSN 1217-2545 Index: 2684

Cover & Design: Roller29 (Péter Nagy)

Annual subscriptions:
$40 ($60 for institutions).
Add $10 postage per year for Europe,
$14 for USA and Canada,
$16 to other destinations and $25 by air
to anywhere in the world.
Sample copies or individual copies of back numbers $12,
postage included.
Payment in $ or equivalent.
Annual subscriptions in Hungary Ft 4,500
Single copy Ft 1200
Send orders to *The Hungarian Quarterly*
P.O. Box 3, Budapest H-1426, Hungary

All export orders should be addressed to
The Hungarian Quarterly

Articles appearing in this journal are indexed in
HISTORICAL ABSTRACTS;
INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL SCIENCE ABSTRACTS;
AMERICA, HISTORY & LIFE; THE MUSIC INDEX;
ARTS & HUMANITIES CITATIONS INDEX;
IBZ (INTERNATIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF
PERIODICAL LITERATURE);
IBR (INTERNATIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY
OF BOOK REVIEWS)

NEMZETI KULTURÁLIS ÖRÖKSÉG
MINISZTÉRIUMA

The Hungarian Quarterly is published
with the support of the
Hungarian Ministry of Cultural Heritage

P.22033

INDEX

The Hungarian Quarterly • Vol. XLIV • Nos. 169–172 • 2003

ARTICLES AND ESSAYS

HISTORY

FICTION & MEMOIR

INTERVIEW

ART

POEMS

BOOKS & AUTHORS

BOOKS REVIEWED

MUSIC

THEATRE & FILM

PLAYS REVIEWED by Tamás Koltai

FILMS REVIEWED by Erzsébet Bori

ILLUSTRATIONS

The Hungarian Quarterly • Vol. XLIV • No. 169 • Spring 2003

BOOKS & AUTHORS

THEATRE & FILM

MUSIC

***Cover**: Objects from the Jankovich Collections*

The supplement in this issue was made possible by a grant from Nemzeti Kulturális Alapprogram (National Cultural Fund).

Gyula Illyés (1902–1983)
POEMS

Blood Kin

Testvérek

I'd want no more than for three days to gaze
only upon the shady valley of your eyes,
your brows, the thick sedge of your lashes, where
the wild glint of a native water plays
the nimble minnow-dance of your intent
that glitters, teases, in its element—
I'd want no more than this, three days together:
dumbly to gaze at one first, then the other.

And three whole days I'd spend on nothing more
than to watch wordlessly that curvature:
the soft hint of your breasts beneath your dress,
the star that has drowsed off on its caress,
and, stretching on the silk a spoke of light,
readies itself to glow on my blind night—
I'd want no more than this, three days together:
dumbly to gaze at one first, then the other.

And it had been enough for three new days
only to let my eyes go sip and graze
the beautiful twinned knees' tightbuddedness
that flaunt yet, clumsy, hide their bashfulness,
a bright portal whose double wings conspire,
perhaps, or egg each other on to flower—
I'd want no more than this, three days together:
dumbly to gaze at one first, then the other.

In the mild heat that from your body flowed,
I would have sat, where your soft fleshlight glowed,
a convalescent patient in the sun
observing how its warmth dissolves the pain
all tingling from his poor chest where it dwelt,
how happily might this flesh also melt
into the cloudscape of a brighter sky,
which in itself is its own lullaby—

As if I were your child, in your child's place,
when I embrace you: thus I would embrace.
So what love only gives in time, I'd hear—
those solace-giving words—right now and here.
As brother sister, so I clasped you tight,
tasting that ancient yearning which makes light
the sin, and in your love that first strange night
so swiftly fled, as sleep bound up my sight.

1935

Translated by Zsuzsanna Ozsvath & Frederick Turner

Goddesses on the Move

Istennők költözése

Out there the snowstorm roars and sings falsetto
rhythmically like a wave of the sea-surge.
The small wooden house with three windows floats
on the rolling steppe, peaks and troughs like a barge,

where Ivan Ivanovich or Pyotr Petrovich, scribbling,
and blue to the elbows with copying-ink, commit
ideas of the Beginning and the End to paper,
wiping their fingers in their beards' coarse knit.

Above them, North and East now, the goddesses
cast out from the treacherous West are on the move;
well-endowed as in statues, they display
the sad intensity of abandoned love...

There flies Liberty, aflame with anger,
her cheeks the more afire for the pinching wind!
Her dress was cut out a century ago for a ball,
but her feet poking under it walk on the stubbly ground.

Then Progress, who will rest her arms on an anvil
before a museum where industry's relics are stored.
The Sower of Knowledge next, with a small lamp,
and Law, who has almost fallen on her sword.

They fly, cheeks burning, never glancing back.
One perches on the hut. One strikes a pose
on a smoking chimney, her teeth chattering: legs
splayed, she looks down and, crying, wipes her nose.

The others fly on, all proceeding East,
their faces trying to recapture former charms.
The ragged Chinese and the fierce Mongol hunter—
Voltaire's old love would fold them in her arms.

1935

Translated by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri

9, rue Budé

As the true poet should, I made my home
for three years in a garret. Pacing the room,
fingers in hair, and throwing myself at the desk,
I'd work on—every night—at my great task:
an endless epic which, growing with each verse
ever more cruel, steadily got worse.

As St George fought with the dragon, I fought it.
With fiercer battle-fever every night
I hurled myself at it, there, between earth and sky
above the rooftops; below, about to fly
it seemed, the slender isle of St Louis
looked like a Seine barge ready to break free
and take off from the foam—as poets, young,
imagine and so write of time to come.

The maid I battled for, a simple peasant,
changed every week. Silently acquiescent,
she'd change her lovely hair, as time went on.
Also her face, legs, sighs and her skin tone.
She grew and shrank. My grim heroes behind her
could exchange glances with befitting wonder
as she rushed off, her head held high, her soul
alone unchanged—that did not change at all,
nor therefore did her loyalty to me.

I was in love with Liza Kutnianski,
a Polish girl, then with Germaine Joyeuse,
Luisa Levinson, Manon de Chambart,
Odette Lacoste and Marie Trepinard,
and with the fairest of them all, the hatmaker
Anna Orosz, as also with her sister
and, though in memory only, Anna Leveszy—

with most of them in vain, alas, completely.

1937

Translated by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri

Ancestor

Ősapa

It is not only on this blue
windswept mountain slope here, hung with vine,
that my sisters with their darting almond eyes—
Kate, Annie, Sarah—have known how to shine.
They could have gone about dispensing
wine and good cheer in the courtyard of a Khan,
where all the guests would've been my relatives,
a little trace of Tartar in each one.

Or Mongol, or Tungusian... Devil knows
some trait of a common ancestor
looks out of each and every face:
the manifold ruins of a fallen tower.

They remind you of the patriarch who once,
laughing and kissing them, scattered all those
treasures from which a later time provided
the Kállays and the Úrhegyis with their "traits"...

Likewise the Hadfys, Ferenczys and Janis:
around me the family roars, merrily quacking
with glee, as if they'd gathered to celebrate
just now this booty-taking.
A lynx's eye glints like a diamond button,
a Japanese smile gleams like a golden bowl...
What did I get from the great forebear's brows
tanned by the sun, from under his iron cowl?

The childhood dream that drove him westward
and would have taken him even further on
to pocket Paris itself, the whole city,
and everything that shone?
I look back at that time, laughing and sighing.
He squints slyly out of me, old, uncowed,
the adventurer King Stephen'd never see—
except at a spit's end—with his head bowed.

No steeds. Just two or three old bikes
hide in the nut-tree's shade. The Tartars came
to the meeting on them and, as they confer,
they pour scorn on the blessings of our time.
Words fly, derision with them, stubbornness
and anger spring from glance to glance,
as if the ancestor were trying out
Hunnish grimaces, making his soul dance.

Smiling inwardly, smiling at myself,
which is to say at the better side of my soul,
I keep calling out to him too: "Only your freedom—
that's what you've got to keep!" (I almost growl)
"What is the use of stone castle, home, order,
if they, like the walls of a prison, shut you in?"
I raise my glass to him and, through iron bars,
as if to a caged beast, pass it to him.

1937

Translated by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri

Árpád

Here's a mound these folk had hardly ever spied
and now rocks and crags to the sky uplifting!
October ends with rain, with snowfalls' dusting;
the frightened horses' hooves on ice-clods slide.

And there's no road! No path, only a pall
of slush in the gorges, of footprints no token.
On the creek-bed's rocks and stones wheels are broken;
accustomed to flat land, the oxen fall.

And yet they must run, onward at any cost!
Forward! Upward! That way, whatever legions
await them there—yesterday, seeking vengeance,
Bulgars, and mounted Pecheniegs in a host.

But few prattling women, few gabbling mouths.
Revenge was merciless—no elders, either.
Everything that binds a people together
—judges, seers, priests, altars—all had been lost.

A troop of orphaned striplings, widowed men.
One mourning his wife, another mourns mother.
Is this, is this what the Hungarians were?
It was thus they conquered the highest mountain.

And it was there they were struck by the worst
of troubles—no view, from there, but the horror
of one step into mist-cloaked vales, their future.
They left their dead lying on the bare earth.

For it wasn't possible there to pause.
A nation? Better to let each and every
one run with his own ill fate separately.
Ukko won't so wildly level his blows,

unless he strikes a mass, a tribe he'd kill.
"Let fly apart, like a tree split by godflame,
descendants of all with King Attila's name!"
And so with this did their hearts and brains fill.

Look, even the chief—why is he tongue-tied?
So Árpád was. His dragging feet prevented
his dwarf stallion's stumble that would have ended
in a fall down the jagged steep mountainside.

What was his duty but to think ahead—
What was in his thoughts, as closing his slanting
wildcat eyes, he for the moment stood, wanting
to see in his mind where his future led?

If here he made fearful battle begin
maybe then they'd return to the diurnal
world they knew, those who could, in the eternal
yoke, most wretched when pinioned by their kin.

But should they prevail, what then will become
of this folk among strangers, widowed, orphaned?
In but a single generation, fortune
will have made strangers of themselves to them.

There may be a new home, and a new wife—
she'll be her husband's, but she'll bear a mixture,
child with alien face, a stranger's stature,
his father's strain not mingled in new life.

From kisses, as it were, that breathe on it
of the Slavic mothers, German or Latin,
the child will lose the skin's yellow-gold satin,
and lovely lynx-eyes' corners will be flat.

The better the new wives, deeper becomes
the cemetery where the glittering sun
of Mongolian smiles, eye-flames of the Hun
dwindle and perish in alien wombs,

as do the signs that warm hearts and ascribe,
over and over as each child resurrects
its father long dead, the blood-line that projects
eternal life's promise unto the tribe.

And why should we live so, stripped to the heart,
discarding our souls, discarding our bodies?—
For those born in his image the old god is
still ready to help—what then, is our part?

It's this troubled him, nor could be expressed
in mere words, until pierced by inspiration
Árpád knew, in changed blood and soul his nation
would find what it is makes life worthwhile and blessed.

"Whatever happens"—he still said no word—
"at least we'll be free"—perhaps this defined
what he felt in his heart, more than in his mind,
while in stirrups his dwarf stallion he spurred,

then stepped out of their ranks, mounted a steep
rise where, with fulfillment aglow in his eyes,
he watched, a shepherd who knows each of his sheep,
as his people now poured into Europe.

1953

Translated by Daniel Hoffman

Refuge

Menedék

In vain you soothe and comfort me
with "You must simply bear it: you'll be fine".
I am ill, and you would not dare fool me
with vowing "You'll get over it in time".
I have a mortal sickness, one I caught
neither yesterday nor the day before,
and there's no way to get on top of it
for, though it makes me groan and leaves me sore,
it is inherited. There is no drug
to ease the tremendous pain, it is too great.
(Well in advance the doctors
have left all the sufferers to their fate.)
There is no remedy that can drive out
this nightmare, even for a day or so;
you must face up to it and acquiesce
and lose—there's nothing else for you to do.

For this same ancient malady is age.
I display its symptoms, all so terrible
that, in alarm at them, I almost fear
to look into the mirror on the wall.
This must be how a person feels when cancer

paints the features yellow, or when the brow
is branded with the ulcerating sentence
of syphilis; for now
the end may come any time. I see myself
in just this way—and so you must see me.
Every life after 50 is a slow,
or a quick, agony.

You will not make me any stronger
by turning my eyes and head
away from prospects I perhaps no longer
look on with such dread.
Let me, without fearfulness, take a look
at the end I won't be able to avoid.
It is for this that you, my sweet consoler,
must use the wisdom of your womanhood.
And when the last hound, destiny,
in at the kill, takes me by surprise,
I should retreat, not even glancing back,
as long ago between my mother's knees.
I should be able, as in that lovely poem...
te spectem *(listen now)* suprema mihi
cum venerit hora—*"when my final hour*
has called me to depart" – then I should be
"able to raise my eyes to you" and—te
teneam moriens deficiente manu
(those ancient verses)—"in my falling hand
hold yours". Oh come and rescue...

For you who are above us like the angels,
you women, it is you alone know how
to treat the hero, when he is besmirched
with blood, as if he were still a small boy,
and because death and love must share a bed
and, in whatever way we make an end,
death strips us naked, while
humiliating us to leave us stained,
and as for a long time what is my secret
has been quite plain to you,
with motherly patience, in the final shame
of my annihilation, help me through.

1956

Translated by Clive Wilmer & George Gömöri

Blood in the Artery

Vér az érben

Night. And through Europe the train pushes.
Blood in the artery; and in it, I
like a warm heart-beat

Da-dramm... outside already Austria's glacial heights.
Da-dramm... and sparkling sky. I'm under way
into a giant living heart.

Tunnel. Then sky again. Rock-peak. Then
lights of a mountain hut beside the Milky Way,
and tunnel again.

Dark—for good? I am speeding within a body
heated by a great ancient heart, within you, Europe.
Lying prone, that's how I fly.

In a lame body the artery pushes and prods.
Da-dramm. . . in a stiff, prostrate corpse.
Remaining alive now, only inside.

Once—I know—it walked, made roads,
cities, god, and how many marvels when
for its rights it went to war!

Has its intelligence become too lame?
Oh, if I, a tiny particle, could fly
with my huge dreams through its brain!

Europe! From your wounded skin I instill
into the heart, oh, not blood clots, not
something that kills.

I am a drop—still I am a giant—Oh,
not through the course, not just because
I can move through you—

but through the news with which on your blood-paths
I can circulate, where the nerve-ends, aching,
ask for strength and give faith.

Move, warm body, our body! Besieging the skies
an agenda is waiting for us still,
white civilisation, rise!

You're sprawled on the ground, though where
is your enemy, your conqueror? You're still the most
lively, most sustaining creature!

Power of Idea that acts as a body of blood and flesh,
and, what's more, was composed of desire,
of faith—even belief.

In you we are more Beautiful and Whole
than what we are separately, endless
striving for Perfection our goal!

Our revolt against you, that too is You,
our denial the continuation of your strength—
flexing you muscles anew.

As more than a hundred ants in an anthill appear
so we human beings became Humanity
in you, through you, here.

Aztec, Tibetan, Hindu spells, holy seeds
elsewhere, in this ground of yours did not
bring forth even weeds.

Up, up—by yourself? Your guiding Spirit?
Earth itself, good magic stallion.
You alone can rein in a planet.

Into new space flying with new thirst
you—who else?—will be of this All
the leading Force.

And on a new Olympus new
Gods arise! And may a new Olympus serve
as home for you.

Up, up!—da-dramm—with this beat the herald
from the burning limes into your heart arrives—
a drop of blood.

1956

Translated by Daniel Hoffman

Because You Sit Across From Me...

Mert szemben ülsz velem...

Because you sit across from me, your face is always
single, without mine there, alone,
not as I'm used to seeing us, mirrored in hallways
or photos where we two are one.

Because you sit across from me I see the traces
time has marked you with, yet still to think
in my egotism's selfishness that my face is
unscathed by time, makes my heart sink.

Could my eyes see as a quarter-century ago
and you were then as you are now,
you'd not even have noticed me, nor would I you—
there's no way we'd have met somehow.

Although both of us were living in the same moment,
if my hair were then as now, white,
even had we shared a room you would not have wanted
to lie beside me, come the night.

How many accidents needed—billions of chances!—
for you to be my only one,
the one of all time—my hope, your wish for romance is
to love me as your very own?

Because you sit across from me... let us two never
sit anywhere but side by side
like the pair in their open sleigh despite the weather
that slashed icy gales on their ride.

Let us sit to the end—do you remember, sweet friend?—
then on the sleigh flying, hard-pressed
by the snowstorm, at Sásd, while its whip-lashes descend
I draw your dear head to my breast.

Like this let's fly to the end, as the thirst still flares so,
if here, or on some distant star,
to find you even today would I gladly go
through space, through time, wherever you are.

1968

Translated by Daniel Hoffman

Mátyás Domokos

East or West? Illyés's Dilemma

One cannot precisely date the conception of Gyula Illyés's 1953 poem *"Árpád"*. For good reasons, some connected with his working methods, others because he had to give way to constraints of a different nature: Illyés insisted on and practised the right to what he called the "hibernation" of a poem. On the 25th of December 1953 "Árpád" appeared in the Christmas issue of the national daily *Magyar Nemzet* (as the first of a projected sequence to be called *Új magyar történelem* — A New Hungarian History), at a time when the 9th-century Hungarian Conquest, and the decisions involved, had not yet been employed as a freeze frame in journalism for discussing the country's appurtenance to Europe. It was reckoned an important national issue which, at the time, could not be publicly delved into with the honesty expected from a poet, but which (precisely for the same reason) called for a formulation in verse, in spite of the tensions of prohibition. Particularly since this is a question to which the poets of every age had responded to and based their answers on the vital consciousness and anxieties of their own time.

In the early fifties, the time of the writing and publication of the poem, political prohibition had a brutally simple cause and explanation: the Iron Curtain had created a barrier cutting off Hungary from the outside world, that is the rest of Europe. The choice of subject itself made *"Árpád"* part of a tradition linking poets and ages, which Communist policy in the fifties would have preferred to cut out from the body of Hungarian literature and from the minds of readers by means of a barbed-wire entanglement, signposted "Beware! Nationalism!"

These loosely iambic, *abba* rhymed four-line stanzas (whose first eight lines read as if they had originally been intended for a sonnet) have an importance which goes beyond their subject: they penetrate into the "prohibited zone" of

---

Mátyás Domokos
is an essayist and literary critic, author of several collections of essays on contemporary Hungarian literature, among them two on Gyula Illyés.

the ideological conditions of the fifties and they follow a great national poetic tradition. The important poems of major poets resonate within the secret, amplifying sound-box of the poet's oeuvre and, frequently, that of the whole national culture or of culture as such. This is true of *"Árpád"*. Thus Ady's *"Fáradtan biztatjuk egymást"* (Tired, We Encourage Each Other) and *"Az eltévedt lovas"* (The Lost Rider) appear as semi-conscious associations with the beginning of the second stanza in *"Árpád": And there's no road!** The horrific visions of *"balsors"* (ill-fate) of the Hungarian National Anthem and of Ady's *"szétszóródás"* (dispersion) are behind the two middle lines of the seventh stanza: *"A nation? Better to let each and every / one run with his own fate separately."* Finally, in the thirteenth to fifteenth stanzas, Vörösmarty's vision *"A sírról, hol nemzet süllyed el"* (of the grave into which a nation sinks) is there at the back of *"child with alien face"*, and *"Mongolian smiles, eye-flames of the Hun"*. For a Hungarian reader, Illyés's poem evokes the anxieties of earlier poets concerning the death of the nation made manifest in assimilation.

What makes *"Árpád"* truly interesting, what one could call the personal drama of the poem, however, derives not from its far from hidden sources but from tensions within Illyés's own oeuvre which express, to paraphrase a line in Illyés's own *"Bartók"*, *"the response to existence of a great soul"*. It is a poet's response to the experience of the second Trianon, the Paris Peace Treaty after the Second World War and the Fifties. Illyés's answer radically differs from what one would expect on the basis of the ideas of his first period, therefore, on the surface, and confronted with certain earlier manifestations, it may even appear as play-acting, and as displaying an excess of flexibility. Nevertheless, it must be said that what is at work here, in its temper and trend, is the organic dialectics of matured personal experience and experienced history, and the ever-present inner compass provided by a stubborn loyalty to the shared fate of his people.

Thus the meta-message of *"Árpád"*, as well as the fitting together, resonance and dissonance of the poem and the oeuvre is Illyés's proposed national strategy concerning the relationship between Europe and the Hungarians, together with its dramatic justification. It is on the screen of the whole poetic oeuvre that the deeper and complete message of *"Árpád"* becomes manifest.

Illyés was a son of the Transdanubian *puszta,* that is of latifundia and the primitive living conditions provided for those who worked it. The experiences of his boyhood and youth, his native sense of justice and what he recognised as the truth marked him for life. The turmoil and dissolution of the 1918 and 1919 revolutions, and the years (1919 to 1926) spent in exile in Paris, turned him into a conscious revolutionary. In his mind at the time even the term "Magyar" referred to the "people" subjected by the "nation", *"the step-children of history"*, thus, in the first place, it was a synonym for the peasantry. As he repeatedly stated in the

* All quotations from *"Árpád"* are from Daniel Hoffman's translation printed on pp. 8–10 of this issue.

poems of this, his first, period, he self-evidently presumed this people to be a race of eastern, Asian origins. For a thousand years theirs has been a feeling of being strangers and temporary sojourners. *"As if they had only / arrived last night / considering already / to move on the next day; / what they built was slipshod / so as not to feel / the loss when it all collapsed"* (Prose translation). This poem, *"Magyarok"* (Hungarians), published by the journal *Nyugat* in 1933, powerfully expresses the uneasiness of this feeling of transience. *"For a thousand years / it has been waiting here, / for a thousand years in a strange environment, / rough handled by winds, at night / this village, this country / the whole of this Hungary."* (Prose translation.) At the same time, it allows to surface a nostalgia carried in the genes which makes the ancient home a painful memory. *"The sweepwell in the yard / restlessly turns its neck, / sniffing and sniffing into space / as if readying to jump / to vault back with sinews taut / to its home, the ancestral plain."* Because: *"Beyond the village right around / a mysterious new world is spread out, / as alien as once upon a time / the western sky on the banks of the Don, / powerful and also forbidding, / you are lost even if you are made welcome."* This harrowing nostalgia is finally summed up: *"Like ill-tidings, a pause for mourning / the clouds flutter away, / They float and float eastwards / breaking their hearts."* (Prose translation.)

It is not an unwarranted generalisation to state that, in Illyés's first period, those of his poems which speak of man as a *zoon politikon,* that is of him as a social being, always look to the East, to Russia and Asia, as the direction of hoped for redemption. Right from his 1924 Lenin poem (*"Éjjelben győzni"* — To Be Victorious At Night) which was written in Paris, and *"Újra föl"* (Up Once Again) published in 1927 by *Dokumentum,* the ephemeral but radiant periodical of Hungarian surrealism, to *"Istennők költözése"* (Goddesses on the Move, see on p. 4 of this issue) which appeared in *Nyugat* in 1935, that is for a good ten years, this kind of work puts its trust in an imagined East made colourful by the poet's hopes. He did this with the heightened enthusiasm of a revolutionary and a poet who felt that even ties of genetic kinship existed between him, his family, his people and this imagined world. The daily *Az Est* published his *"Ősapa"* (Ancestor, see on pp. 6–7 of this issue) in 1937 in which all his kith and kin appeared in a single vision as if *"They could have gone about dispensing / wine and good cheer in the Courtyard of a Khan, / where all the guests would've been my relatives..."*. The surmise of this ancient kinship was repeated a few years later in *Hídi vásár* (Fair at the Bridge): *"Where's the fair, there's the fair, / at its centre a shaman chants / ... The noise at its centre, / as if it had come from Asia / ... Here it winds into wheels, / here Emese's dream purls / ... Look, a Kabar with an Ugrian, / an Onogur with a Vogul. / Ancient Karakorum, this is the kind of forum / you very likely were, with such people."* (Prose translation.) (*Magyar Csillag,* 1943). The same sentiment gave rise to *"Philológia"*, which Illyés suggested should apear *"On the blank page of a grammar of the Vogul language"*. To give it special emphasis, Illyés italicised the question with which he started

the second part of the two-part poem. *"It is this land that you long for, lad? tired of the wild throbbing West / and its skies covered in clouds / of smoke."* (Prose translation.) The answer again is italicised: *"It's his land I long for or even further on / I'd have a horse I'd throw my horse's reins on my horse's soft neck, / far from the roar of Europe I would make it step alone, / to the ancient home that can never be reached; I would boldly follow the way of my desire / towards my secret ancient mother, whose image is unforgettably / alive in my heart, around whose womb the warm country of tales quivers."* (Prose translation.)

The emotions may have been of a different hue, but Illyés's road, cantering towards the longed for primeval mother nevertheless, essentially, ran parallel with the conviction of those first avant-garde artists who saw close links between revolutionary art and social revolution as a self-evident principle governing their art and life. It was their company in the Paris of the twenties, which was Illyés's intellectual and artistic finishing school. The notion, expressed in *"Goddesses on the Move,"* that Freedom, Progress and Knowledge, the goddesses of the Enlightenment that gave birth to modern Europe, the goddesses played false by a faithless West, would seek refuge in revolutionary Russia, would have been accepted as their own by Aragon and Breton, and by everyone else too, from Auden to Richard Hughes and Koestler to Silone who, before the Spanish Civil War had sobered them up, shared the belief that *"The ragged Chinese and the fierce Mongol hunter— / Voltaire's old love would fold them in her arms."* It may be pure chance but it is certainly symbolic that the volume *Rend a romokban* (Order in the Ruins, 1937) places these poems next to *"9, rue Budé"* (see on pp. 5–6) which looks back to young days in Paris with magic irony as in a daydream; it concludes with the four-part great *"Óda Európához"* (Ode to Europe), which is based on the conviction that Europe, from the Atlantic to the Urals, is one and indivisible. The confession bursting out of the poet as the conclusion of the poem is a prayer addressed to this real and yet virtual Europe. *"Masculine in spirit, who, roaming, / enticed virgin nations, / in your coarse voice, ancient eyes, between your wrinkles / I could still detect / who you once were. [...] "Loud and clear I proclaim / myself your son, though even now you cannot understand / my speech and loudly I call / all the people you begat, / my brothers. // Rise above us, our Father! / As Zeus in hundreds and hundreds of shapes / appear once again! Tell us that / you are nevertheless one and unchanging."* (Prose translation.)

In the light of the oeuvre it becomes clear that Illyés's conviction lasted until he really met Russia, the new home of the goddesses played false by Europe, when in 1934 he was confronted by Soviet reality, what became the metaphor of his travel book, *Oroszország* (Russia, 1934), a member of a track gang dozing head down and feet up on a railway embankment, a phenomenon which permeates every moment of daily existence. In other words, while looking for the socialist dream in Russia he keeps on experiencing that, as against Marx's

prophecy, this was not a world placed back on its feet but an upended world. Upended *more russico,* of course.

This is obviously the reason why *Rend a romokban*, according to Gábor Halász, a critic of that time, a portent of a "new Illyés", not only marks the moment of change in the mode of poetic expression but also indicates the metamorphosis from youthful hope to manly disillusion. Towards the end of the volume, in *"Kőasztal, madárka, este"* (Stone Table, Birdie, Evening), a declaration occurs: *"with this I finished the easy song. It lasted for ten years."* The volume concludes with one of the key summarizing poems in Illyés's oeuvre: *"Avar"* (Leaf-mould) at a turning point in his life. In this, the poet, hearing a savage sound, closes a door behind him. And what was shut out by the closed door? *"Images, blinding words"*, when I still *"recited with tipsy lips: man can change for the better"*. (Prose translation.) In Illyés's verse the wound inflicted by youthful hope deceived was never healed. In 1960, almost a quarter of a century later, after the many shattering events that had taken place, his *"Ifjúság"* (Youth), first published in the journal *Kortárs,* then in his volume *Új versek* (New Poems) still bleeds from the same wound: *"Oh, my youth! What did we expect? A miracle, / nothing less, no, one that should / realise what our dream had drawn on the landscape below, / the paradise of youthful faith, // who, I wonder? Man? Faith? Or an ideal?"* (Prose translation.) This illustrates the naturally systematic way in which Illyés's complex identity is manifest in his verse.

The above is merely an indication of the precedents in Illyés's oeuvre on which *"Árpád"* also touches. It should help a proper interpretation of the change in Illyés's views which this poem stands for. True, the literal meaning of the poem requires no explanation, but it must be said that although the well-known and well-worn *topoi* concerning the historical fate of the Hungarians, all the way from Kölcsey to Vörösmarty and on to Ady resound in Prince Árpád's hesitations, and the poet completely identifies with the decision of Árpád the leader, who shepherds his flock; the justification of the decision contains an essentially new answer to an old question that crops up again and again at moments of crisis: where is our place in the world? Is there a place for us in Europe at all, and have we a need of a place in this (ever quarrelsome) family of European nations, and is that worth all the sacrifices we had to make in these thousand years?

The novelty of the answer given by *"Árpád"* appears on the symbolic, moral and extrasensory plane of the poem, that is if we consider the poetic motivation of Árpád's decision in the light of Illyés's oeuvre, which wrestled with such questions over many decades. The change is not an about-face, but the constraint imposed by temporal and historical changes, a dramatic apprehension of that commonplace that old questions are reformulated from time to time, that at times of crisis they indeed placed whole peoples or nations, with their poets, up against a wall. This happened in 1945 when this people of eastern origins was metaphorically and literally overtaken by the East in the guise of the Red Army.

In 1940, the undeservedly forgotten *Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie,* which with its sister paper, *The Hungarian Quarterly* (both edited by József Balogh), served the good name of Hungarian culture abroad, wished to commemorate the fact that the Verecke Pass had recently become a frontier post of the longed for joint Polish-Hungarian border. Gyula Illyés, one of the contributing editors, suggested (according to a 1940 journal entry):

> Let us tell them in detail that this was when the Hungarians, then migratory, led by Árpád, crossed it as they made their way westward. God knows for how many thousands of years this splendidly organised host had drifted from battle to battle. They stopped on top of the hill, looked around, then, at a sign from their leader, they once again dug their spurs into the flanks of their small steppe horses. One more step and they were home, in their country. The next moment the people turned into a nation. There was no lightning, the heavens did not open, no divine call but a sort of miracle occured. A country was born.

But all this can only be said in verse, Illyés, despondent, added according to his journal. The *Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie* promptly chose a poem by the symbolist poet Ady, whose first line begins: *"I am the son of Gog and Magog"* (Gog and Magog). Equally promptly they recognised that the poem was untranslateable. There was no spell that could transpose national feeling into another language. Since

> the national feeling itself would have to be explained first. Perhaps we could add in a footnote what Verecke, the famous eastern gate means to Hungarians. What a Hungarian feels who can say that his forebears came in at Verecke. But one would have to add next to the magic spell Verecke, what the other magic spell Dévény means, the western gate, which is equally unforgettably alive in every Hungarian heart.

Let me also draw attention to another note, written six years later which appeared in 1946 in the first issue of *Válasz,* a sociological and literary journal published by the Peasant Party. In the justified panic produced by the news of a new peace treaty in the making, Illyés wrote calmly and wisely, laying out facts and ideas which, in the forty years of Communism that soon followed, were considered exceedingly touchy. This note could not be published in Hungary even in 1987, though it should have been included in Illyés's *Naplójegyzetek 1946–1960* (Journal Entries 1946–1960). In it, Illyés declares his faith in democracy since it is "the gift of democracy that Hungary exists", doing so in the context of the unbelievably damaging provisions of the peace treaty then under preparation. The armed strength of the democracies and their victory in the Second World War stopped Hitler's Germany from determining the sort of future for Hungary which the Führer had intended for her in *Mein Kampf.* It was only democracy that could perhaps provide somewhere, sometime, a court from which Hungary could possibly hope for justice. (He is concerned with the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty which confirmed the borders determined at Trianon in 1920.)

> The fight for justice is long and hard, longer and harder than the clash of weapons, but it is democracy alone that accepts truth and justice as weapons.[...] We are locked in this, and surrounded, as misunderstood strangers, barely less so than at the beginning of our history, when this people that came here out of Scythia with Árpád, and squeezed a place for itself in this throng, midst suspicion and hatred.

This writer's gloss projects the ideas of the later poem *"Árpád"*, and as a dreadful prophecy he describes the state of Europe in mid-20th century:

> From the age of jealous national rivalry Europe tumbled back into the age of ethnic and tribal jealous rivalry, from which it had started to extricate itself around a thousand years ago,

Illyés notes, anticipating by many years recent tribal wars in the Balkans. What passions are set loose in the mentalities of the peoples of Europe by the absence of that "trifle" which is prosaically called a just peace!

> All over the world, let us hope for the last time, the nations are instinct with the desire for expansion and conquest of the age of migrations, perhaps truly in order, at long last, to gratify it once and for all.

Not long after writing this gloss, as if such ideas moved in pairs in Illyés's mind, he records a vision in his journal which he calls a foolish thing but, as he puts it, "the simplest way of ridding myself of it is to write it down". In this vision the distant ancient Hungarians of old appear as tiny men, but they keep on growing as they migrate from their ancient to their present home, towards Europe. This ancient Hungarian host is full of familiar faces!

> In one corner of the camp Grandad Illyés, bucket in hand, makes himself useful, in another Grandad Kállay busies himself, they haven't a clue that they will soon meet to such an extent that they will amalgamate. The ancient Hungarians are still without a care. How could it happen that by the time they reached the Carpathians they would grow into giants? With one single step they cross dreadful heights. By a miracle they then, step by step, achieved our stature. Perhaps King Mathias could not, but Rákóczi already could easily have been a passenger on a tram.

Let me go on to say something about the changing importance of ethnic affiliation and homogeneity as expressed in stanzas thirteen to fifteen of *"Árpád"*. This is the weightiest import of the much mentioned novelty of the poem: the tribe or people, migrating to Europe, is granted something even more important, namely freedom, in exchange for submerging in the ethnic melting pot. This is the true gift of Europe, the most that a man can get, *"The leader knew, in changed blood and soul his nation / Would find what makes living worth while and blessed."* That, after years of the Stalinist personality cult, the longing for freedom was there in the souls of men, ready to burst out with elementary force, and that, in the eastern half of a Europe divided by the Iron Curtain, a recovery of lost freedom could only be expected from the West, does not require demon-

stration. That, at least, is my interpretation of this point which was much disputed in 1954, at the time the poem was published, that is in conjunction with the closing idea, and not torn out of its context, as argued by the poet and essayist György Somlyó in an article on *"Árpád"*. He called the passage in question "a blot on Illyés's immaculate humanist attitude." He was otherwise highly appreciative of the poem as such, listing it "amongst the major achievements of Hungarian poetry". But *"The cemetery where the glittering sun / Of Mongolian smiles, eye-flames of the Hun / Dwindle and perish in their alien wombs"* is a formulation in "unforgettable metaphors of something which is *bona fide* unacceptable", albeit he later adds that, "perhaps he reads something into these lines which Illyés does not wish to say". Somlyó "is the victim of a fatal misunderstanding" (his own words) when he declares that true to life, the natural and ancient pain which goes with every kind of assimilation to be unacceptable, a pain felt by every migrant when experiencing the normal and unavoidable change of "blood" and "soul" in his own children and grandchildren, which leads to the disappearance (for ever) of something that is part and parcel of us, perhaps a whole tribe or people, all that is us. But it is precisely this deed and mortal risk that is the import, the weight and seriousness, of the Árpád of the poem. But even this ethnic sacrifice is worth making if necessity so demands, since freedom is indeed the highest aspiration which a man can give himself and his people. Noone able to live as a free man thinks of this truth. Illyés was made aware of it again after 1945 by the choking experience of an Asian loss of freedom. From that time on, more precisely from the fifties, he writes poems in which he wears the mask of a historical Hungarian personage, embedding his highly personal message in their lives and circumstance. (*"Mohács"*, *"Zrínyi, a költő"* [Zrínyi the Poet]) or else he looks to certain roles in folkways as an authentic allegory of his calling as a poet (*"Számadó"*, Head Shepherd), who as the *"most far-sighted Hungarian"* thinks and decides, at least in his mind and imagination, about the fate of his people, as did Árpád at the time of the Conquest.

Illyés's judgement concerning the necessary allegiance of Hungarians no longer changes after this. In one of the powerful confessions included in *Dőlt vitorla* (Slanting Sail), a volume whose publication in the Sixties was held up for many years by the authorities, he proclaims as the poet of the European idea *"In you we are more / Beautiful and Whole, / Than what we are separately."* (*"Vér az érben"*, Blood in the Artery. See pp. 12–13) In another poem he conclusively sums up his relationship to Europe: *"I looked out and look out again and again of the porthole of the ship which took me, takes me, from you and towards you: Europe égalitaire, toi ma mère adoptive!"* (*"Ami a palackból még kitelt"*— What Was Still Contained in the Bottle. Prose translation.)

Paris and Europe were the surrogate mothers who nursed Illyés. In one of the poems of his last, posthumous, volume he writes: *"At the sight the vision / as I stepped from the bridge stairs onto the space in front / of Nôtre-Dame humbled*

me as if forcing / me on my knees. / history grasped by the eyes. / It was uplifting all the same: lo! behold! my country! / That new homeland for which descending from our Verecke / on the border of reality and foggy dreams / I had to start to fight, [if for no other reason then] because I am so alone [was left an orphan]" (*"A Pont des Arts-on"*—On the Pont des Arts, prose translation).

Why did Illyés have to busy himself with questions of this sort, so to speak since the war's end? A poem by him, *"Ady és Móricz"*, (Ady and Móricz) appeared in the September 7th 1945 issue of *Szabad Szó*, which expresses the most recent sorrowful experiences: *"This people has never undergone such a test."* Whatever the great predecessors, Ady, Móricz, Babits or Kosztolányi lived through was *"a child's hell"* by comparison. This, in itself indicates that, in 1945, the events of the occupation and their consequences were more of a shock for Illyés, driving him, at the depths of his being, into a more lasting depression and loss of all hope than apparent on the surface of his oeuvre. What follows causally from this depression is one of the persisting minor melodies of his verse in the fifties and Sixties, a sequence of *"a burden to those from whom a word is expected"* in the above-quoted poem. This is the burden of the poet whose duty it is to express, under any given circumstances, in whatever way is possible, speaking for others as well, a *"dumb anguish"* and *"bleak truth"*, confronting the bleak injustices of history, riding on a *"wooden horse that was not up to date"* against passing poetic fads and policies which either irritatedly prohibited all attention to the crucial questions of the nation, or else declared them to be untimely trifles. In general Illyés found himself forced to take to tortuous paths and sidetracks, such as references to Lenin's national minorities policies, in his articles; this gave him a foothold which allowed him, alone for many decades, to raise his voice in defence of the elemental human and national rights of Hungarians on the other side of the country's borders, chiefly in Transylvania. It was precisely the events of the 20th century that taught Illyés that one could not defend individual human rights without shielding collective national rights. On the other hand, for one who in his youth had been a poet of revolutionary faith and cast of mind, claiming a right for poets to have their say on questions which, in this part of the world touch everyone personally, often enough cutting one drawing blood, was self-evident.

In a poem *"Gyűrűk"* (Rings) dedicated to his French friends, which was included in the 1981 *Közügyek* (Common Causes), the last volume which appeared in his lifetime, Illyés writes: *"A white-hot ring of hatred gives off its sparks here, around a people."* One could say, for a thousand years, since Árpád came, sometimes as glowing embers, sometimes bursting into flames. It was up to Gyula Illyés to stand for a desirable ideal European future in this *"hellish cauldron"* both as a man and poet. This is the ultimate meaning of the poetic answer given by *"Árpád"* to the great and essential question concerning the necessity of belonging somewhere.

Postlude

In January 1954 Mátyás Rákosi, "Stalin's best Hungarian disciple" rang Iván Boldizsár, his "mate Iván", at the time editor of *Magyar Nemzet,* and told him off well and truly for publishing this poem. It was especially the mention of Ukko that angered the "wise teacher of our nation". "There is no such thing as a Hungarian god," he declared in a voice brooking no contradiction, according to Boldizsár himself. But why was Rákosi so irritated by the mention of Ukko?

Perhaps a story will shed some light on this. The poet Zoltán Zelk years later told a number of people, including the writer of these lines, about a reception sometime in 1952, on the occasion of one or another National Day, in the presence of each and every one who counted in political and public life at the time, headed by Mátyás Rákosi, the almighty First Secretary of the MDP, the Hungarian Workers' Party, the current euphemism for the CP. Zelk was with Illyés when Rákosi and his entourage stopped in front of them. Rákosi, jocularly by the look of things, called Illyés to account for keeping out of the public view, leading a hermit's life in Tihany instead. "You are avoiding us, Gyula," he said, shaking his index finger at the poet. Illyés used ill-health as an excuse, in particular stomach complaints. Rákosi gestured in dismissal. "Go away! There's nothing wrong with you! You'll outlive us all!" "May the god of the Hungarians grant that," slipped out of Illyés's mouth, and he only realised what he had said when Rákosi went pale and moved on with his entourage withouth any leave-taking. It could well be that the mention of Ukko (the god of the Hungarians) in *"Árpád"* reminded Rákosi of that embarrassing encounter.

I don't know whether it ever occurred to Illyés that a sort of genetic aversion, possibly present in every nation in Europe and not just amongst our neighbours, played a part in the genesis of the *"ring of hatred"* mentioned in the last volume of his poems published in his lifetime. The fact is that the Hungarians were the only people of the Great Migrations Age who formed their own state, becoming a *Staatstragende Nation,* to use the German term, avoiding the fate presaged by the poem which all their fellow migrants suffered, that of disappearing in the melting pot of one or another of the European aboriginals. It is a letter which my friend Pál Réz, the literary historian, wrote to me after my article appeared in the March 1996 issue of the periodical *Somogy,* which set me to thinking such things.

> In your *"Árpád"* study you provide the poem with a rich background, pointing forward and backwards. You place it within the context of Illyés's notions of what a nation is (his philosophy of history), within a system of coordinates. There is noone who is more familiar with the abscissæ and coordinates of this system than you. In this way you willy-nilly make a contribution to the charting of the way of thinking of Illyés and a whole generation, a whole intellectual current... But you do not say enough, not enough for me, about the poem itself, more precisely about one special question which, in my opinion, is the crucial question.

In the poem, Árpád ponders on whether he should lead his people into (speaking anachronistically) Hungary, or should he take them back to where they came from. He does not take them back because he fears that the Hungarians would perish in the maelstrom of sister nations, and there is no fate more cruel and terrible than being suppressed and destroyed by brothers. But he is also afraid that the aboriginals of the Carpathian Basin would assimilate his people in their melting pot. In my opinion this is the axis of the poem—albeit not freed from the precedents and the further development of Illyés's way of looking at the idea of the nation—and there are (also) other links. What I have in mind is something argued by French historians, i.e. that the conquering tribes of the Age of Migrations were bands of nomad warriors, and, for that very reason, there were few women amongst them, it was therefore inevitable that they should mate with the women of the conquered. It followed that, in a certain sense, thereby the conquered were victorious. The mothers, and certainly the nurses, did not speak the language of the conquerors, and the civilisation and culture, the customs of the aboriginals came to preponderate (as, if you remember, we already learnt in our Hungarian studies with Professor Pais in respect to Hungarians and Slavs). If I remember right, Guizot and Thierry were already writing about such things, then perhaps Michelet and certainly Renan busied themselves with the character and consequences of intermixing. Illyés was certainly familiar with the French authors (he frequently cited Renan, although in another connection).

What bothers the Árpád-Illyés of the poem is the nature of the nascent amalgam, and here, I think, we can safely abandon Árpád: just Illyés, basing himself on French research, analysis and hypotheses, fears that in respect of genetics (and language, culture, &c.) aboriginal elements will suppress and absorb what the Hungarians brought with them. This is the basic idea of the poem; what is linked to that, very concretely, are his splendid images and metaphors. Árpád-Illyés's presumptions are realistic, as proved by the powerful seeping in, indeed headway, of a Slav vocabulary and Slav grammatical features. Genetic processes point in the same direction. (Later, of course, tinted by other, e.g., Turkish, effects).

Not being familiar with the work of Age of Conquest historians, I do not know what the experts say—under French influence or independently of it—about the nature and consequences of the intermixture of aboriginals and conquerors. Nor do I know if Illyés, when in this extraordinarily fine poem, (it is in Árpád's mouth that the problem is voiced), relied on Hungarian historians? Do you know anything about this? (I have not, by the way, read whether there are any data about the season when our forebears reached the passes. Illyés is concrete in this respect, as a realist poet he needs the climatic context.

Another reason why I have long been devoted to "Árpád" is because it accords better with my earth and fact-bound rationalism, indeed empiricism, than texts striving to express more general truths (?), be they even by Illyés himself. [...] To repeat, do writings exist which discuss whether there were women amongst the conquering Hungarians, and if yes, then how many, and in what proportion; did they tend to be the leaders' ladies, or the womenfolk of the *hoi polloi?* Do we know whether they came in the autumn or perhas in the spring?" (May 20th, 1996)

Answering Pál Réz, I wrote:

According to the geologists, if the drill does not hit the oilpan in the depths at the right angle, the oil stays down in the ground. That is what happened to me in respect

of your question, although what you write about seems highly persuasive and true to me, even without going into the scholarly aspects. These things never occurred to me since our forebears appear on the oleographs of Hungarian (pseudo) national consciousness complete with all their caboodle, yet if the French say that leaving the women folk behind was the usual custom among predatory nomads, I don't see why precisely the Hungarians should have been an exception.

I had no wish to engage in lengthy polemics with Somlyó in this study, it therefore did not occur to me that from the point of view of Illyés and the poem the most essential question was not the debate but something they could not feel at the time but which we know well, given a perspective of a thousand years, and the experience which this entails, that, paradoxically, the search for a new home, a new landtaking always goes with the risk of perishing ethnically. This in no way depends on the difference between victory and defeat. Thus vanquished Rome absorbed its barbarian conquerors. As I see it, ethnic perishing is also painful to the generations who experience it, if it takes place "in the nuptial bed, midst cushions", and not as in Bosnia, but this hardly touches future generations emotionally. It would pay to deal with this aspect separately, not only for the sake of a fuller interpretation of the poem, but for Illyés's sake too, since the problem is there throughout Illyés's oeuvre, from the "Mongolmole" to his play *"Sorsválasztók"* (Choosers of their Fate). The question is particularly interesting and timely because, as far as I know, here in the Carpathian Basin the Hungarians only partially assimilated the aboriginals, nor can we say that the aboriginals absorbed the conquerors. An odd ethnic amalgam was the result, and I suspect that this already powerfully preoccupied Saint Stephen, the King, the Founding Father of the Hungarian State, or else he would not have defined the nature of the Hungarian nation as he wisely did in his *Admonitions.* [....]

Illyés's views on East-West relations performed an about-turn in 1945. In his youth and young maturity, the experience of France and the avantgarde desire to *épater les bourgeois*—which in his case were authenticated by a social background more serious and bloody than what prevailed in Western Europe—were the dominant element. Starting with 1945, however—thanks to the liberating Red Army and all they brought with them—the recognition defined his thinking that liberation could only be expected from the West, his *mêre adoptive,* and that no price was too high to pay for that, not even merging into an ethnic melting pot.

I am equally unfamiliar with the work of historians of the Age of the Conquest but I shall look into your questions (how many women were amongst them, in which season did they arrive?) But I am certain that whether they crossed the Carpathians in one fell swoop or in several waves, they could only have done so from spring to late in the autumn. In winter the Carpathian passes must have been unpassable, a thousand and one hundred or more years ago even more so than now. (I am dead certain that animals could not be driven across the Verecke Pass.)

It would be worth examining, in as much as that is possible, quite apart from Illyés's poem, what hapened to the other nomad tribes of the Age of Migrations. *Who made it?* Who survived, and who were absorbed, where, under what circumstances, and what was the fate of the descendants of those who were absorbed by other nations. (If I even think of that mindless mad mass movement which is called history and which knows neither justice, nor necessity, nor logic—and least of all Hegel—of

the fate of, say, the Bosnians, who in the hope and constraint of omnipotent survival converted to Allah and his prophet and who now, for that reason—as a punishment?—suffered God's Orthodox scourge, the whip being cracked by their blood-brothers—I break out in a cold sweat.)

One more thing: (in my eyes) Illyés is a greater poet than X or Y since, whatever we tackle in his oeuvre, quite apart from aesthetic questions, somehow shakes you up. It is in touch with the whole, with something whose existence and problems—out in the world and its resonance within us—cannot be doubted.

Later both of us started to delve into the works by historians of the Age of the Conquest. Pál Réz found an answer of sorts in the work of the medievalist Jenő Szűcs. I am quoting from his *A magyar nemzeti tudat kialakulása* (The Emergence of Hungarian National Consciousness, Szeged, 1992):

Historians and archeologists agree that Hungarians assimilated the largely Slav population they found in the inner Carpathian Basin in the course of the 10th and 11th centuries, at the latest in the 12th. This was true not only of the former Roman province of Pannonia and on the great Plain, but, moving up the river valleys, right up to the beech and fir zone. Recent excavations have shown that Hungarian and Slav amalgamation, as regards material culture (including matters of taste), and hence ethnic amalgamation, was pretty advanced by the 12th century. The result was a unique variant in what had been the Roman provinces of Pannonia and Moesia. The Hungarians were unique amongst the peoples of the steppe that moved westwards for close on a thousand years (starting with the 4th century) which did not endeavour to stay apart but assimilated. They maintained their political and ethnic identity and became part of European history. Not only the Huns vanished into thin air, so did the Avars, the immediate predecessors of the Hungarians. In a certain sense a closer analogy existed with the Turko-Bulgars (Proto Bulgarians). They were near neighbours on the Pontic Steppes, which they left in 680 to settle along the lower reaches of the Danube. It was their fate to be absorbed, within three centuries, by the Slavs they conquered. The presumed remnants of the Avars, just like the last, 11th to 13th century fragments of the steppe flood, the Pechenegs, Cumans and Uzes, assimilated and became Hungarians within the framework of the Christian Hungarian kingdom. Hungarian historians have been looking for a long time to structural differences for the explanation of this puzzle. The Avars and the Bulgar-Turks settled as a ruling nomad military caste on top of agricultural societies... The Hungarians came from southern Russia with their own semi-nomad mode of production and other features of a social and political structure. They clearly settled not atop the conquered, but in a certain sense *in an inter-layered manner.* This, in itself would not be a sufficient explanation for directions of assimilation opposed to those of the Avars and proto-Bulgars, but the abovementioned structural conditions were coupled with relative ethnic homogeneity. That is the social dimension of this cluster of problems." ❧

Gyula Illyés

Variations à la France

Excerpts

As a 17 year old village lad sent to secondary school in Budapest, Gyula Illyés, then a naive believer in Socialism, joined Béla Kun's Red Army during the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919. To escape the subsequent White Terror, he fled to Paris where he joined the Hungarian immigrant workers' organisation, and began writing poetry both in French and in Hungarian. He befriended numerous French writers, among them the Surrealists, and some of his early poems appeared in their publications. After an amnesty was declared, he returned to Hungary in 1926, and soon made his name with his book The People of the Puszta *(1936)—an account of the life of the farmhands on a large estate where he spent his childhood—which became a classic, and his life of the 19th century revolutionary poet Petőfi, as well as with his volumes of poetry. By the mid-Thirties he was a highly regarded poet and influential editor. After the Second World War, in 1947 he again visited France, at the time of the peace negotiations. The book,* Franciaországi változatok *(Variations à la France), from which the excerpts below were taken, is a result of that visit and was published in Budapest in 1947. His youthful years in Paris are described in the autobiographical novel* Hunok Párizsban *(Huns in Paris, 1943).*

The Customs Man

Suspicion being a Customs Man's stock in trade, I take it for granted that he treats as suspicious the courteous nod with which I greet him as I slide my two suitcases before him on the broad and interminably long tin-clad bench that separates us and, equally, two countries, two worlds even. This is no ordinary bench. This bench is a very palpable bit, tangible with the knee, of those broken, Morse-code-like lines which define the frontiers of peoples and states on maps. I fully grasp both its mysteriousness and its significance. My nod is self-conscious. Its effect on the Customs Man, I sense, is not beneficial. The man has long, ruddy features, and he has his heart and soul in his work. He is not looking at my smile but at my face, carefully comparing it against the likeness in my

passport, which he holds in his hand. I strive to resemble my lifeless likeness and so take off the smile from my face, like a superfluous garment. "Anything to declare?" the Customs Man asks. The straw-coloured lashes of his eyes open to size me up. His nose—since I grab the selfsame moment to size him up—the nose is slightly crooked, and so not aligned with his gaze but to the right, towards the suitcases. That puts the crazy idea in my head that this nose was not knocked askew in the womb, or amidst the stormy Scylla and Charybdis of coming into the world, but here, whilst constantly sniffing around in the course of carrying out his trade. I announce, conscientiously, that I have nothing to declare. Or rather, as it were under the influence of having via that nose, resembling as it does the unforgettable nose of an agreeable girl acquaintance of my youth, entered, albeit unwillingly, into such an intimate human relationship, and for greater reassurance of my conscience, I announce that as far as I am aware I have nothing to declare. "May I see your wallet, please," says the Customs Man, reaching a hand unbidden towards the inside pocket of my coat and—somehow also a symbol of familiarity—pronouncing the *je* as a *che*. I hand over my wallet.

In my wallet are photographs such as I am reluctant to show even intimate acquaintances; such as I show even to myself only in the most special moments of intimacy. Also in my wallet are impromptu jottings, mostly cryptic strings of words that, I suspect, the uninitiated eye could only view as fragments of a madman's diary. Other than that there is money in my wallet, of two denominations. The Customs Man attentively inspects Mariska's photo then, even more attentively, F.'s. He also looks at the reverse side of the latter. He then carefully opens up, one after the other, the notes and reminders written on tiny slips of paper and leaves torn from note-books. The greater part of these are pencilled jottings, some rubbed into illegibility. He is unable to suppress a disapproving shake of the head. Then, with a practised gesture, he lifts the money out, the whole lot in one go. "How much is this?" he asks, holding up the slim bundle between two fingers and casting a glance at me that conjures up my father's reproving and mournful gaze. There had been a time when he never tired of chiding me for not knowing, to the fillér, how much money I had on me, and for forgetting every day to wind up my pocket watch.

"Six hundred," I answer, with a faint hint of uncertainty. "Six hundred and a hundred and sixty."

A penetrating glance.

"A hundred and sixty. Maybe a hundred and sixty-five...," I say, under the influence of the aforementioned agreeable memory, which in bygone days would have spurred me to a detailed confession, a redoubled disclosure of my self.

The Customs Man counts the money—six hundred and a hundred and sixty-four—then, thrusting the wallet into an outer pocket of his jacket and at the bidding of his snooping nose, as it were, now turns his gaze too towards the suitcases.

"So, nothing to declare."

I am no longer quite so sure about this. I therefore anxiously watch the hands that are moving with what is looking like ever greater expertise. I have the feeling that the alert nose has sniffed out everything from the very start. I have the feeling that the sharp nose and those two fleet, red-downed hands have somehow become detached from the other limbs of this body and united on their own to form a separate being—a super fox-terrier. I have the feeling that not only the two hands, the dog's busy little paws, but the nose too has become preoccupied with the suitcase's corner. A scratching and scrabbling can be heard. Next, like the hay over a fox-terrier closing in on a rat, piled-up items of underwear rise, first here, then there. Then all of a sudden—the dog has become frisky—the whole lot tips over. The muzzle lifts.

The forelegs toy with a pair of socks that have been tucked together, then loosen them. I am disconcerted to find I would not be surprised if a grenade were to roll out of them, or the entire diamond treasure of both the Indies. What is one not allowed to take across a frontier? My confidence is completely shot to bits, so for that very reason I draw myself up ramrod straight and adopt a stern expression.

The only hidden secret yielded up by the socks is that they have been worn longer than was good for them. What is more, they disclose a discreet hole. I myself view this disapprovingly. I hold my head up higher still, though buzzing around somewhere inside me is an obsequious wish to account for this: I have been on the move for two months now; it is getting on for three months since I left the family home, the snug world of darning needles and big bars of laundry soap. All human contact with the Customs Man is gone now. He is the judge, I am the accused. Obviously, I am guilty and, accordingly, riddled with guilt. "Psychoanalysis would have done me some good, after all," flashes through my head. "Alas! all the commited sins and omissions of my life that I have heedlessly forgotten are all now bubbling up from the neglected depths of my consciousness."

A creased shirt rises above our heads and unfurls like a naval signal. Then another shirt. Handkerchiefs rolled up into balls are shaken apart and meanwhile flutter aloft as at some kind of auction, for by now a fair crowd is thronging around us. The next bundle drops down two long legs: a pair of combinations, to be sure. Yes, I also have a pair of long johns, I declare to the whole world, even without the mitigating circumstance that it is the first pair I have owned, and incidentally that it was palmed off on me here in the West, to ward off Geneva's chilliness, which with its insidious dankness, should it sneak in at the ankles, can have an irreversibly detrimental effect on one's knee joints, in the view of the natives. Those few chocolate drops are not chocolate either but digestants for dyspepsia, whilst that is an ear ointment, in case I should get earache again. And that is, indeed, a broken-off shoe heel. Those spirits, on the

other hand, are hair tonic; better not taste them, whatever you do. Though, take a sip if you want, feel free. Down the lot, and may your tongue fur all over. My obligingness is wearing thin.

I stand there with my digestion unbared, my knees unbared and my unbared ears slowly starting to burn. What saves us from looking ridiculous? Only daring to give an immediate account of our ridiculous situation; only if we beat everyone else by being the first to smile at it.

Now a book has come into the grasp of the forepaws, Blaise Pascal's *Lettres Provinciales.* A thumb pressed against the front of the book, the Customs Man inquisitively flicks through the pages and then returns specifically to Letter IX —the one about the comforts of leading a wicked life and true devotion to the Holy Virgin. Since a few pages have been left uncut here, he attentively takes a peek between these as well. Next he picks up the work on which I worked most zealously in all my life, the fruit of three years' industrious labour, the bulky volume in Hungarian which introduces French literature from the *Chanson de Roland* to Marcel Proust. He sees no value in this either. He seems dissatisfied; his dogged muteness is also testimony to that. He rattles then opens a small box. My expression lights up: my spare collar studs have finally turned up! His expression, however, darkens and he tosses the box back with evident scorn. Thereupon the cheerfulness melts from my own visage too, and a sort of discomfiture takes control; my hitherto amorphous guilt begins to assume definite form.

Let me analyse the feeling. It is not just that I sense I have been guilty of sins of omission in the past, that my whole life, from the moment I was born, has been one of sheer and by now irremediable omission, but that I do not come up to requirements even now. Even at this moment, I am not what is expected of me. That fills me with consternation. Whichever way round the facts are twisted, I am no Jack the Ripper, after all, nor some implacable speculator who is undermining France's state budget with fiendish resolve. What, I wonder, is my suitcase not capable of, that battered suitcase, lacking visible signs of encouraging promise or talent, if I may put it in these terms? I almost wish it were capable of something. The trajectories of the unconscious are mysterious. It would now almost give me satisfaction if two hundredweights of Egyptian cigarettes, Michelangelo's *Moses,* or that certain atom bomb were to spill from my unpacked overcoat, tumble out, detonate and blast to high heaven this railway station, this town, Europe as a whole, the world, indeed the entire darned universe whilst we are at it. A person is full of secrets; that is, we no longer know what within our own selves is prohibited. I feel I am a prohibited article *in toto,* from top to toe. Obviously, these thoughts in themselves are prohibited. I look anxiously at the Customs Man.

He finally speaks, albeit as sternly as before.

"You shave with an open razor," he says, not asking but declaring, having unpacked the little parcel enveloped in tissue-paper.

"I shave with an open razor," I respond faintly, thereby also stifling the surging excuse that in this too I am merely following my father's example, having acquired a taste for the sin at a time when there was just a single razor in the whole family—in fact, precisely the one that has come to light from the package.

"What do you whet it on?" he asks in passing as he rummages on.

The question is unexpected and so rattles me, even though I have been under the fire of one or two cross-examinations in my time. I strop my razor on my trouser belt; that is in fact why I have worn a belt since adolescence. But can I confess to that? The belt I am wearing, incidentally, has also been the same since then for that very reason.

"I whet it on my belt," I say, looking straight through the cornhusk-coloured lashes.

"Follow me," says he, shooting back a cold glance.

He lifts a small flap on the long, tin-clad bench, on the mysterious frontier, and invites me into the space behind the bench. He invites me into his homeland. I cast a glance at the opened suitcases which, with the desolated shirts and socks on top of them, are sprawled out exactly like a ripped-open pig on the butcher's slab when the slaughterman takes a short break from eviscerating the bared guts and other internal organs in order to sip the obligatory tot of schnapps in honour of an excellent find. The Customs Man winds up on my left. We are on French soil.

Around the middle of the vast glass concourse there has been constructed a small, windowless and roofless box-shaped room. The Customs Man guides me over to this. My glance involuntarily strays to his chin. Could he be leading me over there for me to shave him? That, though, was just an initial stray thought. Reminiscences attract one another by their hue and not their weight, by their surfaces and not their content. I have passed before now between rows of uniforms in a prison corridor, musing as I made my way on whether a firing squad might not be awaiting me at the end of the walk. A fresh psychological mystery: at this I regain my composure all at once. We step into the tiny house built within the enormous hangar. My attendant turns to face me.

"Turn out everything from your pockets onto that table there."

I take everything out, meanwhile being dumbfounded myself by the variety of the mass of things that I have on me. Yet again there is a crumb of comfort for me. That pea-sized eraser has also been found: it was lurking at the bottom of the breast-pocket of my jacket. And L.'s address in Rome that I was hunting for so hard, likewise found, albeit too late and now of no use (I have just come from Rome). There is something obscene about the Customs Man's watching my every movement. There are two of us in the room. He has closed the door and turned the key. A mind eager to learn will find pabulum anywhere. I am astonished to register that from this moment on I know exactly the psychological state a seventeen-year-old maiden must be in on being dragged into the fo'c'sle. That almost makes me smile. Even involuntarily, I gain reassurance from the

fact that I am a good deal taller in build than my host. He motions, face set, that I should undo my tie and lay that too on the table.

L.N. [László Németh] is right: there is a certain point beyond which there is just one defence against human vileness and debasement, and that is to switch your role as victim into that of observer. I do not condemn the Customs Man, and he is thereby merely diminished in my eyes. For one thing, he is a mere part of the machinery, however zealously he scurries around.

And don't think I am going to identify you with your homeland either, I muse.

He steps up to me and checks that I have not been deceiving him; that is to say, he too hunts through my pockets one by one. I calmly tolerate this spit-in-the-face at my honesty. "Don't think I shall be placing you on the level of Charles Baudelaire either," I muse. He probes the seams of my jacket, frisks both my arms between his palms then proceeds to do the same with my thighs, my knees, and my legs. He fingers round the turn-ups of my trousers, then, as if on a sudden inspiration, fingers them once again. No Napoleonic crown and sceptre trundle out of there either. I have to turn round. Now he lovingly caresses my back, lingering to fondle the coat collar and the shoulder pads. Meanwhile, a spark of life flickers inside him. He makes a statement.

"You are Hungarian."

I corroborate the statement.

"Americans, Turks and Hungarians all cheat at customs."

I stand there in silence, as if I were one in an endless row of sons of these three nations. I cannot help wondering what sort of Americans, what sort of Turks and what sort of Hungarians I was falling into line with, who might have been my predecessors here.

"Be seated. Take your shoes off."

But as though there was something more he wished to say. He stares lengthily, engrossed, first at one of my feet then at the other, as if standing before a tough choice. Finally, with the assurance of a water diviner, he points a finger at my left shoe.

"That one."

I hand over the hefty item of footwear, double soled for my peregrinations. He inspects it with the thoroughness of a man whose entire life has hinged on the secrets of bootmaking, or one who has never seen a shoe before. He eventually hands it back. The shoe is placed toe-first in my hand, and as I involuntarily grasp it the thought passes through my mind—obviously from the world of the palm's personal memory—whether it was not my duty as a man to bash the Customs Man on the nose with the footwear now sitting in my hand like a bludgeon, to smash his head to smithereens then chop up the room, and after that the vast concourse built over it, the firmament into tiny pieces. One has to make a start somewhere in defending freedom and the dignity of man. I soon concede, though, that this would be to stray down an improper path.

"Do you not wish to see the other one?" I enquire, now recalling that I am a Christian after all.

The other one he rejects, incomprehensibly and almost offensively ignoring it. He makes do with one cheek. On the other hand, he now fondles my stockinged ankles and soles with the same maternal affection as before. Whilst he is caressing my feet with such solicitude, even fingering the toes individually, I conjecture what would happen if he were now to ask me to open my mouth and he wished to poke a finger into my throat, or my ears, or some other bodily cavity. If he were to request me to stretch out on the table because he wished to open up my belly with that huge pair of scissors hanging over there on the wall? I do not know where the limits of his powers lie, and so the borderlines of my own power, my individuality, are also hazy. For a minute I have the sensation I do not even exist. I have the sensation, whilst I offer my foot, that I am just a concept, a mere symbol. And equally symbolic is our association, our strange relationship. I am aware of the power of symbols. Do I not have a duty to kick him in the face, at least for the sake of the symbolism? In the face, the mug, the head, so that the head should fly off the neck, smash through the wall of the room, the concourse, the firmament, and land up in space as some baleful moon in an alien solar system. Yet he too is just a fragment of a symbol. The path to the essence—to this obvious lunacy of the world, to the overcoming of this madness—does not lie through him.

He now stands back a little, inspecting me from a few paces back in much the way painters do when, having fiddled with some detail, they take a squint through half-closed eyes to gain an impression of the whole picture. This is an opportunity for me to inspect him in like fashion, with creative intent. An idea flashes into my head, and again a psychological insight. "I have you in my grasp after all," I consider, "You are already in it!" Many people identify inspiration with mental revenge. That explanation is overhasty. Readers of my work in progress will verify that at the moment of inspiration my soul was free of all ignoble passions. I was merely viewing my subject. We looked at one another, therefore, in the reciprocity of the pike caught by a fox and the fox caught by the pike. He too is searching for the essence. The difference is, he is not satisfied.

He steps over to the table, in a movement now reminiscent of painters when picking and choosing amongst their tubes. His expression is care-laden; he is rummaging amongst my papers. Has he spotted the missing tint? He lifts up a page torn from a pocket book—the very one on which the pencil scribble has become most notably effaced—and raises it to his eyes. He beckons me over.

"What does it say here?"

I wouldn't mind knowing either, I can tell you.

"Notes of some sort," I say.

"Read it out. But I should warn you that I have the means to get it checked."

"It's written in a foreign language, in Hungarian."

"I can have that checked too. Just translate."

I would like to ask whether I should translate it in rhyme. After some difficulty I manage to make out from the scrawl:

No village is so small that you would not find
the girl tailor-made for your approval...

As yet, I had not translated a single one of my works into a foreign language. Partly out of modesty, but also through appreciation of the task. It calls for a special ability. I am petrified to think of the daredevil audacity with which I formerly made bold to express myself in a foreign language, by the page, at the drop of a hat. Nowadays, I would have neither the guts nor the heart to bring myself to do that. But in this tight spot I nevertheless resume and, clearing my throat, carry on translating the text with slavish literalness, sacrilegiously trampling on rhyme and rhythm:

No village is so small that you would not find
the girl tailor-made for your approval...
the staunch friend, the inveterate rival,
a heavenly ocean of youthful designs...

"What does that mean?"

"I'm going to clobber you after all," I think to myself. "The job has to begin somewhere. I'll swing a right hook to the mush, then a left, then let go an uppercut to that stupid chin so hard you take off the roof of this room, this concourse, and go flying...," I interrupt the salutary fantasy; I realise I have been here already. With smiling equanimity—after all, can there be any bigger insult than to be asked the meaning of one's own poems?—I respond, "It's a poem."

He peers at me. It is starting to occur to him too in a dim sort of way that we are not made for one another. In his case, though, this still goads him to regrettable obstinacy. He has already expended no small effort on me.

"Americans, Turks and Hungarians are all cheats".

That brooks no protest, not even that I, possibly alone in the rather considerable collective totality of Americans, Turks and Hungarians, have patently not cheated. Both of us, therefore, stick to our guns. I am obviously an exception that proves the rule. Or else I am cheating precisely by not cheating; that is to say, I am the cleverest of all cheats.

He gestures that I may pick up my stuff. As I do this, he again scrutinises me with the look of painters stepping away from their work. Might there be something about me that could be touched up after all? He shakes his head. He is sad and struggling with doubts, maybe even self-reproaches. What can he have overlooked? I know how hard it is to reach the point where we doubt in our own abilities. He watches dejectedly.

"Why are you travelling to Paris?"

"I am going to steal the Eiffel Tower. At midnight I shall dig a huge ditch at Charenton and divert the Seine round Paris straight to Saint-Cloud, which is a shorter path anyway, by the way. Before that, though, I'll hitch a ball of twine to the Île Saint-Louis, the Île de la Cité whilst I am at it, and drag them out to sea, then tow them over the sea, up the Danube, along the Sió, the Kapos and the Koppány as far as Tolnatamási, and you can look for them there." I thought all this out in detail only later on, in the *esprit de l'escalier* at the time it just flashed across my mind. What I said instead was:

"I would like to see what has happened to the French. I am a true friend of France."

I am unable to secure release from that dejected head-shaking, however.

We step outside the box and return to the tin-clad bench. I bundle the end-product of the slaughterman's work together and try to stuff it back into the suitcase. I knead the obstinate pile with my fist, but I only cause it to swell and bulge in much the same way as Mother with the dough at daybreak each day. Suddenly my blood runs cold: my hand has contacted something metallic. I grasp it between my fingers and, from touch alone, perceive that it is a Swiss twenty-centime coin. One last psychological mystery: fright transforms into boundless happiness. I am suffused with a tremendous sense of triumph and requital that I have never experienced before. And I seek to enhance the happiness still further! I produce the piece of money and place it on the tin counter, before the Customs Man, without uttering a word. I have never purchased human dignity so inexpensively. He turned up his nose at it, unaware of what he has given away. Never mind, at least you don't know what you have lost.

As if that small coin alone had been the impeding excess, the suitcase closes at last. Its companion closes too. I grip them and proceed with contented steps towards the train as though arms linked, right and left, with long unseen acquaintances.

It is ten o'clock in the evening; I shall be travelling the whole night. I withdraw into a corner of the compartment, pull my hat down over my eyes, try to settle my weary limbs and, by force of habit, my thoughts, which—or so I feel—have been just as wearied. Through my mind flashes everything about the fraternity of nations, national psychosis, holed stockings, the various methods of shaving, the necessity of defending state finances, and the perils of power, that is, those pitiful maniacs who are obsessed with acts of tyranny that runs through a mind on such occasions. For that very reason I shall not dwell on it: those thoughts are common to all. My mind fashions a metaphor. Borders are merely kinds of skin on the body of peoples; a state too, without a doubt, merely a kind of skin on a nation. The skin into which I had just bitten had most certainly been rather unappetising. Rough, thick, rather like the skin of a medlar or russet apple. Let us spit it out and see what kind of fruit it is, that russet apple, the pulp of which was at one time my sweetest delicacy.

Tzara's head is wreathed in smoke, the white haze of brushwood smoke. Only here and there does a streak of black poke up in the bushy head of hair. His smile, however, is unchanged.

"Another ten years," he says sarcastically and reproachfully of a time that dares to fly past even Dadaists and Surrealists with such vulgar realism, "Nearly ten years!"

Since we last saw one another, that is.

There has been little change in comparison to our very first encounter. When could that have been anyway? In '24—no, '23! Since then there had been occasions when he had received me in a six-room suite, in a villa built to his own plans and taste, amidst a museum-like collection of African sculpture. Now he is again welcoming me in a bare-walled hotel room, unshod and in pyjamas, having got out of bed to open the door, just as at our first meeting. Now he appears most satisfied. Formerly he must have drawn his unfailing liveliness from being able to feel constantly out in front. Even in that audacious, raucously honking gaggle of wild geese that was the avant-garde of French intellectual life, even there, for years on end, he was at the very fore in striking out vigorously against the wind. He is still up in front, heading the vic. But now there are other storms to contend with. The old movement, the literary one, has converged finally and definitively with the social movement, that of the working class, with which it had always aligned itself. Many, to be sure, had been left behind.

"Breton?" I ask.

At one time, during the Surrealist phase, he had been the lead bird.

"He broke away eventually. He was an advocate of free emotions, redemptive passions and love. He tried to raise it to a general principle. Even as a solution to social issues."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning that women should govern, instinctively."

"And Eluard?"

"In the Resistance they would recite his poems during meetings. He struck the right note all at once. You remember Nusch, his second wife? She died just recently, quite suddenly, in less than a week. I have never seen anyone so overwhelmed and yet so uplifted by pain."

There is no need for me to ask about Aragon as I know all about the path he has taken. I simply enquire how he is.

"Funny, but only a few days ago he himself was asking after you; he heard you were coming. I even promised him..."

He is already reaching for the telephone, and whilst waiting for the call to be answered, comments, "He's become a national poet now, a veritable Victor Hugo. Hello! I was just talking about you!... That you will end up becoming a

veritable Victor Hugo... Guess who I am going to hand you over to straight away?"

"And the new direction in literature?" I ask when I finish the telephone conversation.

"Yes indeed, literature! Your lot have committed a fundamental error there. Your Writers' Union, I mean. That appeal in which the writers' organisations of the world were called upon to protest over the matter of the Hungarians of Slovakia."

"You don't say."

"I have just come from Prague. I stopped off there on the way back from Budapest. It made a very bad impression there."

"We, for our part, had a few bad impressions too."

"But it was a *faux pas,* tactically speaking! No notice has been taken of the manifesto in the places from which you hope to gain a response; and where it was noticed it has only harmed you."

"I don't recollect whether I am conversant with the text of that manifesto; I was no longer at home by then. But I can defend it even without seeing it. I'll sign it even without reading. Obviously, like the Hungarian nation as a whole, it appealed to humanity on the issue. It was defending Western democracy itself in the eyes of our own people. In the final analysis, we are defending the future of our neighbours as well; they too have staked their future on humanity. Anyway, literature cannot recognise tactical considerations in such cases."

"Mais, mon cher!"

"Mais oui!"

We plunge up to our necks in politics, the politics of the day, for a good three quarters of an hour. For the first time in our lives we are in opposite camps, agitated and impatient. Impatient precisely because we are both seeking the same thing, striving to make the same point, and maybe making no headway for precisely that reason, because in our hurry we collide, like two men who are both trying to push through a door ahead of one another. We finally make it. The point we get round to is that in this border dispute, which can easily turn nasty, it is necessary, first of all, that people on both sides who can see beyond borders, indeed rise above them, people of reason, need to talk over the fence, but only if from the outset they have the intention of understanding one another. Yet how are they going to clear up the mass of misunderstandings before that? Where are their passions to be set aside? Only in some neutral, objective forum. Here in the paternal court of conscience. Such a reconciliation, that setting of Europe to rights, might be a splendid task for French literature. But for that, of course, it would be helpful if—in this specific case, for example—it were to be cognisant of both parties. If we Hungarians were to be recognised at last.

We part smiling, but I trudge sadly down the stairs. This man has known me since I was a lad. I have been able to enjoy the tokens of his confidence, indeed

friendship, for a quarter of a century. I am quite sure he does not doubt a single word that I say, a single assertion that I make, a single fact that I offer, nor the statistics and historical facts either. But even in the best of cases, he believes only me personally, admits only that I am right, not the nation to which I belong. Even he is incapable of identifying me with being Hungarian. Over against that he, too, is prejudiced in favour of another people, and not just because he is obviously still tied to it by more personal sympathies. He is seeking the truth, but what scrubland and Sahara of unknown lands he needs to traverse in order to get there. I can gauge by him what a monstrous wall we must break through in order to reach out even to those of good will; what remoteness and rejection we live in; to what depths we have been brushed from the place where we stood in the West's consciousness a hundred years ago, at the time of the '48 revolution. Though even then it was not as high as we imagine.

The unity of Europe

No feeling of uneasiness over their being the sons of a great people, whereas I am that of a small one; no sense of inadequacy. I am full of doubts, wounds, the stigmata—marks of humiliation—of the sons of small nations; yet I never felt myself so at home in the West as I do now. Could it be because they too have suffered; because the imprints of humiliation, the lashes of barbarism, are to be seen on them as well? Is Europe being unified in this fashion? I already sensed that in Rome. But I also sensed it in Geneva and Zurich, in the enchanted-castle mazes of their brightly shop-windowed streets... Am I at home in the West because the West has come to know the East's troubles a bit? It is not radio, the railway or the airplane that has brought us closer together, but fate. The fate that to us Easterners has been synonymous with tribulation.

Lyrical poet

Aragon, through his activity, did not fit into activist literature. Others were satisfied, after a fashion, by dreams, experiments, repeated promises of world destruction. For him genuine action was necessary; his nature demanded it. There were three motors at work in him, each moving in a divergent direction. He was to be found amongst the Surrealists, but with one foot already in the realist novel. One foot was with *Clarté,* the other in the labour movement. He was like Shiva. All along he also took in the Middle Ages and was the first to arrive at a new national trajectory for the French lyrical poem. Yet lovers too quote his poems, those that he penned in between composing two illegal leaflets. Now all his limbs are propelling him in the same direction. It is about him that writers speak most amongst themselves—with the most wonderment

and the most irritation. "When does he work?" they ask. For he is both everywhere in person, and meanwhile his rapidly proliferating books are also everywhere.

He heads the Comité National des Écrivains, the French writers' union. He directs the biggest left-wing publishing house, the Bibliothèque Française. The last time we met, in '38, was in the commotion of the *Ce Soir* editorial office; now we meet in the commotion of the publisher's. Everyone is rushing about. One has the feeling that the very presses turn on the driving-belt of his desire for haste.

The secret engines throb within a lithe and fragile body. Externally, this bonnet displays fastidious elegance, a glaze of the most impeccable French courtesy. We sit down, exchange smiles. We are smiling that we are alive, have lived through it all. Instantly, the telephone starts ringing.

As he listens to the distant talking, he converses with me from a sparkling corner of his eye. He gropes around, searching his memories. I am amazed by his powers of recollection.

"We spoke last time," he declares with a smile, "about what Hungarian books we might publish. Now we have the opportunity... That anthology..."

The telephone rings again. I quickly invite him to Hungary. He is sorry but he will not have the time, because he has just received an invitation to India as well, and he could not fit that in either as yet. There is a huge amount to be done here; only now is it really necessary to show them, the waverers, what resistance is about. But he has already linked his trip to Moscow with a small detour to Yugoslavia, on which he had long ago given Tito—*à mon ami Tito,* he says—his word. He might, perhaps, be able to touch down for a minute in Hungary, on the flight to Belgrade.

"At least you could have a bit of a rest."

"Assuming I crash and am buried there."

The telephone rings again. Another also starts to buzz. He picks up one receiver and places it to an ear; he nods and replies. Yet even as he speaks, briskly and copiously, he cannot refrain from picking up the other receiver, because obviously there is nothing to stop him listening in the meantime with the other ear. From his conspiratorial smile, I see that he is now giving his ear over to listening to the first. Then suddenly he starts speaking into the other receiver. It puts me in mind of those master jugglers who are able to keep five balls in the air at once whilst balancing on three chairs stacked one on top of the other. But even that is not enough. With one elbow he presses the button of an electric bell on his desk. A tall, stooping young man enters. He points to the latter with his chin that he may take away some document. A display of mime clarifies that the document still has to be signed. He presses the right-hand receiver to his ear with an adroit hunch of the shoulder, and in a twinkling the freed hand has already dashed off a signature. That is how a poet lives.

Perennial symptom

Gide's diary for 1939–42: "The truth lies in the nuances." Nicely put. Entering his seventieth year: "Not a day, not an hour passes without my age coming to mind. I did not mean without my feeling it!" That too. But then: "Social question!... I would never have written anything of note if that great stumbling-block *(trébuchoir)* had stood in my way at the beginning of my career." Later on, about the French: "If German rule were to bring secure prosperity and plenty, nine out of ten Frenchmen would accept it, three quarters of them with a smile. It is rare indeed for someone to be capable of feeling deep distress on ideological grounds." (On exactly the same day, 9th July, 1940, Mauriac writes: "So finite is the moral sensibility within us as regards the nation's calamity that we dare not admit it even to ourselves.") Four days later both he and Gide fall into the perennial trap: the peasants are responsible for all this. "Which of them [peasants] would not readily consent to Descartes or Watteau having been born as Germans back then, if it had meant he could sell his wheat for a few *sous* more?" Gide asks. Of course, most of them would give up Descartes or Watteau. But does even Gide need to have it spelled out why? Neither was from amongst their number.

Later on: "Our patriotic sentiment is no more constant than any other of our loves."

Still, with the difference that the object of that patriotic sentiment is always the same, so that the fickleness in that case is at most that of squabbling lovers, or, to make one concession, of squabbling spouses.

The only thing to be said in defence of these kinds of thoughts in our eyes (which also makes them sympathetic on occasion) is that even doltishness revolts against them—in most cases precisely that. In an appendix to his book, Gide pins up an accusation of treachery raised against him by one of the flag-waving jackasses of the Algerian Provisional National Assembly, as if it were some kind of Order of Merit. The accusation was asinine, but that does not mean no word of reproach may be raised, with due respect, against Gide and his diary-writing companions. For that unthinking readiness, for example, with which they diagnose every national, social and human shortcoming in the peasantry first and foremost. Them alone! And which tycoon, arms manufacturer, physician, engineer, margrave and pound-keeper, pray, does not put his own material interest ahead of the national interest? Proportionately speaking, not one wit less than amongst the peasantry. What else are these distinguished writers betraying by this curious readiness to look straight to the peasant if a scapegoat is needed? First of all, an old suspicion of mine that since the world has existed, by dint of some unacknowledgeable guilty conscience that depth psychology would find it worth digging down to one of these days, every non-peasant —or, to stretch that a bit further: every non-worker—at the bottom of his heart

despises the peasantry. Second, they are revealing, equally unthinkingly—that is to say, blind to the glaring contradiction—that, notwithstanding this, they identify the jealously guarded and esteemed nation primarily with that selfsame peasantry. The peasant question all too soon, therefore, is no longer just a social and economic question but also, on account of being socially and economically unresolved, passes over into the domain of psychology. Gide, astounding and finely reasoning as his brain may be, obviously considers himself a friend of the peasant. All the more astounding that he too should fly in the face of the most elemental fact! The simple fact that a Descartes here or the price of wheat there, in reality it is nevertheless the peasants—and by the truckload at that—who customarily bite the dust for their country, along with its Watteaus and indeed Gides.

The shop floor

I have slept badly because I was freezing; early in the morning I flee across to the Café de Flore. That is not heated either, the customers sit there in overcoats, but it is a tiny place, so the exhalations and the sour vapour of the ersatz coffee take some of the chill off the air. Besides which, the people, in the good old French way, sit tightly packed together on the long couches, thereby warming one another with their skins as well.

I have nothing to attend to; I just want to watch. The waiter sandwiches me in between a balding gentleman and an agreeably plump lady. The small room is crowded; this coffee-house, the one-time meeting place of Rimbaud's circle, is now a literary centre. It stands on the corner of the boulevard Saint-Germain and the rue Saint-Benoît; beads of condensation trickle down the big windows, which intersect at a right angle. I am sitting with my back to the window, so I too keep my hat on as I give myself over to sweet, contemplative idleness.

The plump lady warms my right side with her well-larded, foursquare flank; she is chatting with her neighbour whilst bent over a book, the pages of which she slits open with a teaspoon. My left-side warmer, a two-day-old white stubble dotted about his swarthy features, is writing in an exercise book of squared-paper, his head held up as if he were painting rather than writing. He is not working with a fountain pen but an old-fashioned steel nib attached to a wooden holder, and lightning fast at that, as the movements of the elbow pressing into my side also apprise me. He pushes the pen with commendable dexterity on a small round table, which is barely larger than the towering inkwell, manifestly a hangover from the age of Rimbaud, placed upon it. Writing away at a few metres' distance—at least in a beeline, though it would take a fair number of twists and turns on the ground—is Ribemont-Dessaignes, the sometime Dadaist poet, completely bald now and in a winter coat much the worse for wear. Only now do I notice that opposite me, at the second little table, is seated another familiar

figure. That is Gorely, the Russian-born aesthete; ten years ago, in preparing an anthology of Russian writing for the publisher of the periodical *Nyugat* in Budapest, I put to good use the book he had published on the poets amongst his fellow countrymen; he himself honoured me with that book. He does not recognise me, or rather does not even look my way, because—head bowed over before him—he is in the throes of creation. Who else is familiar? I start to scan along the couches. Next to Gorely sits an unknown bespectacled lad. He has been given a space between two small tables; thus he has nothing to lean on, and so, raising his tiny note-book before his stern features, he improvises with an upright body posture. All this has a rather unsettling effect on my determined, sweet idleness; deep at heart, I am forced to register that rather than the pleasures of contemplation.

At the foot of the tiny room's far wall, in the middle of the couch, as in the place of some sort of dowager empress, fully armed with all her beauty of old —indeed, with those weapons, as it were, in even more immaculate refinement—Simone de Beauvoir, one-time unrequited object of the love of my departed friend, A. H. [András Hevesi] and since then the spouse of the novelist Jean[-Paul] Sartre, is sitting and jotting something down with a will, not just because she herself is a distinguished novelist but also because, as anyone who claims to be well-versed in literature should know, she does her creative work here every day, given that her husband composes his works in their apartment, in one of the nearby houses, and the two do not wish to disturb one another. The place on her right is empty. Her winter coat lies there, one sleeve trailing down motionless to the floor; the writer herself, in a snugly fitting blue pullover that trimly enfolds her shapely figure, writes on. Yet another in the row of customers on the couch who is scribbling is a jovial-looking man; he is watching the lines that spill out from under his fingers with the entranced and encouraging satisfaction of a mother watching the first steps of her infant child. More troubled is the expression with which another gentleman, beside the window, is inspecting his work; he is correcting galleys, raising his bean-sized pencil stub to his lips, now in triumph, now in irritation. Yet another lady is recording her thoughts as nimbly as if she were knitting; the thick pile of paper resting under her palm shows that she must have broidered together at least a chapter's worth since the morning. Her neighbour—and this amazes even me—is conspicuously not writing, just loitering away his time with inexplicable frivolity. Like my good self, whose uneasiness is by now taking on the definite form of twinges of guilt.

Why! that young girl huddled in the corner by the glass drum of the revolving door is not setting down a jot either; she is just taking a break, propping the small fist clutching her pen under her graceful chin, her eyes fixed on the ceiling. Otherwise, everyone is copying, ploughing a pen, blackening and scratching at paper, expending and squandering ink in the dense yet cold smoke. Conceiving,

going into labour, giving birth to competition. I was once witness to a speed-writing competition. The memory of that resurfaces. I am also reminded of our written examinations, two minutes before the final bell. I am struck by terror that I have not yet produced so much as a line.

Pens squeak, pencils glide, sheets of paper whisper and, on being turned over, rustle. Writers sniffle, shake their heads, soothingly caress their hair, curl their lips and suddenly, without even raising a finger, spit onto the ground a burned-down cigarette butt then, with equal abruptness, light up a fresh cigarette. An elderly lady emerges from the cellar, a fluffy shawl around her shoulders, and calls out in a loud voice:

"Telephone call for Monsieur Audiberti!"

The only one to jump at the name is me. Jacques Audiberti is one of my favourite poets, from the *Nouvelle Revue Française* circle of yore. Amongst his poems, tangled as vine roots but yielding just as heady an end-product, I had a particularly high regard for the volume *Race des hommes*, even if I cannot say that I understood every line of it. I wait with interest for him to show himself, my gaze darting in agreeable suspense over towards the more distant heads as well. Not one of them rises from his work. "Monsieur Audiberti!" the lady who has emerged from the underworld of telephone and toilet cubicles intones reproachfully.

My neighbour on the left suddenly leaps up; he is the swarthy one with the greying stubble who, straight-backed and handling his pen almost like a brush, has been committing his letters to paper as if he were painting. He is a tall, robust fellow. He lifts the little table with his two hands and sets it to one side, steps out of the row, then—as if closing a small gate—replaces the table, with the towering inkwell upon it, and, adroitly threading his way through the maze of other tables, vanishes behind the lady who had bobbed up like Persephone. I am not prying by nature, but then I am on a sort of intelligence-gathering mission. Getting the better of my nature, this induces me to cast a furtive glance onto the outspread exercise book. At 10:32 a.m. on Wednesday, 29th January, 1947, the poet Audiberti set to compositional work with the title *'Les natures de Bordelais'*.

Pens scrape, rasp, and scrunch on like the faint sawing of deathwatch beetles: creators cup the palms of left hands to their brows in tender solicitude, as if they were sick, or as if they were not seeking to determine their own feverishness so much as the temperature of a good friend; fingers wander self-obliviously into ears and noses, but the right hands scribble away without a pause. One suddenly has an overpowering sense of having strayed into some sort of scriveners' office where, from eight in the morning, everyone grinds a quill and through which the severe overseer happens to be passing at this very moment. In the corner to the right a head is raised, as though it were popping up from under water, only to plunge straight back under the billows to carry on notating

—a compatriot that one, Andor Németh, he too is scattering his ideas here. Through the streaks of condensation on the window one can see out to the newspaper vendor's booth, the walls of which are covered down to the ground with various periodicals and weeklies, that is to say, as many of the seventy-eight weekly and two hundred and forty-five periodical titles that presently come out in the French language as will fit onto the modest booth, with those busily at work in here amongst the names on their covers. On seeing that, one is unable to banish the thought that the pieces completed in here do not get onto the walls of the booth via an editorial office and printer but directly from here, piping hot, in much the same way as croissants from the ovens in a bakery's basement into the shop window, and anyone leaving off kneading the dough for even a minute will find himself instantly booted out of the profession. It is of some reassurance to me that at the fourth table in front of me a young woman, without having taken off her gloves, is patently just addressing an envelope. My composure holds for no more than a minute, however, because inspiration begins to stir in the lady charitably warming my right side; the book that just before she was slitting open with the handle of the teaspoon she is now clasping in her lap and scribbling on the margins of the ragged pages with a gold-cased propelling pencil. The table thereby offering the opportunity, her table companion is stringing together his screed on superb cream wove writing paper with the aid of one of those new-fangled ball-point pens that everyone, myself included, still admires and envies so much but which—through what association of ideas I know not—sets off an alarm bell within me that its owner cannot be confecting anything good. There is a quiet in the room, the hush of library study rooms charged with the ozone of brains at work. Again I am assailed by the sensation, the unease, of being in a written exam; the bell is just about to ring in the corridor, I am the only one frittering away the time, so I am going to lose my exemption from school fees, Father will take me out of school, and I shall never become an assistant notary at Dombóvár. I cautiously extricate my right arm from the stout lady's side and search the inside pocket of my overcoat for the periodical that, by good fortune, I purchased at the corner stall just before I came in here. The soul, however, does not content itself with that kind of ruse. Without my having given it any thought, the fingers grip my notebook along with the periodical. I start reading the periodical, which of course has likewise been filled by those hard at work in here. By the very fact that I am reading their works here, in their presence, I feel myself to be some sort of supervisor, and that is not a pleasant feeling. Because in the meantime I also have the feeling that it is not the products of these authors' older lucubrations, from two or three weeks back, that I am reading but what they are bringing into the world at this very moment. One of them informs me that so agreeable was the last night spent with a lady, he would fain roar out with desire, scream out incessantly to the very stars for that extraordinary night to be repeated.

Another, with disconcerting lack of chivalry, brands a colleague an intellectual mongrel and, later on, an intellectual thief, full name supplied, who is no doubt likewise somewhere hereabouts rendering his dreams immortal for posterity. That is not to my liking either. In all honesty, I would like to leave. Instead, I unscrew the cap of my trusty old steed, mulish though it may be and shedding thick blots as it goes, and since there is nothing urgent I wish to communicate at the moment, I give shape to what I have so far committed to paper. And now, having given my penny to the waiter as well as the Muse, I take my leave lighter of heart.

Latins

A slave to the common belief, I too for a long time derided Italians, regarding them as macaroni eaters, the people of *dolce far niente*. They had done a thing or two up to the time of Michelangelo, but since then...!

Since then they had built new cities. Then they had disposed of a host of petty kings. Then they had expelled the Austrians. Then they had put that vastly over-weighted heritage, the papacy, in its place. Then they had forged themselves into a nation. In the meantime, whilst they were at it, they had bestowed on us such gifts as radio, to take just one example. And one or two philosophers, writers, historians, and revolutionaries. It was Cs. [László Szabó] who drew my attention to all this.

A diligent, tenacious people, this, and it was only now, during my third return visit, that I had awoken to the fact. In the meantime they have proliferated tremendously, which is not the least proof of a people's viability. In the meantime, despite hard times and suffering, they have preserved their cheerfulness. They smiled, whistled and sang even in their rags. This innate confidence in life is not to be disparaged either.

I found them in the midst of suffering and privation but, as is now their second nature, of undiminished good cheer. In the so-called dingiest quarter of Rome could be heard the most songs, laughter, zither-playing, thuds of footballs, the noise of children; in the dingiest quarter the broadest beams on the faces. For that reason I suddenly felt a surge of respect for them. The war? It is said that no people has been quicker in putting that behind itself. Fascism? In the first weeks after the turning point—and this too I have from hearsay—the Blackshirts in the north of the country were ferociously and indiscriminately slaughtered. Then no more was spoken about them.

They swarm like ants over the ruins, clearing them away, but meanwhile also find time to do a little dance on them. They know what their duty is. But they know that giving pleasure to our nearest and dearest and those around us is also a duty. There are many big matters. Yet a pleasant minute is also a big matter.

Quid sit futurum cras, fuge quaerere et
quem Fors dierum cumque dabit lucro
*appone,**

I thought, Horace in mind. "Latins unbowed as ever," I added.

The French do not beget so many occasions for merriment, amusing street scenes or children, but—give or take a problem here and there—the great precept that 'every day has its own reward' is not forgotten by them either. The story is told of their July Revolution that the reason it broke out at two o'clock in the afternoon is that people first had to take their cup of coffee after lunch. There is not much coffee around at present, but what there is—what the present hour offers—they do not forego. They too are Latins. They have another attitude to time than we Hungarians.

In the assembled company of good friends, it is my lips that let slip most often the words: Do you remember? Do you remember?! The things we wanted! What we hoped for in just ten years at the outside! What we awaited, indeed expected, from the world, and from ourselves as well! From the future, after what was then the terrible recent past, to redeem it so to speak. And what a dreadful past that future of ours turned into! What will the future bring now? What can we await from it, and what can we expect of ourselves?

Smouldering at the root of the questions, in point of fact, are a calling to account and peremptory demand; they are the questions of some species of public prosecutor.

"Is that why you came back?" asks a smiling Q.-P.

"To the scene of the crime! As criminals supposedly do. To the crime scene of youth. It was amongst you, to some extent through you, that I was inculcated with that need, that belief. *Over there* [with a gesture in that direction] I was struggling, suffocating. Sometimes the light dimmed before me. It is no accident that this *over there* in your language, this *là-bas,* derives from *down*-there. I was down below, in the gloom, and I did not always look up to here, here where youth had stayed. But I could not drive out of my head the thought that the reign of youth here was continuing to develop, continuing to produce fruits, whilst you were cultivating it in accordance with your heritage. You are the trustees of that concern. There was a time when it was here that I received answers to and guidance for my confused emotions and questions. Yes, I thought, all I have to do is come back and I can draw answers by the glass. Give me your answer."

"To what?" asks Cresse.

Here I can risk uttering big words too.

"What, in your view, will the future bring."

* "Tomorrow and its works defy; / Lay hold upon the present hour, / And snatch the pleasures passing by / To put them out of Fortune's power"—Horace, Odes, I, ix translated by John Dryden (1685).

Q.-P. bursts out laughing, slapping his thigh.

"The world has changed, but not you. Not you lot, you old Tibetans! Do you remember how the entire class laughed at your expense when Dumas read out your essay? Twenty years later you have become even more what you were then!"

I only dimly recollect the essay. As they conjure up the memory, the words flood out with the heartiness of the former guffawing. At the end of a lecture on experimental psychology, Dumas had hung up a picture showing a scared young girl standing between a grinning dog and a boy frozen in a gallant posture. Using a pseudonym, we were supposed to describe it. Dumas classified the responses according to who tended to linger more on the colours, the lines or the emotional content. He even ventured to classify them by nation: the Latins were students of external aspects, Slavs of the emotional, and so on; for fun, he even differentiated between the Irish and the Scots. There was somebody who from the first line to the last, devoting not a single letter to colour, line, grinning teeth or distraught girl's face, had expatiated upon what would have happened if the boy had *not* arrived in time. He pinpointed its author—based on what other particular markers was not made clear—to somewhere between the Great Wall of China and the Himalayas, to some tribe of uncertain location and fate. It had been me.

Embarrassed, I enquire, "What do you think I am?"

Q.-P. claps me appeasingly on the shoulder.

"An Oriental. Always worrying about what was and what will be. Or rather, what would be, if there were something. And what would have been different, had it not been like it is. Constantly harping on the past, and even more on the future. Never for a moment the present! Never an appraisal and sensible acceptance of what is. That there is life as well, old chap, between all those woulds and coulds! Evidently, what they say about Slavs having no sense of time really is true. *Hoohah!*... I know, I know, I'll spout the lesson right off: you are not Slavs but God knows what kind of freaks. The cerebral sclerosis has not got to me yet. So anyway, you are Oriental, but you can keep your lids on all the same. You are youngsters. Idealists. Not in Berkeley's definition but in the moral sense, as poor old P. once explained so lucidly at the workers' university back then..."

The conversation thereupon turned serious: P. was the most painful loss for the small circle.

"How did he die?"

"Well, philosophy became his life blood. You remember the darts with which he would puncture hallowed platitudes with his sarcasm; how much, back in our time, he still assessed a person by special individuality! How much on externalities. How he still put every sheep-pen, France, in his view the most putrid of them all, to the torch. He stood before the firing squad singing the Marseillaise, even though beforehand they had mangled him to extract the names of those he had been working with, in a camp. He became a marvellous individual. Gara heard that a *maquis* detachment in the South was named after him.

Baedeker

My Baedeker this time—because I am partial to guidebooks, read them with almost the same pleasure as I did dictionaries once upon a time—is József Teleki's account of his travels in France, which we are able to read in an edition prepared by Gábor Tolnai. I go around the city with this splendid guide in my pocket; I immerse myself in it whenever I have a spare minute, or in the metro carriage, where everyone reads as diligently as if they were in a library reading room anyway. I am overcome with admiration for my guide's keen insight, the superb observations of which this mind, barely out of adolescence, was capable. Modest, and yet dispassionately objective, when he witnesses even the grandest of things—and he had a share in plenty of those. His journey coincided with a fortunate age. He had the opportunity to see Voltaire, Madame Pompadour and Louis XV. He spent the years between his twentieth and twenty-second birthdays, from 1759 to 1761, on French soil. I excitedly search the index to check whether he met who, in my opinion, was the grandest of them all, Rousseau. No, he wasn't left out either. I am delighted that Teleki was highly partial to him, writing at length about him, the following passage amongst others:

"Monsieur Rousseau, to look at, is around 45 years of age, on the short side rather than tall; slight of build too, slightly stooped; crisp and lively of speech, sharp-minded; he has a lot of what the French call *Esprit.* His judgement is good, his thinking keen, and he also communicates well, as I do not believe there is anyone today who writes more cogently than him. His conversation did not flag, because he speaks a lot, or at least on this occasion he was fairly talkative, notwithstanding which one could not say he is a good-humoured person. Odd in some aspects of his behaviour and notions, yet he seeks to appear odder still than I was able to discern him to be. That may have been one of the reasons why he has withdrawn from company. He declares that he never sleeps more than a quarter of an hour at one go, for more than 15 years now, and over the same period has never slept more than one hour altogether in a night, nor does he make up for that by day, because he does not sleep then either. If that is true, since it is unlikely he would assert something that is not the case, I am amazed that he is alive at all, and not just alive but his eyes are clear and white."

He not only gives a sketch of the intellect but, faithful travel narrator that he is, also reports on the great writer's outward appearance:

"In his dress, as in other aspects, I suspect that he affects a touch of unconventionality; there is no doubting that because of his gnarled toes, or some such reason, a hole in the form of a star is cut in the middle of the uppers of each of his slippers. The soles of the slippers are wooden, largely, as he says, so he may keep drier when walking, and also so the slipper should last longer. His impoverished state and mode of living can only be ascribed to his own taste, because although he is now genuinely poor and impecunious, he would only have to say

the word in order to acquire more money, but he does not wish, so it is said, to live on anyone's goodwill. He now lives principally on his Music, for apart from being a scholar, he is a great Musician and Composer as well, composing at the behest of others, and collecting a regular remuneration for that, but no more. Only the other day, it is said, Prince Conti sent maybe 50 louis d'or to Monsieur Rousseau for some Composition, of which Rousseau took only 2 louis d'or, returning the remainder."

But—"since one appraises much about the character of such people from their domestic arrangements"—he also presents the great intellect's environs. As I myself, in this metro carriage, am on my way to the home of a great French intellect, I read this passage with particular interest, as an instructive model, so to say:

"On entering his place, we found him in a hideous, stained dressing-gown, and had we not known that this was Rousseau, we would have supposed him to be a filthy cobbler, particularly in the room, totally without allure, in which he eats and they cook for him. This exceedingly small room is, at one and the same time, his kitchen too. This is where he is accustomed to dine. Upstairs is a room to which a staircase gives access; this is more alluring, even almost attractive. On arrival, he welcomed me most cordially and led me to the *Donjon,* which is separated from the room by a small garden. (*Donjon* is the name the French give to all such outbuildings which stand in some prominent place.) The items in this *Donjon* are quite pretty, but only in a very rustic manner. I saw here, to whit, a printed picture of the King of Prussia, to the bottom of the frame of which was stuck a slip of paper, and upon that two French poems which were most hostile to the Prussian King, but I was unable to hold them in my memory. Sitting down to lunch in the aforementioned room, I ate not plentifully but well. There was a soup, the meat of cow, and a *Lapin* (this is almost the same as a young rabbit) rendered to a sauce. Besides that, there was a pâté on which a start had long been made, cheese, and very wilted grapes; in a word, a very good but merely ordinary, totally unpretentious meal, which undoubtedly tasted all the better the more rustic it was. A girl or woman also ate with us who, as far as I could tell, is Monsieur Rousseau's factotum, housekeeper, cook, etc. She is not pretty, and in that respect beyond all suspicion in anyone's eyes."

I have no time to read further, travel further into the past. The underground train rattles into the Beaugrenelle station. I pocket my guide and we plod up the stairs from below the ground, from the past, as it were, into the sunlight, the biting, wind-swept present.

With a great intellect of our age

Monsieur Mauriac resides in a newly built district of south-western Paris, at No. 38 in the avenue Théophile-Gautier. The house, like the entire quarter, might be on Berlin's Kurfürstendamm, were that not most likely lying in ruins right now. The façade is in the Assyrian style at Babylon; a glazed entrance-gate;

marble staircase, just as in Central Europe; an electric lift, though with the difference here that one does not have to pay for it, indeed does not even have to summon the concierge; after freedom to wield the pen and operate the water tap, the broad masses of the people, with the Westerners in the vanguard in this too, also have the right to operate this contraption. We glide up to the fifth floor with the contraption. Before the door, I exchange glances with my companion, Cs. We are doing the round of the West's greats in the interest of our homeland, albeit without any particular mandate, and thus, we feel, even involuntarily, on behalf of our homeland. We have the feeling that the honour has not been bestowed on us personally, but we are standing here as individuals of a people, the flattering invitation for us to present ourselves having been transmitted to us via the son, Claude by name, of the foremost novelist in world Catholicism of the present day. We ring the doorbell.

A spacious, longish vestibule; off to the left another reception-type room. From here a narrow staircase leads up almost to mezzanine height, and thence almost immediately down, somewhat in the manner of the highly arched footbridges over Italian streams. Into a tastefully furnished, airy study, with enormous windows on the facing wall also. The great writer, a gaunt man of medium height, greets us in well-pressed trousers but shod in fair-sized felt slippers and with a thick sweater under his jacket; it is not exactly warm in the study. It would be impossible to recognise him from older photographs, which show a swarthy, ascetic-looking man.

He has greyed; a pallor suffuses the soft brown hue of the face. He reminds me of the ailing Babits. Likewise in the way he can barely get a sound from his throat; he is able to talk only in an undertone.

Perhaps that is precisely why he hurries his words, his smile, together with the gestures of the head and of the youthful, all but sly eyes.

We stand before him with due deference and a measure of unintentional solemnity, now at a certain remove—two respectful ambassadors from an Eastern tribe, known to him only by hearsay, that, judging from these two random examples (he runs his sparkling gaze over us with sprightly, unfeigned curiosity), he no doubt imagines as being a people with prominent cheekbones, of slightly above-average height, and inclined to premature baldness—and with curt bows of the head, as a form of symbolic gift to the sultan, we both present him with a dedicated copy of the French translations of our works. Though unbidden, we transmit to him the greetings of Hungarian literature and, in hope of gaining their subsequent approval, the gratitude of his Hungarian readers. He is unable to disguise his surprise (turning towards Cs. principally) that, evidently in agreeable contrast to our stiff exteriors and angular faces, we speak his own language fluently and (as far as Cs. is concerned) with near-faultless pronunciation. He offers us seats and cigarettes. He too takes a seat and commences a hand-rubbing that will not be interrupted throughout the whole of our visit and

that we are at a loss to know whether to ascribe to his satisfaction, to the cold, or just a nervous habit.

In keeping with our position, we start the conversation in a roundabout way. We then fire the meaty question at him—giving the impression it was purely on that account that we had boarded a train in Budapest and travelled one and a half thousand kilometres straight here—as to how he sees the future of mankind. With a wave of the hand and a tipping of the smiling features first to one side then the other, he apprises us that he personally sees mankind's future now one way, now the other. He asks how we see the future of mankind. We express our opinions in much the same manner as he. We thereby switch to our second question. Its delivery falls to me; between the two of us, through a purely extraneous circumstance, I seem to be the better qualified.

I am a Catholic. The solace of practising the faith may not have been granted me, but I know almost from experience, on the basis of old memories, the power that religion exerts. As far as the masses go, it is still huge today. In Europe that power, without any doubt, indeed despite the doubts that recur time and time again, is Catholicism. What kind of power is it, where does it stand, and what direction might it take? How does he see the position of Catholicism?

"No priests any longer."

At first, I understand him as meaning that there are not enough clergymen; that is to say, few feel a vocation for in holy orders. He elucidates. True, due to the meagre emoluments, the poor financial state of the church, the number of clerics is dropping. But of those that there are, the great majority are mere administrators! There is virtually no spiritual life in the parishes. They function like tax offices of sorts! What it means to serve the faith is now the preserve of a handful of religious orders—the Dominicans, for example.

If he had a voice, he might be ranting at this point. As it is, he merely huffs and puffs, smiling apologetically during the lulls of his temper. That is touching. It is plain he is the sort of person who can truly come to the boil in a trice. He is full of fire and scorn and courage, yet is unable to discharge it all with the instrument of speech, via his vocal cords. He desists from the hand rubbing and on his knee beats out the pulse of his wan utterances with a delicate fist.

"And the young?"

He does not try to conceal his unfavourable opinion of them behind a smokescreen. His expression, wreathed in apologetic, childlike smiles, again becomes steamed up; struggling with the smile, it even tips over into anger, but only immediately to brighten once more.

We recount that we have just come from Rome. We had been in the Vatican. How spellbinding the splendour and wealth. How it still remains a living, vital power even today.

"Except it has little to do with reality. It is just like a diplomatic court."

I, in particular, find that unsettling. One only vents candour or rancour of this kind amongst like-minded people. I would not like to abuse his confidence, and I therefore again feel it is my duty to inform him that, much as I respect his writings, I am far removed, if not actually opposed, in the matter of my world view. He listens attentively but merely smiles at this too. I tell him we had seen the Pope;[1] judging from his expression he had struck me as being highly intelligent.

There is not one sound in the French and Hungarian languages which is absolutely identical; even the *m*'s and *l*'s are pronounced with different nuances. Similar subtle shades of difference exist between the connotations of the words in most common everyday use. It is possible to translate exactly the same expression in three different ways. It is for this reason I feel it necessary to depart from custom and set down his words in the original.

But no, I won't set them down in the original either. On second thoughts, even doing that, I feel, would be a form of poaching. Our conversation had taken on an increasingly confidential tone, and I am left having to judge for myself what part of it he would have intended to be made public. A sentence ripped out of context can sometimes denote precisely the opposite of what it meant within a train of thought.

He drew parallels between the present and the previous pope.[2] In the matter of sharpness of mind, or insight, or understanding, or knowledge, or erudition, or expertise, or ability to reach secret agreement, indeed such secret dealings themselves—that is to say, in all the things to which the French *intelligence* corresponds in Hungarian—the previous pope had shown himself to be the greater man. Simpler but with a wider perspective, he felt. The present one he had already been acquainted with when he was still a cardinal.

"C'est un homme qui tend à la sainteté."[3]

Yet it is as though he was also expressing a hint of reproof with that laudatory declaration. As though one might strive for holiness for oneself, out of selfishness as it were.

He reverts to how disastrous mixing diplomacy with religious affairs may be. He profoundly disapproves of the church's conduct in the Spanish Civil War, for instance. The church's place then would have been on the left. As on so many occasions since.

I tactlessly enquire, "Like now as well?"

It is well known, of course, that after his close and ardent cooperation with far left-wingers in the Resistance, he has now turned against them too in a number of articles.

His religious conviction does not influence his political persuasion. Yes, he had worked together with left-wingers for years. He had been one of the first to join the *maquis,* and he would be the first to enlist whenever he might see

1 Pius XII (Eugenio Pacelli; 1939–58).
2 Pius XI (Achille Ratti; 1922–39).
3 He's a man striving for saintliness.

France's independence come under threat. He discourses on how the workers' parties were thinking and politicising too much in an international context, or in other words not from a sufficiently French viewpoint.

The reason we are here is in order to listen to all shades of opinion.

"So in your view what guarantees France's complete independence?"

"The Atlantic Charter!"

"And the Atlantic Charter?"

"The Anglo-Saxons," he says with a chuckle, acknowledging in advance the impasse in a chain of thought which predicates an independence from the international setting that is ultimately dependent on another nation's policy.

I ask him:

"What is the explanation for the latest big advances that the Communists have made?"

With an expression of astonishment that he needs to explain such a thing, he answers:

"That is now the people's party."

This people, this *peuple,* is not pronounced with quite the same nuance as it has when we Hungarians say it, as it had when Petőfi said it. Nor, of course, the way it must have sounded on the lips of Marie Antoinette. It sounds the way it would be used by the son of a wealthy patrician family from the Bordeaux region who lives amongst books and is an Academician.

Their strength is their organisation. Their newspapers and publications percolate into even the tiniest village; they are gaining many adherents even amongst the peasants.

"By what means?"

"What peasant anywhere in the world bothers himself with abstract thinking? Direct, practical solutions are what speak to them. One cannot reproach them for that."

"And in the cities?"

This is a matter that he does not understand either. That is precisely why he has just written about it (smile) in a leading article to be published tomorrow. Intellectuals have a clear picture of the difficulties of socialism. They do not live in a fool's paradise. They are familiar with anti-Communist literature. Koestler's books have passed through everyone's hands. Yet they still gravitate to the far left without any reservation, youngsters in particular. Perhaps purely because that is the rising tide; that's what carries and sweeps them along. Perhaps it is not the mind that is moved but the temperament. The French are a hot-blooded people. Or perhaps those who still have the future before them consider this as a way of insuring themselves.

I express my own notion, or rather hope: the next half century for Europe is going to be concerned with how each people achieves socialism in accordance with its situation. So that unity and peace in Europe can at last be established as a result of this.

He too approves of socialism. Expropriating the means of production from the hands of a minority—no one can raise any objection to that. The big question, though, is how those means of production should be transferred as speedily and completely as possible into the hands of the majority, the masses, rather than a new minority.

We get up. Now it is his turn to pose a question, having shyly confessed that he knows a thing or two about us Hungarians. During the First World War he had served at Salonika; he had taken the greatest pleasure in observing the life of the peasants of that region, and was entranced to see how much they resembled French farmers. He had made several trips out of Scutari into "the interior of the country". He speaks passionately about these reminiscences and the landscape, about Yugoslavia's diverse peoples. We too are associated with that. So enthusiastic and courteous are the praises he heaps upon us that, for a moment, I am assailed by a doubt over whether he still recollects precisely which remote people we introduced ourselves as being the sons of.

On their language

At the first French sentences I inhale and exhale the atmosphere like the smoke of a long-craved cigarette. I tingle agreeably. Before long, however, the constant titillation dispirits and stupefies me. My palate dries out, my eyes blur, my head throbs, just like after overindulging in nicotine. I am incapable of a wholesome thought. I am indubitably in the grip of an overdose of French.

My throat quakes, my vocal cords pant in distress, my jaw is stiff from fatigue. I have had to speak French since eight o'clock this morning, and it is now evening. I have not had the chance to utter a mouthful of Hungarian the whole day long. Even now I have been conversing non-stop for two hours with a lady who, elderly though she may be, is twittering away like a fledgling bird. I have the feeling that the very convolutions of my brain have seized up. I would like to rinse out my throat and my brain too a little. To that end—begging the lady's pardon—I turn aside for a moment and softly, but scrunching every syllable, I quickly enunciate a splendid Hungarian tinker's cuss and then a juicy tap-room profanity. The experiment, which I commend to everybody, succeeds admirably. For five minutes I flawlessly rattle off Racine's exquisite verbs anew.

The ambition finally to master French is at last kindled within me. I don't wish to speak it 'perfectly', any more than I speak Hungarian 'perfectly', nor shall I ever do so, I can see that already. All I want is to be able to use the language without getting tired. For that purpose, I try to practice my ability as it stands now. I soon come to the realisation that practice in this is not the same as it is in the domain of physical training: I am not putting on any new muscles through it. This means of communicating my thoughts, far from being sharpened by use, only wears out and becomes blunted. It is not my vocabulary that

becomes exhausted but I myself. This is not some deficiency peculiar to me. We are again in a convivial French gathering, and we have not had a chance to speak a word of Hungarian today either. One is obliged to change conversation partners every half hour, and I am now on the fourth. Cs., who speaks the language twice as well as I do, all of a sudden steps up to me:

"Let's go. Instead of *chef de section* I have just said *section de chef.* I'm done for. Next thing I'll be saying *air de courant.*"

We go, but we are joined, along with his wife, by one of our dear, clever French acquaintances, the very one who, perhaps, has worked hardest to give some sense to our stay here. The hours of talking have really served just as a warm-up to bring him into top form. He now produces the cream of his wit. We listen despondently. Finally, after due courtesies, straining the last drop of energy, we falteringly say farewell and take our leave.

We plonk ourselves down on a bench in the street, having mutely offered one another a place. We stretch our legs, raise our faces towards the wintry heaven, and for a good half an hour do nothing but maintain a precious and profound silence, yet now in Hungarian.

That rest, the physical and mental bliss of that thorough airing, will be an abiding memory.

One cannot serve two Gods

Their *i*'s shriek, as when one's throat is being throttled; their *t*'s and *d*'s, which detonate from the back of the teeth, I perceive at some times as lisping, at others as dull drumbeats; in articulating the *a*'s and *e*'s their lips jerk apart as if being twitched back by a bridle; they eructate their *u*'s from somewhere deep within their bellies; for their *r*'s, mastery of which no mortal has yet managed to acquire from them, they do not employ the tip of the tongue which offers itself for the purpose but an appendage that it did not so much as cross the mind of any other European people to use, the little flap which dangles down from the soft palate, which for this purpose they let slip to the back of the pharynx and roll there; one would be able to imitate their b's and *p*'s more successfully by abandoning any experimentation with the lips and instead clutch a violin string, giving a quick twang on it at the appropriate moment. Their articulation in its entirety is tense and impassioned; they speak with a perpetual setting of every muscle of the head and neck into violent motion and dance, because this is important for them. They feel they are bound scrupulously to express everything that pops into their heads instantaneously, as if they did not think just with their brains but simultaneously with their mouths. At any rate, the transmission of driving-belt and cogwheels between the two seems to be more direct than with other peoples. Compared to their voices, our Hungarian ones shamble and loaf, barely managing to trundle the thought out. Yet what is it which makes that way of speaking so melodious and engaging on the lips of their women? What can

make it like a wild beast's howls on those of men? And why is it inimitable in both this and that? Because, in point of fact, it does not sound from the oral cavity, the pharynx and the tongue (the latter, incidentally, being inflected not just downwards but also upwards, towards the palate). The secret of their pronunciation—as of that of every other people's, by the way—inheres in their constitution. The language lesson, then, ought to start there.

At a time when I did not yet know that, however, and I still believed it was best to express our thoughts hot off the press, there and then (not measuring one's words beforehand), I too made an attempt to acquire their pronunciation. I soon abandoned it. I considered it was a form of treason to dangle the little flap of my soft palate in my pharynx and rattle it there. It does not become a real man, not even if he chances upon that flap in his mouth, though I myself have not yet hit upon it to the present day as it happens. There was a moment when I was able to articulate the *o* and *a* of that renowned *oi* as a single phoneme. That too made me uncomfortable. Pliancy and adaptability of that kind are truly more for women. We consider it natural and touching if a woman gives up everything that is hers to move to the country of the man she loves and become a mother to children of a foreign people. We consider it just as natural and charming if they chatter in a foreign language with unobtrusive perfection. Obviously, nature has bestowed on them the ability to be faithful and self-sacrificing mothers of the mother language of any foreign people whatever. As far as men are concerned, it is something else that moves me.

Already during my very first stay in Paris I made the acquaintance of a man. I did not know what his nationality was; we were amongst Frenchmen, and the conversation proceeded in French. He spoke the language with the greatest imaginable perfection, but what won my admiration most of all was his pronunciation. It was resonant, warm and genuinely human. I listened to him with ever greater enchantment; all at once an ardour engulfed my heart. After a brief tussle, I plucked up the courage and addressed the following to him in French:

"Monsieur, you would not happen to come from the county of Somogy?"

I think that I will be shedding light rather than shade on him if I disclose his identity. It was A[lbert] Gy[ergyai], one of Hungary's outstanding French linguists.

Let he who swaps homelands swap his soul. I seek merely to enrich my soul. I want to swap thoughts and experiences. Yes, I would also like to be polished and honed—but in order to be all the more serviceable as a Hungarian in the hands of a single humanity.

Greetings

What should I bring back for him? For him, from Paris, as a token of forgiveness and apology? A single flower stem, I thought. He might misunderstand that, though. However much they may be a symbol of peace and love, only in China as far as I know is the giving of flowers between men customary.

A handspan-high Eiffel tower as a paperweight? But it is hypocritical to give a present that we personally would accept with grateful smile and eyelids fighting to hold back the tears only for as long as the one bearing the gift was standing before us, yet the moment his back was turned would gladly pitch the object between his shoulder blades, let him rot for his taste. The most fitting would be to surprise him with something that, besides being appealing, he will be able to make good use of in practising his trade: a magnifying glass, for example, in a version of a watchmaker's loupe custom-made for the purpose of determining in a trice what is concealed at the bottom of a lady's handbag. Or a silver skeleton key that would instantly open all the suitcase locks in the world; no doubt a lot of his time is also wasted by the age-old experience that travellers regularly fail to find the keys to their suitcases at the fishiest moments, and even when, having searched through all their jacket pockets and the pockets of the overcoat hanging over the seat to boot, they finally come across it in their wife's purse, it is only at the cost of a protracted and gripping struggle that they are able to prevail upon the puny lock to submit. Or should I have someone extemporise an ingeniously constructed hand-held X-ray torch that would not only display any swallowed gold there happened to be in a person's stomach but would also detect, in the blink of an eye, the mysteries of shoes with cavities in the heels, false-bottomed trunks, suspiciously bulky book covers, and unusually heavy walking sticks? But there is an etiquette even for giving presents: an inordinately valuable gift to a casual acquaintance has the effect of overfamiliarity. I feel the torch would be a tad expensive, and thus ostentatious and forward; our acquaintance would run to something like a pipe or a pack of American cigarettes. But then won't he regard that as an insinuation, nay bribery? I don't know the chap even that much! I know only myself, but then myself all too well. My giving a present is, in point of fact, a need on my part, it becomes clear to me.

I would like to give not so much a gift as a response of some kind, not just to him personally but to all those whom fate singles out for that arduous vocation of being dispatched, like torpid guard dogs, into the raw, icy night to loll and loaf about and scratch themselves before diverse barriers, fences and gates, deprived of any spiritual fellowship, any at all, with their owner and the inhabitants of the house, and who are thereby condemned by destiny to what, in the vernacular sense of the expression, is truly a dog's life. Whom, for that reason alone, it behoves me—a long-time, faithful friend to dogs—to console and placate. My soul is urging me to do this, maybe even as a penance for the fang-baring, wolfish moods that overcome even me every once in a rare while. A soul alert to their worries is urging me to this, as I again snuggle drowsily against a compartment wall, heading once more towards a barrier. I would like to prevail on them at least to try and be human.

Were I to have an exact replica made of the Bourbon sceptre that is placed on public display on high days and holidays, I would hide it away with devilish cun-

ning, and only after our transactions were concluded would I hand it over to him with the same simple flourish with which one produces a half-crown after all from the waistcoat pocket for one's godson out in the country. Or what if, after that, I too were to discover the secret of the atomic bomb, setting down the manufacturing process, indeed the procedure for preparing a home-made version, in detailed plans, and hand this bundle of plans, inscribed 'Secret of the Atom Bomb', over to him, likewise as a farewell encore? Then, having taken my leave, hold up from the train, as it was pulling out, an astonishingly realistic papier-mâché model of the freshly decapitated head of the unfortunate Louis XVI.

There is no need for me to explain why, straight after that, it occurred to me that, what if, before leaving the frontier, standing on the steps of the railway carriage, I were swiftly to present him a small, coloured devotional picture, wordlessly, without batting an eyelid, or at most just making with my right hand an eloquent sign of the cross over him, in the sense of peace upon earth and God be with us sinners.

It is not he who is the sinner, not they who are the sinners. They are merely the tip at the end of the whip with which humanity scourges its own body, and thus the bit that cracks upon our flesh. Let us not crack the whip unnecessarily, not lend force to the blow of our own accord—that, to start with, is what I would ask for to vanquish sin and improve our lives. That is a big thing in itself.

It is a start, after all.

A chance event nevertheless switches my placatory fancy back to flowers. On the day of my departure they were selling mimosa for the first time on the streets of Paris. They were also selling it by the train that was waiting at the railway station. My younger brother bought a bunch as well—not for me, of course, but for his fiancée—and one of the twigs, the largest, ended up with me, from the fiancée. There it is, right now, on top of my luggage.

What if I were to hand that over, after all? I would tie a golden ribbon round it in a dainty bow, attaching to the end a piece of paper the size of a calling card upon which, instead of my name, would stand no more than *'A true European'*. Or perhaps: *'The last Christian'*. That sort of thing can sometimes say more than even the grandest name. Possibly: *'One who wished to be a cosmopolitan'*. Perhaps both, or even all three together. But would he, I wonder, understand it all the same? Whether this or that side of borders, or within borders, the sharing of understanding between one person and another is the most complicated of relationships. How many difficulties surround just form and content! The shape and weight of our rifle bullets is similar around the world, but that is less true of our thoughts. This is obviously connected with the considerably greater ease with which we exchange, dispatch and receive a nicely whistling bullet into our heads, our hearts and our bellies than the most resonant thought or most melodious sentiment. Most depressing of all, we are already incapable of even comprehending this absurdity. Maybe if I were to attempt it in verse, for which there

have been precedents—maybe by rewriting something on the lines of *"Hic fuit Matthias rex et commovit ova sex."** Sadly, it has got to the point where we no longer even see the joke in a joke. What if I were to express myself directly and write *'Down with insanity! Keep on smiling!'* Or maybe, even more directly: *'Don't bother hurrying—I'm an unswerving optimist!'*

Nothing came of any of this. I was not done with wording the inscriptions, nor even—so many suggested themselves—thinking them over and selecting them, when all of a sudden we arrived at the frontier. It was night-time. Drawing back the curtains on the compartment window, I looked out for my chap. At heart, I would have spared even him the trouble of having to pace about the wind-swept platform of the deserted station instead of dreaming peacefully in a snug bed. Equally, though, my heart was just as set on him being the one who represented the authorities in our carriage. No one at all entered our carriage, however. To be honest, I fumed about whether to beckon him to me. I had just spent five weeks out of my short life in the country whose security he had been entrusted to maintain. The mischievous thought crossed my mind that I should demand he search what I was bringing with me out of Paris, or rather what I was taking away in exchange for the irreplaceable five weeks that I had left behind there. I was ready to declare everything, for it was anyway my aim to render an account of it to myself. I finally spotted him. Further off, towards the front of the train, he was standing by a column, legs straddled, hands thrust deep into the pockets of his cape. He was clearly freezing. He was smoking without so much as once raising a hand to his cigarette; it was stuck to his lower lip, being thrust up from there for each drag. The eddying long ribbon of smoke thus spilled out largely through his nose, which was turned almost separately into the wind. His face was impassive. He was looking rigidly in the direction the train was pointed, to the east; one had the idea he could see all the way to Kamchatka. He was bored, visibly so, indeed peering into the distance by way of appearing busy, or in other words grudgingly putting on a show, like a mediocre bronze statue. That prompted the further idea that he was hollow inside and would respond to a rap with a lifeless thud—a notion, I would add, that unavoidably springs to mind whenever I see rigidity of any kind. I have the feeling it would be pointless to try with him. A symbol, that is what you are, I muse. I sense the awesome scale, even today, of what he symbolises.

He symbolises mistrust and everything that springs from that. Ultimately, the terrifying murderous lust that might be represented, not by him, but by a statue like that: a prehistoric man in animal skins stands before his cave, peering into the distance beneath his dog-skull cap, a massive cudgel in his hand, straining and fearful with every nerve in his body in case others are not going to be afraid of him. The spectacle is degrading.

* "King Matthias was here, and six eggs he consumed." A legendary inscription by the 15th-century Hungarian king, who reputedly travelled around his realm in disguise. – The Editor.

As a result, I am gripped by fear for just a minute—a perception at which I myself, in my entirety so to say, am disposed to cheer up. "What have I to fear?" I muse. I can wait. I am a champion of understanding. I wish to fight hubris and selfishness of every sort, all isolation and self-imposed seclusion, indeed all borders, with the strongest weapon of all times: unfaltering tolerance. I do not doubt the legitimacy of other weapons; tolerance has no bounds either, and my toleration is no false front. It's just that I believe that the tip of a well-directed smile is the best way, if not of bringing one's enemy down, then of operating upon him, excising the vile malady from which he too suffers. I return home reinforced in the belief that we should contend only with our ills, not with one another. I have to declare that I acquired this contraband some time ago here, in France. I let the curtains fall and turn my back to the compartment wall. It comes to mind that I am from Rácegres. That sparks a droll smile, since I left Rácegres ages ago, and I am not bringing the news to the plainland farmstead there, nor is it from Ozora, 20 kilometres away. But the train's growing clickety-clacking lulls me back again into the shaking of the horse-drawn cart, with its clattering forage rack, as it jolts across a bridge. What filters out the dark thoughts before they percolate down from my head and become my blood? What was it that made me unable to despair even in desperate situations? I don't believe that nations differ so much. If the way is clear, they come together readily enough, in keeping with their strata. I am solid, son of a hardy and solid people that has grown wise in misfortune, with optimism as my far from negligible shield. ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

László Mravik

Plucked from the Abyss of Oblivion

Jankovich Miklós (1773–1846) gyűjteményei (The Collections of Miklós Jankovich 1773–1846). Catalogue of the Exhibition at the Hungarian National Gallery, 28 November 2002–16 February 2003, Buda Castle. Budapest, Hungarian National Gallery, 2002, 413 pp.

The proper remembering of forebears is a basic requirement in a normal society. European cultures, as high modern cultures, measure themselves by their intellectual, scientific, artistic and political achievements; they also endeavour to preserve them from the ravages of time and to rescue from oblivion those that were lost. Not as intellectual playthings, but as shapers of the age in which they lived. A man who has once performed a great deed exerts an influence which has become part of our everyday lives even if we are unaware of it.

Still influential on our everyday are the founders of public collections and those who filled them with valuable material, developing the tiny and provincial into the great and international; the fruits of their activity may be assessed in our present museums, libraries and archives. These are the flagships of culture, of socio-historical research, of education in culture and history. The first exhibition in Budapest of selected items from the by now scattered collections of Miklós Jankovich, the most important Hungarian art collector of all times, provides a good occasion here for a brief review of the antecedents and the impact of his activity. The life work of Miklós Jankovich has left its mark—a powerful one in some respects, a lesser though still considerable one in others—even though the most productive period of his life coincided with an era which is considered sleepy and boring: the narrow interval, roughly from 1800–1830, between the Enlightenment and what is called the Reform Period in Hungary.

This period was both the end and the beginning of something important. Enlightened absolutism, a success in some countries in Western Europe (and even in Austria), was a failure here. The Habsburg rulers, Maria Theresa and her son Joseph II, attempted to make the people of Hungary happy with the best of inten-

---

László Mravik

is author of North Italian Fifteenth Century Paintings, *Corvina, 1978, published also in Russian, French, German and Hungarian and* The Sacco di Budapest and Depredation of Hungary 1938–1945, *Budapest, 1998.*

tions, but their methods did not always yield the best results. Maria Theresa's attempts at easing the burden of the serfs aroused the heated opposition of the landowning nobility, even if the Queen's measures were indirectly aimed at improving agriculture, from which the landowning class, and especially the large landowners, would have benefited. In the second, more peaceful, half of her reign, however, she came to realise, at least in part, her ambitions, with effects that were not later completely eliminated. Joseph II, more consistent and rigorous, strove for more fundamental changes, introduced a totally new and effective administration, doing his best to put an end to the privileges of the county nobility—those bastions of Hungarian backwardness. The Hungarian Estates regarded this as meddling with the Hungarian constitution on a scale that demanded their opposition. The intro-duction of German as the language of administration was interpreted as a violent assault on the national character (although the language of administration had previously been Latin, not Hungarian). Joseph II was neither a nationalist by nature nor biased in favour of the Germans; nor did he vacillate when, for the sake of centralisation, he abolished by decree the rights to self-determination of the Saxons of Upper Hungary and Transylvania. He was finally forced to concede that his efforts at modernisation were futile because of the almost solid opposition in the country.

Leopold II, his successor, abandoned the enlightened form of absolutism. Menaced by both the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, the beleaguered emperors Leopold and Francis considered that the continued existence of the Habsburg Empire required a bureaucratic-military style of absolutist control; the latter, especially, regarded intellectual accomplishments of a high order with suspicion. Francis I was a civil servant of an emperor, like more than one Habsburg. He was by no means unsuccessful, but immobility and immutability chimed in closely with the corrupt values of the Hungarian Estates. In the early years of his reign, however, he had to bloodily surpress the Hungarian Jacobin movement because of the threat which it presented, symbolic rather than substantial though this was—it had a handful of supporters, mostly drawn from the common nobility and the clergy of common nobility origin. Although the Hungarian nobility had been by no means enthusiastic in support of the Jacobins, it protested against the arbitrary means used in the suppression and against the execution of their leaders—because these were noblemen. In other respects, however, they tolerated as well as might be both Francis' practice of carrying out his plans by decree and through measures for which he needed the authorisation of the Hungarian Parliament. There were some in his entourage on whom Francis looked manifestly askance, and indeed, he totally banished from his court Count György Festetics (1755–1819), one of the most popular of Hungarian aristocrats. This did not, however, inhibit the Count's inclination to found schools and encourage the arts, nor his work for the advancement of culture in Hungary.

Nevertheless, if not exactly overnight, it became clear that Francis' absolutist notions were untenable. The Emperor did not actually like dealing with

Hungarian affairs, but focused his energies on the development of Austria, Moravia and Bohemia—that is, the richer lands of his inheritance, which had not been occupied and devastated by the Turks and which did not trouble his rule with legalistic bickering. Very gradually, his every action clashed with the interests of the Hungarian Estates, and the Vienna administration and the Emperor's practices furthered the backwardness of Hungary. Certain decrees of Maria Theresa, forcible modernisation by Joseph II and the short-sighted and blinkered autocracy of Francis I, combined with the domestic troubles of the country, the grinding poverty of the common people, the woeful state of public health and the backwardness of industry and commerce, combined into a unified force: more and more people longed for change and for more bourgeois ways. Some did this because they were temperamentally so inclined, some for political reasons, others as opportunity arose in their official capacities. They included conservatives and radicals, but radicalism did not turn into republicanism until 1848.

Bourgeois progress in Hungary, however, was beset with unheard of difficulties. First of all, the bourgeoisie was only a minute stratum of society. The majority were also of foreign speech, for the most part town-dwelling Germans. Just at the start of the 19th century there was an increase in the number of those active in county administration and in the law, and gradually an intelligentsia of sorts emerged among the industrial and commercial classes. Everything that tended towards uniting these and fending off the unpopular measures of the Court found a natural home within the framework of national unity. In the society of the Hungarian Estates, however, 'the nation' meant simply the nobility and the senior clergy, together with citizens of towns, all of whom jealously guarded their privileges. They were the only ones to possess any political rights. The narrowness of this outlook became ever more obvious, but combatting it involved the abolition of centuries-old privileges. And, naturally, the growth as quickly and effectively as possible of the bourgeoisie. All this offered a long, painful road, which the nobility—taking the place of a non-existing powerful bourgeoisie—appreciated, and a rational and ever more patriotic part of it was ready to undertake.

It was, however, the great landed proprietors, men of great incomes and imbued with patriotism, who were to undertake work of substance—as they had done for a long time. The first outstanding individual was Count Ferenc Széchényi (1754–1820), who offered his collection of books, engravings and coins for the foundation of a Hungarian National Museum (1802). Subsequently items were added to Széchényi's from various other collections, most famous of which is that of the Marczibányis, that most wealthy, generous and noble-spirited of Hungarian families, and a collection of minerals too was presented to the new establishment. Even with these, however, the Hungarian National Museum was able to cover only a few aspects of Hungarian culture. There were relatively few items of international interest and for some time it was ill equipped for research in a wider sphere.

It was thanks to Miklós Jankovich that it became possible to raise the material of the Hungarian National Museum to European standards. That includes not only museum items in the traditional sense of the term but also the library (at that time the two functioned together, as they did for a considerable time afterwards: the National Széchényi Library only left the hallowed walls when it acquired a new home in the Royal Palace in Buda Castle in the 1960s).

Jankovich had received a first-class education. Like almost every nobleman and the literati of the day, he studied law, but devoted all his time to collecting, which inevitably seriously inhibited his practice. The University of Nagyszombat (Tyrnau-Trnava), which had moved to Pest, following a decree by Maria Theresa, opened great vistas for him in his education. The teaching staff was exceptionally strong, a significant number of the foreign-trained outstanding historians, librarians, archivists and antiquarians were Jesuits. (The order was not long afterwards banned by Joseph II.) His teachers and tutors introduced him to every subject necessary for his later interests; later he acquired the collections of several of them. The formation in his lifetime of the first significant Hungarian archives had a beneficial influence on him as did numismatic plates and other specialist books and descriptions of a number of larger Hungarian collections. That was the time when the first great Hungarian historical compilations appeared, among which mention will be made of only the most significant, that of Márton György Kovachich (1744–1821), who was basically a legal historian, a scholarly publisher of sources and one of the most universally-spirited social historians of the age. From him and other outstanding scholars (György Pray, Dániel Cornides, István Schönwisner, Miklós Révai, etc.) Jankovich learnt respect for sources, and that led to his love of books, his painstaking collecting of old documents, and his assessment of works of art—as distinct from most of his contemporaries—with a care for their authenticity. To this may be attributed the fact that the high proportion of copies and forgeries which deceived most contemporary collectors is not in evidence in his case, and hardly any forgeries came into his hands. He made occasional mistakes, but the forgeries that he accepted were only unmasked in recent times, and scholars treated them as originals for a hundred and fifty years. On the other hand, even those forgeries are to his credit, such as, for example, an aquamanile in the shape of a female head supposed to represent Athéné, undoubtedly the work of an artist of genius, now considered to date from about 1800. Even on this question, however, despite all appearances, it is not certain that the last word has been spoken. Jankovich's few errors in no way detract from any assessment of his collection, of which one can speak only with praise and deep appreciation. Jankovich himself was not guilty of false modesty, and knew precisely the value of his collecting. He actually describes it in one of his appeals, and had the following text appended to the 1830 portrait engraving by Sámuel Lenhardt:

> I have plucked from the abyss of oblivion the heroic deeds of our ancestors, their fashions and their works; I have tracked down their monuments that had been exiled, scattered throughout the world, by the tempestuous ravages of time, and, being fortunate enough to find them, have brought them home; sacrificing of my own life and wealth I have thus brought to new life that Hungarian dawn which had vanished from us, been forgotten, and was all but dead and buried.

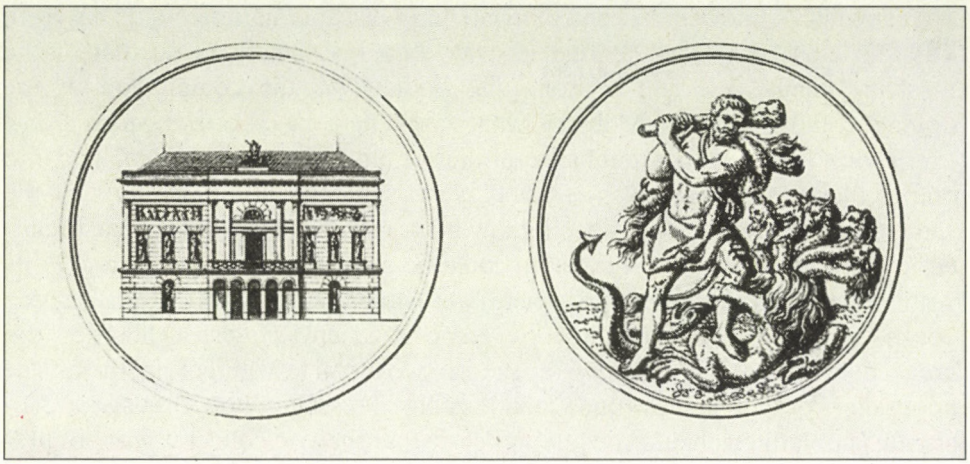
His contemporaries felt his justifiable pride to be conceit, some envied him, others mocked him behind his back and slandered him. An even greater trouble is that to this day historians have misinterpreted the phrase "I have thus brought to new life that Hungarian dawn", and see in it support for the view that Jankovich was in his time a living fossil, driven only by nostalgia for the (supposedly) glorious past, the idea of the "noble nation", which rested on the mothball-scented society of the Estates and its feudal basis. Quite the reverse: Jankovich understood perfectly well the cultural mind-set of the years between 1780–1810, shaped by the delayed Enlightenment. All his writings and actions bear witness to the fact that from the start he collected with the intention of creating a collection for his country. From Ferenc Széchényi's donation onward, this pointed in the direction of the National Museum, both for Jankovich and for others.

Evidence exists that in the closing years of the 18th century Jankovich (whose father owned a collection of antiques and a library which attracted the attention of experts) bought several large and small objets d'art, primarily from the common nobility living in obscurity in Upper Hungary (such as Károly Fejérváry and Sámuel Székely of Doba). The flow of these objects to Jankovich's house in Pest, took place mainly in the years between 1805 and 1820, and it was at the beginning of this period that the 'infrastructure' was set up, and began to function as a motor for the whole of Hungary, and indeed Austria, Bohemia, Germany, and sporadically, North Italy too. We can be almost certain that his agents were also active in some regions of divided Poland, although the difficult circumstances pertaining there provided relatively few opportunities for the full exploitation of the region, rich though it was in relics of Hungarian association. The principal territory was, however, the larger towns and stately homes of Upper Hungary, the whole of Transylvania and Vienna, but Jankovich also succeeded in insinuating himself into the pictures of Hungarian relevance in the Fugger collection. Jewish dealers in precious metals did him the greatest service and, apart from the Esterházy treasure, his incomparable historical silverware and jewellery came to him through them. These middlemen (principally the Pest dealer Izsák Totesz, an expert with an educated eye) did not send off the gold jewellery, the coins and silver that was brought to them for sale to be melted down but offered it to Jankovich. Friendly though their collaboration was, their prices were less so, although it is true that for the most part they provided important pieces, among which were many enamelled items, and more than one with dozens, sometimes hundreds of diamonds and other precious and semi-precious stones.

Meanwhile Jankovich succeeded in merging sizeable libraries with his own, the most significant to find its way onto his shelves being that of the Illésházy family. His aim in collecting books was the compilation of the Common Hungarian Public Library, what would be a canon of *Hungarica* today. Every book whose author, publisher, printer or binder—perhaps only falling into one of these categories—was of Hungary was guaranteed a place in it. At the same time there was also a place for any book whose subject was at least related to Hungary, even if no Hungarian could be shown to have had a hand in its writing, printing or publishing. There were many such among the Illésházy books, as there had been among Ferenc Széchényi's. Lesser libraries too aroused his interest if there were one or two notable volumes in them. The booksellers of Vienna, Pest-Buda, and Pozsony (Pressburg, now Bratislava) constantly kept Jankovich informed. It was clear that the avid collector was not prepared to forgo a good work of art or book. It is no surprise that he acquired Corvinas from King Matthias' famous Library (the Ransanus codex), but his Greek, Hebrew, Persian and Slavonic books accumulated, as did his considerable collection of prime quality German MSS from the eleventh to the sixteenth centuries. Mention should also be made of his magnificent collection of maps, among which were some outstanding early maps of Hungary.

Meanwhile, he also purchased weapons with significant historical associations, often connected with princes; these were mostly from Transylvania, and included Prince János Kemény's sabre and long-hafted battle-axe for mounted use. Some of the horse equipage must have merely served to fill gaps in the collection, suggesting the way that things had been. As, however, every stately home abounded with the like, and Jankovich was primarily anxious to collect items liable to be lost for ever, he paid them little attention. His coin collection too grew to a great size and contained ancient Greek, Roman and Byzantine coins, together with specimens both from the Age of Migrations and of medieval date; his Hungarian collection, however, grew to almost near completeness by the standards of the time. He exchanged a goodly proportion of his ancient gold coins—and perhaps some money too—for old jewellery of Hungarian association that belonged to Count Mihály Viczay (1756–1831), but he never sold items from his Hungarian numismatics collection. He possessed the finest Hungarian coin of all time, the 100-ducat of Prince Michael Apafi I of Transylvania (1632–90, reigned from 1661) with its wonderful blend of the silversmith's craft and the highest art of the miniaturist, and in addition a whole range of Apafi's rare and brilliant coinage. The countless items in Jankovich's *Müntzkabinett* illustrated the whole of Hungarian history.

The formation of his collection of pictures, sculptures, bone-carvings and ivories proceeded, as far as we can judge, on a different course. He owned few pieces of sculpture, and those were chance acquisitions rather than the result of deliberate pursuit. Well informed though he was in the assessment of monuments of antiquity, he was less confident on medieval statuary. This may presum-



Josef Daniel Böhm: Design for a commemorative medal commissioned by Miklós Jankovich for the inauguration of the Hungarian Theatre of Pest, the first National Theatre, 1837. Obverse and reverse, Indian ink on paper. 78 x 169 mm.

ably explain why he acquired relatively few items, although he did obtain one splendid piece of work—a wonderful small marble Madonna by Andrea Pisano. The paintings belong to two categories: the first contains those of historical significance, most of which are portraits, rare of their type, but from the artistic point of view modest productions; the second, on the other hand, are pictures of unknown origin but artistically often of high quality.

In this regard one can only refer once again with the greatest approval to Miklós Jankovich's flair and imagination. He did not invest his money in the sort of thing that others would also buy, did not endeavour to acquire pictures of dubious origin and authorship that were adorned with great names. In some counties of Upper Hungary, however, he bought several dozen dismantled altar pieces, or fragments of them, things that awaited almost certain destruction. Each of these was Gothic in style, and as such both the fashion and art historians of the day considered them of little value, but Jankovich saw in them not merely works of art but documentary material which demonstrated the standard of medieval Hungarian panel painting. These works were produced in Upper Hungary, and although the artists were not necessarily ethnic Hungarians, still they reflect the high artistic culture of the country in the late Middle Ages, especially when we take into consideration the hard fact that in this regard the royal centre was the repository of authority and excellence. The counties of Turóc, Liptó and Sáros, together with the towns of the Szepesség region, where Jankovich obtained the great majority of these items, were classed as provincial, as the sphere of operation of artists of more modest ability compared to the central parts of the country. So great a collection of large-scale Gothic pictures may be regarded as a rarity, if not unique, in the whole of Europe in Jankovich's time.

József Peski (Peschky) (1795–1862):
Portrait of Miklós Jankovich of Vadas.
Hungarian National Museum, Budapest
(on loan to the National Széchényi Library).
Painted in 1823 when Jankovich had
just turned forty.

**"The Jankovics Fragment"
of the Codex Jordánszky, 1519.
Ink and tempera on paper.
National Széchényi Library,
Budapest.**
The two sheets are from the most complete early Hungarian Bible translation, which was first published by Jankovich. As the rest of the Codex was unknown to him, his claims and conclusions proved to be false.

Bohemian painter cca 1420: *Annunciation*.
Tempera on wood, 28.5 x 22 cm.
Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest.
1370–1440 was the golden age of Bohemian painting, exercising a powerful influence within international Gothic art.

Master of Raigern, cca 1430: *The Nativity*.
Tempera on wood, 100 x 72 cm.
Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest.
Originally one of the wings of a Blessed Virgin altarpiece, by one of the most influential painters in southern Bohemia.

Master of the St Stanislas Legend, cca 1500–1510: *The Death of King Boleslav II*.
Oil on wood, gilded. 47.5 x 36 cm.
Hungarian National Museum, Budapest.
One of three fragments from an altarpiece. The other two show the martyrdom of St Stanislas and a miracle associated with his relic. By an outstanding painter in the largely Saxon-inhabited Zips.

Unknown painter, at work in Hungary, 1514: *The Adoration of the Magi.* Tempera on wood. 109 x 102.5 cm. Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.
One of four panels that survived of a large altarpiece by a painter who came to Hungary from some other country, though a Transylvanian connection may exist, too. Not in the 1838 inventory, nevertheless believed to be one of the Jankovich paintings. (Museum tradition)

Austrian (?) painter, 1519 (?): *Portrait of the Dead Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian I.* Oil on wood, 47.5 x 36 cm. Hungarian National Museum, Budapest.
Obtained from the Fugger Collection in Augsburg through the good offices of Johann Jakob Hertel the Elder, a dealer in antiquities.

German painter, second half of the 16th century: *Portrait of Jan Ziska, the Hussite Warlord.* Oil on wood, 74 x 50 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest.
Jankovich presumably successfully bid for it at the 1811 auction of the Birkenstock Gallery in Vienna. Many portraits of the invincible warlord have survived, but not of this type, which is a rarity. Only one other, somewhat later, example is known.

Jacopo Tintoretto or his school, cca 1565–1570: *Portrait of János Zsámboki (Johannes Sambucus)* (?). Oil on canvas, 80.5 x 64 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest.

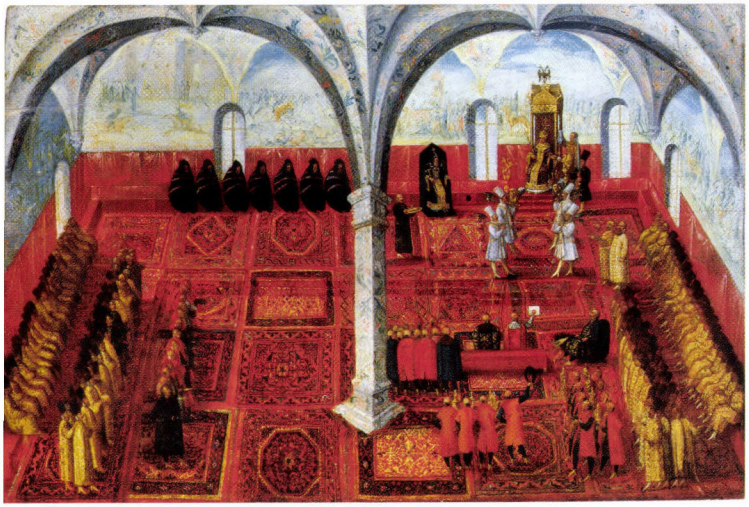
Earlier in the possession of Adam Ferenc Kollár (1716–1783), the Jesuit scholar, bibliophile and historian, and of Sámuel Székely of Doba (1704–1729), Captain of the Foot, collector of coins and medals, portraits of the famous, books and ancient deeds. Both collectors cherished the portrait because of its alleged subject. However, Zsámboki had only been in Italy in his twenties. Zsámboki (1531–1584) was a renowned philologist, historian, poet and physician. Born in Nagyszombat (Trnava), he studied in Vienna, Wittenberg, Paris and Padova, then settled in Vienna. His volume of poems, *Emblemata* (1564), is said to have influenced Shakespeare.

Unknown painter from Hungary, 1645: *Count Nicholas Esterházy (1582–1645).* Oil on canvas, 215 x 129 cm. Hungarian National Museum, Budapest.

This full-length portrait of the Palatine of Hungary and founder of the Esterházy fortune was once on display in the College at Nagyszombat (Tyrnau, Trnava), which had commissioned it to commemorate their patron and benefactor. Nicholas Esterházy himself had it built from his own purse as he also did the church. It is noticeable that the artist took much more care over details in the apparel than over facial features.

David Richter (1662–1735):
Francis II Rákóczi (1676–1736) Prince of Transylvania. Oil on canvas, 77 x 61.5 cm, painted in 1707.
Hungarian National Museum, Budapest.

David Richter (1662–1735):
Charlotte Amalie, Princess of Hesse, Rákóczi's wife. Oil on canvas, 84 x 65 cm, painted in1704.
Hungarian National Museum, Budapest.



Other Paintings

Polish (?) painter cca 1600–1625:
An Embassy at the Kremlin in Moscow. Oil on wood, 43.5 x 64 cm. Hungarian National Museum, Budapest.
From the Fugger Collection in Augsburg.
It was once believed that it represents the emissaries of King Matthias Corvinus to – in his words – *"ad Basilium Magnum Ducem Moscoviae."* It is almost certain, however, that those shown were members of a Polish embassy.

Jean-Étienne Liotard (1702–1798):
Silenus and Putti at Play. Enamel on glass, 24.5 x 27 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest.
Jankovich speaks of it as an important work by Liotard, a frequent visitor to Vienna, where he painted the portraits of Maria Theresa and her consort, Francis of Lorraine. Liotard also worked in Hungary.

Andrea Pisano, cca 1335: *The Virgin and Child.*
White marble, height 31 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest.
The statuette is one of the finest items in the collection,
albeit there are doubts concerning the attribution.

A sculptor from southern Italy cca 1084: *The Creation of Birds and Fishes.*
Ivory relief, 10.6 x 10.4 cm. Museum of Arts & Crafts, Budapest.
As Jankovich reports, this authoritatively composed relief derives from an old church in Salerno and was part of the ornamentation of a large ecclesiastic object. A fair number of related pieces, altogether seventy-one, have survived. The majority are in the Museo Diocesano of Salerno.

The Passion Diptych. Paris, cca 1340.
Ivory, 2 x 12.6 x 9 cm. Museum of Arts & Crafts, Budapest.
Typical of French altars of the time, made for domestic use.
Many of the details of this ingeniously carved piece stand freely in space.

Caspar Fredenberck, 1577: *An Astronomical Table Clock.* Height: 38 cm. Base: 23 x 17 cm. Museum of Arts & Crafts, Budapest.
A type of clock favoured in the Manierist period, a luxury at the time, with rich plastic ornamentation. Fredenberck made the ornamental case, the maker of the works is unknown. Made in southern Germany.

***Ceremonial Silver Vessel.* Work of Ulrich Sautter. (Became a member of the Ulm goldsmiths' guild in 1573). Silver, gilded in part, in the shape of an owl. Height: 30 cm. Museum of Arts & Crafts, Budapest.**
Jankovich claimed that the number 56 on the inside of the stem referred to the year of making, but this is unlikely. The owl's head is the removeable lid.

***The Kölesd Treasure.* Hungary, early 16th century. Hungarian National Museum, Budapest.**
Six silver vessels gilded inside out. The largest is a lidded cup, 22.6 cm in height, the smallest an 8.7 cm-high tumbler. Very likely the treasure was hidden as the Turks advanced in 1526. When discovered, the treasure allegedly consisted of close on forty pieces.

Tankard. Northern Hungary, 1569. Silver, gilded in part. Height: 18.5 cm. Hungarian National Museum. Budapest.

With ancient coins and the head and shoulders portrait of Michael Prock, an official of the Selmecbánya (Schemnitz, Banska Stiavnica) mines. Forty-eight Roman denarii appear on the body, as well as incised inscriptions.

Rock Crystal Jug with Lid. Italy (?), cca 1680. Mounted in gilded silver, with enamel, diamond and semi-precious stones. Height: 20.2 cm. Hungarian National Museum, Budapest.

Earlier in the Buda house of István Marczibányi of Puchó (1752–1810), the most prominent collector in Pest-Buda in the period preceding Jankovich's. Since he obtained many of his pieces from Italy, that can be presumed as the place of origin.

Lidded Ostrich Egg Cup. Johannes Lencker I. (Augsburg goldsmith cca 1570–1637). Silver, gilded in part, cast. Height 50 cm. Museum of Arts & Crafts, Budapest.

On top, Diana accompanied by two dogs.
Also earlier in Marczibányi's collection.

Cruets. Allegedly from Nagyvárad (Oradea). Transylvania, end of the 15th century. Silver, gilt, embossed, filigree decoration, enamelled. Height: 25.3 cm. Hungarian National Museum, Budapest.

Their liturgical use must have ceased early in the 17th century, should they truly be from the Nagyvárad Cathedral. At one time in possession of Count Bethlen of Bethlen.

Patrona Hungariæ Pendant. **Hungary (?), 16th century. Gold, rubies, ronde-bosse enamel. 10.6 x 6.8 cm. Hungarian National Museum, Budapest.**

Jankovich registered it as a votive altar, but there can be no doubt that it is a jewel. He claimed that it had once belonged to Imre Lósy, Archbishop of Esztergom (cca 1580–1642). At one time owned by Count Mihály Viczay the Younger (1756–1831). Lately dated around 1600 and said to have been produced in a German workshop. This, however, would make it difficult to explain the pure Renaissance style. This manner of depicting the Virgin and Child was common in 16th-century southern European jewels, particularly in Spain.

Pendant with Opals. **Hungary or Poland, cca 1600. Gold, rubies, opals, and coloured enamel. 11.5 x 7.1 cm. Hungarian National Museum, Budapest.**

Jankovich bought the jewel from a female member of the Zamoyski family in Vienna. According to him it had once belonged to Isabella, John Zápolya's queen. This, however, is unlikely since Queen Isabella died in 1559 and this jewel could not possibly have been made before the end of the 16th century. It is more likely that the jewel once belonged to Griseldis Báthori, the niece of King Stephen Báthori of Poland (also Prince of Transylvania), who married Chancellor Jan Zamoyski. More has been published about this piece than about any other item in the Jankovich Collection or indeed about any jewel in Hungary

Medallion. **Sebastian Hann. Gold, set in a circle of rubies, enamelled. 5.6 x 4.3 cm. Hungarian National Museum, Budapest.**
It shows the counterfeit of Valentin Franck (1643–1697), Comes of the Saxon Nation in Transylvania, who was the most prominent commissioner of work by Sebastian Hann.

A Bow-Shaped Pendant. **17th century. Gold with filigree ornamentation. 5.2 x 4.9 cm. Hungarian National Museum, Budapest.**
Found in the arch of Count Illésházi's chapel in Trencsén (Trenćin).

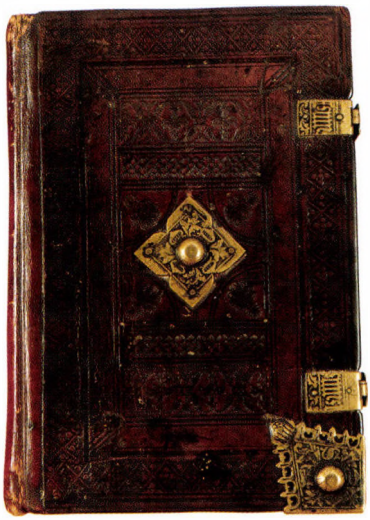
Jewel-Box. **Hans Jakob Mair (1641–1719). Silver, gilt, seven precious stones, coloured enamel. 19 x 31 x 26 cm. Hungarian National Museum, Budapest.**
According to Jankovich's inventory, once owned by the Empress Eleonore. Two smaller intaglio boxes were very likely used as sewing boxes by the Empress.

Bone Saddle. South Tyrol (?), cca 1430. Beech, red cordwain, with a horse or cattle bone and antler cover. 31 x 55 x 48 cm. Hungarian National Museum, Budapest.
Illustrations from St George's legend and a coat of arms. Most likely the 1431 gift of the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund to Vlad II Dracul (reigned 1431–1445), the ruling Prince of Wallachia. For some time in the custody of a Bucharest church. No horse was ever saddled with it.

Double-Barrelled Pistol. Southern German, late-16th century. Length: 54 cm, 11 mm caliber. Hungarian National Museum, Budapest.

Petrus Ransanus: *Epithoma rerum Hungarorum*. 1489–1490, Naples. A Latin manuscript on parchment, 169 sheets, 247 x 163 mm. National Széchényi Library, Budapest.

The miniaturist is presumed to be Neapolitan. Commissioned by King Matthias Corvinus but, since he died before it was completed, it stayed in Italy and was later owned by Tamás Bakócz, Archbishop of Esztergom. The coats of arms are those of King Wladislav II and Tamás Bakócz. Jankovich obtained the codex as part of Count Illésházy's library. The first printed edition was produced by Sambucus.



***Ornamented Binding of the Blessed Margaret Legend*. Hungary, 1510. Red cordwain over wood, with traces of gilding, brass hinges and rosettes. 213 x 145 mm. National Széchényi Library, Budapest.**

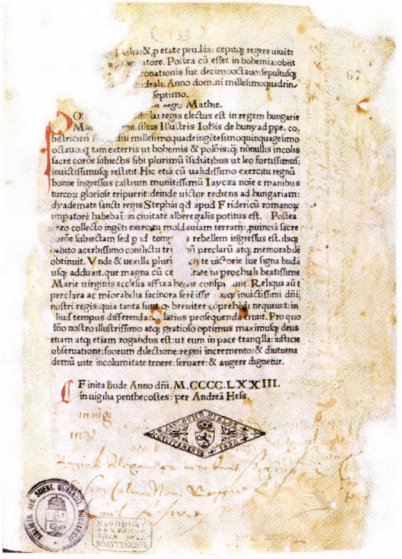
An outstanding item of Hungarian book binding, albeit the hinges are not complete. Jankovich obtained it from Count Mihály Viczay the Younger by way of an exchange.

***György Szentsei's Songbook*. County Veszprém, Hungary. 1704. Handwritten on paper, 159 sheets, 150 x 130 mm. National Széchényi Library, Budapest.**

This outstanding *Hungarica* item is the sole source for around half the poems included. All we know about the compiler is what we can read between the lines of the *Songbook*. Most likely a Transdanubian Protestant with *kuruc* (Hungarian rebel) sympathies.

Church Slavonic Tetraevangelion, Moldavia, 14th–15th centuries. A parchment manuscript. Coloured ink, gold, tempera. 232 sheets, 290 x 260 mm. National Széchényi Library, Budapest.
First published in the National Gallery Catalogue of the Jankovich Exhibition.

Mordechai ben Hillel: *Sefer Mordechai*, (Book of Mordechai). Lower Austrian miniaturist workshop 1372–1373. Hebrew manuscript on parchment, ink, tempera, gold. 338 sheets, 370 x 280 mm. National Széchényi Library, Budapest.
A Christian workshop was responsible for the sumptuous illuminations, and the scribe's knowledge of Hebrew was far from perfect. The work is a compilation of halachic prescriptions.



Chronica Hungarorum. Buda 1473. Incunabulum. Officina Andreas Hess. Paper, 72 sheets, gilded leather binding. University Library, Budapest.
The first book printed in Hungary was very likely commissioned by Archbishop János Vitéz of Esztergom. By the time the commission was completed the Archbishop, charged with treason, was in gaol. He died soon after.

Johannes Thuróczy: *Chronica Hungarorum*. Augsburg, 1488. Incunabulum. Officina Erhardt Ratdolt. Printed on parchment, black and gold, with woodcuts. 174 sheets, 18th-century embossed leather binding. National Széchényi Library, Budapest.

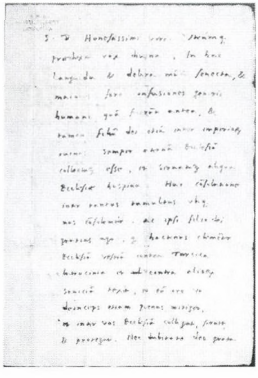
János Thuróczy was a chancery notary, later Master in Equity; the publisher, Theobald Fegerer, was a merchant in Buda. The coats of arms of King Matthias Corvinus and Queen Beatrix, surrounded by the coats of arms of Matthias Corvinus's family and of the lands of the Hungarian crown on the frontispiece suggest that this sumptuously illuminated volume was meant for presentation to the royal couple.

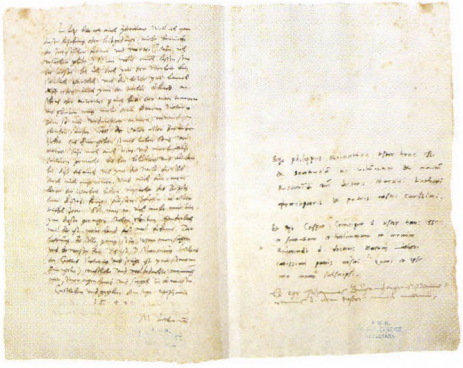
Claudius Ptolemaeus: *Cosmographia. Registrum. De locis ac mirabilibus mundi*. Lat. trad. Jocobus de Angelus (Giacomo Angelo). Ulm, 1486. Paper, 140 sheets, 32 woodcut maps and charts, Officina Johann Reger on behalf of Giusto de Albano. National Széchényi Library, Budapest.

The maps, which had not appeared in the Greek manuscripts made in Byzantium, were drawn by Donnus Nicolaus Germanus O.S.B. and engraved by Johannes Schnitzer. The first edition with woodcut maps.

Philipp Melanchton's Autograph Letter to the Municipal Council of Bártfa (Bartfeld, Bardejov). Dated Wittenberg, 20th of August 1555. Ink on paper, 2 sheets, 318 x 217 mm. Lutheran National Archives, Budapest.

A letter in Latin recommending Solomon Scherer, a student at Wittenberg and native of the town.





Martin Luther's Autograph Last Will and Testament. Wittenberg, 6th of January 1542. In German. Ink on paper, 4 sheets 315 x 203 mm. Lutheran National Archives, Budapest.

As soon as Jankovich obtained it, he made a gift of it to the Hungarian Lutheran Church, but it was physically transferred to them only after his death.

100-Ducat Gold Coin. **Issued by Prince Michael Apafi of Transylvania. Transylvania, 1674. Dm: 117 mm. Weight: 347 gr. Hungarian National Museum, Budapest.** Jankovich obtained this masterpiece, the most beautiful and most valuable Hungarian coin ever minted, from the numismatic collection of András Semsey.

Gold Guldiner. **Issued by Wladislav II of Hungary, Selmecbánya (Schemnitz, Banská Stiavnica), 1499. Dm.: 39 mm. Weight: 34.48 gr (10 ducats). Hungarian National Museum, Budapest.** The obverse shows Wladislav's Hungarian coat of arms and a Latin inscription, the reverse an equestrian Saint Ladislas, King of Hungary. The gold version of the first Hungarian guldiner is the only one of its kind.

Ten-Ducat Gold Coin. **Issued by Prince George I Rákóczi of Transylvania (reigned 1630–1648). Kolozsvár (Cluj), 1631. Dm.: 38 mm. Weight: 34.92 gr. Hungarian National Museum, Budapest.** On the obverse a profile of the Prince and his name with abbreviated rank and title, on the reverse a number of Latin tags including SOLI DEO GLORIA, which the Rákóczi family traditionally used.

The number of items in Miklós Jankovich's collection can no longer be established with complete certainty, as there was always a degree of fluidity and several items have been lost over the years. The greater part of his books were placed in systems of 'pure profile' by thoughtless subsequent librarians operating in the spirit of Prussian-style organisational principles. These, however, are trifles. From the point of view not only of quality but also of quantity, the collection is astounding. There were 197 richly decorated codices in the library dating from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries, a great number of other manuscripts, parchment and paper codices (30 in Greek, some 200 each in Latin and German, of which 55 were parchment codices), a large part of which was exchanged for the Hunyadi archive, the return of which to Hungary was likewise associated with Jankovich. In addition there are many Slavonic codices, approximately 70 in number. The early printed books, however, are of unparalleled richness; the number of *incunabula* and sixteenth-century antiquities in German rose to almost 1,200; Bohemian and Polish works numbered approximately 1,000, and there were some eighty old books on Oriental subjects. The *Hungarica* material is almost complete, as is the collection of printed Bibles in Czech. Of the printed books some 12,000 are in Hungarian, 50,000 in other languages—and there are also many (several hundred) ancient maps, mostly dating from the sixteenth century, including the oldest engraved maps of Hungary. And so it goes on; space and time do not permit even a broad outline. There were also some 3,000 engravings. Let that be enough.

The numismatic collection was mainly composed of the following: 1,002 gold coins (almost 2219 ducats in weight-value; 978 survive); 2,300 silver coins; 6,020 other coins: 163 are Greek or barbarian, 1,622 Roman, 91 Byzantine, 2,883 Hungarian, 320 Transylvanian and 586 from other European countries; 451 are commemorative issues. A large number went to the Museum, but some items are missing and the reasons should be noted: these may have been exchanged, perhaps sold, or their provenance can no longer be established. This is beyond doubt the largest extant Hungarian numismatic collection; Count Viczay's was perhaps bigger and was of exceptional value, but it went abroad and has been broken up.

Jankovich's collection of silverware is one of the biggest in Hungary. Consisting of more than a thousand items, it contains 276 vessels, both ecclesiastical and secular, many of which are representative pieces and many others extremely rare, 490 pieces of jewellery and 318 rings. There are one hundred and ninety-two chalices and goblets. The greatest number of our finest pieces of historical silver jewellery have come down to us through him. Jankovich must have believed that they were mostly Hungarian—nineteenth-century expertise was unable precisely to define their origins—but we now know that many are by German, Austrian and Silesian craftsmen. The collection includes all sorts of silverware and the greatest variety of materials, including some rarities (serpentine, horn, semiprecious stones and many more); we can say 'all sorts' without

the least misgiving. The number of related weapons is now relatively low, but even so there are almost two hundred items.

Statues, ivories, paintings, and other work in stone come to approximately two hundred. Every piece arouses attention, sometimes for its enigmatic nature, sometimes for its quality, sometimes for its particular flavour. And Jankovich, that pedantic systematiser, that illustrious representative of Romantic nationalism, prepared careful notes on every one of his pieces; the majority of these are still extant, and so light is shed on the origins of most items. The detailed account of the paintings has been lost, however, and only the bare catalogue remains. In brief, with his own rather dry but honest descriptions, Jankovich is to this day the principal support of the scholars that burrow in his collection. It is gigantic, and all together (including 6,000 official documents, his own family archives and his inventories) amounts to almost a hundred thousand items. It is difficult to appraise, but even looking at it all is more than enough for one man. Not to mention collecting, organising and—paying for it!

Miklós Jankovich's financial situation suffered something of a decline in the first half of the 1820s, and he went from one creditor to another in an effort to stop the gaps. At the same time, the sale of certain objects less dear to his heart came under consideration, and negotiations took place with Archduke Eugène about the collection of rings. At that time most of his rings, according to the catalogue, could be associated with historical persons, and later, when the deal had fallen through, they returned to fitting anonymity; today too it seems that only a few had really been the property of the great (rings belonging to Queen Maria, to Louis II, who perished at Mohács, and to the great preacher Péter Pázmány, Archbishop of Esztergom). The inventor of false names was in all probability the noble Sámuel Literáti, the diminutive latter-day Hungarian Cagliostro, who indubitably deceived Jankovich on a number of occasions, but on others concluded some favourable deals. Skilful though Jankovich was, he could never again permanently overcome his financial difficulties, and was obliged to offer the material originally intended as a bequest for sale to the National Museum. Compared with the cost of acquisition the sum hoped for from the sale may be called paltry in the extreme.

In 1824 the Archduke Joseph (1776–1847, Lord Lieutenant of Hungary in 1795, Palatine from 1796) visited Miklós Jankovich's house in Pest. The Palatine was in all probability aware of the significance of the collection, because in 1825 Jankovich made him the offer of purchase in an extraordinarily detailed official submission, to which the Palatine raised no objection (which confirms a previous and probably continuing agreement). Palatine Joseph was actually the only Habsburg whom Hungarians of all classes and generations respected and took to their hearts. Throughout his life the Archduke did all in his power to improve the economic and, most of all the cultural, circumstances of Hungary. The policies of the Court restricted him considerably as to the first, but the latter offered

a wider field, especially when the cutting edge of the Hungarian Jacobin plot had become blunted. He secretly improved the situation of several of the prisoners who had been released after serving long sentences in the fortress prisons of the hereditary territories, one of whom, in his wider entourage, was employed as a tutor. This required not merely decency but courage too. We may conjecture from his methods that he loathed Francis's harsh absolutism and never made use of its apparatus, that he believed in compromise and the reconciliation of interests. As Palatine he was the ex-officio head of the National Museum, and as such regarded it his prime duty to advance its cause in every way. In this spirit he brought Jankovich's offer of sale before the National Assembly of 1825–27. This body, usually considered the first Reform Parliament, was mainly concerned with mulling over the grievances of the Estates and devoted itself to the expression of the mood of opposition to the Emperor which had been suppressed for almost fifteen years—for the most part, of course, without any result. From our point of view it is a greater shame that in the matter of the Jankovich collection too it accomplished nothing.

The Palatine was not, however, the sort of man to abandon so weighty a matter, and one so dear to his heart. He primed the counties that sent representatives to the next Parliament by appealing to their patriotism, and results were forthcoming. The Parliament that assembled briefly in 1830 authorised the Palatine to enter into contracts and to begin settling this business. The Parliament of 1833–36 finally voted the funds, and in so doing decided favourably on the future of the great new establishment. Thus it was enacted that Jankovich's collection be purchased on behalf of the National Museum for 100,000 silver forints, and that a further 25,000 be applied to the purchase of duplicate and third copies (coins and books). A further 500,000 silver forints were voted for the building of the National Museum. The Parliament, by then unequivocally in support of the Reform Party, showed unreserved enthusiasm for the Museum and accepted the Palatine's stipulation that the costs should be met from their own resources by the privileged Estates, the counties, the Free Royal Boroughs and the six chartered *hajdú* towns, and that they should not be passed on to the peasantry.

By this time the transfer of the mass of material was well under way, but as building work was proceeding slowly more places were found to accommodate the collection. It also had to be saved from the great and tragic consequences of the Pest floods of 1838, and had to be moved on other occasions too, until it finally found a home in the new building of the Ludoviceum, the Hungarian military academy in Pest, where it remained until the Museum was half built.

Jankovich overcame, for the most part, his financial problems and set about creating a second collection, but the indications are that passion got the better of sober calculation. He again acquired significant material, which was naturally not comparable with his first collection, yet had there not been the first this latter would be praised to the skies today. In 1844 he attempted to sell that also to the

National Museum, but unfortunately without success. Before then, in 1841, the post of Director of the National Museum was advertised, and Jankovich himself applied. Previously the historian János Horváth, a man renowned for his startling dilettantism and who could not abide Jankovich personally, had directed the Museum, in 1837 and 1843 without a salary. It came as a great shock to Jankovich that not he but the colourless botanist and amateur historian Ágoston Kubinyi (1799–1873), a man mediocre in all respects and not exactly over-endowed with merit, was appointed. True, Jankovich was 71 at the time, a man of an indubitably difficult nature, worn down by other cares, and who was at the time not only the target of scorn but also often accused of profiteering at the expense of the state. Palatine Joseph too was growing old, and although his regard for Jankovich was unshaken (incidentally, the Habsburgs were always very civil to their subordinates even if they happened to hang them), he could not risk his appointment in the face of public opinion. The financial affairs of the sick and ageing collector again took a turn for the worse; after 1844 his affairs were in the hands of a sequestrator, and he had to ask him for even the daily sustenance of his family. Only death on 18 April 1846 released him from this humiliating situation. The Museum building was by then complete but it was not yet open to the public. After a long legal battle with the National Museum, the victorious Jankovich family put the second collection up for auction in Pest in 1852, in the family home on Hatvani utca. Ornate codices and silverware were the principal items, from which, thanks to the family's broadmindedness, the Museum, which had hitherto behaved in an indolent fashion, was at liberty to select, as we now believe, not really wisely. Most of the items were thus sold, and the majority, which included some exceptionally important early illuminated German MSS, were bought by foreign collectors and antique dealers. With this posthumous event Jankovich's career as a collector finally came to an end. From then on his fate has been oblivion and the random dispersal of his material.

In 1989 the writer of these lines put forward detailed plans for a Jankovich exhibition that would dispel the mist. For a variety of reasons the opportunity for this arose only in 2002, during the bicentenary celebrations of Hungarian public collections and museums. Naturally, there was no question of displaying the material in its entirety because of its scope, and more than one major item had to be withheld because of other parallel exhibitions and problems of conservation. Those who, like myself, did not originally reckon on so many inevitable complications are now disappointed to some degree, but even so the Hungarian National Gallery's elegant exhibition, which closed in February 2003, was rich in masterpieces and a delight for visitors. We hope, however, that the catalogue of the event, with coloured illustrations of almost all the exhibits, will be a headstone on Miklós Jankovich's grave, one that oblivion will no longer be able to overturn. ❧

Sándor Majoros

Kosovo, Gunshot Wound. A Soldier's Tale

Short Story

A family that does not have at least one secret to hide does not exist. Ours is connected with Father's death. He was gunned down in Kosovo, somewhere around Uroševac, in seventy-nine, when he was transporting cement to a nickel mine that was being opened up in Macedonia. We never did find out why.

Two years later, Mother married one of Father's colleagues. I was three at the time, my brother was two. I can't say anything bad about the man: he did not beat us or swear at us, but we still hated him, loathed him with all our heart. He reigned over our lives, proudly and self-assuredly, and we were never able to forgive him for that.

My younger brother acquired a shooter in ninety-five. He could not get any cartridges for it, but even so he proudly flashed it around. Through an unfortunate coincidence of circumstances, this was at the time our step-father struck Mother over a meal of potato noodles that had gone cold. As if that was all he had been waiting for, our kid announced he was going to shoot the swine. And off he went to look for cartridges for his gun.

That was no simple matter: the Yugoslav People's Republican Army by then was through the Bosnian war, and the arsenals that had been wide open for irregulars had been locked up again. It was a period when anyone sniffing around for bullets might well be asked what he wanted them for. In the end, though, the Balkans being the Balkans, the ammunition was arranged for fifteen Deutschmarks. At the time, that amounted to an average monthly wage. Our parents had patched up their quarrel in the meantime, so we were left with a useless bullet that had cost us an arm and a leg.

In the past, they used to send ethnic Hungarian conscripts from the Vojvodina off to Slovenia, Dalmatia, Bosnia or even Macedonia to do their military

---

Sándor Majoros

is a Vojvodina-born Hungarian writer who now lives in Budapest. Of his three volumes of short stories one appeared in the former Yugoslavia, the other two in Hungary.

service, whilst they brought the Slovenian, Croat, Bosnian and Macedonian lads here, amongst the endless fields of wheat and maize. But where are Slovenia, Macedonia and Bosnia now! I was called up to serve in Sabac, in northern Serbia, right in the lull between two storms that lasted from the Dayton Peace Accords to the NATO bombings. My brother came to visit every week, bringing money, food and warm clothing, depending on what my needs were. On one occasion, finding me particularly down, he pressed the fifteen-mark bullet into my hand. Anyone giving you a really hard time, pump that into his skull, he instructed. I was in no mood to explain to him that I didn't actually have a weapon. Along with two Muslim lads from the Sanjak, I was only ever put on latrine-cleaning detail. Still, the cartridge was left with me.

Twelve months I sweated it out at Šabac, a period during which I learned that the biggest market in all of Serbia was held right there. In February '99 I was discharged with chronic arthritis. By then the KLA was waging a regular guerrilla war in Kosovo. On top of that, the Albanian propaganda machine was functioning a great deal more effectively than the Serbian—hardly surprising, given that the latter had lost all credibility with the massacres in Croatia and Bosnia.

I got back home to be greeted by the rotten news that my younger brother had been called up a week before my own discharge. He was packed off to Malisevo, which is roughly midway between Kosovska Mitrovica and Uroševac. He was right up to his neck in the powder-keg. I twiddled the bullet that he had given me, studying it as I listened to Mother's lamentations. She begged my step-father and me by turns to hit on some way of getting him back home. The old man just hemmed and hawed and shrugged his shoulders, but I was spurred to say that I would sign up as a volunteer and track him down. Mother turned off the waterworks straight away. Off with you, son, bring your brother back! she whispered, and practically bustled me out the door.

Down at the recruiting office they looked a bit askance at my seeking, despite being of Hungarian origin, to go down to Kosovo, but they took my name anyway. The same day, I was transported with a unit of internal security police off to Niš, where we joined up with a volunteer corps that was being assembled from all over Serbia. Most of them had already undergone their baptism of fire back at the time of the fighting in Slavonia, several of them had been wounded too. It was rumoured that NATO would soon be attacking us, so we slept in sheds and pigsties, well away from the armoured vehicles. We feared for our chickenshit lives.

In Kosovo, the bowl of one valley runs into the next, the flatlands are interminably eerie, the scrub on the lazy arcs of the mountains is sparse. Usually just a single paved road with a line of acacia-wood electricity posts alongside —in some cases not even carrying a cable—runs between them. At other times we proceeded between stone walls high as your head, a veritable labyrinth that you could only get out of with the aid of a tank. The sky is perpetually grey,

it drizzles constantly, and a rumble of uncertain provenance can be heard from beyond the horizon.

The company was holed up for two weeks in an evacuated school at Lipljan, awaiting the order to go into action. Meanwhile, I made friends with Dalibor Pesic, a radio mechanic, gun-freak, and one of the Seven Sleepers. He claimed to own a light automatic rifle, a double-barrelled hunting gun, and a Beretta nine-millimetre. I showed him the bullet my brother had given me. It took no more than a cursory glance for him to say it was a round for a Zastava ZCZ-99, and I'd do well to be careful with it, because its percussion-cap was sensitive. I was flabbergasted. That evening we learned that NATO planes had been deployed against Yugoslavia.

After prolonged deliberation, our officers came up with the idea that the engines of our vehicles should be kept running constantly because we might get the order to move off at any moment. So the T-75 tanks and armoured personnel carriers roared throughout the night in the school yard. The Americans must have got some great overhead photos of us with their infra-red heat-detector cameras from a few thousand feet up.

I was woken at four o'clock for my spell of guard duty. I shivered my way out into the yard and decided to station myself over by one of the lorries, thinking the engine would surely help keep me warm. At almost the same moment I heard a strange sort of murmur. Whipping round, I spotted a yellow and two red dots of light above the school building. They seemed to be hanging motionless in the sky, somewhere over the hills to the west, yet I sensed that they were in fact rapidly heading our way.

Rushing into the school, I began yelling that the bombers were here, everybody should clear out. I kicked, punched and slapped the company to their feet, and look lively they did too. We had dug trenches at the far end of the yard days before; we flung ourselves into them and peeked out at the growing points of light. Someone then yelled out, "Dalibor is still inside!" I did not know who shouted, but it was immaterial anyway. I had one minute to haul my pal out.

I raced across the yard. That took some ten seconds. Up the steps: another five. Down the corridor: again five. I burst in on Dalibor's billet, grab his shoulders: that's five plus another five. Outside the drone is swelling into a rumble. I drag Dalibor to his feet, push him ahead, and that takes fifteen seconds. He senses something is up and does nothing to resist, but he is still caught on the borderline between sleep and wakefulness. He has no clue which way the exit lies. I jostle him towards the door but am suddenly overwhelmed by a wave of sentiment like when you cry. I am not going to find my brother, because I am about to die, flashes across my mind, and by now I am no longer counting the seconds but hurl Dalibor out into the yard. He crawls down the steps and comes to a halt. I yell at him to run! run!, but he cannot hear because the roar is now deafening.

The sun was going down by the time I came to. My head and arm were bandaged, and there was a burning pain in my thigh. I was lying on a hospital bed—in Pristina, as it later turned out. Apparently they had spent an hour and a half digging out splinters that lodged in me from the panelling ripped out of the school's corridor. It was my luck that the pressure wave had hurled me into the building, but even so the legs of my fatigues had caught fire, and the Zastava ZCZ-99 cartridge in my pocket, the one I had been given by my brother, had been set off by the heat. Dalibor had been quite right: the damned thing had a sensitive percussion-cap. What was left of him, I never managed to find out. He sank into the same mysterious non-existence into which my father had disappeared in seventy-nine.

I was treated for weeks after that in various clinics, and when I was allowed home, they wrote under the "injury" heading of my army service book: "Kosovo, gunshot wound."

Exactly what had been in Dad's death certificate. ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

John Ridland

The Poet Who Didn't Smoke

In Memory of Ernő Szép and Miklós Radnóti,
Hungarian Jewish poets, who did.

Where do the gestures go—the double fingers
Fuck-you-ing at the stars, forking the ember?
The thoughtful tap-off of the wasted ash?
How to forego the joy of blowing smoke rings?
How to no longer thank those 'Indians'
Columbus thought he'd found, for their best boon:
After potatoes, chili peppers, sweet corn?

How do you pass the intervals between stanzas,
Between lines, sentences, between words?
How, the air passing sweetly, silently
Up your clear windpipe, warming around your pink,
Uncoated tongue, out clean between clean teeth
Without the rasp and rattle, hack or hawk
Reminding you of clouded ultimates?

How, as the evening slopes off down the slide
Of music, bright Hungarian rhapsodies,
How not to smoke it down, out the side door,
Under the glowworm sky, with those deep breaths,
Lacking the anti-taste of brave tobacco,
To taint the tan of this year's fresh-picked apple
And seal the evening in its locket case?

John Ridland
has taught literature and writing at the University of California since 1961. Besides his four volumes of poems he has published a translation of Sándor Petőfi's epic fairy-tale János vitéz *(John the Valiant, Corvina, 1999), reviewed in* HQ *160.*

How, being a Jew, being marched from Budapest
To Csomád, being a poet, either Szép
Or Radnóti, how, in the half-hour breaks
When everyone lights up, how can you stand
To be the only breather of free air,
Lacking their need, alone deprived of nothing
But all the rest the rest were all deprived of?

And in your left breast pocket not a pack
But the small notebook you'd be buried with
After they shot you, in the common grave,
To be dug up again if you were lucky
As Radnóti, and published, and translated,
Carried across like the ashes of November
Whose shadows undercut the half-moon's shadow.

Gábor Lakatos

The Last Round of Bargaining Before EU Accession

At the European Union's Copenhagen summit held on 12–13 December 2002, Hungary, along with nine other candidate countries, successfully closed its accession negotiations with the EU. The stage is thus set for enlargement and the reunification of Europe. However, this historic moment has been somewhat overshadowed by the fierce and often degradingly parsimonious debates between current member states and candidate countries during the last few months of negotiations regarding the financial terms of accession.

There were rifts not only between old and new members, but also between current member states. Negotiations concerning the highly sensitive financial chapter inevitably brought the weaknesses of the EU's reallocation policy to the surface, especially with regard to the shortcomings of the outdated Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which is becoming increasingly difficult to finance.

Germany, currently suffering from severe economic problems, declared that as the largest contributor to the EU's purse, it will not pay a single euro more for enlargement unless the CAP is reformed. This would have been a severe blow to France, the largest beneficiary of direct agricultural support. The Mediterranean countries and Ireland, who have been the number one customers of the EU's structural and cohesion funds so far, feared that with the accession of so many poorer countries, money from the EU's consolidation funds will be redirected towards the new member states. In addition, the EU's average GDP will decrease as a result of enlargement, making it possible that some regions in the countries that have been net beneficiaries so far will now fall outside the scope of support.

The EU's initial offer of financial support to the new member states, amounting to a mere thousandth of the Union's gross national product, could by no

---

Gábor Lakatos

is on the staff of the Institute for World Economics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. His main fields of research are EU institutions and the domestic and legal policies of member countries. He has co-authored a book on fund applications in the EU.

means be called generous. After prolonged negotiations and debates, it was put forward and presented to candidate countries at the fiscal summit held in Brussels on 23–24 October 2002.

Acceptance of a unified stance depended on accord between Germany and France. The two countries' leaders met prior to the summit and, in an unexpected turn of events, hammered out an agreement concerning direct agricultural income support. According to the deal, spending on agriculture would not be reduced until 2006, but then during the budgetary period lasting from 2007 to 2013, a ceiling would be imposed. This effectively means that after 2006, spending on agriculture will only increase by a maximum of 1 per cent each year, which will mean a reduction in real terms. Thereby, Germany received a guarantee that subsequent to enlargement, spending on agriculture will be frozen in 2007 at the 2006 level, sparing the country any additional financial burdens. At the same time, France made sure that the structure of direct agricultural support payments will remain unchanged until 2007. This private agreement between the two nations made it possible for member states to formulate a common position on the financial terms of enlargement.

Finally, the summit brought unexpected success in the issue of enlargement. Consistent with the wishes of the member states, the EU promised to prepare a financial package that would put new members in a better financial position in the first year after accession than in the last year before it. The new plan set the costs of enlargement between 2004 and 2006 at 37.5 billion euros according to prior calculations. Within that, a ceiling of 23 billion euros was imposed for the structural funds for the first three years, which is 2.5 billion euros less than in the previous offer. At the same time, 16 per cent of available support will be reallocated to the cohesion fund, which will be made available primarily to the poorest member states, i.e. the new members. The remaining 14.5 billion euros will cover agricultural support, internal projects (institutional development, etc.) and administrative measures. According to the offer, direct agricultural support provided to new members in 2004 will be a quarter of that allotted to current members. The level of support will then be gradually increased to 100 per cent over a space of nine years. Those countries whose financial position deteriorates during the first three years following accession will have the option of claiming a one-off lump sum budget refund.

The October offer would have granted Hungary 12.5 per cent of all funds allocated for enlargement, amounting to approximately 4.5 billion euros in the first three years. Of that, 2.87 billion euros would have been allocated from the structural and cohesion funds, 1.37 billion euros provided for agricultural support (including 550 million euros of direct income support to Hungarian farmers) and 411 million euros for internal projects.

The current member states agreed that every one of them would have to make financial sacrifices for enlargement, and they did so without rescheduling

debates on the 2007 to 2013 budget. Thus it became clear that the budget would not be increased but, rather, some of its resources would be reallocated to finance enlargement. The freezing of direct agricultural support in 2006 means that the gradual raising of direct benefits for new members will be financed by reducing the level of agricultural support provided to old members. Neither will enlargement leave the structural and cohesion funds unaffected, which entails new sacrifices for countries that have been net beneficiaries so far. Some even suggested, albeit informally, the renegotiation of the British budget refund which had been secured for the U.K. by Margaret Thatcher. At the same time, the additional sacrifices made by old members in terms of agricultural support will be offset by the CAP's second pillar, spending on regional development. Expenditure in this area, which currently amounts to 10 per cent of agricultural spending, will not be frozen. This could serve to compensate those countries that had been net beneficiaries of direct support.

The EU's financial offer also implies that a comprehensive overhaul of the CAP has been put off until after 2006. At the same time, France, the chief advocate of the current system of direct agricultural support payments, has failed in its bid to separate the reform of the CAP and other budgetary reforms set forth by the European Council in Berlin, as well as the EU's international responsibilities aimed at the gradual elimination of those CAP measures that are detrimental to free trade.

The summit was overshadowed by the decision—advocated primarily by the Dutch and opposed by most members—to increase the permitted duration of safeguard clauses from two to three years. The two new, special safety measures supplement the general, two-year economic safeguard clause that has been in effect so far and could, theoretically, have been used during previous enlargements by old and new members against each other. The first new measure extends the period of protection to three years following enlargement. It protects old members from those newcomers who will not be able to fulfil the provisions of the *acquis communautaire* completely, thereby endangering the functioning of the internal market. The second measure relates to cooperation in justice and home affairs.

Members also managed to reach an agreement regarding institutional matters. After the accession of the ten new member states, 124 votes will be distributed in the Council of Ministers between the 25 members, with Hungary to receive five. A qualified majority will require 88 votes. After 2005, 321 votes will be distributed, of which Hungary will be allotted 12. In this case, the number of votes required for a qualified majority will be 232. However, the summit failed to agree on the number of seats to be allotted to Hungary and the Czech Republic in the European Parliament.

The EU emphasized right the way through that its joint position is an offer, and not an ultimatum to candidate countries. But since its formulation had involved great difficulties and compromises, it was clear that none of the candidate countries were likely to obtain any substantial concessions in addition to what had been proposed. After the fiscal summit, candidate countries seemed to have had very little space left in which to manoeuvre during the final stages of accession negotiations. They were made to understand on several occasions that anyone rejecting Brussels' offer would be running the risk of delaying accession.

It appeared that the candidate countries' primary objectives, to raise the initial level of direct agricultural support and to curtail transitional periods, were not open to discussion. All they could hope to achieve was an increase in some of their production quotas. In addition, there was a chance that the EU could "show mercy" and somehow make up for the 2.5 billion euros subtracted from the consolidation funds, or that candidate countries would be granted a little more space to manoeuvre in financial matters during the final stages of accession negotiations. Nevertheless, expectations ahead of the Copenhagen summit in December were rather low on the part of the candidate countries.

After the fiscal summit, the often fierce debates between member states and candidate countries got under way. Quite rightfully, candidate countries cited an infringement of the principle of equal treatment, since, according to the EU's offer, new members would receive much less support than the old ones. On the other hand, the Union argued—also not without reason—that on purchasing power parity, the offer was not as modest as candidate countries claimed. But the prospective members also begrudged that the funds allocated by the European Council for enlargement in Berlin in 1999 were not increased in any way when the number of candidate countries in the first round rose from six to ten.

During the negotiations, the candidate countries attempted to secure a higher initial level of agricultural support for their farmers, and also wished to curtail the period during which the level of support would reach that provided to current members. Another of their main goals was to achieve an increase in the one-off lump sum budget compensation. They even contemplated applying the principle of the gradual increase of direct agricultural support to their budget contributions, and fulfilling their financial obligations towards the EU in like manner.

Denmark, holder of the EU's rotating presidency at the time, prepared a new offer for the Copenhagen summit. The current members—albeit reluctantly—accepted the new deal, which was slightly more generous than the one agreed to in Brussels had been, as the basis for future negotiations. The new package did not propose an increase in the level of direct agricultural support. Rather, it suggested that new members should be able to supplement support payments from their national budgets, with the EU providing both direct and indirect support to this end. As part of the scheme, new members would have the option of reallocating 20 per cent of the resources from the regional development fund to

financing direct payments. The new offer also proposed the establishment of a new fund of one billion euros to counter cash flow problems during the first year of enlargement. New members would be allocated resources from the fund in proportion to their contribution to the EU budget, and the money would be spent on easing liquidity problems arising from the introduction of the Union's support system. The implicit purpose behind the establishment of the new fund was to reduce the burden of direct support payments on the national budgets of new members during the first year of accession. Another new element in the package was the proposal to set up a "Schengen fund" of 300 million euros, with new member states being allocated resources in proportion to the length of their borders with non-EU countries.

At the Copenhagen summit, the Danish presidency's carefully planned tactics paid off and their manoeuvres split the candidate countries' unified stance, which had been shaky in any case. Through a series of private agreements, they managed to isolate the countries that showed the most fierce resistance to the EU's package deal, thereby diminishing the weight of their arguments. This is how Hungary, battling to the last minute, was left on its own, and was forced to accept the Union's finalized offer. Those candidate countries where agriculture is not a significant area were more interested in securing more budget compensation than fighting for increased agricultural support. In addition, the EU offered Poland, the primary advocate of agricultural issues, more favourable financial terms than other countries, as part of a private deal. As a result, Hungary was left isolated in its fight for more agricultural support. It had been evident even before the summit that the candidate countries could only hope for significant gains during negotiations if they presented a unified position throughout. This, however, proved to be impossible right from the start as six of the ten countries came to Copenhagen ready to accept the EU's deal. On the other hand, as long as the influential "Visegrád Four", who were considered to be the "core group" within the candidate countries, showed unified resistance to Brussels' offer, the acquisition of additional resources from the Union remained a distinct possibility. Once Poland parted from the group, however, the remaining three countries were left with limited options.

The Danish presidency appeased Poland by offering them a billion euros of quick and easy cash for the first year of accession. But this was not a supplementary offer. Rather, the money would be granted to Poland through a reduction of the consolidation funds, allocated as a total of 8.6 billion euros for the first three years of membership. The offer seemed tempting to the Polish delegation, even if no additional resources had been offered. In any case, they would have been unable to call on the total amount allocated to them from the structural and cohesion funds, so the reduction would not have any significant effect on Poland. The prospect of a guaranteed, up-front payment of a billion euros, on the other hand, seemed attractive to the Poles—more attractive than a negligible

increase in direct agricultural support. Polish farmers would, in any case, not be at a substantial competitive disadvantage compared to their EU colleagues due to the option of supplementing agricultural support from the national budget. As a result, Poland no longer pressed for increasing support for farmers. In addition, the Poles realized that the one billion euros of EU money could well be used to cover the expenses of supplementing agricultural support, thereby reducing the burdens on the national budget. The Polish delegation finally called it a deal when the EU promised to redistribute Polish milk quotas and increase the resources allocated to Poland from the Schengen fund.

Similar tactics were used to disarm the Czechs, who showed little interest in agricultural affairs. Their main concern was the relatively low level of their net financial position compared to other candidate countries. Thus, the Danes were able to win them over easily with the offer of budgetary compensation through an initial guaranteed payment. This was the final blow to cooperation between the Visegrád Four. Hungary and Slovakia, who maintained their objections, were finally forced to give in. As a result, since all candidate countries accepted the European Union's financial terms, accession negotiations came to an end. The ten countries managed to obtain 408 million euros of extra funding in addition to the Danish offer, bringing the total cost of enlargement between 2004 and 2006 to 40.83 billion euros. Let us not forget, however, that this sum represents financial obligations undertaken by the EU. The actual level of payments made will be much lower.

Thus the price tag for enlargement will remain 1.8 billion euros below the initial ceiling set at the Berlin summit in 1999. According to the Danish proposal, an additional 2.2 billion euros were still available for allocation during the concluding negotiations. Originally, most candidate countries had planned on claiming their share of this sum. With this in mind, the 408 million euros of extra funding secured by the ten countries seems a rather paltry achievement.

In summary, the terms offered by the fifteen member states in Copenhagen were the following:

1 ■ Poland's structural funds for the period 2004 to 2006 will be reduced by one billion euros, and this money will be turned into a cash payment used to improve the balance of the national budget in 2005 and 2006. Thereby, Warsaw has traded a vague financial obligation for guaranteed cash. It is required to spend some of the money on structural purposes, but it is free to allocate the remaining amount as it wishes. Some of the money will be transferred to Poland in 2005 and 2006, but a certain proportion has to be spent on specific consolidation projects.

2 ■ Similarly, the Czech Republic will receive 100 million euros of quick and easy cash in 2005 and 2006 (in two instalments of 50 million euros each.)

3 ■ Poland will receive an additional 108 million euros of support from the Schengen fund during the first three years of accession. The money has to be

spent on improving border controls on Poland's borders with non-EU countries. This is a supplementary amount, not the result of restructuring.

4 ■ The nine other candidate countries besides Poland will receive a total of 300 million euros for improving the balance of their national budgets in 2005 and 2006. The money will be transferred in the form of a one-off, lump sum cash refund from the EU budget. The 300 million euros will be divided between the nine countries according to need. Countries with a relatively large budget deficit will be allocated proportionately more money, with Malta (54.3 million euros extra support), the Czech Republic (83.1 million), Slovenia (48.7 million) and Cyprus (10.1 million) being the nations most favoured.

The parties also managed to reach agreement regarding the issue of direct agricultural support. According to the deal, new members will have the option of supplementing direct agricultural support payments with money from their national budgets by up to 30 per cent. This means that although support provided by the EU will be only 25 per cent of that received by farmers in current member states, the level of support received by farmers in the newly joined countries could potentially be increased to 55 per cent. As a result, the level of support will reach 100 per cent in six years instead of nine, as planned in October. We have to bear in mind, however, that this is just an option, and it is by no means certain that all new members will wish to or will have sufficient funds to make full use of it. In any case, the European Union will also contribute to the supplementary resources. EU funds will be available for a maximum 20 per cent of all sums spent on regional development. (Although the pre-requisite for obtaining this money is at least 20 per cent of co-financing.)

To sum up, during the first three years after accession, the ten new member states will be allocated a total of 38.5 billion euros (according to the 1999 price level) under various financial schemes (with 10.2 billion euros transferred in 2004, 13 billion in 2005 and 15.3 billion in 2006). This is roughly a billion euros more than the current member states had planned at the fiscal summit in October. In addition, new members will receive an extra 2.3 billion euros in the form of short-term budgetary compensation to improve their cash flows (with 1.2 billion transferred in 2004, 580 million in 2005 and 440 million in 2006). If we add up the two sums, we get the grand total of approximately 40.8 billion euros for the complete cost of enlargement.

Hungary has obtained financial support for a total of 5.093 billion euros from the EU in the first three years, with actual payments expected to amount to about 3.6 billion euros. During the same period, the country will be required to contribute 2.26 billion euros to the Union's budget. In the closing stages of accession negotiations, the Hungarian delegation managed to secure an additional 55.9 million euros of support. Although the country failed in its bid to raise the level of direct agricultural support to 30 per cent in the first year, Hungary will still be in a better net financial position during the first three years

of accession than in the last year before it. The country is set to receive 197 million euros of pre-accession support in 2003. By comparison, its net financial position will be 271 million euros in 2004, 494 million euros in 2005 and 618 million euros in 2006.

During the closing stages of accession negotiations, Hungary and the European Union not only concluded an agreement about financial matters, but also about a host of other issues. Among these, the Hungarian delegation managed to renegotiate Hungary's contribution to the budget of the European Investment Bank (EIB). As a result, the country will only have to pay a contribution of 49 million euros instead of the 56 million specified in earlier agreements. Hungary's share of the EIB's capital of 164 billion euros will be 1.121 billion euros. In addition, the parties established the country's various production quotas. The Hungarian delegation also secured exclusive use of the word *pálinka* (fruit brandy), which can only be used with the Hungarian spelling by Hungary and by four Austrian provinces. A significant achievement was obtaining a three-year extension to the seven-year restriction on land purchases in Hungary by foreigners if the price of land had not reached the EU level at the end of the seven-year period. Regarding small and medium-size enterprises, the European Union accepted the Hungarian request that any such companies with less than 35,000 euros of annual sales revenue should be granted an exemption from V.A.T. In addition, Hungary will receive a discount V.A.T. rate for gas and electricity consumption. A fair deal was achieved in institutional matters as well. It was agreed that 24 Hungarian members will join the ranks of the European Parliament in 2004, which means that the country will have the same number of MEPs as other nations with a similar population.

The process of enlargement began in 1993 in Copenhagen with the definition of the basic criteria for EU membership. Thus it is symbolic that it was also in Copenhagen in 2002 that accession negotiations came to a close for the candidate countries. Following the ratification process and the referendums to be held in the ten nations, the number of member states in the European Union will increase to 25 on 1 May 2004. This will also mean the fulfilment of a dream: the eradication of internal divisions in Europe. ❧

Ibolya Planck

A Nineteenth-Century Glance

László Lugosi Lugo: *Klösz György (1844–1913) élete és munkássága. Monográfia* (The Life and Work of György Klösz 1844–1913. A Monograph); *Fényképek—* Photographs. 2 volumes. Budapest, Polgart, 2002, 124 + 277 pp.

Research into the work of professional photographers has been a neglected field internationally. In Hungary, recent publications have been a sign of welcome change and the beautifully produced two-volume work on György Klösz is a real milestone. Klösz's name has primarily been associated with the cityscapes he made of Budapest between 1870 and 1910, which are of outstanding documentary merit.

The author, László Lugosi Lugo, is a practising photographer himself and has already documented Klösz's work in a highly individual album: *Budapest 1900–2000* (Vince Kiadó, 2001). Lugo used a wooden camera made in 1993 by Gandolfi/England to capture some of the Budapest scenes from the same angle and elevation that his predecessor had photographed a hundred years earlier. Then he arranged the pictures in pairs: the one by Klösz on the left and the other by himself on the right. This parallel representation of the cityscapes turned out splendidly: *Budapest 1900–2000* has been on the bestsellers' list in Hungary for over a year now.

The two-volume book reviewed here is a direct follow-up. Published in English and Hungarian, *Klösz György: Fényképek— Photographs* is also meant to cater for the lovers of old photographs, while *Klösz György: Monográfia (1844–1913),* (only in Hungarian) is meant to satisfy the researchers who are also interested in biographical details and sources. (It is a pity that no summary in English is included here.)

All that has survived

The monograph discusses György Klösz's life and work in a number of chapters, with footnotes, a verso catalogue, a dictionary of technical terms and an appended bibliography. However, it is not in this volume but in his foreword to the album that Lugo Lugosi admits to his failure to reconstruct the life and work of the photographer in its entirety, as the majority of the documents were lost over the years. Most of the letters and invoices associated with the running of the studios and print shops have been lost, so it has been impossible to trace the clientele and business connections of Klösz and his company. His private letters and family corre-

Ibolya Planck
is Curator of the Photo Archives of the National Office of Cultural Heritage. She has published widely on architectural photography.

spondence have also been lost. In addition, the author faced an impossible task when he tried to establish the number of photographs Klösz had left behind. Although the number of his portraits far exceeds that of his outdoor photographs, the study and cataloguing of the latter was more difficult but more rewarding. Klösz preferred to think in terms of series, which he published and sold with a numbering and not as individual shots. In addition to identifying the original negatives and prints forming the series, there was also the possibility that several thousands of copies could have resulted from their publication. To illustrate the problem, here are some actual figures. At the present state of research, the first decade of Klösz's creative period, (the 1870s) is represented by 260 cityscapes of Budapest, 360 reproductions of artworks and those photographs he took in the country. The collection was further enlarged by Klösz's participation at foreign exhibitions (1873, 1885 and 1896) and his series of architectural photographs and cityscapes in the 1890s—including the 430 pictures, mostly interiors, he took of 100 Hungarian country mansions—which were the high point of his professional career. At the present state of research, we know of almost 1200 numbered photographs. Margit Szakács, who pioneered the academic research, briefly mentioned the significance of the serial numbers.[1] The serial number of one of the photographs in the Hungarian National Museum's Klösz Bequest—60,768—should be sufficient to make this point. László Lugosi Lugo estimates the total number of photographs left to posterity by Klösz at nearly 4000. In the case of a large number of photographs, the print has got separated from the negative and is to be found in various archives. The Budapest Municipal Archive alone holds a major collection of 2050 prints.

The two major figures in 19th century outdoor photography and photomechanical copying and printing were Károly Divald (1830–1897), whose family resided in Upper Hungary, and György Klösz (1844–1913), who was of German descent. Their achievements are usually presented in conjunction. The elder Divald took the first photographs of the highest and hitherto unclimbed peaks of the High Tátra, and Klösz was the first to document the vibrant life of Buda, Pest and Óbuda, united in 1873 as Budapest and rapidly growing into a metropolis. At first they both worked using the wet-collodion process in very difficult outdoor conditions.

A detailed picture of Klösz only starts to emerge from the dim contours of his family background after 1866–67, when the young photographer settled in Pest. In the first part of the monograph the author sketches the history of Klösz's first studios and the growing number of commissions. After arriving in Hungary from Darmstadt, Germany, the 22-year-old chemist set up his business in Pest in 1866–67, as was customary in those days. He and his partner first rented a studio in a building at the corner of downtown Korona utca and Úri utca, precisely where Miklós Barabás, one of Hungary's foremost portrait painters, had worked as a photographer earlier. The attic was converted into a studio in 1862 to Barabás' plans, who specified a ground plan and dimensions appropriate for the purpose. Between 1866 and 1872 Klösz completed over 10,000 portraits in this building. Although he continued to produce portraits for the next forty years, it was the cityscapes and architectural photographs he took in the last three decades of the 19th century, with their exceptional quality and documentary value, which earned him high esteem. Lugo emphasises that he regards Klösz as the founder of architectural photography in Hungary, who was not an

innovator but a perfectionist keen to employ state-of-the art technology. He goes as far as saying that artistic considerations were not the main concern of a photographer who specialised in cityscapes; rather, his oeuvre had everything to do with professionalism, commercial photography and market demand.

Klösz established himself as a serious photographer in the 1870s with the series on *Budapest Svábhegy—Zugliget* and *Vámház* (Customshouse), as well as with the photographs of *Közraktárak* (Public Warehouses) and the pictures he took of the Imperial, Italian and Egyptian buildings at the Vienna World Fair.[2] By the Eighties, Klösz and Ferenc Kozmata were the busiest photographers. The pair of them were commissioned to photograph the temporary and permanent buildings of the industrial and commercial exhibition for the Budapest General Exhibition Photography Company of 1885. In addition to this documentary work, they also came forward with pictures of their own, mostly cityscapes of the capital.

In Klösz's approach to urban photography, traditional concepts and innovative ideas can be traced. Alongside the urban scenes and the pictures showing groups of buildings, the representations of public buildings—churches, family vaults, schools, town halls and academic buildings—continued to dominate his subject-matter, although by the 1890s, as if to note the economic upswing, he was turning increasingly to industrial and commercial buildings (slaughterhouses, railway stations, banks, transport vehicles, etc.). The series on construction work in progress came to form a separate bloc within the oeuvre, with some outstanding pieces capturing moments of particular interest in the erection of important buildings in Budapest—laying electrical cables, adding roof structures, fixing architectural sculptures, etc.—all valuable documents in architectural history and technological development. By far the best known are, however, the photographs of the streets and boulevards of the capital, which faithfully reflect the great building boom during the 1880s and 1890s in the design of apartment buildings, all in the name of Historicism.

Prints, reproductions, print shops and studios

Lugo emphasises that infrastructures and skills involved in outdoor photography and those in photomechanical reproduction were two different things. In the second half of the 19th century a few studios suitable for both kinds of work already existed. By the 1880s, specialisation and division of labour had already taken place all over the world, especially among photographers concerned with cityscapes and landscapes, who had the keenest interest in the sale of commercial prints. Italy had the Alinari brothers, Scotland had George Washington Wilson, and Hungary had Károly Divald & Sons and György Klösz. They all ran their studios as businesses, responding to market forces and following the rules of commercial enterprise. The importance of publishing for Klösz is revealed by the words "Photographed and published by György Klösz", which constantly appeared on the photos mounted on cardboard.

The topographical identification and the architectural and technical description of the locations and buildings where these photographic studios operated are a special area for research. The actual location of the studios and print shops, along with their exterior and interior design, are all a telling evidence of the activity and financial situation of the photographer in question. In György Klösz's case, the succession of studios he based himself in were important milestones in his career. According to the

author, the first of his many changes of premises took place in 1872, when he moved from the corner of Úri utca and Korona utca to 1 Hatvani utca, a one-storey building owned by the Franciscans. After the renovation and the extension of the building to a four-storey one, the next move was to a modern, two-storey studio on the two top floors with 26 rooms and a lift in 1877. It was followed by another studio around 1884 at 18 Hatvani utca, the layout and the dimensions of which are not known. There is one thing we can safely say: by 1884, one of Klösz's main objectives was to find a studio with adequate conditions for reproducing and marketing his cityscapes. One of the most important platforms of publication was the popular monthly magazine *Budapesti Látogatók Lapja* (Budapest Visitors' Journal, founded in 1888), which continuously published Klösz's photographs.

Mr and Mrs György Klösz, 1884. From the Eintracht Narrenabend *album. Metropolitan Szabó Ervin Library.*

The year 1879 marked a turning point in his career, as that was the time when he switched to photo-lithography, the technique that was to be the hallmark of the Klösz Studio. However, the mass-production of lithographed drawings, maps and graphics took place in the fifth, and last, of Klösz's studios, located at 49 Városligeti fasor. The owner applied for permission to reside in the newly-completed building complex, which also served as his family residence, in October 1894. After this the workshop cum studio, which spread over 800 square metres, began to produce maps, leaflets and advertising material in millions of copies. After graduating from the Viennese Academy of Graphical Arts, his son, Pál Klösz, joined the company, which specialised in zincography and lithography. It was Pál who introduced offset colour printing in Hungary in 1933. The studio was turned into a share company in 1947, was nationalised in 1948; finally it was merged with the Hungarian Geographical Institute under the new name of Offset Nyomda, one of the major printing houses of the country, in 1949.

Klösz's career developed along exactly the same path as did those of the period's major photographers. Typically, they progressed from running a simple portrait studio to owning an operation equipped with printing machines. We must, however, point out that most of the portrait photographers never reached this level of independence, although among them were owners of expensive properties, even developers. To complete the general picture, the work carried out in the studios of painters and sculptors often drew the attention of 19th and early 20th-century society papers and weekly magazines, as well of the art world itself.[3] In photography, the larger portrait

Lajos Kossuth's funeral in Budapest, 1894. Metropolitan Archives, Budapest.

studios usually stole the limelight, although various specialised journals also included brief reports about photographers who embarked on new construction work, developed their existing facilities or introduced new technologies.

The Vienna World Fair of 1873 and the National General Exhibition of 1885

Trade fairs provided other regular occasions to put the most up-to-date products on view. This was not without interest to the photography industry, as it gave them a chance to show their best works and to introduce their latest inventions. The more fortunate photographer could take pictures of the events and of the location. [4]

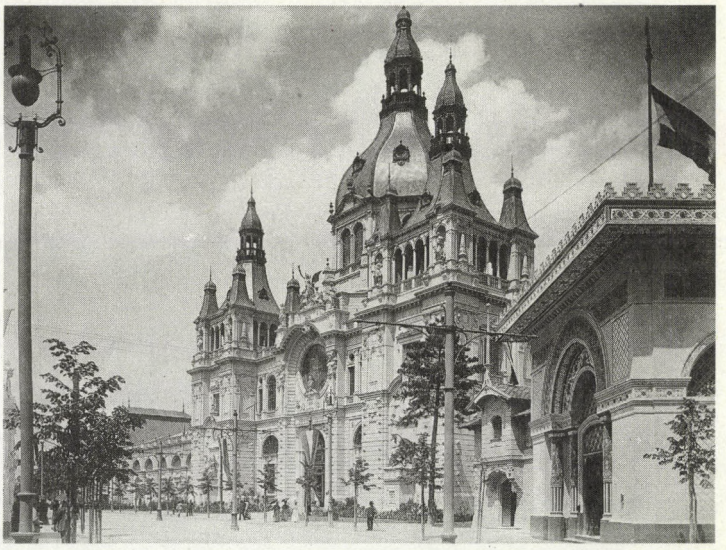
In 1873, the twenty-nine-year-old György Klösz was invited to the Viennese World Fair as part of a team, the Viennese Photograpic Association. Lugo's research has revealed interesting details about the work that in its own age constituted a highly modern form of visual communication.

As an individual business venture, the Klösz print shop first presented its products at the National General Exhibition of 1885. It must be added that the celebrated new thoroughfare of Budapest urban development, the Sugárút, modelled on the pattern of the new Parisian boulevards, was opened to the public that same year and was to bear the name of Gyula Andrássy, prime minister, later foreign minister of the post-Compromise era. The book makes a special mention of a panoramic view consisting of several pictures, which was produced by the Klösz studio primarily for self-promotion. In spite of the little evidence available, it is worth trying to reconstruct possible versions of this work. What we know for sure is that it depicted the Sugárút, lined by eclectic town houses, almost house by house, leading as it did

towards the city centre from the north-east. Work on the project began in 1872 and was completed in 1884. The beautiful boulevard—today a World Heritage Site—was flanked by public buildings including the Opera House, the Academy of Fine Arts, the Old Palace of Art, the Old Academy of Music, as well as by some very attractive houses. (After 1896, the first underground electric railway on the continent also ran—and still runs—directly under the avenue.) Another thing we know about Klösz's panoramic photograph is that it was installed in the Metropolitan Pavilion near the Industrial Palace. The building's ground plan offers some clues about where the pictures may have been hung.[5] A further question is how this photograph, printed on a scale of 1 to 100 of the buildings, might have looked like and what dimensions it may have had. The complete length of what is now Andrássy út allows one to estimate to width and the length of the photograph. Taking into account both sides of the boulevard, we are talking about a series of photographs measuring 2 x 20 metres. As to the height of the prints, this can be estimated from the original height of the houses along the avenue. This suggests that the height of a contact print may have been approximately 25 to 35 centimetres. We have no information on the degree to which the resulting sight may have given viewers the impression of a stroll along the modern boulevard. There is a sentence in the exhibition catalogue which claimed that the photographer depicted Sugárút, along with its side streets, "with vistas".[6] Architectural historians have, to this day, been hoping that at least some of the original items of this series would turn up somewhere.

The Fish Market before the reconstruction of the Inner City of Budapest (where Molnár utca and Irányi utca now meet). Members of the Pest Fishermen's Guild there sold their catch, a privilege granted by the Empress Maria Theresa. Metropolitan Archives, Budapest

Photographers have tried ever since to produce illusionary realities, just as museums and exhibitions have captured the attention of visitors with various visual gadgets. Possibilities for interaction with the viewer were demonstrated at the National Expo in Switzerland in 2002, where, besides high-tech elements, the visual surprises played a dominant role.[7] The association might seem a little far-fetched at first, yet the experiments of the photographers working in the pioneering days must have greatly contributed to all this, regardless of whether their works survived or not.



The Transport Pavillion at the Millenary Exhibition, 1896. Metropolitan Archives, Budapest.

The Millenary Exhibition of 1896

In 1896 Klösz had another opportunity to cover a national event.[8] The country celebrated the 1000th anniversary of the Magyar Conquest. To organise and control the visual documentation of this exhibition, the Photographers' Association was formed in 1894 by the period's most prominent and financially soundest photographers. Naturally, György Klösz was among the members. As the chapter discussing the Millenary Exhibition shows, Klösz was able to turn to good use much of the experience he had garnered at the Vienna World Fair. But as we look at the shots taken at the Millenary Exhibition of 1896, besides appreciating their professionalism and technical competence, we are overcome by a strange impression. The pictures are imbued with a certain conservatism and staginess. Instead of chatting, looking around, moving about or being part of a lively crowd, the people in the pictures stand stiffly in front of the exhibition buildings, looking straight into the camera. In the age of snapshots, this is unusual: one feels as if confronted by posed pictures. There is no trace of that hive of activity one expects at national trade fairs, and the ceremonial effect is furthered by the pavilions, which sometimes appear like stage sets. One possible explanation could be that in harmony with the architectural style of the Millenary Exhibition, which combined the elements of various historical periods and wished to demonstrate the great role that the past played in the nation's life, the photographs too were meant to convey immobility as in a *tableau vivant.*

Even these monumental exhibitions and trade fairs shared the same fate: at their closure the goods were taken away and, with a few exceptions, the frequently highly elaborate pavilions and installations were demolished.[9] As regards most of them, all we have now is Klösz's photographs.

In the closing years of the 19th century, another unique series of photographs was produced at his initiative. In preparation for the Paris Exhibition of 1900, Klösz decided to capture the country's finest stately homes in an album. When he set out to photograph the exteriors and interiors of one hundred such in 1899, he undertook something special and unlike any routine documentation such as that of a state ceremony. Taking photographs of buildings on private land went beyond the ordinary line of duty, especially when the interior was to be photographed too. And this was precisely what Klösz wanted to do. Despite the variety of the locations, Klösz tried to achieve a homogeneous effect. After carefully studying the buildings, he selected the most characteristic angle. In some cases this meant the frontal view (Gödöllő, Eszterháza, Keszthely), but in other instances he thought the side view (Parnó, Mosgó, Gács) or the rear view (Tőketerebes, Nádasladány) as being aesthetically more appealing. In the cases of Szentesgál, Nyitra, Sáros-Újlak or Bogát, on the other hand, a mausoleum, a bastion or some part of the park offered what seemed most characteristic. Besides the various details, the natural setting of the houses was the most important feature of these buildings, and also of the much envied life they housed. One should mention the art historian József Bíró who, under different circumstances and for different motives, photographed some of the stately homes in Transylvania between the two world wars, making use of his personal contacts.

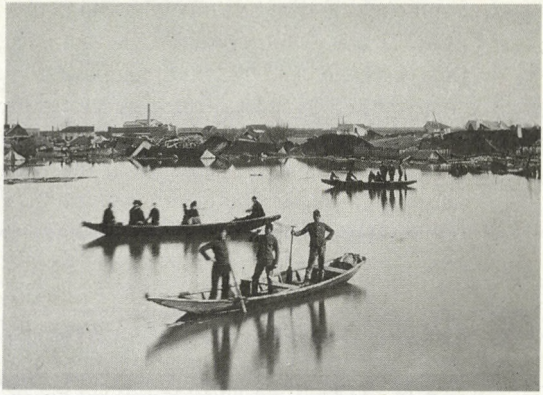
Earlier photographs of mansions and palaces help us a great deal to familiarise us with this type of building which all over the Carpathian Basin went through such catastrophic and devastating changes in the century that followed. György Klösz's "country mansion project" was seen as something of a curiosity at the time, although its reception at the Paris World Fair of 1900, the event that inspired it, was not in keeping with its importance. I know of no other similar enterprise on a like scale at that time.

View of Somoskő Castle. Cca 1875. Hungarian National Museum.

Pictures of floods and reproductions of artworks

Among the truly revelatory findings turned up by László Lugosi Lugo are the pictures of floods between 1875 and 1879. These photographs were meant to provide authentic and objective information on extraordinary events, in the vein of 20th-century newsreels. The photographs of floods at Szeged, Eger, Miskolc and Budapest were published in the highly popular stereo format with the illusion of three-dimensional effects, which was popular at the time. The books provide a fine selection of these hitherto unpublished items.

In 1876, following one of the most devastating of these floods, a charity event was held for the victims, and rarely displayed art treasures in ecclesiastic and private ownership were put on show. György Klösz was asked to photograph the artworks. The task required great professional expertise and technical skills, indeed Klösz produced reproductions with lavish details and of beautiful texture, the quality of which far exceeded that of earlier graphic works. The author is right to trace the origins of photographic reproduction in Hungary to Klösz's activity[10], although he was not the only one to photograph artworks in the country at the time. An early example of books illustrated with photographs is an album published in 1871, which shows the paintings in the Esterházy Gallery.[11] In the 1880s Sándor Beszédes produced a beautiful series of photographs featuring the ecclesiastical artworks in the Esztergom Treasury.[12] But save for a few fine examples, drawing continued to be dominant for some considerable time. With regard to photomechanical reproduction, collotype was the turning point (1878) in the reproduction of artworks in Hungary.



The 1879 Szeged floods.
Móra Ferenc Museum, Szeged.

Budapest 1873

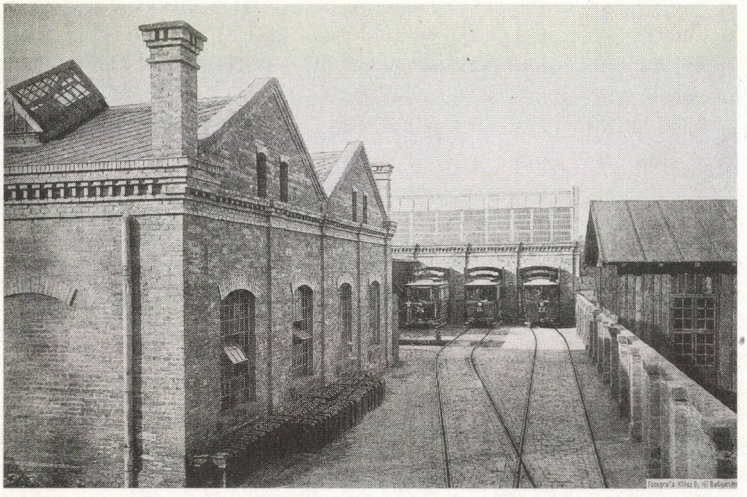
Subsequent to the failure of the 1848/49 Revolution, the Compromise of 1867 provided a reconciliation with the Court. Hungary became one of the constituent parts of the newly established Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary. The year 1873 saw the unification of Budapest, when the administratively and culturally diverse towns of Pest, Buda and Óbuda merged. The municipal authorities tried to give a homogeneous appearance to the city by eliminating the differences that had developed in the course of the centuries. By the end of the nineteenth century Budapest had become one of the most beautiful and fastest growing cities in Central and Eastern Europe. The reconstruction of the inner city, the demolition of whole sections, the construction of two new bridges and the development of a modern transport system produced a fundamentally new situation. The replacement of neo-Classical and Baroque buildings by elegant, three or four-storey blocks of apartments, along with the installation of the accompanying infrastructure, signalled the beginning of the modern era. The city's overall appearance changed, as did the objects surround-

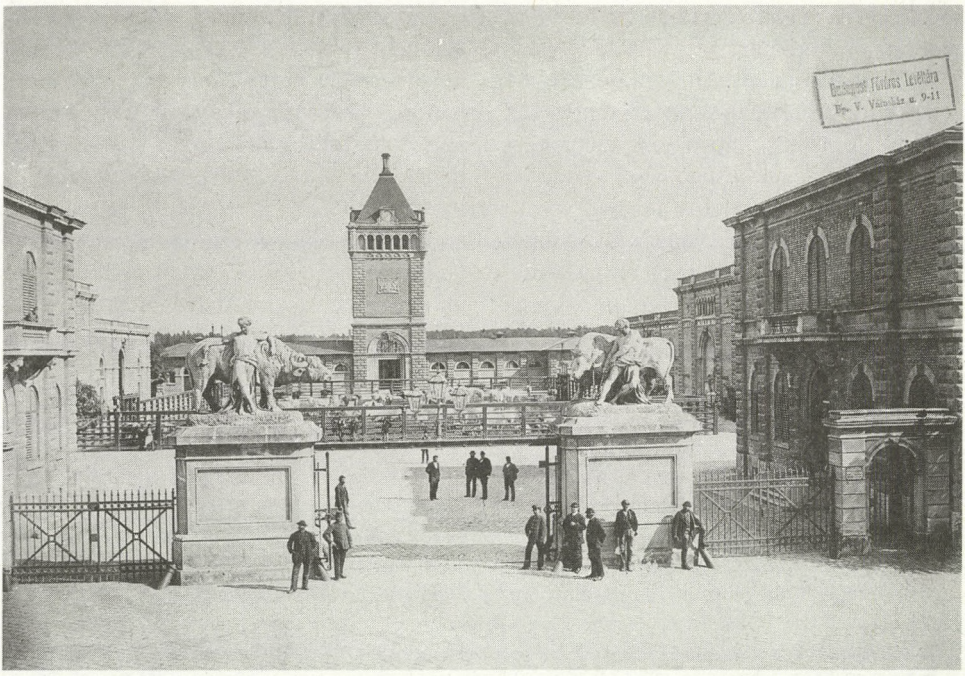
ing those who dwelled in it. What stand out in Klösz's oeuvre are outdoor photographs that faithfully reflect the changes. The chapter The Budapest Horizon—Pictures of the 1870s, presents a selection from his early photographs. We learn that the pictures in the series had been given the title Budapest Views and The Budapest Horizon. The most complete series known so far comprises 108 photographs. The book offers us little information on the locations and the objects photographed, only the size of the pictures and the conditions of work are discussed. In one of the chapters on the studios, Lugo refers to a number of interesting early photographs of the public railway system: the horse-drawn cars and the station buildings. Elsewhere we learn that in the following decade Klösz also took photographs of the modern electric tram system: the electric engines that replaced the horse-drawn cars, together with the carriages and the stations. These photographs demonstrated a technical accuracy that was characteristic of him.

"If you want to know what Budapest looked like at the turn of the century, take a look at Klösz's photographs." This advice is frequently given by those in the profession. For almost forty years, Klösz worked "on the city" and "for the city"; his lens captured everything it "saw". From time to time Lugo lectures on ways photographic technology affected the approach to urban photography. The spread of dry-plates, for example, at the beginning of the 1880's produced fundamental changes in the previously descriptive character of architectural photographs. The photographs suddenly came to life, swarming with people, some looking into the camera, others passing by it indifferently. Klösz's photographs would deserve further study from the point of view of their stylistic marks and layers of meaning.

Lugo discusses the events of the 1880s in a chapter headed 18 Hatvani Street. The Fourth Studio. In it he more than once points out the dynamic expansion of Klösz's interests in printing. The year 1895 was a milestone, with the demolition of some of the city's central area decided on so as to make room for the Elizabeth Bridge. The archivist László Toldy, who was a founding member of the city's metropolitan museum, immediately suggested that the buildings singled out for demolition were to be photographed for posterity. The letter Klösz wrote in 1895 is something of a curiosity: in it the photographer urged the panoramic documentation of the old Tabán, a district destined for destruction in the plans for the modernisation of the

The Siemens & Halske tram sheds, cca 1890.
Siemens & Halske and the entrepreneur Mór Balázs were responsible for the electric trams which replaced horse trams in Budapest.
The first trials were held in 1887. Metropolitan Szabó Ervin Library.





The central building of the Budapest Cattle Slaughter House and Meat Processing Works. 1872, Metropolitan Archives, Budapest.

Buda side. An accurate list of the buildings to be photographed only survived from 1897. Lugo too publishes a list of 31 photographs of buildings condemned in downtown Pest. Since the demolished buildings were soon replaced by new ones, a brief outline of the urban reconstruction projects of the 1880s would have come in handy. Apart from the title, New Budapest, we get little information on the approximately 250 pictures that make up the series. We are in a much better position regarding the period after 1888, as Lugo devotes a separate chapter to the magazine *Budapesti Látogatók Lapja*, which published Klösz's photographs in almost every issue.

Only a part of the negatives and original prints have survived. The studio in Városligeti fasor, considered to be the flagship of the Klösz empire, was the last place where the negatives and the printing blocks were kept in a relatively ordered state, arranged by theme. Following the nationalisation of private firms in 1948, public collections managed to acquire nearly 4000 photographs.

The two volumes under review present the results of nearly five years of research by László Lugosi Lugo. György Klösz's oeuvre is undoubtedly pivotal to any historical survey of the genre, and his achievements are impressive. But at the end of the 19th century not even Klösz could make a living out of producing and marketing architectural photographs alone. Between the two world wars, the media, architects and experts on contemporary, and most notably modern, architecture learnt to appreciate the role of photography in the popularisation of architectural styles and new technologies of construction. After the 1920s, in Hungary photographers also closely collaborated with the

architects. The all-pervading fashions of modern photography and particularly the New Objectivity powerfully influenced the renewal of architectural photography.[13] In Klösz's footsteps, hosts of Hungarian photographers have tried their hand in a genre whose standards he had set so high. Some of them made only a brief excursion into the genre of architectural and object photography (Olga Máté, József Pécsi, Iván Hevessy, Kálmán Szőllősy); others devoted their entire life to it (Zoltán Seidner, Tivadar Kozelka, István Petrás). Most of them never came to enjoy international fame; the only exceptions in this regard are László Moholy-Nagy and György Kepes, who studied the broader aspects of the vocabulary of form and the function of architecture, as well as Hungarian-born Lucien Hervé, who elevated architectural photography to the status of a separate branch of art. But that is another story. ❧

NOTES

1 ■ Margit Szakács: "Magyarországi kastélyok képei a századfordulóról" (Photographs of Hungarian Mansions at the Turn of the Century). In: *A Magyar Munkásmozgalmi Múzeum Évkönyve* (Annals of the Museum of the Hungarian Labour Movement). 1981/82. p. 116.

2 ■ *Képes Kiállítási Lapok,* 1873. p. 103.

3 ■ *Művészek és Műtermek* (Artists and Studios). *Tanulmánykötet és katalógus a Budapest, a művészek városa című kiállításhoz.* (A Collection of Essays and Catalogue to the Exhibition, Budapest as the City of Artists). Ernst Múzeum, Budapest, October 20–December 4, 2002.

4 ■ Since the Paris World Fair of 1855, Hungarian photographers have always been present at international exhibitions. The first Hungarian success was registered by the Pest photo-grapher Antal Simonyi, who won a Gold Medal for his invention allowing instant photography. For more details, see: *A kép és fényíró Simonyi Antal* (The Photographer Antal Simonyi). Exhibition catalogue edited by Hungarian Museum of Photography, 20 March–20 June, 1992.

5 ■ *Kiállítási Lapok,* 31 January, 1885. Vol. 28.

6 ■ *Budapest főváros Pavilonjának külön katalógusa.* Országos kiállítás Budapesten 1885-ben. (Separate Catalogue of the Budapest Capital Pavilion. National Exhibition in Budapest in 1885.) pp. 53–54.

7 ■ See the webpage www.expo.02.ch.

8 ■ *1896. Magyarország az Ezredévi Kiállítás tükrében* (1896. Hungary in the Mirror of the Millennium Exhibition). A Milleniumi Országos Kiállítás és az ünnepségek krónikája. (The Chronicle of the Millennium Exhibition.) Edited by Katalin Varga. Budapest, 1996.

9 ■ *Pavilon építészet a 19–20. században a Magyar Építészeti Múzeum gyűjteményéből* (Pavilion Architecture in the 19th and 20th Centuries from the Collection of the Museum of Hungarian Architecture). Exhibition Catalogue, ed. by Zoltán Fehérvári, Virág Hajdú, Endre Prakfalvi. Budapest, 2001.

10■ In 1876 György Klösz was asked to photograph the items of the exhibition held for the victims of the flood in Hungary. The 363 pieces held in the Budapest Metropolitan Archives are the most complete representation of the exhibition pieces known today.

11■ Gusztáv Keleti: *Az Eszterházy-Képtár eredeti fényképekben* (The Eszterházy Gallery in original Photographs). Vol. I. Pest, 1871, Published by Mór Ráth.

12■ Az *Esztergomi Főszékesegyház Kincstára LXXIX. Műtárgyának LV. Fényképe* (The LXXIX Artworks of the Treasury of the Esztergom Cathedral in LV Photographs) Published by Dr. József Dankó, Esztergom MDCCCLXXX. Budapest, 1914, pp. 238–241.

13■ The last time that a thematic exhibition was held on the history of architectural photography from the beginnings to the present was in Paris in the Summer of 2002: Vues d'Architectures Photographies des XIXe et XXe siécles. 2 jun–25 aout 2002. Musée de Grenoble. Paris, 2002.

László Lugosi Lugo

Pascal

It was Wednesday afternoon. I had just left the Deák Erika Gallery on Jókai tér when my mobile started ringing. A man speaking broken English said a name. I didn't understand it. Then another, the one who gave him my number. But the connection was breaking up badly, I couldn't really hear him. He called me again a couple of minutes later. I was out on the Körút by then. *I am a ship's master,* he said, *and I now call you from my vessel. I am going down the Danube. I will reach Budapest tomorrow, about one o'clock in the afternoon it will be. They said you are photographer. I want picture of my vessel sailing under the Chain Bridge, with Buda Castle in the background. You stand on Parliament side, and you make picture for me please.*

Needless to say, I said yes. I was fascinated by the adventure lurking behind the story. Someone who is a complete stranger calls me from somewhere along the Danube and asks me to take a picture of his boat for him. I started thinking. It is raining today. Will the sun come out tomorrow? *Okay, listen,* I said to the man with the broken English, *I will be by the Chain Bridge tomorrow. Just call me ninety minutes before, so I can make it on time. I hope the weather will be fine. Okay,* the ship's captain said. *But you give your mobile number to me. But we're talking on my mobile right now,* I said. *I will call you tomorrow,* he said.

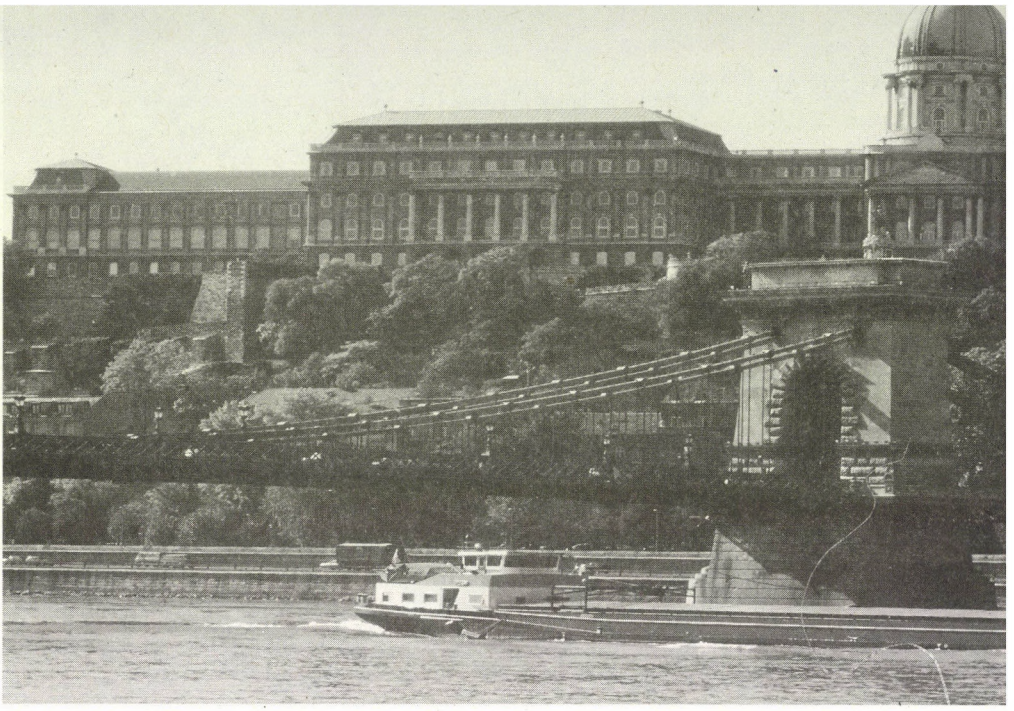
Now, then. What sort of camera should I use, I wondered. It's got to be a 35 mm one with a good zoom lens. In short, I knew I needed a telephoto lens. My own camera (a Nikon F 70) that would have been ideal was being repaired, however, so I had to make a choice. It was either going to be my ancient but reliable Nikon F, or I could borrow a Nikon (a 601) from my friend Bálint with an auto-focus and automatic light meter, but I might not be able to figure out the logic of all the various buttons for settings.

I decided to have both cameras with me. The next morning, a Thursday, I packed my equipment and waited for the captain to call. It was a beautiful

---

László Lugosi Lugo

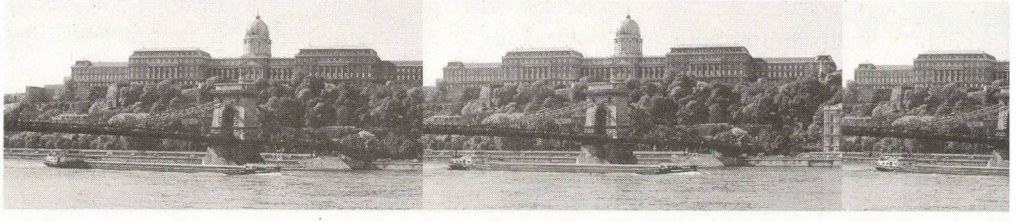
is a professional photographer, writer and critic, author of a two-volume monograph on György Klösz, reviewed on pp. 87–98.

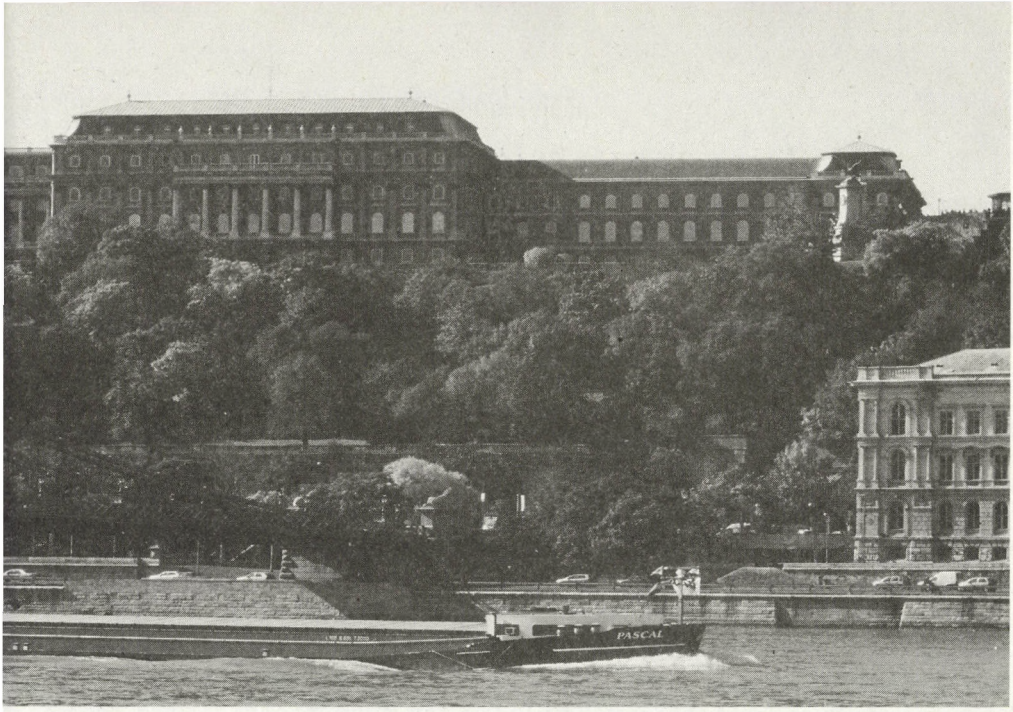


autumn day. The air was permeated with a thin veil of mist, but the sun shone warm all the same. At nine thirty, the mobile rang. *We should under the Chain Bridge be by around eleven,* the ship's captain said. *Please to leave now. The name of my vessel, it is* Pascal. *I run under the Belgian flag.* Interesting. Instead of 'ship' or 'cargo', he kept using the word 'vessel'. A real pro. *I'll be there,* I said. *I will you call again,* the captain continued, *when we ten minutes from you.*

I set off. I had to wait fifteen minutes for the No. 2 tram. I was mad with impatience. I had to be in front of Parliament on time to meet Bálint, who was going to bring his camera. At last the tram came. I got on. I kept checking my watch. The minutes were flying by much too quickly. Or was the tram slower than usual? Every other stop, I sent an SMS to Bálint to wait for me. I caught up with him at the last moment. He had to be inside Parliament to report on some political event or other. I started walking back towards the Chain Bridge, along the quay. Actually, I was running, although I was well on schedule, I knew. But adventure called!

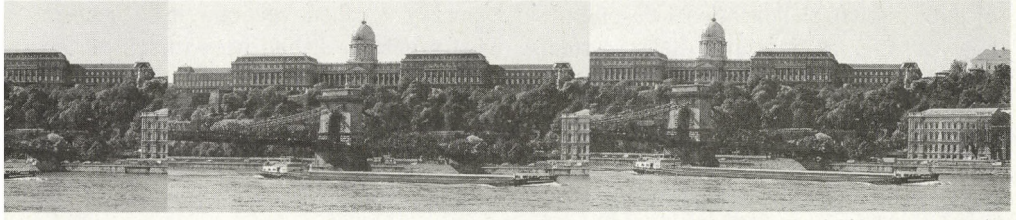
I reached the appointed scene at ten thirty. A good thing that the *Pascal* had arrived a bit early, I thought later, when I saw the finished pictures. At this time in autumn, by one p.m., the sun is behind the Castle. It lights up Pest from there, and almost everything would have been backlit. Except for me, the only people





on the quay were some dog walkers and a man eating out of a plastic bag. I put my equipment out on a bench, checked the frame through the viewfinder, and thought once again about which camera I should use. I opted for the traditional camera. I attached the telephoto lens, then proceeded to measure the light with a hand-held light meter and to calculate the exposure. Then I waited. Around ten forty-five, my mobile rang again. *I am under the Petőfi Bridge,* the captain of the *Pascal* reported. *We will be there soon. Any time, I am in position,* I said. *You are in position?* the captain returned with obvious delight.

Full of expectation, I craned my neck. In a couple of minutes, I caught a glimpse of the front of a tugboat just passing in front of the Vigadó, it seemed to me. Then, as it approached along the river, the boats moored by the shore hid it from view. But it re-appeared and slowly reached the Chain Bridge. As it passed under the bridge, I took about a dozen pictures, with half an f-stop corrections, because I was shooting slides. Okay, two more close-ups, one of the boat's stern, one of the prow. The *Pascal*. For a fleeting moment I may have even thought that yes, there it is, the Belgian flag. I put the camera down on the bench, and walked down to the water. The figure of a man appeared on the poop. He straightened up. Arms held high, we waved to each other. ❧



Mihály Vargha

Budapest—City of Offices?

'Budapest—City of Spas' is often heard. The city does indeed boast hot medicinal springs that feed the baths built above them, some with halls that go back to Turkish times. And these baths are still functioning, although one or two have been run down to the point where they may have to close (the Art Nouveau Gellért Baths and the charmingly neo-Baroque Széchenyi Baths are, perhaps, the only spruce exceptions). And foreign visitors do come, for Budapest is indeed a city of spas.

Post-socialist urban development apparently aimed at new office blocks as prestige development buildings, of which there was a shortage for a long time. There was actually a curb on their construction under 'existing' socialism. For years, orders from the Planning Office, the Ministry of Construction Affairs and Urban Development, even the Central Committee of the ruling Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party banned the building of new blocks. There were dodges and exceptions, of course, each explained away. Currently, a succession of office blocks are being pulled about or pulled down, slapdash work despite the ban, or after it, as the socialist system wound down. Right now the 'Spinach House', which is undoubtedly one of the ugliest products of socialist architecture in Budapest is undergoing treatment. It stands next to the Gresham Palace, a gem of eclectic Art Nouveau architecture at the Pest end of the Chain Bridge, and close to the magnificent classicist building of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Another block hardly twenty years old is coming down in Fő utca in downtown Buda. The same fate awaits a block of offices on the south side of Vörösmarty tér, in the heart of Pest. Mind you, speculation could have something to do with all this as well.

The watchword during the changeover years was liberalisation. The earlier dictatorial restrictions were lifted too fast in some cases. There should have been the same circumspection with urban real estate, building plots and housing as there was with farmland, where market forces are permitted to assert themselves by degrees. It is easy to be clever with hindsight, of course, but Budapest Mayor Gábor Demszky recalled recently in a lecture what a mistake it had been to sell off, so

---

Mihály Vargha,
an architect and critic, is editor of the online magazine www.építészfórum.hu.

suddenly and so cheaply, the bulk of the state housing stock to its tenants.

The uneasy peace gave way all too soon to warfare on the real-estate market, in wholesale and in other commercial vetures that seemed to promise quick returns—a process exemplified by dozens of new shopping malls and multiplex cinemas. They snap at and crush each other like dinosaurs, although they try to disguise their nature, of course, as gentlemen in suits and elegant ladies lay foundation stones, raise roofs and cut ribbons with ubiquitous smiles. The outcome is aesthetically chaotic; a motley of structures vie to be noticed.

Throughout the city and the country, an architectural storm rages. The most glaring examples are the 'residential parks' of the green belt, the proliferating wounds of suburbanisation, designed to be accessible only by car. The tendency to move outwards has seen Budapest lose ten per cent of its population within a few short years. Nor is there a need for so much commercial property. Already, there are brand new edifices standing empty, especially in and around the capital, with huge advertisements announcing what they can offer. Once oversupply sets in, it soon leads to a situation where perfectly serviceable buildings empty and die. Should they be demolished? Should they too have their plots sold off? While new building follows the dictates of perceived demand, all you need to do is suck as many consumers into the spiral as you can.

Initially, they were adding about 20,000–30,000 square metres of new office space a year in Budapest. By the mid-1990s, this had risen to 50,000–60,000. This led to excess supply and some moderation of output after 1995, but by 1998, the annual increment was 70,000 square metres, in 1999, it topped 100,000, and in 2000, 2001 and 2002 it was 170,000–180,000.

If the aggregate figures can be believed, there are now more than a million square metres of modern office space in Budapest, of which almost a quarter stands empty (although the proportion that is vacant differs from section to section in the market). Those worst affected are ill-appointed buildings with lower standards of quality and services or those less easily reached. Those with the highest rates of occupancy lie to the north of the centre of Pest, in the Váci út area, in West Buda and in Budaörs, while the lowest rates are found in the centre of Pest, mainly because of access and parking problems.

Looking at the developments of the last decade in location terms, three characteristic waves of development make their appearance. Developers in the early years of the transition confined themselves almost entirely to infilling in the centre of the city, continuing a process begun under the previous regime. Typical examples of this period are József Finta's buildings in downtown Váci utca and on the corner of Bajcsy-Zsilinszky út and József Attila utca. Apart from blocks built on imposing sites in the centre itself (Lajos Zalaváry's East-West Business Centre, the Providencia building on the Nagykörút, Finta's Bank Centre in Szabadság tér, or the ING–NN complex in Andrássy út and Paulay Ede utca by the Dutch firm of Erick van Egeraat), it is best to see the adjacent developments in the 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th Districts (the Rumbach Centre, Madách Trade Centre, SÜBA I and II in Nagymező utca, etc.) as attempts to extend the city centre. In 1994, the demand spread to other districts with good public transport that are close to the centre, such as Váci út. The first major office developments in the inner areas of Buda occurred at the same time.

The third wave brought suburbanisation of office functions, with projects in the south-west of the conurbation (Buda-

örs, Törökbálint, and in a sense, the 11th District in Buda also belong here). Developments took place on a scale almost amounting to urban areas in themselves, the first on a non-traditional site, projecting a strong image of architectural quality, being Grafisoft Park, on the old gas works site in Óbuda. Others, much less demanding architecturally, were the Terrapark in Budaörs and MOM Park in the 12th District, with its imitation of the variety of an urban fabric, combining offices with a shopping mall and a housing zone. More will be said about that later. Meanwhile another complex or conglomeration was rising next to the Western Railway Station on the edge of the city centre: the WestEnd Centre, which includes a massive shopping centre and the city's second Hilton Hotel.

Thus Budapest has gained large amounts of new office space, but quantity has not translated into quality. Most of the buildings erected in the last ten years have little in common with architectural standards. Perhaps this has something to do with investor-dictated criteria, third-rate imported designs, or the difficulty Hungarian architects have in being creative within tight budget constraints. There are grades of nonentity, of course. The *ennui* of glass or thin granite cladding (or the two combined) or the unimaginativeness of reinforced concrete boxes can produce a background which sets off other buildings that display architectural merits after all. Examples are the Bank Centre by József Finta (achieved after a series of less successful attempts), or the much-criticised office block in Kálvin tér by the husband-and-wife team Csaba Virág and Judit Z. Halmágyi. The latter (still unfinished) is already a subject of strong debate, on the characteristic grounds of 'consensus' about values, or the absence of it. My subjective opinion is that there is more draughtsmanship or poetry in it than in the Bank Centre, expensively wrought in fine materials, but brutal in its shape and proportions.

On the other hand, there are refreshing exceptions, architectural bull's-eyes, intimating that all hope is not yet lost.

Dorottya and her chimney stack

The old chimney stack has been left in the courtyard of a rebuilt factory, now functioning as offices. It has no direct function, but it remains as a spatial motif, surrounded by a new Zen-inspired garden that includes a pond—a regular haven of rest in the courtyard of the U-shaped building. The British investor expressly wished the stack to remain: it has a rare octagonal profile instead of the usual round one.

It was no common occurrence for a chimney to be spared, and it is rare also to find an old industrial building exploited as office space. Yet there are opportunities of making such conversions all over the city, and what a good idea it would be to use some of them for housing, teaching or commercial purposes as well. Hungary embarrassingly lags behind the EU countries in rehabilitation. Sadly, there is not enough effort by local government to ensure that projects square investor intentions with local social demands.

The chimneyed office block, christened Dorottya-udvar (court), stands on the edge of the 11th District, at the end of Bocskai út, which ends at the foot of Sas-hegy, one of the Buda Hills. The somewhat romantic factory built in 1910 had stood empty for years (it started life as a textile mill and later became the Caola cosmetics factory). It is not an especially splendid piece of architecture, rather a transitional piece from the early years of the reinforced concrete period—not yet modern in appearance, but with a flat roof. The front is adorned with false pillars picked out in

Zoltán Tima: Dorottya Court. The factory building at night and view from the new glass tower

brick, with stylized capitals, while above them, as a kind of *ur*-post-modernist joke, there are vases on the pediment, in reinforced concrete again. It has character, of course, especially now that it has been renovated and repainted, and is bathed at night in some enchanting architectural lighting effects.

The architect, Zoltán Tima of KÖZTI, has handled the old factory discreetly, perhaps restraining himself too much. Tima has already proved himself on new buildings (a dwelling house as his diploma work in hilly and verdant Dániel út, a company headquarters in the 11th District, with Miklós Marosi) and on some conversions (an office complex in Buda's elegant Németvölgyi út in the 12th District). Apart from renovating the front of the Dorottya Court, all he has done to show that this is a conversion is to place round steel caps on the four corners and glass towers on the sides to link two tracts of the old building. These follow on into extra top storeys of the two outer wings. I do not know why it turned out like that. Could a more striking and signal upward extension on the main front of the flat-roofed building, facing the railway, not have been considered during the design work, to dilute the symmetry of it?

The new garden dominates the courtyard, and the octagonal chimney stack, as the one motif, provides the asymmetry, which is what makes it a bull's-eye. The proportions of the mass and the rhythm of the frontage surfaces are in order as well. The line of the solid wall and the windows of the tall areas inside are varied enough. Only the view from the courtyard is a little monotonous. Also appropriate are the glass towers mentioned earlier, repeating

The Dorottya Court office building on Bocskai út. Detail of the new glass tower.

at the ends of the taller tract the alternation of brick and plaster surfaces on the fronts, in a smaller way, with motifs of blind windows. Furthermore, there are only bridges to the lift shafts on the three floors, so that the space is the full height of the building, with the pipes of the ventilation system on top. The architect had little room for manoeuvre there, but he managed to resolve everything within it—just as things should be.

A new city gate

The M1 and M7 traffic corridor leading into the Buda side of the city from the West has developed into a multiple city gate over the last twenty years or so. Much further out than the Dorottya Court, great commercial areas have been opened up beyond the city limits, especially at Budaörs. This environment of vast boxes for a time follows the traveller into the city. Then the traditional fabric of the city is reached, where a new, more urbane gateway has emerged on the surviving patches of green and in the industrial area that once neighboured the residential area. This can immediately be seen to have been aimed at stronger gestures and architectonic shaping, compared with the great flat boxes and wide open car parks of the homogenous suburbs around it.

A much earlier vision had been to build a line of tower blocks along Alkotás út, an extension of the corridor. The only one actually built was Elemér Nagy's Intranszmas headquarters building, which is still a landmark in the area.

Some echo of the tower-block vision can be seen in the prefabricated Novotel and adjacent Budapest Convention Centre (by József Finta and Antal Puhl respectively). Behind these rises the large new complex of MOM Park and Alkotás Point.

The former occupies the site of the old Optical Works, the latter being built on parkland attached to the Sports Hospital —'brownfield' and greenfield side by side. The offices in MOM Park were designed by Antal Puhl. The housing estate behind, using good materials but ultimately reminiscent of a socialist-period housing estate in East Germany (not the modern reconstructions of these!) was the work of Tamás Noll. Puhl was also responsible for the cube of the shopping mall.

The German investor earns a good mark only for choosing to work with eminent Hungarian architects. Nonetheless, the outcome is hardly a joy to behold, perhaps because of the choice of colours, the otherwise elegant brown limestone and the metallic claddings, not in the least counterbalancing the monstrous character of the whole complex. This applies especially to the windowless shopping mall, with its brutally massive wall surfaces and striped cladding, relieved only slightly by the more urban, but ultimately boring, frontage onto Alkotás út. This is Germanic precision and lack of imagination.

But there is something eye-catching and refreshing on the other side of Alkotás út. It is almost as if the nearby street, supposedly named after Haydn's *Creation,* had inspired the architects, Richárd Hőnich, Ferenc Keller and Ferenc Cságoly. With a sweeping gesture, they have planted their work on the corner of Alkotás út and Csörsz utca right at the top of the hill. The building lends verve, breathes life and grabs one's attention. It is like three daggers cutting into the field of vision and drawing the gaze involuntarily. There is a slight trick in it, but there is much need of a little playfulness and a parade of formal ideas, lest we smother in the immaculateness and spotless grooming of the false world that high technology tries to impose upon us. The architects would have liked

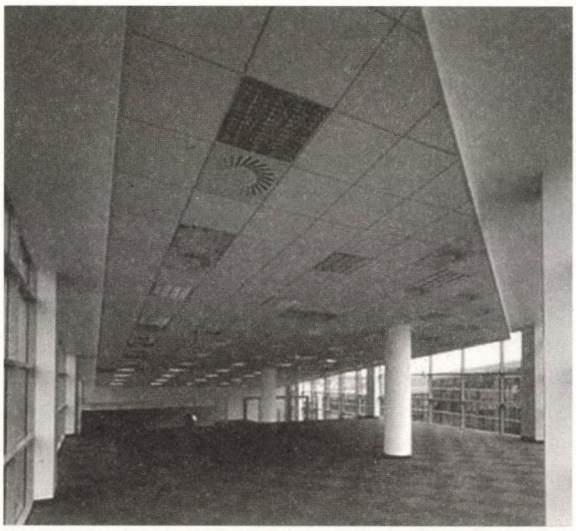
to do more than they did, gaining greater transparency and penetrance, but no more extras could be accommodated within the strict frames of realty utilisation.

The scheme goes A–b–A–b–A, with each 'b' standing for an entrance through which those arriving are almost sucked into the building. The almost bare entrance hall is imposing and its height is generous. This is where it was possible to make the richest use of materials, with stone playing a restrained role in the surfaces. The lifts are sited in the most natural place for the flow of people, but with a slight displacement, the left-hand lift has a glass back wall, turning it discreetly into a panoramic lift fitted into the corner of 'b'. In their plan, the three pointed wedges converge a little, giving a disproportionality that lifts the composition even more.

The comb-like, fivefold articulation takes a more subdued form on the Sports Hospital side of the building, so that the whole block gains a pleasing balance. The contours of the frontage surfaces and the proportions of the apertures are always delicate, making for a sensitive system of lines. Only the almost ubiquitous greyness seems overdone to me, and combines with something else that disturbs me more: the hesitancy and cheapness of the horizontal band of cladding that covers much of the front.

The main attraction is on the upper level of the three A-shaped wings: the areas with a slanting roof, ending in a two-level 'observation terrace'. At present, the landlord's advertising office is housed in the middle tower room, but all three are likely to be taken up by tenants looking for offices that are both elegant and extravagant. There are few other chances of gaining such a view: Gellért Hill, Sas Hill, and a distant view southwards between the two. The evening lights will only be seen in their full glory after all the floors of Alkotás Point have been occupied.

This new building brings to architecture in Hungary a new degree of quality that may spread beyond its immediate surroundings. But there are things to ponder around it as well: the ghastly brown block of the Novotel complex from the 1980s, mentioned already, with its Convention Centre tucked behind, and then the interesting metamorphosis of the oh-so-international FOTEX-Plaza, carved out of a factory building. And then came the realty tempest that swept away the remains of the Optical Works, including some units that looked suspiciously like historic buildings, replacing them with the unimaginative MOM-park, also mentioned above. It was an easy situation, you might say, but more importantly—a competition was held, and the result of it is a new office block. It was a rare opportunity, and we would like more of them.



Alkotás Point. Office interior, upper level.

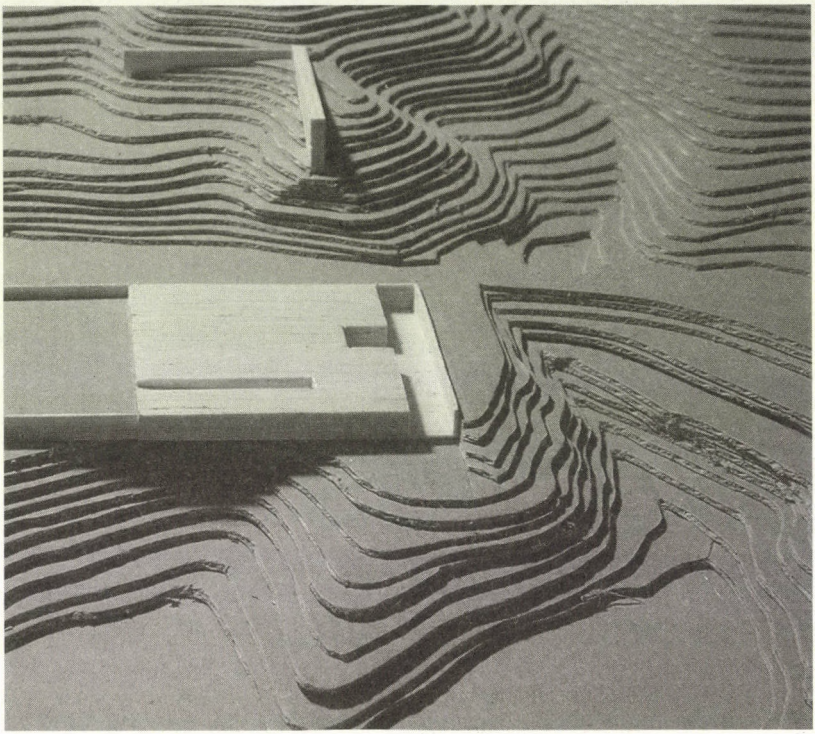
Richard Hönich, Ferenc Keller, Ferenc Cságoly (Építész Studio Ltd.): Maquette for the Alkotás Point office buildings.

Not just Budapest, not just offices

In 2002, one of the biggest, if not the biggest international successes for Hungarian architecture was the result of a Japanese invitation to submit designs for a museum. The newly qualified architects Edina Péli, Balázs Mórocz and Tamás Ükös, as the YoHa (Young Hungarian Architects') group learnt about the competition on the Architects' Forum webpage and registered themselves (among 4600 others). Eventually 1211 designs for the projected Tomihiro Museum of Shi-ga (poetry-painting) in Azuma-mura, Japan, were submitted—from all over the world. After four preliminary rounds, five designs remained: four Japanese and the YoHa submission as the only survivor from abroad. The Péli, Mórocz and Ükös team then came third as a special purchase.

Tomihiro Hoshino, after whom the museum is named, was a physical education teacher who was paralysed in an accident. Since then, he has been an artist, painting with a brush held in his mouth. (The great Hungarian sculptor Béni Ferenczy, suffered a stroke in the autumn of 1956, after the suppression of the Revolution; it left him unable to read and talk, but he learnt to use his left hand to paint, draw and even make some excellent small sculptures, so that his career could continue. I met the elderly master several times through my parents, and those encounters were among the rare exciting and enchanting moments of my childhood.)

Hoshino's works show an anthropocentric world full of life and the relations between nature and humanity. His success comes from his ability to tran-



Edina Péli, Balázs Mórocz, Tamás Ükös: Maquette of the design submitted by the "yotta" team for the Tomihiro Hoshino Museum.

scend the performance-oriented outlook common among the Japanese and show that life is about something else as well.

The ambience of Budapest derives mainly from a period of hectic urban development around the end of the 19th century. Obviously that, primarily, is what we should think of as our own, look after and render as vibrant as possible, all of us who live in the city. That does not mean hanging on tooth and nail to everything, any more than allowing the march of ostensible civilisation to claim ever more victims. And here I am thinking more than anything else of the motor car.

The baths of Budapest exemplify clearly that the culture in buildings is primarily what people carry within themselves. If excessive emphasis is placed on buildings and their not always objectively measurable aesthetics, there is a danger of forgetting the movable possessions inside them —ourselves. Yet here we Hungarians are in our capital city, Budapest, where our continuing presence is crowned by such moments as Imre Kertész winning the Nobel Prize in Literature. His best-known book, *Fatelessness*, tells how the smell near the crematoria of Auschwitz reminded the author/protagonist of the tannery in Újpest, which he would pass every Sunday when his father took him to a football match. Hardly more than a year ago, a new museum and gallery of contemporary art, the MEO, opened in Budapest, in an old industrial building, sensitively and competently converted. The building concerned was the tannery in Újpest. ❧

Miklós Györffy

Hot and Cool

Zsuzsa Rácz: *Állítsátok meg Terézanyut!* (Hold Back Mother Theresa!). Budapest, Bestline, 2002, 290 pp. • Richárd Salinger: *Apám beájulna* (My Dad Would Freak Out). Budapest, Ulpius-ház Könyvkiadó, 2002, 226 pp. • Andor Kárpáti: *kurvajó!* (frigging great!). Budapest, Dee-sign Kiadó, 2002, 192 pp.

Publishing contemporary serious literature in Hungary these days is generally a loss-making enterprise. Print runs, as a rule, are in the range of 500 to 1,500, which means that publishers cannot even expect to break even. If they are fortunate, their losses may be covered by one of the few public foundations set up for the purpose—if the foundation's board votes to award a subsidy. A number of publishers, large or small, who feel it their duty to bring out serious literature provide what is essentially an intermediary service: they will publish a book, well or badly, if they manage to scratch together the backing for it. Nor would these publishers get far if they were to charge more for such books—still cheap relative to book prices in the West—because those who still read them are barely able, if at all, to afford even the current prices.

It is rare, but it happens that a demanding work proves capable of turning in a modest commercial return. To do so it must sell at least 8,000–10,000 copies. I was told by someone in a position to know that there are just three Hungarian authors who fit that bill: Péter Esterházy, Ervin Lázár and György Moldova, to whom the Nobel laureate Imre Kertész can now be added. Even with the best will in the world, whatever his earlier record, the social reportage that Moldova has been turning out over the past twenty years or so cannot be classified as serious fiction, and Lázár is popular primarily for his highly literate children's books. On the other hand, one may slip in alongside Esterházy's two recent bestsellers, *Harmonia Cœlestis* and *Revised Edition,* Pál Závada's outstanding *Jadwiga's Pillow,* which has racked up sales of several tens of thousands since it first appeared in 1997, and books by Miklós Vámos. (Admittedly, sales of the latter owe much more to their author's hosting his own TV shows than to their middlebrow literary worth.) Now that Imre Kertész has received the Nobel Prize, one anticipates that sales of his books too will break the ten thousand barrier. For several weeks after the Prize was announc-ed, potential readers combed bookstores for his works in vain—almost certainly the first occasion since the 1989 changes that, even with rush reprintings, the books of a living Hungarian author were in "short supply".

Miklós Györffy
reviews new fiction for this journal.

The mass market for lowbrow fiction is a different kettle of fish, but there the pressure coming from international bestsellers has been so strong up until quite recently that the Hungarian producers of similar potboilers have tended to market their products under foreign—usually Anglo-American-sounding—pseudonyms to give their work a better chance. These trashy clone fiction titles, with garish covers, are indistinguishable from anything that can be purchased at airports and railway stations anywhere in the world.

I am going to deal here with three bestsellers that seem to be part of a new trend: books designed as a light read but with the action taking place in a specifically local setting and, above all, written with a specifically local accent. Hungarian filmmakers have been trying their hand at a format of this kind for some time. Several recent box-office hits, such as *A Kind of America, Moscow Square, Glass Tiger* and *Pirates,* have devised a light, easy-going idiom for a new generation, itself taking its cue from foreign models. Zsuzsa Rácz's novel *Hold Back Mother Theresa!,* which quickly went through ten "editions"—so, at least, the blurb says—relies for its impact, at least in part, on adapting an imported model, its underlying proposition being based on Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary,* which was highly successful in Hungary too. This too is a novel concerning a young, lonely, unmarried woman's determined search for a job and a mate, and Rácz tailors the model to a domestic setting, so skilfully and convincingly that its Hungarian readers, and of course the tens of thousands of young female readers in particular, can relate it directly to aspects of their own lives.

I do not recall having previously read anything, whether a novel or a piece of reportage, in which the radically new lifestyle and attitudes of the twenty-somethings who have come of age over the last decade is so effortlessly and neatly distilled. The first-person narrator moves around in a milieu that is her natural element, at every turn getting into situations that relate totally to the times that have passed since the change in régime. To anyone who did not grow up in this period, the world as viewed close up through this prism of its self-absorbed mundanity, which despite one's presumed familiarity with its general outlines, is likely to seem strange and remote.

Kata, the 29-year-old protagonist, a former journalist who has somehow lost all her previous jobs, is interviewed by prospective bosses. Her best chance is to be engaged to run "training courses" for employees of their firms. A head-hunter puts her on display at Humanexpo, a trade show for human resource specialists, and delivers a lecture about her, as if she were an exhibit. On one occasion she obtains a temporary job running "communications workshops" for lorry drivers. Readers who made their acquaintance with the world of work during the era of state socialism will know little about what function is fulfilled by the "training sessions" that the characters in the book refer to with self-evident familiarity. In any event, our heroine herself would seem not to have too high an opinion about the market in humans:

> ...at a job interview in the first place you always have to make out you are enthusiastic and endlessly fascinated, go into ecstasies at the merest hint that you may be called on to do the payroll in a machine-tool works, or teach grammar to traffic wardens... And when they question you about family or career, are you perhaps planning a child, then you laugh devilishly: "Family???!! What's that when it's at home???

The firm must be the family—"let's be one big family"—and the firm's business

interests are to be regarded as the family's most intimate concern. All this is already familiar enough from American films, but *Mother Theresa* offers staggeringly authentic testimony that it is now being widely aped in Hungary too—and with the backhandedness typical of those new to a game at that. She is selling herself in a market where qualifications count for little; a job seeker offers her personality, her inborn talents, as it were, and thus gambles these, as it were, in what is essentially a lottery. The odds may be stacked against her, but there is a chance she may win. If she lands a "training course", she will be able to quickly earn a tidy sum.

Though Kata does not own her own apartment, she is not on the breadline and, from time to time, is able to afford fashionable gear and expensive titbits, dine out in restaurants and do the rounds of clubs and other places. She has women friends, some of them wives and even mothers of her own age, but their main preoccupation, whether single or hitched, is to find a man. I have no idea what a feminist might make of this book, so very explicitly written for women as it is, but one sure take-home message is that these young, self-aware, self-sufficient single women have nothing else on their minds except how to catch a good-looking hunk with a flat stomach. They hunt for them on evening forays, lure them in internet chatrooms and through e-mails, but all the males they run into seem to be either ludicrously self-centred dickheads or neurotic wimps.

Kata calls herself Mother Theresa because, like that famous resident of Calcutta, she takes pity on, and wants to save, everyone she comes into contact with—sorry menfolk most of all—even though her efforts regularly misfire. She has an innate compulsion to help others: earlier on she had been an anti-drug activist and had written a book on drug addicts. One of the reasons why she issues herself the injunction of the title—Hold Back Mother Theresa! (enough of the sympathy and do-goodery)—is that otherwise she is never going to get either a job or a man. (The title is, incidentally, also intended as a witty, though actually somewhat misplaced, reference to the title by which Brecht's play, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui,* is known in Hungarian.)

It is not hard to discern the author, Zsuzsa Rácz, behind the figure of Mother Theresa and the entries in the diary as representing the daily reality of her own life. She was once a radio reporter, and she wrote a book *Kábítószeretet* (Drug Love), and her novel came into being when she decided, all of a sudden, to sit down and write a day-by-day account of what was happening to her and around her, as though she were holding a reporter's microphone up to her own daily life. For that record to be interesting and authentic, of course, takes an appropriate mixture of personality and suavity, honesty and self-irony, but as a result it gives expression to something that otherwise rarely gains form in prose. Whether this was prompted by a similar need to articulate unspoken and suppressed thoughts or is just a clever marketing gimmick on the part of an author blessed with managerial smarts is not my place to decide, but one notes that every Tuesday evening a public service radio station is now broadcasting a one-hour programme from a "Mother Theresa Club", which is a meeting place for those in search of happiness.

We are thus already seeing Mother Theresa spin-offs (a parody *Hold Back Father Theresa!* has been published) which all fits in with its being a barely concealed soap-opera saga. The adventures of Kata and her woman friends as they search for jobs and men succeed one another like the episodes of a soap: the characters become

our acquaintances, which is why we are eager for ever-newer chapters of their story, which in principle are infinitely extendable and convertible into a branded franchise. For anyone who is looking for something else from literature, of course, the refreshing wash of self-oblivious chattering palls after a while; one gets bored with the repetitiveness of episodes that are cut to the same pattern and puts the book down before reaching the end. One already knows everything there is to know.

The ferocious slang of the younger generation plays a major role in Zsuzsa Rácz's book, but it moves to centre-stage in the even younger Richárd Salinger's novel. The declaration that gives his book its very title in Hungarian carries a slang overtone, the normal verbal prefix *el-*, as in *"Apám elájulna"*, or "My dad would faint (if he heard or knew about it)", here being replaced by *be-*, an "incorrect" usage typical of modern Hungarian slang, an arbitrary swap that creates new-sounding connections. In the present case it suggests that whoever "faints" falls "into" something, or collapses "into" himself. One presumes the author's name is a pseudonym, intended as a tribute to J. D. Salinger, author of *The Catcher in the Rye,* whose translation bestowed much the same cachet of "official" literary approval on the surreptitious student slang of Hungary in the Sixties as the original did on that of late-Forties America. Up till then, and to some extent even afterwards, of course, the prissy guardians of Party taste had banished it from being seen in print.

My Dad Would Freak Out is likewise narrated in the first person and again has a female protagonist: a seventeen-year-old Budapest high-school girl, who takes on various holiday jobs for a bit of "dosh"—pizza delivery, "creative" worker at an advertising agency, barmaid in a "pub" at Lake Balaton. This book too can thus be read as a sociological handbook. Down by Lake Balaton, *Szarka*, or Magpie, as our heroine is nicknamed, meets Barbie, a girl from a nouveau riche family who is looking for adventure. Barbie's parents having taken off on a trip abroad, she sells off the Mercedes that nominally belongs to her for two million forints (Euro 8,000, say) and whisks her new girl friend off to Budapest's international airport. There they ask for tickets on the first flight out, and they end up in Israel. They take a room at the Tel-Aviv Sheraton, from where Barbie, after thinking things over, sends back all the remaining money to her grandma, so the adventure for which she has been longing "it's for real from here on"—.

All things considered, the holiday abroad is a fairly smooth ride; indeed, much of it would be a traditional adolescent novel, if one discounts the modern external trappings. The only thing that could be said to be fresh or original is the vitality of their teenage "jive", but as soon as they have settled down in a hotel at the seaside resort of Eilat the accent increasingly slips into artless banter. Here too, as in *Mother Theresa,* the hunt for lads become the central issue: the bombshell Barbie always manages to hook someone but Magpie can never get it together. The friendship between the two is another topic, but the heroine's limited vocabulary precludes any profundities: "Anyway, we were sitting there in the room at daybreak, and we needed to talk things over something awful." Or this, when they are at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem: "Really the one big wish I had was that I would get a fellow double-quick; nothing else seemed to be worth a fart there and then."

The reader might just wonder, in this connection, whether the girls are in Israel because it is rather a hazardous place for someone still wet behind the ears just to "fart around" in these days. But no, fortu-

nately there are no nasty surprises in store for our heroine, who on seeing Gaudí's mural tiles in Barcelona can still blithely declare that "if I look at tiles, then I would love to stick them up in my bathroom."

It seems fair to ask why, if the girls are only interested in boys, the author has them travel first to the Israeli coast, then on to Barcelona and finally Rome, since he could just as easily have demonstrated their pulling fever in a "pub" by Lake Balaton. Several Hungarian lads are in the hostel for employees of the Eilat hotel and the most promising, tangled and protracted, but ultimately frustrated relationship that Magpie has happens to be with one of them. That is a downright dumb move on the author's part. Then, when the girls have earned enough money, they go to Barcelona because the year before Magpie had made a date to meet up there with the love of her life at the time, a class mate, whilst they move on to Rome because one of Barbie's ex-boyfriends happens to be staying there. It almost goes without saying that these attempts likewise come to nought, for after a while one gets the sneaking suspicion that this is the whole point: for all the vaunted freedom, when abroad we remain who we were in the first place. By the end, Magpie has traipsed all over Europe for two months without succeeding in getting what she longs for from a single bloke. Then, in an epilogue headed Chapter 77, it turns out that not long after returning home she meets "a kid by the name of Bendegúz... I have been going out with him ever since."

There is no denying that the boisterous self-irony and, above all, the even more boisterous idiom of *My Dad Would Freak Out,* like that of *Mother Theresa,* is good fun. The author naturally has no illusions about the right place for his heroine: "There was a period when I used to watch the soaps on TV, but then I realised they were of no interest to me; the only reason I was watching the stupid, endless serials was because they were about me. That's when I got miffed, and stopped watching them, yet they are still about me." That, of course, may be why we like Magpie, and Richárd Salinger also understands how to make her likeable to the reader. Since it is reported that the book is going to be filmed, the only question is how they will mange to capture its essence, its suavity, in images.

In these two books the women are doing the chasing; Andor Kárpáti's autobiographical extemporisation *frigging great!,* which its publisher advertised as "the hit shocker of the year", has the male chasing the skirts. It also looks as if the sexual stereotypes have been set in stone for commercial purposes once and for all: women's talk, game though it may be, is softer than that of any self-respecting male. In places, Andor Kárpáti's "couldn't-give-a-toss-what-you-think" self-portrait seems to be unintentionally parodying itself. A dauntless Alpha-Male, gambler and bum—"globe-trotter, lecher, drug freak," the blurb quotes one Hungarian writer who is never at a loss when it comes to a spot of bluffing—shoves his impromptu memoir before us: it may somehow have gone over my head, but by all means read it for yourselves. Henry Miller, Jack Kerouac, Charles Bukowski and Jean Genet spring to mind as possible distant models, though it is more than likely that the author has never even heard of them.

The life-path that sporadically unfolds (something under twenty years) might even be interesting. Kárpáti spent his early years as a latchkey kid on some dreary housing estate in Budapest, then his mother, on divorcing his father, took him with her and her new husband to Germany, where he attended an élite Hungarian boarding

school in Bavaria for nine years. There he rapidly established himself as a sore trial for his teachers, on the point of expulsion more than once; at the same time, we are asked to believe, the undisputed champion when it came to poetry-reading contests, school festivities and literary competitions, admittedly, for all this is learned from a casual aside. On one occasion when he is supposed to be reciting a poem at a ceremony to mark the March 15th anniversary of the outbreak of the 1848 Revolution, he happens to be away on an unauthorised trip to lose his virginity in a Prague brothel: "The first screw in my life was at dawn on March the fifteenth."

Screwing is his overriding passion from the very start, and although he almost never "gets it together" during his high-school days, he more than makes up for that later. He begins his career as a man after his matriculation exams, on the island of Mallorca, where he falls in with assorted gangs of Germans, Gypsies, Romanians and Hungarians to fleece tourists and buy women with his ill-gotten gains. He gets involved in all manner of brawls, over the looting and over the women. One begins to see through Kárpáti's narration precisely on the grisly detail that he feels obliged to dish up on every single momentous brawl and, even more, momentous coupling. The impression is given that he can recollect all these with meticulous accuracy, whereas other plausible details, such as his mother, the countryside, his companions, history, his feelings and thoughts, etc. somehow do not exist. The size and quality of every woman's sexual organ, and how he knocked out whom is carefully listed, but the link between the bumming around Germany, the Hungary in Mallorca, and the whoring in Budapest—on that the book is silent. Under the pretext of his life story Kárpáti is merely peddling crude pornography, the same sort as that on which he himself, as he repeatedly admits, grew up.

Anyone who does not like it can keep his trap shut up. His self-justifying freedom lies precisely in not accepting that any outside moral or aesthetic precept applies to him. He has written the book that he wants, creating his own narrative rules. At one point, the book suddenly launches into a travel diary which reports its narrator's six-month journey from Bucharest to Thailand. He is carrying hard-porn magazines at the bottom of his luggage, rather risky items to be in possession of at the Turkish-Iranian border, yet he is not caught. He encounters whores in Iran, India and Bangkok, but everything is so grossly exaggerated that one senses he must have become bored with the drudgery of writing and prefers to get high on pot instead. Then he gets it into his head that he is really a painter, and though, deep down, he would rather be doing that when he moves on to Guatemala, he barely finds a free moment from his continual dope-taking and whoring. In the end, we are supposed to be touched when he falls for a wee whore.

Andor Kárpáti may have something, but to be a writer requires a modicum of humility and discipline as well. Publishing, in turn, demands elementary skills, too. The text of *frigging great!* teems with spelling errors that are out of place in the text. If that's business, give me an esoteric postmodern author any day! ❧

György Litván

Fatal Attraction

Lee Congdon: *Seeing Red. Hungarian Intellectuals in Exile and the Challenge of Communism.* Northern Illinois University Press, 2001, 223 pp.

Lee Congdon, an American, who is currently professor of history at the James Madison University, Virginia, studied in Hungary on a scholarship in his younger years. He learnt Hungarian, wrote essays on the poet Endre Ady and the arts in early-twentieth-century Hungary, and eventually set out to write on the lives, activities and influence of the leading Hungarian intellectuals who had emigrated to Western Europe, Great Britain and the United States after the collapse of the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic. The first of these volumes was published by Princeton University Press a decade ago as *Exile and Social Thought. Hungarian Intellectuals in Germany and Austria, 1919–1933.* The central figures in that book were Communist and liberal writers and thinkers, together with artists of the Hungarian avant-garde, namely Georg Lukács, Béla Balázs, Lajos Kassák, László Moholy Nagy, Aurél Kolnai and Karl Mannheim. In addition, he discussed such eminent individuals in the immigrant communities of Vienna and Berlin as Ignotus, Oszkár Jászi, Pál Szende, Karl Polányi, Ernő Kállai, Béla Uitz, Arnold Hauser, Andor Gábor, Julius Háy (but leaving out Lajos Hatvany, Anna Lesznai, Károly Kernstok, Béni Ferenczy, Leó Szilárd and other no less important figures). Regardless of all its shortcomings and somewhat incomprehensible structure, the first volume was a major breakthrough, for it provided the first summary review of an important intellectual circle within the massive emigration from Hungary in the wake of the 1919 Soviet Republic and the ensuing White Terror.

Sadly, Hungarian scholars have done little research in this important area, and the task was left to a foreign historian, who knows and respects Hungarian culture and scholarship. Perhaps we feel more intensely the loss that this mass exodus caused our country—after the emigration of White Russians, this was the second largest at that time—though the impact, on the other hand, that the accumulated intellectual energy of the so-called second reform generation made on the Western world could probably be better appreciated from the outside. Congdon's

---

György Litván,
who headed the Institute for the History of the 1956 Revolution between 1991–1999, has published widely on modern Hungarian history.

latest book is not simply a sequel to the first. He makes no attempt to offer a complete picture of the Hungarian intellectuals who fled to Great Britain and subsequently exerted a significant influence there. He fails to mention Lord Káldor and Lord Balogh, who played an important role in shaping economic policy in Britain; nor does he deal with the sociologist Karl Mannheim and the psychoanalyst Michael Bálint, along with most of the Hungarian writers and artists who were active in Britain (although he does briefly mention Alexander Korda and László Péri in the first chapter). In this book he deals with those Hungarian exiles in whose lives Communism played a part, discussing their relations with their Hungarian and British counterparts. His principal characters are the Polányi brothers (the economic historian Karl Polányi and the chemist, economist and philosopher Michael Polányi), Ilona Duczynska, Arthur Koestler, Aurél Kolnai, Pál Ignotus, István Mészáros, Imre Lakatos and Tibor Szamuely.

Instead of discussing separately the role and the work of these thinkers, some of whom became world famous while others were known only within their respective professions, Lee Congdon presents them in a peculiar amalgamation, introducing many supporting characters, publishing letters, describing divergent and intertwined lives, stories and legends, all set against the background of the period's great ideological and historical issues. Mostly, he moves from one character to another in a seemingly erratic manner; nevertheless, through this peculiar mode of composition, he succeeds in presenting Hungarians, who had very different lives and attitudes—although most shared Jewish origins—as a community living almost as a family, rather than as isolated individuals. Save the case of the last three, (who left the country after 1956) this more or less fits the facts. With the exception of Koestler, they all experienced the vigorous intellectual revival in Budapest of the early twentieth century, growing up in the radical, reformist and occasionally revolutionary milieu characterising the social science journal *Huszadik Század* (1900–1919), the associated Social Science Society and the Galieo Circle; but even Arthur Koestler began his "studies" in the experimental school founded and directed by Laura Polányi (sister of Karl and Michael), with his subsequent life intertwined with the various members of this large and exceptionally gifted family. From secondary school on, Aurél Kolnai was a member of the Galileo Circle headed by Karl Polányi; later he became Oszkár Jászi's disciple and student, he worked with Polányi in Vienna, in the editorial office of *Österreichischer Volkswirt.* Through his father, who had been the editor of *Nyugat,* the most important literary journal of the first half of the century, Pál Ignotus, who was of the same age as Kolnai, had links with progressives in Hungary. The individuals featuring in the book kept in touch, remained friends and continued their debates with each other (as well as with those of their friends later scattered around in the world) for the rest of their lives. Therefore, the presentation and analysis of their respective lives in such a "collective" and "interactive" manner not only seems justified but even promises some additional rewards.

As well as on personal ties, the cohesion of the group was based on its members' attachment to Communist ideals and the Communist movement, their intellectual contest with these ideals, their identification with or rejection of them. The book's line of reasoning roughly goes like this: after the First World War, the left-wing intellectuals all fell under the sway of a new religion or creed (the first chapter is

entitled A New Faith); in the course of the following decades some of them became disillusioned with this creed, others stuck with it. This, however, is an oversimplification, as Congdon's book itself illustrates. Not everyone in this group fell under the sway of Communist ideology: the majority of the Social Democrats and bourgeois radicals rejected Béla Kun and his party even during the Soviet Republic and at the beginning of their period in exile; so much so that they engaged in theoretical disputes with it in the interest of a democratic future. Of the main characters discussed here, Michael Polányi, Aurél Kolnai and Pál Ignotus fall into this category. The situation is, of course, entirely different in the case of Arthur Koestler or Imre Lakatos.

In contrast with other members of his family, Michael Polányi was quite immune to the allure of Communist theory. In the middle of the 1930s, he even published in the Budapest journal *Századunk* (Our Century) a number of highly critical articles on the Soviet five-year plans. As Lee Congdon himself describes, at the beginning of his exile in England Michael Polányi created a stir by delivering a vehement attack on an apologetic book, *Soviet Communism: a New Civilization?* by Sidney and Beatrice Webb.

Karl Polányi reproached his younger brother for that article even though he himself had written critical articles on the Soviet Union in the first years of his exile for the Vienna-based Hungarian newspaper *Bécsi Magyar Újság,* edited by Jászi. These articles earned him some vitriolic attacks in the Communist press by the fanatical Andor Gábor, earlier an author of pieces for the cabaret and light comedies. The older brother, as described here by Congdon too, worked on developing a socialist model free of dictatorship and centralisation, in partnership with his mentor and friend, Jászi. What the latter described as "liberal socialism", Polányi preferred to call "guild socialism". Later, and especially in the first years of his life in Britain, Polányi saw the solution in a left-wing Christian Socialist theory and movement, although in the 1930s he made decidedly pro-Soviet declarations, despite the warning signs emanating from the Moscow trials. In January 1943, after their ways parted, he still wrote to Jászi: "I have never called myself a 'Christian Communist' and I am quite convinced that you can't say of anybody who is not a Communist that he is one. It has never occurred to me to be a Communist and even less a 'fellow traveller' [...] It's true that except for the darkest times, when I began to doubt seriously, I have always hoped that Russia will provide one of the real solutions of the problem of industrial civilisation. And I still hope for this."[1]

The author explains this attitude by the Russian cultural background of Polányi's mother, the Russian-born Tante Cecile, along with the Russophilism of the entire family. Congdon also mentions the supposed influence of Samuel Klatschko in Vienna, the patron of exiled Russian revolutionaries and a friend of Trotsky's; however, this wise old man (who was incidentally not a translator and underground fighter but the head of an office of patent attorneys) exerted a considerable influence on the young Ervin Szabó in the 1890s but then died in 1914, while Polányi continued as a bourgeois radical for another ten years. His wife, the idealist revolutionary from a gentry family, Ilona Duczynska, gave a more persuasive explanation for his drift to the left: "It is given to the best men to put down the roots of a sacred hatred somewhere in the course of their lives. This happened to Polányi in England—it has only increased in the later period, in the United States. His hatred was for the consumer society, for the dehumanising effects of this society."[2]

In 1927 Polányi severely crticised western democracy. "An abstract notion of democracy, which highhandedly ignores the reality of class division, religion, war and violence, deserves to be ignored by reality."[3] Congdon has managed to come up with much new and interesting information on the relationship between Karl Polányi and the British Christian Left, as well as on the Polányi couple's participation in the London group of Hungarian exiles led by Count Mihály Károlyi. Polányi's career was, indeed, rather unusual among left-wing exiles.

In direct contrast to the typical trend, he came to the West not as a communist or a sympathiser who would gradually become disillusioned, but as a non-Marxist liberal socialist, who became the ideologist of market-free economic redistribution and an atypical but stubborn Soviet sympathiser unshaken even by the Moscow trials. Although this was not in connection with his years in Britain, it is worth mentioning that the anti-etatist grass-roots socialism of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution for a brief period enchanted his capricious intellect. In an unpublished article written in early 1957 and entitled "A Hungarian Lesson", he tried to trace the Hungarian uprising back to economic causes, then wrote an enthusiastic letter to his younger brother, Michael: "1956 re-conquered me for Hungary... I admire the fighters of October".[4]

But that was not his last word on the subject. The "sacred hatred" got the upper hand in him, reviving his anti-capitalist and anti-American sentiments. In an open letter written in 1960 he broke off relations with the London-based Association of Hungarian Writers Abroad. Then in 1963, shortly before his death, he visited Hungary and in a document entitled *"Hazánk kötelessége"* (The Duty of Our Country), which read almost like a confession of faith, he called on the young writers and scientists of Hungary to fight against capitalism. His last venture was the launching of *Co-Existence,* a magazine promoting peaceful coexistence. Karl Polányi and his wife Ilona Duczynska were among those exiles in England, and later also in America (in Canada, to be precise, because Duczynska's request for a visa to the United States was refused on the grounds of her Communist affiliation), who, despite their reservations, continued to support "existing socialism" right to the end of their lives.

For this reason, the Polányi brothers were rarely in agreement, although they made an effort to avoid engaging in public polemics. One of their rare debates took place in the 1930s in England. It concerned the problems of a centrally planned economy and employment in connection with John Maynard Keynes's *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money,* and involved a third Hungarian intellectual, Karl Mannheim. In his *Full Employment and Free Trade,* Michael Polányi partly accepted Keynes' analysis, but—in sharp contrast with Mannheim's views—rejected the idea of central planning and stood by the principle of separating politics and the economy, a view contested by his brother. In his discussion of contemporary articles and letters, Congdon here throws light on a scholarly debate on a problem of key importance.

The outbreak of the Second World War meant insecurity and threat for most exiles in Western-Europe. Congdon illustrates the life of the "Wandering Jew", using Arthur Koestler's and Aurel Kolnai's decade-long vicissitudes as examples. The former reached Great Britain during the war, after having had first-hand experience of Spanish prisons and French internment camps, while the latter made it to England

long after the war had ended, following a prolonged American-Canadian detour. Koestler's life is well-known from his famous autobiography. By contrast, Aurél Kolnai (1900 Budapest—1973 London) is practically unknown in his native country, while in the West his reputation as a moral philosopher started to grow only recently. His book *Political Memoirs,* on which Congdon relies extensively, was published in the United States in 1999. Kolnai was something of a child prodigy, who became an associate of Oszkár Jászi's journal *Huszadik Század* at the age of 18 and who published a book, *Psychoanalyse und Soziologie,* two years later when already an exile in Vienna. He even contributed to Freud's journal, *Imago.* In the course of his intellectual quest, he took some side-roads to the left and to the right, even to conservative Catholicism. He thought democracy incapable of remedying the ills of society, but he never cut his ties to Jászi, his spiritual mentor, whom he informed in long letters about his intellectual adventures. In Great Britain he made a name for himself in 1938, when Gollancz's Left Book Club published his first English-language work, *The War against the West.* The book was about Nazism, which the author traced back to its German intellectual forerunners, warning the English reading public of a deadly danger. During the war he actively campaigned against Nazism in the Untied States, then moved to Canada to teach at the Catholic Laval University of Quebec. After a time, however, he had to realise that his own brand of lofty Catholicism was incompatible with the doctrines of the church. Finally, he settled in London, where he lectured at Bedford College, living in near poverty.

Congdon primarily uses Koestler to demonstrate why these liberal thinkers with a European outlook and of Hungarian/Jewish origin chose Great Britain for their final domicile. For years both before and after the war, Koestler lived in France, where he had numerous friends; he spoke excellent French and his novel *Darkness at Noon,* although originally published in Great Britain, made a real breakthrough with its French edition *Le Zéro et l'infini,* not only in literature but also in politics: it preempted an electoral victory by the French Communist Party. Nevertheless, the majority of France's intellectual elite were staunch left-wingers and pro-Communists in those years (essentially right up to 1956). Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir all turned against the obsessively anti-Communist Koestler, who came to the conclusion that his friend, Michael Polányi had been right in choosing Protestant Great Britain, a country less susceptible to the persuasion of the new absolutist secular religion, rather than Catholic France, where the roots of the old absolutist mentality reached deeper.

After the division of Europe, the opposition of views was soon followed by the opposition of deeds. The growing tension between these intellectual brethren, and in one particular instance actual brothers, became especially obvious during the foundation and functioning of the Congress for Cultural Freedom. A militant product of the Cold War, this organisation, which enjoyed surreptitious CIA support in the background, enlisted eminent thinkers in its fight against Communism. In this eastern half of the world all that was known about the Congress, which was launched in Berlin in June 1950, was general condemnation; actually, not many details emerged about it in the Western press, either. Congdon describes the history of the Congress and the controversy surrounding it in detail, all the more so since two of his book's heroes, Koestler and the younger Polányi, played important

roles in it. Originally, the idea of the Congress was proposed by Melvin J. Lasky, who then edited the Berlin *Der Monat* and the London *Encounter* on its behalf. The CIA's financial support, which was kept secret for a long time, was channeled through the Congress. But the dominant figure of the Berlin talks was Koestler, who in his opening speech—on the day of the outbreak of the Korean war—recited the Bible in chastising the lukewarm intellectuals who fell for Moscow's manoeuvring: "Speak yes for yes—no for no!", which went on to become the slogan of the entire conference. Incidentally, the closing statement of the Congress was also worded by Koestler, who motioned that in the interest of pushing on with the offensive they should transform the Congress into a permanent organization. This was, however, entrusted to the liberal Raymond Aron, who replaced the radical Koestler as the provider of intellectual leadership.

Three years after the Berlin Congress, in June 1953, Michael Polányi chaired the international conference "Science and Freedom" in Hamburg. It should be noted that unity, which originally characterised the participants' stance against anti-liberal regimes, had already begun to crumble. The dividing line ran between a religious world view and rational skepticism. Despite family traditions and his early views, Polányi himself failed to align himself with those who wished to revive rationalism in their fight against totalitarian regimes and spiritual dogmatism. Although he formally did not join any denominaton, at that stage of his life he believed that the eternal moral values could not stand up without backing by religious—Christian—faith. It was true that in his family, including his son, the Nobel Prize winner John C. Polanyi, the memory of their Jewish and Hungarian origins had grown faint. Nevertheless, the 1956 Hungarian Revolution made a deep impression on Michael Polányi, prompting him to write a number of important studies.

Congdon devotes a separate chapter to the Hungarian Revolution, its ideological preliminaries and eventual suppression. He discusses the Congress's role in the establishment and financing of both the Association of Hungarian Writers Abroad and of the London-based literary magazine edited by Pál Ignotus, *Irodalmi Újság,* as well as Koestler's and Michael Polányi's protests against the restoration of the oppressive regime. But 1956 opened a new chapter in the history of the Hungarian exiles, including their intellectual wing in Britain. The 1956 exodus of over 200,000, which was primarily directed towards North America, did not produce as many philosophers and social thinkers as the earlier two waves had. Nevertheless, it did include some important publicists, political and social scientists, such as Miklós Molnár, Péter Kende and Tibor Méray; their destination, however, was not London but Paris or Geneva. And the same applied to Georg Lukács's students who left the country almost two decades later (Ágnes Heller, Ferenc Fehér, György Márkus, Mihály Vajda), as well as to the sociologist Iván Szelényi.

Congdon discusses three men who emigrated to Great Britain after 1956. Of the three, only Imre Lakatos qualified as a '56 refugee, settling in Cambridge late in the year. István Mészáros and Tibor Szamuely arrived later, and their intellectual influence cannot be compared to that of Lakatos. Mészáros, who was Lukács's student, went to Italy on a scholarship in 1956, where he published his book *La rivolta degli intellettuali in Ungheria* in 1958. The book outlined a one-sidedly "left-wing" picture of the 1956 Revolution, in the context of a—practically non-

existent—"workers' socialism". Although Congdon quotes extensively from his English-language works published later (*Marx's Theory of Alienation,* 1970; *Lukacs' Concept of Dialectics,* 1972; *Beyond. Towards a Theory of Transition,* 1995), they do not appear to have had a substantial influence on British intellectual life. The situation is different with Szamuely's work, *The Russian Tradition* (1974), which constituted a major and influential piece of Kremlinology, a popular genre at the time, regardless of the author's lack of credibility. Congdon is mistaken in writing the following: "There were, in fact, two Szamuelys, and the anti-Communist was beginning to get the upper hand". Tibor Szamuely's political attitude in Hungary showed no sign whatsoever of any intellectual vacillation: he showed himself a Stalinist through-and-through both before and after 1956. Although on October 23, 1956 he marched in the front row of the protesters representing Eötvös Loránd University's Humanities Department, after the Revolution's suppression he also took a leading role in purging the Department of its "counter-revolutionary" teachers and students. Later he, too, was removed from the University, but that was the result of the rival Communist faction's successful coup, rather than his political resistance—as he claimed later. Unlike Koestler or Lakatos, Szamuely demonstrated no remorse, self-criticism or oppositional attitudes before he escaped from an African university to England to become a Kremlinologist there—on the strength of considerable knowledge acquired in the Soviet Union. The British historians paid no attention to his record and admitted him to their fold.

Thanks to his degree in mathematics, Imre Lakatos was included in one of the first contingents in Vienna. Great Britain took him in not as an established scholar, but as a relatively young (34 years old) and promising intellectual who then paid back this act of good faith with interest. Lakatos's youthful record as a fanatical Communist is widely known by now, together with all its essential factors and darkest details. However, Congdon is not content with the facts established by Hungarian researchers; he tries to dish out the "story" to foreign readers with all the thrilling details—primarily based on the recollections of friends and contemporaries. When he refers in his notes to police documents hitherto unknown, they are of highly dubious origin, with the source and date given being incomplete or improbable. ("Secret document from the Ministry of Interior, July 17, 1956. Bureau of History".) It is not quite clear why Congdon tried to establish the causes and precise details of Lakatos's arrest and internment from such a great distance, by employing foreign researchers. This had no bearing on Lakatos's activities and role in England, which are the subject of the book. The author's intention was to show that Lakatos wanted to unmask József Révai, then chief ideologist of the Communist Party, member of the Politburo, and one of the "almighty four", and that Lakatos's elimination was a consequence of that. One cannot exclude the possibility of such an assignment, otherwise Lakatos's actions would have been quite unthinkable, along with his acrimonious debates with the powerful and arrogant Révai, but the quoted interviews and the belated recollections by distant friends are not sufficient corroboration. Yet the author concludes, "That must have been the truth."

In the infamous Recsk labour camp, Lakatos became an ÁVH (State Security Bureau) informer. According to some allegations, he volunteered for the task thinking that in that way he could still be a member of the vanguard regardless of his

being in detention. After his release—on his own admission—he informed the ÁVH not just on the psychologist Ferenc Mérei, as Congdon writes, but also on the mathematician and historian Árpád Szabó and the professor of English literature Tibor Lutter (a man who had once sympathised with the Nazis and then became a servile Communist), two friends who gave him most help in his first days outside. His friends and acquaintances, who at that time sympathised with Imre Nagy's oppositional faction within the party, noticed how difficult it was for Lakatos to break with the "party line". I personally remember one occasion when, in his typical manner, he put a provocative question to me in the spring or summer of 1956, during the debates of the Petőfi Circle, the harbringer of the Revolution: "So what do you think about a multi-party system then?" Naturally, it soon turned out that this was at the bottom of the debates and of the entire de-Stalinization process, yet this was the only issue that could not be addressed because of the Stalinists lurking around the Petőfi Circle. To this day I cannot tell whether Lakatos acted on "party orders" or whether he genuinely wanted to know my answer. His autumn lecture in the Petőfi Circle was, on the other hand, one of the best and most important speeches: he spoke to an audience of young brainwashed intellectuals about to come to their senses on how to discriminate between confirmed and unconfirmed facts and what scientific thinking involves.

As is commonly known, in addition to renouncing his earlier political and general world view for good, Lakatos also demonstrated a clear move to the right in exile. Congdon quotes some of his statements made in 1968, testifying to his firm opposition to the student movements, and also his feeling whereby he perceived a fatal shift to the left in Great Britain and in the world. This makes it highly doubtful that it was only death that prevented him from working out a well-balanced theory of "Open Society Liberalism" in keeping with Sir Karl Popper's ideas.

In 2001 a book devoted to the analysis and assessment of Lakatos's life and work was published: John Kadvány: *Imre Lakatos and the Guises of Reason* (Duke University Press) The author, who is of Hungarian descent, apparently does not read Hungarian, since he relies on translations of Hungarian sources; nevertheless, in the introduction he puts the question in Hungarian: Who was Imre Lakatos? He gives a rather grandiloquent answer to his own question: "Lakatos was a charismatic and treacherous member of the Communist underground during World War II, after which he worked and studied with Lukács". The word "treacherous" is the only one in this sentence that is undoubtedly appropriate. Lakatos had no connection with the illegal Communist party, although he organised a secret "cell" in Nagyvárad (Oradea—in Romania but then part of Hungary) and it was there that, on Lakatos's proposal, a young woman named Éva Izsák, who joined the group, was forced to commit suicide by a party resolution, so as not to disclose the identity of others in her cell, in case she was caught. She carried out the order. If Lakatos had "charisma" at all, then that was manifest only in such diabolical ideas. By contrast, Georg Lukács's role in Lakatos's life is a question of fact, rather than a point open to assessment by hindsight. The assumption that, besides Hegel and Marx, Lukács had the greatest influence on Lakatos is implicit throughout the book. Even the book's title is in reference to this assumption, as "The Guises of Reason" paraphrases the title of Lukács's book, "The Destruction of Reason".

In reality, Lakatos was not among Lukács's students, and to the best of my knowledge he had no lasting and meaningful relations with the philosopher, whom he did not even regard, during his "phase of Party loyalty", to be his intellectual mentor. (Quite the contrary, I suspect that before his arrest he was working on the ideological "unmasking" of Georg Lukács, rather than of Révai.) It is a different matter that his works published in England, and his philosophy of science, are evidence of Lukács's influence, a point made emphatically by Kadvány. This is a matter for philosophers to decide in serious and meticulous analysis, along with Lakatos's standing in the social sciences and his intellectual relations with Sir Karl Popper. László Rapalyi attempts to do this in a recent volume of studies devoted to Lakatos (*Appraising Imre Lakatos: Methodology and the Man.* Ed. by G. Kampis, L. Kvasz and M. Schilzner. Dordrecht, Boston, London, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001). But the paper "Lakatos and Lukács" is as little able to make a case for a personal or intellectual relationship as Congdon. It would appear that Lakatos's success in England prompts all those who write on his life and work to boost the importance and the scale of his years in Hungary well beyond anything warranted by the facts. As regards the years in Hungary, I consider Jancis Long's concise study to be the most reliable source ("Lakatos in Hungary". In: *Philosphy of the Social Sciences.* Vol. 28, No. 2, June 1998).[5]

At the end of his book, Lee Congdon draws up a quick list: some of his heroes (Frigyes Antal, István Mészáros and, to some extent, Karl Polányi) never cast off Communism, while others (Lakatos and Szamuely, for example) did; but three of them, Koestler, by becoming absorbed in parapsychology, Michael Polányi by his faith, and Aurél Kolnai in ethics, were able to move even beyond their anti-Communism in their late maturity and embraced a universal and affirmative view of the world.

NOTES

1 ■ See: *The Legacy of Karl Polanyi,* New York, St Martin Press, 1991, p. 255.

2 ■ Polányi Károly: "Jegyzetek az életútról" (Notes on a Life). *Magyar Filozófiai Szemle* 1971/5–6.

3 ■ "A magyar demokrácia célkitűzéseiről," (On the Objectives of Hungarian Democracy). *A láthatár* 1927, 2, p. 10.

4 ■ *The Life and Work of Karl Polanyi.* Ed. by Karl Polanyi–Lewitt. Black Rose Books, Montreal–New York, 1990, p. 36.

5 ■ See also: Jancis Long and Alex Bandy: "Dress Rehearsal for a Revolution?" *The Hungarian Quarterly,* No. 157, Spring 2000, pp. 85–102.

Tamás Koltai

Contemporary Hungarian Operas

Emil Petrovics: *C'est la guerre* • Gyula Fekete: *A megmentett város* (The Town that Found Redemption) • Gergely Vajda: *Az Óriáscsecsemő* (The Giant Suckling-Babe).

Opera is undergoing a renaissance. This is a box-office fact, which may be put down to globetrotting star singers and, in more fortunate cases, fruitfully imaginative directors. Modern productions of classic operas frequently strive for extreme effects, drawing attention to themselves by provocative stage-trickery. Certain opera houses also favour the presentation of contemporary works. Since such compositions, by their very nature, employ a new musical language, it can happen that they are accessible only to a narrow public, and so they are taken out of the repertoire fairly soon. It would be very much in the interests of opera as a genre, however, not to give up on them.

Recently a number of new Hungarian operas have seen the light of day and stagings of earlier modern pieces have likewise been growing in frequency. György Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre,* which has been put on by a number of major opera houses across Europe over the two decades since its Stockholm premiere in 1978, has made it to a Hungarian stage for the first time, albeit for just two scheduled performances (possibly because there were concerns that the level of interest would not sustain more). Caution of that degree was almost certainly misplaced, because Balázs Kovalik's extraordinarily inventive and fascinating production, coupled with outstanding performances, proved a resounding success on both evenings.

Not that caution is unwarranted in the case of modern opera. It is salutary to note what the musicologist András Batta has written about the traditions of this genre in Hungary: "There is no such thing as a distinctive Hungarian operatic genre, in the sense that one speaks of Italian, French and German opera. From Ferenc Erkel [the composer of *Bánk bán, László Hunyadi,* and several other nineteenth century works] onwards, Hungarian composers have taken their pick from pre-existing genres (Romantic grand opera, *bel canto* opera, Wagnerian music drama, etc.). One exception is Bartók's *Duke Bluebeard's Castle,* which is a dramatised ballad, and just as effective on the concert platform as on the operatic stage. A masterwork that transcends genres, it could not provide the prototype for a distinctly Hungarian opera, which is why his fellow countrymen who

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

embarked on operas in the course of the twentieth century did not take it as their point of reference." What did flourish, on the other hand, was a brand of Hungarian opera with historical or patriotic, folk-rooted subjects, which lent itself far better to tragedy than comedy. Contributing to this was the fact that, like everywhere else, but especially in Budapest, opera houses were reckoned to be as conservative institutions. Unfortunate though it may be, then, it is little wonder that such milestones of modern opera as Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* and Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* (in the latter case after one aborted attempt) only reached the Opera House in Budapest after time-lags of several decades. To which one may add—and only in the early 1960s.

During that same period the Hungarian State Opera presented *C'est la guerre,* the first opera by the then young Emil Petrovics. This has recently been revived by the same house, and it transpired that the work was not just viable but a real success. The key may well be the fact that Petrovics was following in the footsteps of Puccini and Richard Strauss, both twentieth-century composers who innovated "from within" the existing operatic tradition, that is to say, strove to make a "courtly" genre accessible to a wider public. What again became obvious with the revival were the work's "audience-friendly" strengths — first and foremost the plot, based on Miklós Hubay's play of the same title. (The composer originally suggested the subject to the writer, on the understanding that he wished to turn it into an opera later.) The action opens with a set that represents a sitting room in a middle-class home somewhere in Budapest. The costumes might be clothes of today, for the only references to period are military uniforms of Second World War vintage. As a musical backdrop a German military march thunders from backstage—that does not quite sound familiar. The words are incomprehensible, and even if we could discern them, we would find that they are a paraphrase of Kant. A gramophone, too, is sometimes to be heard (voiced by the orchestra, of course), playing in the style of the 78 r.p.m. shellacs of pre-war dance music. An army deserter is in hiding in the room, and he is being kept under observation by a man in a wheelchair through binoculars from the house across the road. The characters have no names: we know them merely as the Deserter and Vizavi (i.e. *vis à vis* since he lives opposite), the married couple who are sheltering the Deserter as Husband and Wife. Vizavi, the man with the binoculars trained on the Deserter is an invalid ex-colonel, and his confidante is the Concierge, whose husband and son were killed in the war and who seeks compensation for those losses in her desire for revenge. The Deserter and Wife develop a Platonic attraction for one another, which, even were there no moral barrier, has no chance to blossom because the Concierge, prompted by Vizavi's denunciation, lets the M.P.s into the apartment. Their Major sniffs around before making advances to the pretty young Wife. He gets nowhere and so departs, leaving the residents to scramble desperately to avert the impending danger. Time runs out with the Major's return, however. The Deserter and the couple who gave him refuge can only expect one sentence from a summary court: execution. The Wife takes her own life by leaping from the balcony of the apartment.

At the time of its premiere, the miseries of that war were still fresh in the mind and the political tensions of the 1950s' dictatorship an all too vivid memory for many. Even in 1962, though, the very notion that history steamrollers over victims incapable

of defending themselves was enough to make Petrovics' opera suspect in the eyes of official ideologists. The Ministry of Culture felt it needed to set up a high-level advisory panel to rule on whether the premiere be allowed to go ahead, with the composer being compelled to play and sing through the score for them before the green light was eventually given. The revival vindicates the "timelessness" of *C'est la guerre,* if only through its reprise of the four-hundred-years-old genre's well-tried technique. The piece certainly did not count as a "cutting-edge" modern score even at the time of its first performance, especially compared with the serial structures and electro-acoustic experiments of contemporary works by the likes of Boulez, Stockhausen, Xenakis and Ligeti (admittedly none of them had, by that time, written an opera). Still, that is no reason to feel ashamed today that it offers a touchingly melodic love duet, and all the less so given that what the work demands is far from easy for either the orchestra or the singers. The requirement that the vocal lines be comprehensible applies to the text as well as the music. Petrovics is a master of Hungarian prosody, an innovator even, the style of *Sprechgesang* that he demands calls for a high degree of vocal agility. The composer, who was the Opera House's manager in the late Eighties and is now its musical director-in-chief, has a keen sense of theatricality, which has largely been realised by Miklós Gábor Kerényi, the director of this revival. A peculiar framework looms like a spider's web behind the realistic stage-set of the living-room interior. The spider himself —Vizavi—barely moves, occasionally spinning around in his wheelchair as it elevates into a look-out perch in order to swoop down on his victims at the right moment.

History also comes under scrutiny before the composer's judgement seat in a brand-new one-act opera by Gyula Fekete, inspired by another dramatic work of the same vintage as *C'est la guerre.* István Eörsi's *A megmentett város* (The Town That Found Redemption) was written in 1964 (though not performed then) and likewise evinces the fraught, Kafkaesque political atmosphere of the Fifties. The history enacted within it is, in truth, no more than an external shell or garment, a metaphysical framework. We see the stock figures, or masks, of an unnamed medieval town busying themselves with the affairs of the *polis.* The topics on the citizens' lips are theft, cheating, harlotry, and abuses of power. Some of them are working away on the town's salvation and will shrink at nothing to attain this. Lidi, the town whore, snips a lock of hair from each of her clients in order to gain a hold on their fates through the agency of magic. The trouble is that the extirpation of witchcraft likewise forms part of the salvationary project, so Lidi herself soon becomes a victim. Once the Inquisitor has proclaimed a doctrine of denunciation—the small-scale realist motif of Petrovics' opera writ large, as it were—the town's citizens set about systematically wiping out one another. After Lidi's execution and the murder of Vilmos, a string of *buffo* roles come to the fore: the Judge, the Barber, and a growing number of the anonymous crowd. In the end, just two remain: the Inquisitor and his right-hand man, the Gaoler. The latter considerately offers to string himself up, and his boss is moved to accept. We are left with the sight of him, along with a few children, their backs to the audience, as they face the forest of the hanged. They are all that is left of the "redeemed" city.

The plot of the libretto has been extracted from what was originally a three-act play. In the process of condensation,

however, the parable lost its structure, literally having no beginning, middle or end (the precise opposite of the elegantly constructed *C'est la guerre,* in fact), making it, for many, unnecessarily hard to follow and also posing a well-nigh insurmountable problem for the composer, unless we interpret the piece as a "morality-play" opera, as its producer, Péter Halász, the apostle of alternative theatre, has chosen to do. (It is quite a surprise that the conservative Budapest Opera House should have allowed to set foot within its hallowed walls this once marked man of the Sixties—the Sixties yet again!—who was first banned, then forced to leave Hungary in the Seventies, gained some fame as the founder of New York's off-off-Broadway Squat Theatre during the Eighties, and has spent the last decade or so as a director shuttling between New York and Budapest.)

Halász has had the following to say about Fekete's opera: "At first reading it appears to be a *buffo* morality play, a school farce, a cautionary tale without teaching a lesson. For me, however, it resembles a passion play more than anything. That goes for its story and for its music. Just as in a passion play, every element is familiar and therefore perfunctory and straight to the point. There are no carefully moulded psychological insights. A passion play is constructed so that the evocation of the events should stir spectators and so set off the psychological processes, emotions, passion, and laughter to run their course within them... I have accordingly furnished the roles in the piece with external qualities that make it immediately obvious with whom one is dealing, but at the same time each should clearly display a characteristic trait that defines the "actor's" personality... That demands a specific theatrical discipline. It is a matter of a style of acting manifested in poses that are not realistic nor even operatic, but grotesque. The sort of figures that are seen in the engravings of Francisco Goya or in etchings by the Belgian painter James Ensor or those done by Jacques Callot in Florence."

That intention succeeded only in part. The morality-play aspect of the parable —one critic referred to it as a *"petit macabre",* drawing an obvious parallel with Ligeti's work—did not achieve the desired effect. The eclectic, post-modern musical idiom, in which many professed to discern quotations (or pseudo-quotations) from Baroque operatic conventions through Rossini's *Barber of Seville* to the Strausses (Richard as well as the Johanns), Wagner, Mahler, Kodály, even the "burlesque" motif used by Stravinsky in *The Rake's Progress,* and the ambience of early twentieth-century chanson, does not always reach beyond the footlights. The main reason for this is that the lines remain incomprehensible. It is little use the composer writing that "my work is a *bel canto* opera, by which I mean that the acting must in no way detract from the singing," when the singers' articulation is unable to cope with even the small forces of a Mozartian orchestra in the pit. Since the work lacks a strictly intelligible plot, the uninitiated spectator is thrown back on his or her mood and superficial impressions in regard to what is going on. It is little use sensing the theatrical stylisation (the scenery, for instance, models the inner courtyard of a neo-Baroque tenement building, the cast are deployed in diverse groupings, stepping forward and back in formation, the lighting has a decorative function, and so on) when one is left groping in the dark for the point, or thrown back on puzzling it out like a crossword.

Like his older colleagues, the young and exceptionally talented clarinettist, conductor and composer Gergely Vajda found a dramatic text which could be turned into

a libretto. Unlike those mentioned above, however, *The Giant Suckling-Babe,* an early work by the novelist Tibor Déry, stems from further back in time. From 1926, in fact, though this characteristic product of Hungary's brief flirtation with dadaism, naturally enough, was itself not produced on the stage until as late as 1970. If not parabolical, the play is most certainly metaphoric, and to that extent shares affinities with Eörsi's, dealing as it did, when originally written, with man caught up, right at his birth, in the machinery of a social mechanism set on obliterating individuality and thereby losing his freedom. It is also, in some sense, about inter-generational conflict and the hollowing-out of the classic bourgeois values. "What kind of world have I landed in! I am imprisoned in the cells of emotions; everyone is seeking to manipulate me, to use me, but no one feeds me when I am hungry. I'm going back to where I came from," the Babe declares the moment he comes into the world. This insatiable hunger is not purely physiological, for the infant wishes, as it were, to gobble up the world in its entirety. At that moment he imagines himself to be immortal, essentially a god, and until his fall (i.e. loss of innocence) that is precisely what he is: at a single gesture from him an unpleasant creditor dies on the spot. Yet when he makes the acquaintance of sexuality it turns out that he too is mortal, a slave to the on-going logic of life. In short, he has to find a place in society. He starts a family, and Babe II, a "cloned" replica of his progenitor, is born and meets a similar fate. There is no escape; the circle is completed, and it all starts afresh, from the beginning.

New Hungarian opera-composers seem to be trawling in practically the same waters. *The Giant Suckling-Babe* also has nameless characters, the situations that it dramatises are not particularly well characterised, it has little plot to speak of, and, as in the case of *The Town That Found Redemption,* it lacks psychological depth. Its musical idiom is even more reductive, with a tiny orchestra of six musicians, playing wind, percussion and synthesizer. The strong brass presence is a touch on the strident side, whilst the music, through its paucity of melody, tends to fall back on its gestural elements, functioning more as a commentary or background wash to the action.

The work, which is described as a "chamber opera for singers, instrumentalists, speakers, and puppets", was staged in the Budapest Puppet Theatre under the composer's baton, he and his ensemble also taking up places on the stage. That venue is certainly not alien to the tenor of the piece, given that the original work itself is not lacking in puppet-like elements, it indeed more or less invites mimetic solutions. Balázs Kovalik, a director with well-established credentials as a stylist (not long ago he provoked a storm of protests from the general public and plaudits from professional critics for a production of *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* that sharply departed from all precedents), daringly combines puppetry with live acting. The female singer of a well-known pop duo, who, with her plump figure and rounded face, is physically well-suited to the title role, played with bovine placidity but no subtlety and far from adequate vocal equipment. She stands all but motionless throughout the work as other people and objects teem around her in a cavalcade that, at times, is choreographed in the manner of, and almost as an ironic exposé of, black theatre. The thread of the action is sometimes hard to discern, which puts a strain on a large swathe of the audience. It rather looks as if this work will not be featuring for too long on the playbills.

None of this should come as a surprise, for contemporary operas are just not explicitly designed to become regular features in the repertoire. What is an opera for nowadays is a question many ask, and they are by no means all laymen. One distinguished person who might be said to speak on their behalf is Professor Tibor Tallián, author and translator of a number of key scholarly works. He offered, not without irony, the following reflections in a rather unflattering review of *The Town That Found Redemption:* "In the year 2002, everyone outside the Opera Fan Club has long been aware that opera does not exist. In art there is no moral proscription on necrophilia; the liaison of contemporary music and a dead genre does, on occasion, spawn viable progeny. The Opera Fan Club then sees a vindication of its stance and jubilantly proclaims, "Opera lives!" In a sense, rightly so. Opera has survived its own death for so long, and so stubbornly, that we are now able to regard that in itself as tantamount to life, or to a Second Coming." ❧

Erzsébet Bori

The Hungarian Documentary

The Fifties: A land of smiles

The guns were still thundering and street fighting was still raging in Budapest when the mayor issued a decree about the reorganisation of film-making in Hungary. Those working in newsreels carried on as the war was drawing to a close, at first in the Film Bureau, a relic of the past, and later on in the News and Documentary Film Studio that was set up in 1948.

The democratic promise of the coalition era proved an all too brief transition to the gradual takeover of power by the Communists which, with the backing of the Soviet occupation force, was completed as 1948 turned into 1949. The Rákosi era saw a Soviet-style dictatorship introduced into Hungary through the elimination of the multi-party system, the complete subjection of economic, social and cultural life to state control, a string of show trials and the terror unleashed by the secret police, the dreaded State Security Department (later Office), the ÁVO and ÁVH.

Newsreels of the period precisely mirror that initial advance of the left and the subsequent monopoly of the new ideology, which saw film as a prime weapon of agitprop. Instead of newsreels, documentary and educational or popularising films as disseminators of information and expositions of reality, there were triumphal reports: even the "sweeping clean" of barn lofts (the euphemism for the confiscations and accompanying punitive sanctions inflicted on peasant smallholders who secreted some of their own crops for their family's use when faced with the impossibly high targets for compulsory deliveries of produce), discoveries of "sabotage", trials and executions on the basis of trumped-up charges were given a positive spin—showing the party's fist smashing the enemies of the people. Cinema screens showed wise (and adulated) leaders, enthusiastic young pioneers, shock workers who overfulfilled their work norms by hundreds of per cent, feats of Socialist construction, smiles, flowers, ripened ears of wheat—an unending stream of one success after the other. "I made newsreels up till '55," Miklós Jancsó recalls of that era:

> Reaping, the year-end tallying up on cooperative farms, that sort of thing. One had to go down there and do on-the-spot research.

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

> For motivation, as film-makers call it. Back home in Budapest, we would put together a detailed shooting script. I say we, because I did not do it on my own. We even engaged a writer, a real one—a member of the Writers' or the Journalists' Union... The go-ahead was preceded by discussion of the script for all works of that kind. Possibly a rewrite. That is how a 'documentary film' started life in those times. We would shoot for several days, often weeks, just to get ten minutes of film. We would talk everything over with the peasants beforehand. They knew what they had to do. They would put on their Sunday best, their best bib and tucker, if they had one, pinning on their Orders of Labour. Sometimes we would even do a make-up job on the 'performers'. Once we had set everything up, they could start feeding the pigs.

Unmitigated lies? Worthless propaganda? That it was, from one angle. From another though, this was a period when the great generation of film-makers of the inter-war years was still alive and active. Considered as politically unreliable, the majority were not allowed anywhere near feature films. However, the new régime needed their skills, so they were put to work in documentary genres, and although this was under close supervision, the younger generation had a chance to observe and acquire their love for the medium as well as the technical basics and tricks of the trade. That was the dismal era our grandparents and parents endured; living in poverty and scarcity if they were ordinary Hungarians and not part of the leadership circles or privileged apparatchiks, they rebuilt a country that lay in ruins after the war, bled dry and plundered several times over, as they studied, worked, paid war reparations, started families and raised children. Their real lives, the struggles and sufferings, the varied forms of political repression, persecution, terror, and the forced resettlements could only be presented in documentary films three or four decades later. A rounded picture can only be gained if, alongside the official propaganda films of the Fifties, we set works like *A Dunánál* (By the Danube), *Pergőtűz* (Drumfire) on the 2nd Hungarian Army on the Don, *Recsk* on the Hungarian Gulag, and *Pócspetri* that were put together in the late 1980s and 1990s.

But what's become of István Szőts?

What is referred to as the Fifties, as a historical era, began for Hungary in 1948 and lasted up to the fateful turning-point of the Revolution in late October 1956. The terror moderated when Imre Nagy first became Prime Minister in June 1953. Rákosi and his faction managed temporarily to drive back the reformist wing in early 1955, but they were no longer in a position to halt the ferment in social and cultural life.

The feature-length films of the early Fifties in truth did no more than copy the clichés of pre-war light comedies ("white-telephone" films as they were jokingly referred to) and musicals. Italian neo-realism (elements of which can be traced in the pre-war films of István Szőts) and French *film noir* only made an appearance in Hungarian cinema, whether in features or in documentaries, in the mid-Fifties. Along with others labelled as "right wing", Szőts was pushed out of the cinema mainstream and retreated to the Institute of Folk Art, where the films he shot in rural Hungary before its radical transformation are now valuable ethnographic documents. This was the time when he mapped out plans for a large-scale project with the working title of *Bölcsőtől a koporsóig* (From the Cradle to the Coffin), which "was intended to track the lives of three generations, their celebrations and customs, from birth to death within the cosmic frame of the four seasons... in the most typical regions of Hungary." This was a project that was never to be realised, for

political reasons, but in 1955 it suddenly struck someone that the most highly esteemed of film directors had vanished from the field. "But what's become of István Szőts?... We are a small country and can ill afford to be deprived of anyone's talents," a magazine of the time noted. Szőts was to make the short film *Kövek, várak, emberek* (Stones, Castles, People) the very same year. Winning a prize at the Venice Film Festival, this stood in stark contrast to the tone and mode of portrayal obligatory according to socialist realist dogma. It employs the devices of poetic realism to trace a day in the north Hungarian village of Hollókő, showing the changes that had taken place, the new living alongside the old, but ultimately it intimates the abiding strength and resistance to change of a peasant world that takes its cue from Nature.

The leading role of the working class was the regime's legitimating ideological linchpin (it called itself a dictatorship of the proletariat), and its chief aim was to turn Hungary from a predominantly agrarian economy into a modern industrial state, the régime took portrayals of the working class in deadly earnest. That was a subject which had to be treated strictly in accordance with official directives, although creative artists were given some leeway in depictions of rural life. The period between 1953 and 1961 saw the completion of such films as Vince Lakatos' *Viharsarok* (Stormy Corner, 1953) or László Mönich's *Holládi ballada* (Ballad of Hollád, 1960), and the young Miklós Jancsó tried to experiment in a string of his village reports: *Arat az orosházi Dózsa* (Dózsa Cooperative of Orosháza is Reaping, 1953), *Éltető Tisza-víz* (Life-giving Waters of the Tisza, 1954), *Galgamentén* (Along the River Galga, 1954), *Az idő kereke* (The Wheel of Time, 1961), and *Alkonyok és hajnalok* (Twilights and Dawns, 1961):

> I also made so-called "documentary" films during the period of Imre Nagy's government... I experimented with a few innovations in the composition of the pictorial frame; there was the odd little treat or two for the eyes, especially in those days. Feri Széchenyi was my cinematographer, with Janó Tóth as his assistant. The combine harvesters reaped away, and we fibbed that the operators had radios with them, but of course there was not a scrap of truth in the whole thing. The Nagy government's programme was a huge relief for the peasants, but not for the cooperative's more radical left-winger chairman. He said it would all end in tragedy, so he was nicknamed Miksa Dózsa [György Dózsa headed the peasant army in a great rebellion in 1514]. I too was enthusiastic about the political headway that Imre Nagy was making, and that was the mood I tried to capture on celluloid at the end of the film... I made another documentary in the Imre Nagy spirit in 1954. It was shot in a village by the name of Rózsafa [Rosewood] just outside Pécs. Originally it had been known as Büdösfa [Stinkwood] but Socialism could not accept that. The issue there was that collective agriculture was voluntary. Anyone who wanted to resign from a cooperative could do so; anyone who didn't, didn't. Some wanted to farm on their own, others stood by the cooperative. That was kicked up into a huge furore, especially after Rákosi's gang forced Imre Nagy and his followers to toe the party line... That is how we got to '56.

The dual fate of one film

For the few days of the 1956 Revolution ordinary Hungarians took their fate into their own hands. The setting up of democratic institutions got under way in every area of life. István Szőts was elected to the three-man directorate of a newly established workers' council for film production.

> Our job was to ensure orderliness and continuity of work and to protect the equipment. We headed off any personal vendettas or attempts by people to take the law into their

> own hands, justified or not. During the two weeks not a single punch was thrown in anger at the Hunnia Studio. We were conscious of the great responsibility that fell to us film-makers to be faithful and true chroniclers and recorders of the historical events, to capture as much as possible of those events as a source and authentic documentation for future historians.

The director recalled in an interview:

> Six film crews toured the city. They shot around ten thousand metres of material. On the morning of 4th November they wanted to get it out to Vienna, to the International Red Cross and the organisations of the United Nations, so that the outside world would have objective information and send aid and medicine... In the panicky mood that was induced by the sound of dawn gunfire and the tragic appeal that the radio was broadcasting, someone switched on a light and ruined part of the stock that was being developed. A couple of cans got out to Austria in the rucksacks of two young Film School students, and it was that scanty material which later formed the backbone of the documentary *Hungary in Flames* that was subsequently put together in West Germany.

The world got to learn about the 1956 Revolution from that film, which was naturally not shown in Hungary. Instead, screenings were given of *Így történt* (This Is What Happened), directed by Ilona Kolonits in 1957 and cut from exactly the same material—a horrifying example of how a film document that was shot with the intention of recording the truth can become the tool of lies, misinformation and manipulation.

The Sixties: wall-to-wall

In Hungary the Sixties likewise do not coincide with the decade itself. The bloodily suppressed Revolution was followed by reprisals, and the authorities exploited the climate of fear to rush through the socialist reorganisation of agriculture—forced collectivisation, in other words. In 1958, Imre Nagy, prime minister during the Revolution, and his political associates were executed. Prisons were full, hangings were going on, the "Hungarian question" was continually on the UN agenda, and American longshoremen refused to unload the baggage of the Hungarian delegation headed by János Kádár when it arrived in New York for a session of the United Nation's General Assembly. It would be futile to search for any reference to these matters in Hungarian films of the time: the events of 1956 and of the years of reprisals could only be treated from the late Eighties onwards.

The consolidation of the Kádár era did not begin with a reconciliation with society at large but with the firming of Kádár's own grip on power, a process in which he waged an internal battle on two fronts, against both right and left within the party. The Sixties did not commence in Hungary until 1963, when a general—though not comprehensive—amnesty was declared for political prisoners sentenced during the 1957–58 reprisals. Hangings were still being carried out as late as December 1961, but in less than a year Kádár declared: "Anyone who is not against us is with us."

A measure of the repression in cinema is to be found in the conspicuously high number of prohibited works and the disappearance of the names of dissident artists and those who left the country from film credits. A bureau of censorship was set up in 1957, the Inspectorate of Films.

At virtually the same time that Imre Nagy and his associates were executed, the Balázs Béla Film Studio was being formally set up to function for a long time as an experimental workshop and progressive powerhouse—much to the envy of professionals in other Soviet satellite coun-

tries. It was from here that the most significant documentaries of the era, still highly regarded today, emerged. The BBFS organised itself democratically: any film that was approved by a majority of its members could be shot. Whether it would be shown was, of course, quite another question.

Amongst those at BBFS were the duo of Sándor Sára and István Gaál, who first attracted attention in 1957 with the film *Pályamunkások* (Trackmen). In 1962 they produced *Cigányok* (Gypsies), which has become a classic. Sára was *the* cameraman of the Sixties, being associated with the cinematography on feature films such as Gaál's *Sodrásban* (Current, 1963), István Szabó's *Apa* (Father, 1966), János Róna's *Gyermekbetegségek* (Children's Diseases), Zoltán Huszárik's *Szindbád* (Sinbad, 1971), as well as Ferenc Kósa's *Tízezer nap* (Ten Thousand Suns, 1965), the first main feature to be produced by the BBFS itself.

During the Sixties, Hungary clawed its way back, however tentatively and belatedly, into the mainstream of European film-making. Over and beyond a softening of the dictatorship that could be ascribed to the ineluctable advance of time: the new generation of the post-war baby bulge was beginning to come of age. Precious few signs of that widespread youth subculture are to be found in the films of the period, however; this was not to be explored until the Nineties, starting with the films of András Kisfaludy, *Törvénytelen muskátli* (Muskátli: The Illegal Café) and *Elszállt egy hajó a szélben* (A Ship Has Flown Away). The changes became perceptible in the world of adults only gradually, inch by inch. The new, unspoken consensus was founded on the premise that the nation would not rock the boat by questioning the régime's ideological footing and political legitimacy (i.e. 1956) or its alliances (the Soviet occupation), and in return it would be allowed to enjoy a measure of relative freedom, albeit strictly within the bounds of private life. With films like *Kézenfogva* (Holding Hands, 1962) by Anna Herskó, *Bognár Anna világa* (Anna Bognár's World, 1963) by Márta Kende, or *Válás Budapesten* (Divorce in Budapest, 1964) by Mariann Szemes suggest, documentaries also turned their attention to the private sphere.

Towards the end of the Sixties Hungarian motion pictures became bolder and more outspoken. What helped create that more favourable climate was the fact that a string of feature films were then garnering resounding success at foreign festivals and, eager as it was for any outside recognition, the political leadership felt obliged to handle directors with kid gloves. It was again the documentary film-makers of the BBFS who led the way: Judit Elek's first major film, *Meddig él az ember?* (How Long Does Man Matter?), which she made in 1967, was highly acclaimed both at home and abroad. Miklós Csányi, in *Boldogság* (Happiness, 1968), and Gyula Gazdag, with the fantastical flights of *Hosszú futásodra mindig számíthatunk* (The Long-Distance Runner, 1968), both pointed to a crisis in society's values. (Virtually all of Gazdag's subsequent work was to be devoted to portraying the operetta-style character of Hungarian Socialism.) Amongst documentaries that were produced in other studios, mention should be made of Péter Bokor's *Halálkanyar* (Dangerous Curve, 1961), the first film to bring the subject of the annihilation of the 2nd Hungarian Army on the Don Bend in early 1943 to the screen. (That the subject continued to be hedged with strong taboos was demonstrated two decades later by rows over the television screening of the instalments of Sándor Sára's series *Pergőtűz* (Drumfire, 1982)—also presented under the title of *Krónika* – Chronicle). Another harbinger with regard to the

history of the recent past was Rezső Szörény's *Kivételes időszak* (Exceptional Times, 1970), which dealt with the "people's colleges", the institutions set up between 1946 and 1948 to provide residential higher education for substantial numbers of young people from underprivileged families but which were smartly shut down by Rákosi's régime a few years later as alleged hotbeds of reaction. The tiny advances that these kinds of works represented added up over time, allowing the documentary to move from the portrayal of issues affecting individual lives to the probing of questions that bore on society as a whole.

Into the Seventies: object lessons

The Prague Spring and the student unrest in Western universities affected the discreet transformation that had been under way in Hungarian society as an external shock. Here progress was organic, being channelled not into revolution but a management model that was dubbed the New Economic Mechanism (NEM), on which leaders and led alike pinned great hopes. Reformists within the party leadership were seeking an economic boost that would strengthen the régime's new-found legitimacy through welfare provisions and the chance to achieve personal prosperity. Ordinary working people were looking for greater latitude, more freedom of choice, a dollop of jam on their bread and butter. There are intriguing grounds for asking whether the seed of the whole NEM concept may have been sown by a film. During a visit to Paris, András Kovács, then the powerful head of the Script Department at MAFILM, the state feature-film studio, made his first encounter with the New Wave or *cinéma vérité* style of filming and considered that this was eminently compatible with the demands of socialist realism. On returning home, he made a feature-length documentary, *Nehéz emberek* (Difficult People, 1964), in which the scientists and inventors, embodiments of the new Socialist ideal, spoke about how their talents and drive were being continually thwarted by curbs imposed by the régime. This sparked off a lively nationwide debate in *Népszabadság*, the party's daily newspaper. By 1968, though, the whole world, and left-wing intellectual critics in particular, were robbed of one illusion, for it became evident that the sow's ear of democratic socialism could not be turned into a silk purse, the régime could not be reformed either economically or politically. The Seventies and even much of the Eighties were to be marked by that disillusionment; indeed, right up until 1987–88, though it had long been plain that "real existing socialism" was a blind alley, holding no prospects, it seemed that generations to come were nevertheless going to be stuck with living out their entire lives in the roles that had been dealt out at Yalta.

This was the period that marked the start of widespread disenchantment with the régime and its derisively labelled "fridge socialism" and "goulash communism". Even as official ideology carried on insisting on the principles and goals of communal society, in reality it forced the population, constrained within the bounds of private life, to opt for the path of personal success. Baring the Big Lie, confronting the régime with its own false consciousness, became the subtext of all important work in the cinema. As open criticism was off limits, feature-film directors (as well as writers and theatre directors) went for veiled, figurative modes of representation, dressing up their message in stylised poetic images or in the garb of the grotesque and ironic.

In some cases, though, quite the opposite was done. The Seventies also witnes-

sed the blooming of documentary features and a host of variants that blended fictional and documentary elements (fictional stories set in real locations, shot with non-professional actors and varying degrees of improvisation; ordinary people telling their stories to camera, etc.) This blurring of boundaries between genres often makes it hard, if not impossible, to classify them. Prime examples are Béla Tarr's *Családi fészek* (Family Nest) and Lívia Gyarmathy's *Kilencedik emelet* (Ninth Floor), two films made at much the same time, on a similar subject and using similar techniques. Both are set in a working-class environment, with the housing shortage as their topic, and both use non-professionals to enact their own stories. Yet the first is a feature film, the latter a documentary.

The miseries of the housing shortage and the inadequacy in education were the favoured topics for films of this period, being used as a sort of touchstone through which film-makers could offer a diagnosis of the entire régime. Here one may point to the series *Nevelésügy* (Education Programmes Series), produced over several years through the pooled efforts of a BBFS team that included István Dárday, Györgyi Szalai, László Mihályfy, László Vitézy and Pál Wilt, or János Rózsa's *Tanítóasszonyok* (Women Teachers) and András Péterffy's *Iskolapélda* (Object Lesson). There were also a growing number of ever-franker attempts to portray the lives of workers. That had long been a taboo subject, given that the régime had styled itself initially as a dictatorship of the proletariat and later as a workers' society, and had no wish to hear about how its titular "ruling class" actually lived, worked, and thought. It was a long road from portraits of shock workers to Tamás Szentjóby's *Kentaur* (Centaur), which, though not a documentary, took advantage of the eclecticism of the time by employing the devices of that genre, or Pál Schiffer's *Fekete vonat* (Black Train, 1970) on commuting workers. Some chose to emulate and elaborate on the ballad-like cinematic idiom linked with Sándor Sára, as in the urban film-poetry of István Szabó in his series of shorts collectively titled *Te, Budapest, amiért szeretem* (You; Budapest, Why I Love It, 1971). The trilogy of *Capriccio, Tisztelet az öregasszonyoknak* (Respects to the Old Ladies) and *Elégia* (Elegy, 1965) by Zoltán Huszárik is one of the top-flight achievements in this category. What is more, the cheek and sheer nerve required to challenge the régime's declared principles and values with reality, flippant and hard-hitting by turns, was kept alive at the BBFS in such films as *Nászutak* (Honeymoons) by György Szomjas and *A határozat* (The Resolution) by Gyula Gazdag and Judit Ember.

Screened in regular cinemas, the latter film, along with Ferenc Kósa's *Küldetés* (Mission, 1975), about the Olympic gold-winning modern pentathlete András Balczó, and the evening-long documentary feature *Vannak változások* (Changes That Have Been Made) by the Gulyás brothers, Gyula and János, drew audiences normally only attracted to feature films. That index of growing public demand, the profusion of subjects tackled and the diversity of idiom all point to Hungarian documentaries having come of age, alongside the feature film.

The Eighties: a golden age

Having pulled themselves up to the level of the feature film, documentaries then seemed to leave the latter standing during the Eighties. Through a progressive drying-up of finances and a loss of touch with audiences, feature-film production went into a major crisis, and full-length or multipart documentaries, tackling subjects that for decades had been banned or

swept under the carpet, triumphantly pushed ahead to fill the gap. Historical documentaries, a genre that had barely existed before, burst into life. Workshops toiled furiously to make up for lost time, well aware that it was almost the last opportunity they had to locate and record surviving eye-witnesses to some of the major events of the twentieth century. Mention has already been made of Sára's *Drumfire,* which was effectively the opening shot. Nowadays it is hard, particularly for the young, to understand why the part that Horthy-era Hungary played in the Second World War was a taboo subject for forty years, and people whose participation in the German invasion of the Soviet Union was by no means voluntary, were silenced. To be sure, Rákosi had dismissed Hungarians as "a fascist people" and Hitler's "last henchmen", and the country had certainly been responsible for historical crimes and errors, but given it had also paid a price for that, in human casualties, loss of territory and wealth, war reparations—to say nothing of the régime that was foisted on it. There was no rationale for maintaining a deathly hush over the part played in that war. Sára nevertheless had to overcome many obstacles, from political obstruction to the misgivings of the interviewees; even after the series was made, a quite separate set of battles had to be fought before all 25 episodes were broadcast in 1982. By then similar difficulties had been faced by Judit Ember too with *Pócspetri* (1982), which dealt with the first of the post-war "staged trials", finally redressing the injustice of the execution of the innocent priest of the village of that name, and that done to those who were falsely arrested, tortured or sentenced to long prison terms for their alleged involvement in the (purely accidental) shooting of a policeman during a protest demonstration.

Lívia Gyarmathy and Géza Böszörményi teamed up to make a series of key documentaries during this period: *Együttélés* (Coexistence, 1982), *Faludy György költő* (The Poet György Faludy, 1987) and *Recsk – Egy magyar kényszermunkatábor* (Recsk, the Hungarian Gulag, 1988). *Co-existence* concerns the tribulations that were suffered by Hungary's 'Swabian' (ethnic German) minority after the war, and was followed by a string of further films dealing with this and other tit-for-tat expulsions that were mounted between Hungary and its neighbours under the euphemistic label of exchanges of population. The subject was touched on, for example, by Bálint Magyar and Pál Schiffer in *A Dunánál* (By the Danube), which was an adaptation of a book by Pál Závada, *Kulákprés* (Kulak Squeezer, 1986), presenting forty years of social history of the partly ethnic Slovak community in the writer's native village in southwestern Hungary. Another film to which Závada contributed was *Statárium* (Martial Law, 1986–89), directed by András Sipos, about the trial of a rich kulak.

After ethnic minorities, the next in line for resettlement were "enemies of the people"—aristocrats, the moneyed upper classes and anyone else whose wealth was seen as fair game by the Rákosi régime—as examined by Gyula and János Gulyás in *Törvénysértés nélkül* (No Offence Committed). The list of unexplored historical iniquities was literally endless, but some truths had to wait until the change of régime to be uttered at all, as in the case of the fate of Hungarians who were carted off to Soviet forced-labour camps, treated by the Gulyás brothers in *Malenkij robot* (A Bit of Work).

Whilst historical films undeniably had pride of place, interest in the present did not flag either. As the country, closed in on itself for so long, began to look at the world outside, more and more people re-

alised that Kádár's social contract rested on rocky foundations: lack of democratic rights and liberties could not be compensated for with consumer goods and, in any case, the growth of the welfare net was not untroubled. The régime perceptibly weakened, and as it lost its ability to inspire terror, it began to look increasingly ridiculous. And that was the sobriquet by which Hungary was known: the merriest barracks. Documentation of contemporary life was extended to the sick, the poor and such marginal groups as ex-prisoners, in *Sír, lobog a szeretet* (Longing For Love) by Lilla Mátis and *Bebukottak* (Tripped Up) by András Mész, and to the "difficult people" of the Eighties whose efforts paved the way towards exposing the régime's anomalies, as shown by the Gulyás brothers in *Ne sápadj* (Don't Go Pale), Béla Szobolits in *Aki nekiszaladt a demokráciának* (The Man Who Bumped Into Democracy), or Judit Ember in *Hagyd beszélni a Kutruczot!* (Let the Kutrucz Speak!). Satirical indictments, like Gyula Gazdag's *A bankett* (The Banquet), József Magyar's *A mi családunk* (Our Family), and Béla Szobolits's *Macskakörök* (Cat's Claws) also retained their popularity, and many were curious about the tragic ending to the career of Hungary's first beauty queen as presented by András Dér and László Hartai in *Széplányok* (Pretty Girls). One new issue that horrified the entire country, and the subject of Ádám Csillag's punningly titled *Dunaszaurusz,* or Danubeesaurus, was the plan to construct a barrage across the Danube at Gabčikovo-Nagymaros, a white elephant for which the Kádár régime fought to the very last ounce of its strength.

Much of the public associates the decline of Hungary's heavy industry and the fall in working-class incomes with the post-1989 period, but sharp-eyed documentary film-makers like Tamás Almási, in *Szorításban* (In a Vice), already spotted the incipient signs in the industrial town of Ózd as early as 1987. Gábor Bódy's *Privát történelem* (Private History), which made use of old home movies by amateur enthusiasts, was an innovative enterprise that inspired a whole new genre in the next decade.

Simultaneities: after 1990

The change of régime did not bring a sharp break in the subject-matter of documentaries since from the mid-Eighties onwards virtually all the major issues had already been shifted by film-makers from the strictly taboo to the (reluctantly) tolerated category. There were two exceptions: narratives about the 1956 Revolution and the ensuing retribution could only be undertaken after Kádár's demise—first the symbolic one, with his dismissal from office on 8th May, then his death on 6th July 1989. Film-makers were of course present when the unmarked mass grave of Imre Nagy and his associates was opened so their remains could be honoured in public before a state burial on 16th June. From their different points of view, documentaries such as Judit Ember's *Újmagyar siralom* (New Hungarian Lament, 1989), János Erdélyi and Dezső Zsigmond's *Vérrel és kötéllel* (With Blood and Rope, 1990). József Magyar's *A mi forradalmunk* (Our Revolution, 1995), and István Lugossy's *Széna tér 56* (Széna Square '56, 1993) reconstructed the events, memorialising those killed when the security police opened fire on unarmed crowds and the victims of the subsequent show trials and hangings. Thanks to these tenacious efforts, a spotlight could finally be shone on just what 1956 represented for several generations and, just how much the nation had been forced into silence and suppression.

The Second World War was also far from a closed chapter: justice needed to be

done to the honourable men who had served in Horthy's army, as in András Kisfaludy's *Végzetes esztendők* (Fatal Years, 1995), and the stories of those who had been taken prisoner-of-war or carried off into the Soviet forced-labour camps still remained untold until Sándor Sára's *Magyar nők a gulágon* (Hungarian Women in the Gulag, 1992). And then there was also the long-untouchable subject of Hungary's Holocaust, since anything concerning the position of Jews was taboo, not just during the Kádár era but already during the Rákosi dictatorship. At best it could only be discussed in the banal circumlocutions of the official ideologists, though even that was not encouraged. "Tell your sons!" runs one ancient Hebrew injunction, and in the immediate aftermath of the war the distinguished thinker István Bibó had called on the nation to do just that, to speak out and discuss what had happened, but that confrontation with the immediate past did not occur for a constellation of deep-seated historical and social-psychological reasons. There had been some earlier attempts to record this history, as with Gábor Oláh's *Gettó* (Ghetto, 1974), but the bulk of the work was left unfinished. Here too, however, time was pressing, but it was not until the Nineties that work really began on disclosing the fate of Hungarian Jews who had been conscripted into labour service or deported to Nazi death camps from Hungary's provinces and re-annexed territories. Here, mention must be made of Gábor Dénes's *Bélyeges sereg* (Branded Army), Judit Ember's *És ne vígy minket a kísértésbe* (And Lead Us Not into Temptation, 1993), János Erdélyi's *Akik utolsónak maradtak* (Those Who Were Left to the Last, 1993), András Sipos's *Alija* (Aliyah, 1994), and Miklós Jancsó's *Elmondták-e neked?* (Have You Been Told?). There was an even longer delay in tackling the forgotten Holocaust that overtook the *Roma* population, in Ágota Varga's two films, *Porrajmos* (Roma Holocaust, 2000) and *Feketelista* (Black List, 2002). The activities of those who put their own lives at risk to help the persecuted in those perilous times also lay claim to special attention in András Sipos's *Igazak* (The Righteous, 1993) and András Kisfaludy's *Veszélyes vidék* (Dangerous Area, 1998).

Hungary's history in the twentieth century, including the history of the country's Jews, is presented by Péter Forgács in the very particular refraction of the home movies he has been collecting since the Seventies—*objets trouvés* he calls them—and edited into the films that make up his series *Privát Magyarország* (Private Hungary), which brings to life the pleasant middle-class world that came to an abrupt end with war and two dictatorships.

Disenchanted

Alongside the filling in of the blank spots in history, interest in presenting contemporary developments, many of them fraught with conflicts and personal tragedies, was undiminished. The irrealistic expectations and misconceptions that many had invested in the fervently craved blessings of democracy and the free market swung with a jolt into disenchantment when it became clear that, in the short term at least, the change of régime had created more losers than winners. Wide segments of society tasted unemployment, insecurity, a sense of redundancy, and poverty. Entire towns and regions that had grown up around and been sustained by Socialist heavy industry were devastated; whole swathes of skilled work that had formerly put bread on the table for legions of workers disappeared virtually overnight during the early Nineties, at a time when there

were no effective organised safeguards of workers' interests. The specific experiences, sporadic success stories and, far more frequently, personal tragedies that lay behind the alarming statistics were tracked indefatigably over the years in the work of two documentary film-makers: Pál Schiffer, in the three-part *Elektra Kft, avagy bevezetés a kapitalizmus politikai gazdaságtanába* (Elektra Ltd, or Introduction into the Political Economy of Capitalism, 1992-2001), dealing with the workers of the old Videoton factory at Székesfehérvár, and Tamás Almási, whose *Tehetetlenül* (Helpless, 1997) is the most recent film in the series about Ózd that he began in 1987.

Other phenomena that, just a few years before, were likewise essentially unknown to the general public, film-makers included, now began to attract attention: AIDS, which Pál Zolnay looked at in *Védtelenek* (Unprotected, 1990), and drug addiction, tackled by Béla Doszpod in *Egy nap döntöttem – drog helyett az élet* (One Day I Made Up My Mind—Life Rather Than Drugs, 1994). Nor did two groups in society who were at peculiar risk in the hard times that were sapping social solidarity escape notice: children, the subjects for Ágnes Tölgyesi's *Pipacsok* (Poppies, 1998) and Ádám Csillag's *Mostohák* (Foster-Care, 2000) and Gypsies. At the same time, a conspicuous change in style could be registered in the approach taken by such "socio" films: film-makers quickly realised that it was no longer their business to shock with exposés or presentations of ghastly horrors—they had no hope of competing with television news and current affairs programmes here—it was now the time to acquaint their viewers with, and bring them closer to, the outcasts of society. Prejudice will certainly anathematise a group in society, placing it in an invidious position, but it should not be viewed simply as a canker, rather as a normal part of our thought processes, a necessary component in helping us sort out the flood of data which swamps us. It is not sufficient to fight prejudice with censorious crusades and summary judgements. Amongst the solid achievements that may be credited to Hungarian documentaries are a string of recent works that have managed to put a human face on the subjects of routine reportage dealing with the socially disadvantaged, including *A lépcső* (The Stairway, 1995) by Lívia Gyarmathy, *Városlakók* (City People, 1997) by András Salamon, and *Történetek a boldogulásról* (Stories About Surviving, 1999) by Edit Kőszegi and Péter Szuhay.

As the country slowly but surely became more democratic, the opportunity presented itself for the nation to readmit to its ranks, in spirit at least, those Hungarians who live as minorities in the territories that were ceded to neighbouring countries in the Treaty of Trianon in 1920. A start was made on recording their history and their current lives and concerns, with particular regard to the previously unimaginable bloody war in Yugoslavia, which hit very close to home, if only because the ethnic Hungarian community there was caught up in it: László B. Révész's *Családsirató* (Family Lament, 1993), Péter Pál Tóth's *Magyarok a balkáni háborúban* (Hungarians in the Balkan War, 1998–99), and Ferenc Moldoványi's *Gyerekek – Koszovó* (Children—Kosovo, 2002).

Documentaries with a highly personal voice and perspective returned with a flourish, displaying a rich variety of content and formal invention. A stream of unclassifiable works too numerous to list in full but including Zoltán Kamondy's ongoing series under the overall title *Magyar Tarka* (The Hungarian Piebald, 1993-), Lívia Gyarmathy's *A mi gólyánk* (Our Stork, 1999), and István Tényi's *Az én dühödt Magyarországom* (My Enraged Hungary, 1992). These paint

whimsically sardonic and outspoken yet affectionate portraits of the Hungarians of today and their everyday lives. Pseudo-documentaries, like Szilveszter Siklósi's *Az igaz Mao* (Mao, The Real Man, 1994), and an alternative to the depressingly dreary regular domestic channels, in the form of Bábolna TV, have also seen the light of day.

The gloomy prophecies, made in the immediate wake of the 1989 changes, that freedom of speech and democracy might suck the life from documentaries because there would be no subjects left to be explored, no more truths waiting to be told, no exigency to force filmmakers into ellipsis or other forms of indirectness, have therefore proved unfounded. There are still subjects aplenty: in any society that is undergoing wrenching transformations, as Hungary is, something new is always happening, ever new phenomena materialise, things are in a continual process of change. There are nevertheless many who believe that the Hungarian documentary film is in crisis. The difficulties have been caused in part (and initially) by the break-up of, and the flight of financing from the entire film sector, but even more seriously by a collapse in interest, the defection of a paying public. The golden age when the country, caught up in the fever of the change in régime, suddenly became curious about itself, wanting to know about its past and to examine its present, receded rapidly. Then came the mounting problems, the worries about making ends meet, keeping one's head above water, the testing struggle for a livelihood, and the ensuing disenchantment. Large segments of society simply turned their backs on reality, having no desire to see or know anything about it, opting instead for the long-denied and sorely missed magic of light-entertainment movies and the cheap thrills offered by new TV channels. Commercial television broadcasting is irreconcilable with documentaries, and not simply because the latter just do not fit into its programming; that would not matter had the public channels been able to respond to the challenge. What has been truly harmful is that the commercial channels' insatiable demand for content to fill their schedules has led to the mass assembly of simulated documentary products. TV screens are now awash with pseudo-reportage, scandals presented as investigative journalism, celebrity portraits, publicity-seeking treatments of fashionable topics, travel advertisements dressed up as educational programmes, much of it so amateurish as to make a mockery of the professional standards of documentary film-makers. Worse still, the opportunists and their products siphon the financing, slots in schedules and viewers' attention away from genuine documentaries.

For all that, it would be wrong to say that the Hungarian documentary is in crisis. It has learned how to tack against a head wind, in the war and other hard conditions—and time is on its side. Shiny fashion items lose their glitter, and who still remembers today's "hot" news a week later? Fifty or a hundred years from now Hungarians may look back on them with the indulgence that one accords a curiosity, but if they have any wish to become acquainted with the country's past, if they would like to know how their parents and grandparents actually lived, then they will surely turn to documentaries. ❧

Tibor Tallián

From *Singspiel* to Post-Modern

Two Hundred Years of Hungarian Opera

The social context is probably more important in the case of opera than it is for the other dramatic and musical arts. This may even be true in the sense of good old Marxist theory: 18th-century *opera seria* serving solely the court's needs for representation, *juste-milieu* 19th-century opera peddling emotions to the bourgeoisie as a commodity and modern opera reflecting the alienation of the bourgeois individual from society without being able to truly reflect the victorious *Weltanschauung* of the working class. Within the European operatic traditions, there is of course some potent counter-evidence of diversity, both qualitative and stylistic, of operas written and/or presented in similar social surroundings. In terms of how opera has been consumed, this is also true for the European periphery: however different social circumstances in Eastern Europe may have been from those dominant in Central and Western Europe, fashions in opera have been much the same everywhere where opera was cultivated.

Regional social and political circumstances were more strongly felt in local opera production. This is why a number of typological constants can be discerned in an Eastern European national opera such as the Hungarian: traits that tend to accompany it faithfully throughout its history. Here I shall not attempt to provide a historical survey of Hungarian opera. My intention is to consider some issues central to the genre that Hungarian opera was compelled (or had the privilege) to encounter and resolve during its two hundred years of more or less continuous, albeit not overwhelmingly fruitful, history. The first step is to try to define precisely what opera has meant to those who made it and those who consumed it, as the usage of the word "opera" does not lend itself easily to chronologically or systematically unequivocal definitions.

It was in 1793 that the first attempt was proudly announced in a playbill of the first Hungarian theatrical company, performing on temporary stages alternately in Buda and Pest. The piece itself was a German parody of a French play, translated into Hungarian and embellished with songs allegedly newly composed by a certain Joseph

---

Tibor Tallián
is Director of the Institute of Musicology, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and author of books on Béla Bartók.

Chudy. The claim to originality could not be confirmed over the centuries, since the score was never printed and nobody apart from the company appears to have seen any of it in a manuscript copy either. I would not be surprised if it turned out that the "original" musical insertions of this first Hungarian opera were adaptations of popular songs and arias supplied by Chudy, who was an accomplished musician, earlier in the service of Count Erdődy, at his private opera in Pressburg/Pozsony (Bratislava).

To call a modest parody with a few musical numbers of dubious origin an opera could well have been a piece of bravura on the part of a Hungarian company struggling to survive. On the other hand, opera in the late 18th and early 19th centuries was always a *Singspiel* everywhere in the German orbit, to which Hungary belonged: essentially a play with more or less elaborate musical insertions. In Italian operas, such as those by Mozart, *secco* recitative was replaced by prose dialogue. As contemporary scores show, even grand operas like *La vestale, Tancredi* and *La straniera* were often performed with spoken dialogue until well into the 19th century.

All Hungarian operas composed in the first decades of the 19th century, some with a national subject and enjoying countrywide popularity, were of the German mixed opera type. As a consequence Ferenc Erkel, the 30-year-old first conductor of the newly founded Hungarian National Theatre in Pest, justly claimed for his *Mária Bátori,* composed and premiered in 1840, the proud title of the first truly Magyar tragic opera: *Mária Bátori* was the first through-composed opera in Hungarian that had musical continuity, with dramatic *accompagnati* instead of spoken dialogue, with two-part arias and large ensembles, cast in the Italian large musico-dramatical forms that Bellini, Donizetti and Mercadante exemplified.

Erkel steered the Hungarian genre, navigating in the stream of high European opera. His turning to grand opera was, however, not the only important development on the Hungarian musical stage in the 1840s. It coincided with the creation of the *népszínmű,* i.e. folk play, the Hungarian version of the Austro-German *Volksstück,* a play with popular songs for the main characters to sing and other musical numbers, especially dances. The *népszínmű* allowed for lighter subjects than opera, and for a less complicated elaboration of the texture of the individual musical numbers.

It will perhaps be useful to explain to the non-Hungarian reader that the adjective *"nép"*—whose dictionary meaning is "people" (as in "the British people")—in the compound *népszínmű* does not denote "people" in general but the peasantry, the village folk. Folk plays were invariably set in villages, their characters were peasants. The music of these plays had little to do with folk music in the purist sense of the term Bartók and Kodály were to give it later. Folk plays were dominated by the fashionable national songs and dances that originated mainly in towns, but which spread rapidly among the rural population too. Musically, the *népszínmű* was situated somewhere between the stage and real life: songs that were sung out in the streets, were often incorporated, and new songs written for particular plays were soon and rapidly disseminated all over the country. For many decades, the *népszínmű* was very popular with the lower middle classes, and several songs had a currency that surpassed by far anything national opera could even have dreamt of achieving.

The typical 19th-century Hungarian song, whose melodic content and rhythmic patterns have been made familiar by Liszt and Brahms, was considered a musical symbol of national identity until well

into the 20th century. The identity that the songs created and reflected was not political; the body of songs that achieved country-wide circulation served more as a means for the nation's emotional self-expression. It was generally believed that Hungarians felt sentiments similar to those expressed in the songs, and that there was an atavistic relationship between the songs and the Hungarian soul.

This being so, it was only natural that their melodic essence and harmonic implications were not expunged from Erkelian opera: in fact Erkel consciously used the national lyrical melodic style at moments of the greatest emotional intensity. One such moment is the song-like beginning of Bánk bán's soliloquy in the second act of the eponymous opera: it falls to him immediately after he has learned from his wife Melinda that she had been raped by Queen Gertrudis's brother.

There are other indications that opera and folk play were not in irreconcilable opposition till late in the 19th-century. Up to 1875, both were cultivated on the stage of the National Theatre, the one and only Hungarian-language stage in Budapest. Neither its first conductor, Ferenc Erkel, nor members of the orchestra found it beneath their dignity to compose music for a number of folk plays. For them, the only difference between opera and folk play lay in their musical density. The attitude was similar in the Vienna of the time, where important opera composers such as Konradin Kreutzer produced much music for the popular local comedies by Raimund and others. A community and communication between opera and folk play were practicable as long as song-like stanzaic structures were part and parcel of operatic expression. From the mid-1860s on, national opera increasingly began to experience difficulties with the idiomatic use of the song-based *style hongrois*. Erkel himself was deeply disturbed by this development in the later phase of his operatic career, so much so that he left the composition of operas that were premiered under his name more and more to his sons, the anonymous collaborators in all his later operas.

Romantic opera, committed to historical or pseudo-historical plots and Franco-Italian pathetic forms of expression, had difficulties in the representation of the life of the peasantry; Erkel did not use a plot set in rural surroundings till later, and even then the plot was, characteristically, historical rather than contemporary. Hungarian operas in rural or peasant settings were inevitably comedies, and can be seen as adaptations of the light subgenre of the Auber and Adam-type *opéra comique*. *Ilka* by Franz Doppler, the only highly succesful opera comedy of the mid-19th century, falls into this category.

Some forty years later Jenő Hubay, the famous violinist and diligent composer, who had adapted various French opera models, especially those of Jules Massenet, undertook a promising experiment with his *A falu rossza*—a title I would translate as *The Villain of the Village*. This opera (composed for the 1896 thousandth anniverary of the Magyar Conquest) takes both title and plot directly from a folk play premiered in 1875 at the newly opened Hungarian-language Népszínház (People's Theatre). Musically, the two versions of the play hardly bear comparison. The printed edition, published by Gyula Erkel, the oldest son of Ferenc Erkel, of the music under the title "All the Popular Songs from *The Villain of the Village*" contains six songs, the last being the title-song which even now the elderly in Hungary still know by heart: *("I alone am the villain of the village, I get barked at by every dog from a long way of")*. The characters in Hubay's opera version, similarly to those of folk plays,

burst out into song at whatever moment seems appropriate to them or to their creators; however Hubay composed a number of his own songs rather than simply drawing on the songs popularised by the earlier *népszínmű*. As with most art songs of a more elevated national style (including Béla Bartók's Lajos Pósa songs), the results were neither fish nor fowl. For one reason, in the last decades of the 19th century, the Hungarian musical idiom had lost the nobility of style it still possessed in the 1860s, at least at the hands of an Erkel. In addition, trained composers such as Hubay seem to have lost the ability to compose folk songs that would please both singers and the public. Between songs the characters in this folk opera (*magyar opera,* as the title has it) converse with each other and the audiences in a fluid style that is vaguely Hungarian, supported by not very colourful French harmonies.

Hubay's experiment at a peasant opera superficially chimed in well with one triumphantly succesful trend in contemporary opera, *verismo.* The international fashion for folk opera could not escape the attention of a composer working in Budapest. *Carmen* was of course a standard item in the repertory, and had shortly before been revived by Arthur Nikisch in a much acclaimed production. After the sensational first Hungarian performance of *Cavalleria rusticana* (as early as 1890), a series of Italian, German, and French *verismo* operas reached Budapest, the latest in this line being *La navarraise* by Jules Massenet in 1894. Another event of the Nikisch era (1893–95) may also have influenced Hubay's turning to village comedy: *The Bartered Bride* was first produced at the Budapest Opera in 1893. After *Cavalleria rusticana,* though, none of the rural *verismo* operas found any lasting success with Budapest opera audiences. These audiences were eagerly polishing up an image of themselves as up-to-date and metropolitan in the spirit of Art Nouveau; nothing could be more embarassingly *passé* in their eyes than remaking an old success in the national popular genre. The latter had been enthusiastically endorsed in the audience's own social adolescence, but had since been resolutely abandoned in favour of what the 'advanced' entertainment industry was producing, namely operettas imported from Paris, Vienna, and sporadically, from London.

We may assume that a complete lack of personal relationship to and first-hand knowledge of the reality of peasant life on the part of both librettist and composer were also responsible for the artistic failure of *A falu rossza.* This lack impeded the creation of a realistic musico-dramatic representation of the potentially dramatic and operatic aspects of rural life. Like the village Prince Potemkin erected for the Empress Catherine, the theatrical version of villages shut off the realities of village life from Hungarian authors. This was not so much the fault of the old genre itself, but of the general lack of interest in and information on the life of the peasants obtaining among the so called cultivated classes in Hungary. For some of the urban population, this lack of knowledge and interest may have been the result of their non-Hungarian origins. The nobility also had little knowledge of the peasantry, though they were of Hungarian origin and spent at least the summer on their country estates. The young Béla Bartók indignantly formulated this in 1906:

> What I cannot fathom in the least is the thinking of the provincial intelligentsia about the peasant question. How is it possible to know so little or nothing at all about what one constantly sees, as gentlemen must see peasants. When the subject is

the peasantry, such incredible nonsense is spoken that I feel like fleeing by jumping through the window.

In the fifteen years from 1905 Béla Bartók spent on intensive ethnomusicological field work, he undoubtely came to know the peasantry much more intimately than most members of the educated classes, whether urban or rural. He must have made the acquaintance of hundreds of peasants as he made them sing thousands of their songs and play hundreds of their dance tunes for his phonograph. He must surely have had the opportunity to know some of them as individuals, too, although his published reports contain hardly any personal references to individual members of the peasantry. Bartók's relationship with individual peasants was most odd. I hope I will not be misunderstood if I claim that peasants for him were a species of animal with the miraculous capacity to produce song in the way that bees are animals with the capacity to produce honey for a bee-keeper. Maurice Maeterlinck wrote a wonderful book on the life of bees, but as far as I know, he did not devote a stage work to them. Nor did Bartók or his Maeterlinckist librettist Béla Balázs tackle episodes from the life of peasant individuals or communities in any dramatical form or genre. The discovery of the peasantry as a music-producing class was not accompanied by any discovery of its social life on the part of opera. To explain Bartók's lack of interest in the peasant as an individual with dramatic potentialities, I would venture to say that this resulted from his own lyric-individualistic personal attitude towards folk music. He went to the peasants not to find the peasants themselves, but to find a new self for himself. An additional argument from music would be that Bartók was passionately looking for the most archaic strata in folk music, so much so, that he was nauseated by everything in the country that smelled even faintly of the city. It was among the archaic communities of Hungarian, Romanian and Slovak peasants that he found what he was looking for: he found epic poetry, myth and ballad, but not drama with its individuation of characters. (Village drama was, even in *verismo,* usually set among the middling and rich peasants and rural entrepreneurs such as the innkeeper Turiddu and the carter Alfio.)

Bartók's only opera and the two other stage works, the ballet *The Wooden Prince,* and the pantomime *The Miraculous Mandarin,* allow one to reconstruct his ideals as a musical dramatist: the opera is identified both in its plot and its musical symbols as a ballad of the old European type; the pantomime, on the other hand, belongs to the new urban type of street ballad that the Germans call *Bänkelgesang* or *Moritat*. *The Wooden Prince* tells a parable using motifs typical of folk tales. Thus, ballad and folk tale are the secondary genres of what, on the surface, are an opera, a ballet and a pantomime. What the composer actually does, then, is to re-tell on stage ballads and tales, as peasants do on occasions that are prescribed by custom or ritual. In his stage works, Bartók models the traditional cultural activity of the peasant and not the peasant's everyday life. The stage works reflect the young Bartók's aestheticism in another way, too: they show him as a cultural producer, as a song-producing animal exactly as he saw the peasants: it is he who sings ballads and tells tales. Cultural productivity in general, and song-producing (that is, emotionally hightened articulation of sound) in particular, are sexually strongly charged activities in zoology; the unequivocal sexual symbolism of the stage works and what we know about their genesis, make it essential to interpret Bartók's stage works

along such lines. It is hardly surprising that in the second half of his life as an artist and the last third of his biological life, when sexuality ceased to be of central importance to him, the stage completely lost its attraction for Bartók.

Bartók wrote in a letter in 1924 that after the First Word War, the general tendency in the arts was leading away from expressionist individualism, and towards "objectivity" and "impersonality". It is an interesting question whether Zoltán Kodály, so often twinned with Bartók, who became *the* par excellence Hungarian composer for the musical stage in the interwar period, could be interpreted as reflecting the tendency Bartók noted. In his first work for the musical stage, *Háry János* (1926), Kodály clearly turned away from the Wagnerian and Straussian myth based or balladesque opera: *Háry János* is acted out in longish spoken dialogues, interspersed with delightfully illustrative orchestral pieces which concert audiences are familiar with from the *Háry* Suite, and no less delightful arrangements of both authentic folk songs and of early 19th-century art songs. Kodály's type of opera obviously relies on the *opéra comique* or ballad-opera, a dramaturgical initiative that is not incompatible with other well-known referals to ballad-opera in the 1920s. Transplanting authentic folk song onto the aristocratic stage of the Budapest Opera House was interpreted by Kodály and his circle as a superior way of recycling *objets trouvés,* and this they deemed extraordinarily audacious for its socio-cultural as well as its musical aspects. Looked at from this angle, *Háry János* was decidedly contemporary in post First-World-War Europe. Other kinds of topical references in *Háry* will not have escaped the attention of Kodály, who was a highly self-conscious composer. He was well aware of the ephemeral efforts at reviving the old folk play that were taking place in post-Trianon Hungary at the time when he was preparing to compose the music to Béla Paulini's libretto. Another trend of the time, the vogue of irredentist operetta, may have also caught his attention. Like Bartók, with his own idea of an integral Hungary, Kodály, when composing a neo-classic or neo-romantic national folk play, stood in a discord concordance with the official ideology of his time. His attitude may have been national but it was not political nationalism.

The relationship of the musical dramaturgy of *Háry János* to previous developments in the national musical theatre bears witness to a fertile productive ambiguity. Kodály's choice of subject seems to be relevant in this respect. *Háry János* was written to a libretto based on János Garay's comic narrative poem *Obsitos* written in the year 1843, an attractive piece of literature in the popular style of the Hungarian Reform Age; it may not be a classic but is very much a Hungarian classic. (*"Obsitos"* was the word for a veteran discharged after long military service, derived from the German word *Abschied.* János Garay wrote his poem in the period that saw the birth of the folk play at the National Theatre; indeed, the narrative poem, was born out of the same spirit of early Hungarian populism. Because of his strongly historical perception of Hungarian culture and music, Kodály was of an open mind towards the non-authentic (i.e. not of peasant origin) popular music of the 19th century; however, he took the view that it was faking to introduce any authentic peasant songs, only as if by mistake, into a genre which allegedly portrayed the life of the Hungarian village. It was by way of reparation that in *Háry János* he created a folk play with authentic folk songs.

There is an explanation for Kodály's chosing, out of all the genres of the musical theatre, not opera but the *Singspiel* or parody folk play as the model for his first theatrical venture. (He was thus, formally at least, placing *Háry János* in the vicinity of modern operetta, that meretricious descendant of early 19th-century musical comedy). The explanation lies in his conviction that a series of folk songs cited in their integrity either affirmatively or ironically at crucial points of a stage work, cannot be worked into a continuous musical context without an "incongruity of style" (To paraphrase his own words). It is slightly exagerrated to interpret his position as a revocation of the Erkelian operatic model, which frequently patched small-scale lyric structures together into longer operatic constructions, for the most part ignoring congruity or incongruity of style. (Erkel as an opera composer did in fact deliberately resort to eclecticism, as his own short analysis of the various stylistic layers of *Bánk bán* attests.) I would even hazard that Kodály's purism went as far as having reservations about the inner congruency of the musical comedy form chosen for *Háry János*. Certainly there is no musical incongruency; however, there is surely a discernible discrepancy between the artistic qualities of the text and the music, and also a divergence in their respective moral attitudes. Here I mean not only the contrast between the purity of the folk music, and the pseudo-folksiness of the puns in Paulini's book. Even the high poetic aspirations of Kodály's music, and the more down-to-earth literary character of Garay's poem do not harmonise completely. In Kodály's words, the Háry of Garay is a Hungarian *miles gloriosus*, a village boaster. His own Háry was not a boaster but a poet: he incorporated the poetic fantasy of the peasants, the poetry with which the "folk" compensated for the scant opportunities society had always burdened it with. I am probably not the only one to feel that Kodály's music can convey his message more succesfully without the dialogue, in the form of the orchestral suite that the world outside Hungary seems to have recognised as an authentic Kodály contribution to this type of historical popular comedy.

Judging by *The Spinning Room*, his next stage work, Kodály himself drew similar conclusions. To define it in terms of genre, one has to turn to expediencies like *Liederspiel* or "sung pantomime", or symphonic stage suite. The piece dispenses completely with any kind of text, either spoken or recited, other than the original lyrics of the folk songs and ballads the soloists and chorus sing in the guise of members of a Székely village community who spend their evening in a spinning-room. It is as if Kodály had returned to the Bartókian model of a stage ballad, reversing both the dramatic and musical approach. Kodály did not compose one single great ballad out of fragmented motifs of folk melodies, what he did was to arrange several authentic folk songs so that they combine into a great one. The audience can reconstruct the unspoken ballad from the pantomimed frame story, which is about the Suitor, who, for some obscure reason, is forced to escape from the village, and leave behind the woman he loves. She, the Housewife, mistress of the house where the villagers gather in the evening, is no longer a young girl but a mature woman (this was surely so that the role could be sung by the legendary Mária Basilides, leading contralto at the Budapest Opera). The Suitor was cast as a baritone, and sung at the premiere by the equally legendary Imre Palló, himself a Székely, a Hungarian from Transylvania, that other half of the Hungarian "double mother land". There is no question in my

mind, that the ballad without words of the exiled Suitor, replayed in *The Spinning Room*, implicitly symbolises Kodály's grief over the loss that Hungary had suffered through the cutting off of Transylvania, the homeland of the Székelys, and the core-land of Hungarian folk music. However, ballads have multiple interpretations. I propose one that is significant for Kodály's relationship to opera. It is not difficult to recognise an allusion to the return to Ithaca in the scene on stage: we see a country abandoned by its master, living a life closed up into itself, centred on the matriarchal figure of the mistress, who is mourning the past and hoping for the future.

Amongst the papers of the great writer Zsigmond Móricz, Dezső Legány has found a letter by Kodály, written probably in 1930, and exceptionally revealing. He declares himself overwhelmed with compositional work and other activities, expressing his understanding for the similar situation Móricz finds himself in, only to add:

> Since for years I have seen you in the turmoil of great labours, I have not had the heart to remind you of Odysseus! What could an opera mean to you that will not be performed but three or four times a year? But now after the "scandals of Zsarátnok" are over [a reference to Móricz's famous novel *Rokonok*, (The Relatives)] you could perhaps take it up...

Kodály apparently had for years or even decades intended to compose an opera about Odysseus, with whom he must have identified himself early in life, as his well known song "Nausikaa" (1907) shows. It is tempting to see the adventures of the boaster Háry János in this light as a persiflage to the adventures of Odysseus. And what could *The Spinning Room* represent if not the melancholy gesture of abandoning forever the great project of an opera about the adventurer, who sets out to seek great gains, but also to risk great losses. Instead, *The Spinning Room* is a play about the feminine principle of retaining what one still has, a choice that in contrast to the adventurer Bartók, Kodály would also personally take in a few years.

It looks as if by abandoning his Odysseus project, Kodály had also abandoned adventuring into opera as such: *The Spinning Room* is obviously a piece about not composing an opera. As such it was to be an onerous legacy for the next generation of Hungarian composers, for the most part pupils of Kodály. In the history of Hungarian opera, the period roughly between 1940 and 1960 can be described as a series of sporadic endeavours to unwrap a real opera from the Kodály song-play, which he himself designated as its bud. At the end of this period, the stage works of Kodály seemed to represent, not the bud of future Hungarian opera, but the *non plus ultra* of what could be achieved in opera out of folk songs.

Not that there were no attractive pieces among the operas composed by Hungarians and premiered on the Budapest opera stage after *The Spinning Room* and before the end of Hungarian folklorism around 1960. Some of these novelties even enjoyed a popular succes, and one or two had revivals later. It would also be a gross simplification to say that all Hungarian operas trundled along the path pointed out by Kodály. Other influences, such Carl Orff, made themselves felt; various shades of neoclassicism were adapted, and in one case even some kind of historical operatic realism was attempted. When, in the late 1970s, I first studied this specific case, *Sigismund Báthory* by Zoltán Horusitzky, the only attempt at a tragic historical opera that reached the stage in post-war Hungary, I believed it to be a typical product of the 1950s, written under the dictate of the political aesthetics of socialist real-

ism. Later I learnt that Horusitzky had begun his struggle with his subject probably as early as the second half of the 1940s and thus could not originally have been inspired by socialist realism—his efforts may have reflected the influence of some other heroic historicism, like that of fascist Italy. In the 1950s Horusitzky certainly tried to make amends. He attempted to shape the historical tragedy of one of the Princes of Transylvania to the first commandement of socialist realism—optimism. I have seen a version of the score which, after the death of Sigismund, a Boris Godunov-type figure, ends with the people coming to the footlights, singing a hymn and looking confidently into the future, as the stage direction suggests. However, it was not the optimistic ending that condemned the work to failure. Horusitzky ambitiously sought to create larger operatic forms in the spirit of 19th-century historical realism, but the musical material that he had at hand was Hungarian folk lyricism, to a large extent devoid of dramatic expression. This tension threatened his undertaking from the start.

Other efforts had more luck with their eclecticism, that is, with their amalgamating the Hungarian lyric idiom with traditional subjects and operatic modes, drawing on various periods in operatic history. (Cynical though it may sound, the shorter the opera was, the greater its artistic success: all three pieces after Kodály which found a place in the repertory were one act operas). With his *Magic Wardrobe* Ferenc Farkas offered a harmonious variant of the opera-novellette based on an episode Arabian Nights. His thoroughly enjoyable music is memorable at times; it springs from an exquisite melodic invention, and is handled with a feeling for classic formal balance that is usually described as latinate. With his *The Gold and the Woman* (1943), Jenő Kenessey attempted a historical operatic blood-chiller. The libretto (by Gyula Krúdy) has a plot similar to Oscar Wilde's *A Florentine Tragedy,* and is given malleable Hungarian pentatonic tunes, with decorative orchestral accompaniment. György Ránki's *King Pomádé,* after one of Hans Christian Andersen's tales, was the only opera premiered in the 1950s to achieve a genuine success. That success would have been all the greater if the original short version, as performed and recorded by Hungarian Radio in 1951, had been retained on stage. Unfortunately, Ránki was induced by the Opera House to rework the piece into a three-act opera; this he did by adding a great deal of folkloristic optimism to the lean and witty satire that the opera originally was. To my knowledge *King Pomádé* is unique in Hungarian opera in that it is conjoins, if not amalgamates, motifs from archaic East European folk-music with the rhythms and techniques of American dance music—if not of jazz, as Ránki's suspicious contemporaries thought (he was castigated because of his jazz-mania). One would believe it was impossible to stage an opera in the early 1950s in a Communist country that made open use of musical Americanisms, since jazz and American dance music were branded as the opium of imperialism for the masses. On the surface this was precisely the symbolic role that American dance motifs had in the musical hierarchy of King Pomádé: Americanisms accompanied the make-believe activities of the fake weavers as they pretended to work on the new vestments for the King, vestments that would be cut from a fabric that was visible only to the initiated. However, in the Hungary of the year 1951, when the targets of production for the first five-year plan of the country, then in its second year, were doubled, there could be no question about who the weavers in the tale stood for. That the impossible did

happen and *King Pomádé* could be staged in 1953 can only be explained by the boundless arrogance of those in power: they simply did not believe that it was they that the tale was pointed at.

The oblique hymn to labour intoned by Ránki was the nearest Hungarian opera of the first socialist decade came to meeting the official line in aesthetics: to depict and celebrate the heroic productivity of the people in the course of building socialism. The other main objective seemed equally unattainable for Hungarian librettists and composers: putting on stage the historical heroism that the people of earlier times had shown in their struggle against oppression, as a direct precedent to the present when the long struggle was at least crowned with success. Historical heroism was celebrated in the 1950s in the transcendental genres of oratorio and symphony, but not on the stage where the realistic presentation of any kind of grandeur, either national or social would have been strikingly in conflict with the mood of depressive Hungarian society was in. If there appeared any kind of heroism in the small number of historical anecdotes that added up to the lean operatic harvest of those years, it was the heroism of the trickster, as in *Huszti kaland* (Escapade at Huszt) with its pseudo-Hungarian music by an eminent composer, Pál Kadosa, joined to an anecdotical libretto from an eminent musicologist, Bence Szabolcsi; both can be forgiven, but what they did cannot be forgotten. Heroic anecdotes proved to be more viable in the (anachronistic) genre of historical musical comedy, which saw itself revived around 1950, a frosty second blossoming fifty years after its heyday. The historical periods revisited were the same as those around 1900: the Rákóczi uprising, the Hungarian Reform Age and the 1848–49 War of Independence. Each of these these attempts to achieve independence for Hungary were failures, the musical comedies however figure triumphant stories about them, which was just as well for a country so totally subjugated by an awesomely powerful foreign state which permitted not the slightest deviation from its political and economic line.

The great lack of heroism was more than made up for in the second, longer period of opera composition in the post-1945 era, a period that began with great expectations. A triumphal future for Hungarian opera was one of these: its future potential was thought to be all the higher since opera was markedly present at the beginning of a hopeful rejuvenation of what used to be called "the Hungarian music". The new operatic era began in 1961 with the broadcasting and stage premiere in 1962 of *C'est la guerre* by Emil Petrovics. Based on a *pièce bien faite* by Miklós Hubay, as far as I know, *C'est la guerre* is the first Hungarian *"bürgerliche"* opera, set in a Budapest appartment in the last months of the Second World War. It is a somewhat sentimental urban tragedy (in the vein of *Tosca*) about the Woman, her husband, and the cicisbeo, a deserter; the plot is "alienated" by a framework, a prologue and an epilogue, which strike a shrill grotesque tone. *C'est la guerre* sits exactly where a good opera should sit; you may not find it very likeable with the killing of all three of its main characters (corners of an eternal triangle), its tragicomical mood, and the music woven out of leading motifs which are sometimes grotesquely coloured, sometimes intoning very "private" melodies in sentimental and melancholic moods. Yet on leaving the theatre, quite a few of the opera's motifs have remained in your head and you find youself humming them on the tram home—tunes the characters themselves may have picked up on

a tram. The objectivist outward style paired with an intensity of internal emotion was a total novelty for Hungarian opera. (The party aestheticians were suspicious of this opera that was so clearly an opera: they objected to its attitude as being merely realist and not socialist-realist.)

Sándor Szokolay's *Blood Wedding,* a shortened version of the Hungarian translation of Lorca's play, was the greatest and most lasting operatic success since—not *Bluebeard* or *Háry János*—but since *Wedding at Carneval,* the only 20th-century Hungarian opera to reach real popularity on the Budapest opera stage. This sweet and refined musical invocation of the vanished world of the old landed gentry was composed by Ede Poldini, who was born in Hungary in the 1860s, and who lived for long years in Switzerland; it had been given nearly 150 performances up to the end of the Second World War. After more than one hundred years of attempts to express national aspirations, and after more than fifty years of composition almost exclusively based on "authentic" peasant song, *Blood Wedding*, with its intense and elemental music, was the first true peasant tragedy by a Hungarian composer. No historical analysis of the dramatic potency or impotence of musical nationalism and folksiness in Hungary speaks as loudly as the fact that this first Hungarian peasant tragedy had to be a Spanish one. Some twenty years later Szokolay composed another peasant opera, *Ecce homo,* this time using a Greek source, Kazantsakis' novel *Christ Recrucified*. It was as if one's own people, as they actually lived and loved, in the present or the past, could not be presented on the Hungarian opera stage. The single notable exception was *Together and Alone* by András Mihály, a *pièce mal faite* by Miklós Hubay, and notable because it was the only Hungarian opera on the Communist movement. The composer, as a young Jewish Communist, had a rough time in 1944; after the war he took his revenge as a leading ideologist of the Communist Party. What he composed was a pseudo-Brechtian *Lehrstück* about a young Communist hero, who perished under the anti-Communist regime. This piece, as *Lehrstücke* go, was devoid of any historical reality, Hungarian or other. Musically, Mihály walked in the steps of Petrovics—a little grotesque, a little Berg, a lot of Puccini—but in no way did he have the dramatic instinct and the melodic invention of the former.

This Movement piece began a period which, in a 1980 sketch on the recent history of Hungarian opera, I dubbed the era of heroic-lyrical opera. Why I called it heroic will become clear from the titles of the works premiered at the Budapest State Opera between 1966 and the end of the 1980s: *Together and Alone* (András Mihály, 1966), *Hamlet* (Sándor Szokolay, 1968), *Crime and Punishment* (Emil Petrovics, 1969), *The Tragedy of Man* (György Ránki, 1970), *Samson* (Sándor Szokolay, 1973), *Be Good unto Death* (Ferenc Szabó, 1975), *Moses* (Zsolt Durkó, 1977), *Outside the Door* (Sándor Balassa, 1978), *Ecce homo* (Sándor Szokolay, 1984), *Csongor and Tünde* (Attila Bozay, 1985). It surely took a heroic measure of self-assurance for Sándor Szokolay to compose an opera on Hamlet, using the canonical 19th-century translation by János Arany which the cultivated in Hungary know as well as their English counterparts know the original; heroic too was the self-assurance of Emil Petrovics to condense *Crime and Punishment* into a cinematic tragic revue, retaining a more or less comprehensible plot, and allowing for challenging scenes for an ambitious composer. The literary sources of some of the other operas are probably not familiar to the non-Hungarian reader, but the heroic nature is evident for pieces entitled *Samson* and *Moses* even without

knowing that Szokolay based the first on a play by László Németh, a highly respected dramatist of the mid-20th century, and Zsolt Durkó based the second on a free adaptation of a play by Imre Madách. (The latter is the great 19th-century poet whose *The Tragedy of Man* is next to *Bánk bán,* the most revered piece in the Hungarian dramatic heritage; a literary *opus magnum* that György Ránki did not shun to turn into a libretto.) All other libretti were also based on well-known foreign and Hungarian works: the text of *Outside the Door* was taken from Wolfgang Borchert, that for *Ecce homo* from Nikos Kasantsakis. Bozay composed another canonical piece of 19th-century Hungarian literature, *Csongor and Tünde* by Mihály Vörösmarty; Ferenc Szabó put to music a novel by the same Zsigmond Móricz who was to have written the text for Kodály's Odyssey. Further additions to the gallery of Hungarian heroic-lyric opera were to be *Mario und der Zauberer* by János Vajda, *Leonce and Lena* by the same composer, *Karl and Anna* (after a Leonhard Frank novel) by Sándor Balassa, and recently the second opera on the last five scenes of Madách's *The Tragedy of Man,* composed by Attila Bozay who did not live to orchestrate the score.

The hero of *The Tragedy of Man* is Adam, who passes through fifteen historical episodes (including a vision of the future), experiencing each time a reaction that Hamlet commented on: *"The time is out of joint: O cursed spite, That ever I was born to set it right!"* This is the situation of the tragic hero, born to set things right, their being out of joint being the consequence of his own *hubris* or, as with Raskolnikov, of his own crime. It could also be the tragic flaw in another person as in *Hamlet* or *Samson* or *Be Good unto Death,* or the moral turpitude and transgression of a community or of the whole human race, as in *Moses* and *The Tragedy of Man.* The hero sets things right by sacrificing himself in an act of redemption. Heroic self-sacrifice to attain redemption was so pronounced in all operas of the Sixties and Seventies, that in 1980 I took the liberty of predicting that, sooner or later, a Hungarian composer would come to the point of writing an opera with Jesus of Nasareth as the protagonist. I thought the subject might be taken from *The Master and Margarita,* but the "Passion" opera that justified my prediction turned out to be based on Kazantsakis's novel and not on Bulgakov's.

Over many years of engagement with contemporary Hungarian opera, I wondered a great deal why opera dramaturgy leaned towards the Passion, a dramaturgy that also led to an epic structure in most works, where the narration was developed as in the Stations of the Cross. I have to admit that, in the 1970s, I found myself astonished by the fact that this tragic and individualistic type of opera, employing progressive or even avant-garde music (at least for its time and place), was so eagerly accepted by the political regime as its own, a regime that had still not abjured optimistic socialist realism as its official aesthetics. I must confess that I suspected some kind of unspoken complicity on the part of the composers: I felt that through a heroic pessimism and a quasi-sacral presentation of their subjects, they were lending human authenticity to a political system, that was neither human nor authentic. In more recent years I did learn to see the Hungarian opera of the last socialist decades in a different light. Now I realise that the heroic pessimism of the works derived, at least in some of their authors, from the emotions or, even, the passions of national frustration. More importantly, I recognised that the heroic masquerading by Hungarian composers, like Goethe's

Liebhaber in allen Gestalten, derived from intentions that were poetical rather than political. By disguising themselves as heroes of mythical greatness, they intended to put their compositional vocabulary into a grandiose perspective. I am quite sure now that at least in Balassa, Bozay and Durkó, true lyricists among the Hungarian composers of the time, their opera must be appreciated as a means for organising musical structures of a quasi-mythological power. Through opera (and oratorio for that matter) their intention was not to present musically an autonomous drama with characters who live their own lives on stage, but to lend greater pregnancy and power to their own musical communication; this objective was imbued with a strong longing to be understood and accepted by the community as their own. This longing has inevitably tinged these operas with quixotic colours; it is still an open question if it ever took them beyond quixoticism to the realm which they really intended to move into: Utopia.

In Sándor Szokolay's case, who was, if I may say so, the only professional opera composer of the last forty years in Hungary, with seven full operas to his credit, the lyrical attitude was initially less obvious. Szokolay's music has characteristics that are sometimes idiosyncratic, but out of these stylistic elements he never developed an ideal type of opera such as Durkó did. Instead, at least in the oeuvre of his first two decades, he succumbed to the attraction various operatic paradigms exerted upon him. What he did in his operas was to try to recreate (some would say, to remake) such paradigms: *Blood Wedding* he projected along the lines of a realist peasant drama of the Janáček type which at the end turns surrealistic. That *Hamlet* and *Samson* mimicked mid-19th-century French grand opera is borne out by the titles themselves, recalling as they do Thomas and Saint-Saëns. *Ecce homo,* set in rural Greece under Turkish rule, offers the opportunity to introduce peasant crowds chanting Orthodox hymns and thus creating the atmosphere of an unknown Russian folk opera. In his later attempts, Szokolay distanced himself from operatic models, and experimented with a more personal musical dramaturgy; unfortunately his later operas did not find much resonance in the public.

For János Vajda, the only important opera composer of the generation born after Second World War, masquerading is such a natural condition for composition, that it is percieved no longer as masquerading but as post-modern. Completely absent is the previous generations's pathos of an avant-garde that never was, he does not allow you to feel that his operas are simply second thoughts on earlier dramatic models in the genre. He takes music dramatically at its face value even when he paraphrases earlier operas, (as in *Leonce and Lena*, where the *Aida* March strikes up when the court marches onto stage, and it is played in retrograde motion when it exits. This direct, though not elemental, approach assured a remarkably sympathetic reception for the one-act opera he based on Thomas Mann's *Mario and the Sorcerer*. Here the depiction is of a journey towards the innermost layers of the soul (it is immaterial whether the journey leads into the soul of Mario—a speaking role—or into that of Cipolla), a journey that leads through layers of various types and styles of "musics" till it reaches "music" itself,—music, as it must sound in a soul that has till then not known any of the "musics" that have been composed, sung and danced to in human history. ❧

Deborah Kiszely-Papp

Dohnányi: Outlines of the Oeuvre

James A. Grymes: *Ernst von Dohnányi: A Bio-Bibliography.* Westport, CT, Greenwood Press, 2001, 254 pp. ISBN: 0-313-30850-0 (Bio-bibliographies in Music, ISSN 0742-6968; no. 86)

This volume by James A. Grymes presents a welcome addition to the relatively small amount of scholarly documentation available on Hungarian composer, pianist and conductor Ernő Dohnányi (1877–1960), whose lifework has suffered undeserved neglect, particularly here in his own homeland. It follows the prescribed format of the series, featuring a brief biography, a list of works, a discography and an annotated bibliography. Three appendices are also included to facilitate the location of entries from the list of works and the discography.

The introductory chapter (Biography, pp. 1–10) offers a frank and vivid account of Dohnányi's long and versatile career, including the many hardships he endured after the Second World War. Despite several simplistic, inaccurate generalizations, such as the statement that begins the concluding paragraph: "Dohnányi's recordings and compositions were largely ignored for most of the twentieth century", Grymes provides the reader with a fresh, informative synopsis of Dohnányi's life that is a worthy preface to the wealth of information that follows. While in the current age of internationalism the practice of anglicizing names (Frederick von Dohnányi, Charles Forstner, etc.) seems unnecessary and even tedious, Grymes nonetheless negotiates the reader through the chaotic, tragic period of Hungary's history immediately following the First World War, and writes with compassion and insight into the political ordeals which plagued Dohnányi throughout much of the last period of his life.

The real substance of this book, however, is in its various lists. The first of these is somewhat ambiguously entitled "Works and Performances" (pp. 11–69), but in fact seeks to provide a catalogue of Dohnányi's compositions and arrangements of works by other composers grouped according to genre into one of five categories: Keyboard Music (pp. 12–30)—which, other than one work for organ, consists entirely of music for piano; Chamber Music (pp. 30–40)—which also happens to contain one work for unaccompanied flute; Orchestral Music (pp. 41–52)—including cadenzas; Theatrical Music (pp. 53–57); and Vocal Music

---

Deborah Kiszely-Papp,
a pianist, is the director of the Ernő Dohnányi Archives, Musicology Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. She is the author of Ernő Dohnányi *(Hungarian Composers 17, a bi-lingual series), Budapest, Mágus Kiadó, 2001.*

(pp. 57–69). Although the title of the chapter leads the reader to expect performance lists of each work, in actuality only the dates of known premieres are included. The cataloguing of Dohnányi's compositional output is ever problematic because of the many different levels on which he composed; in addition to his major works, consisting primarily of those to which he assigned opus numbers, he also improvised, score-read, and arranged on the spot. In these situations the arrangements were rarely written down, and contemporary accounts may be the only evidence that such a musical work existed. The present list of works is cumbersome and difficult to oversee, despite the fact that two supplementary lists (Appendices A and B, arranged alphabetically and chronologically, respectively), offer optional ways of viewing Dohnányi's oeuvre. Nevertheless, the entries feature valuable details about the pieces, including dedications, manuscript location(s), complete instrumentation of orchestral works, and cross-references to recordings and bibliographical entries. There are several new discoveries, such as Dohnányi's cadenza to Mozart's Bassoon Concerto in B-flat Major (p. 52), about which the only information provided is that it was last in the possession of bassoonist János Fasang of Budapest. Another previously unknown work is an unfinished, untitled flute trio (p. 36) on which Dohnányi was probably working around the time of his death. Some welcome, updated pieces of information include the dates of the premieres of the three different versions of Dohnányi's Op. 40 Symphony in E Major (p. 44), and the present location of the multiple manuscripts of the Op. 38 symphonic cantata *Cantus vitæ* (p. 62) and of Dohnányi's cadenzas to all of the Mozart piano concerti (pp. 51–52).

But most of the information contained here is a reiteration of Imre Podhradszky's earlier catalogue.[1] Unfortunately, Grymes perpetuates too many mistakes and dubious entries contained in that earlier list of works. For example, an alleged two-piano arrangement of Schubert's *Valses nobles* (p. 29) according to this account had its premiere in 1954, in Tallahassee, in a performance by Dohnányi and Edward Kilényi Jr. —this is a replication from Podhradszky's catalogue. But according to both written and verbal communications from Kilényi, a lifelong friend with whom Dohnányi regularly performed two-piano music in concert during the composer's late years, this was not the case: the work was arranged only for solo piano by Dohnányi, in that familiar concert transcription which the composer recorded several times and which Kilényi also recorded in 1955.[2] In another example, *A tékozló fiú* (originally *L'enfant prodigue*) [The Prodigal Son] (p. 25), a pantomime with music by André Wormser, appears here under the sub-category "Editions and Arrangements for Solo Piano". Elza Galafrés' account, which details the difficulties of trying to stage a performance of the French work in 1916, states that: "Only a piano score was available", and that Dohnányi conducted the entire work from the piano.[3] There were no doubt numerous other instances in which Dohnányi utilized his multifaceted skills to allow a performance to take place, but such inconclusive information should not form the basis for a catalogue entry in Dohnányi's list of works. Another case of incorrect information lifted verbatim from Podhradszky's catalogue appears in the form of a note in reference to the "*Romance* in A Minor" (p. 17), which contains only inaccuracies. The correct information can be read in Dohnányi's letter to his father, Frigyes Dohnányi, of 14 September 1894: "After this the director asked me what I had composed, and at his request I performed the *Romance*. The director was most impressed; he patted me reassuringly and then could be heard in the hall proclaiming what a talent I was, etc. etc....On the next day (today) the entrance

exam for composition took place at 9 a.m."[4] We also know that Dohnányi composed his *Romance* in F# Major in January of the same year, and that this later work is a considerably more complex, sophisticated piece than the *Romance* in A minor, composed in January of 1891. Thus, we can surmise that on his entrance exam for piano on 13 September 1894 Dohnányi probably played his most recent piano composition, the *Romance* in F# Major, which he also chose to play again fifty years later on a Hungarian Radio broadcast in January of 1944. But in the absence of further evidence, this must remain a conjecture rather than an assertion.

Furthermore, Grymes also introduces a disturbing number of new errors: for example, the Menuetto in D Minor is in fact the third movement of the Quatuor in D Minor (p. 32) rather than a separate piece. Primary sources for the dates of composition of the choral works, *Király himnusz* [Royal Anthem] (p. 58) and Der 6. Psalm (p. 59), can be found in Dohnányi's letters.[5] Regarding dates of premières, for example, the date given for the first performance of the Op. 2, No. 3 Intermezzo in F Minor is incorrect: Dohnányi played the Op. 2, No. 1 Scherzo in C# Minor on his formal debut concert in Berlin on 7 October 1897.

In addition to the inaccurate dates, keys, and other data, the author states hypothesized information as fact when it remains unverified: for example, the alleged autograph manuscript of *Köszöntő* [Greeting], p. 60). A parenthetical question mark would be a more judicious choice in cases for which there is not yet sufficient documentation, and it would also provide a cue for future researchers to investigate further. In some cases (e.g.: *Nemzeti ima* [National Prayer]) the list is bloated with redundant categorizations of the same work according to insignificant differences in multiple arrangements. It may be argued that it is better to err on the side of giving too much information, but what emerges from this particular list is not a clear picture of Dohnányi's oeuvre in terms of importance and quality. Thus Grymes' list can in no way be considered definitive, but it does underline the need for a comprehensive thematic catalogue of Dohnányi's oeuvre. An *errata* supplement to the entire volume —and in particular to this chapter—would be a most welcome and necessary improvement, and would greatly increase its credibility and value to scholars.

The Discography (pp. 71–106) features commercially-released recordings of performances by Dohnányi as both pianist and conductor (pp. 71–82), followed by other musicians' interpretations of his works (pp. 82–106). The sheer number of recordings (400 entries), including piano rolls and the many re-releases of earlier recordings, gives credibility to the idea of a Dohnányi renaissance already underway. The arrangement of the data alphabetically according to the producing company proves awkward, however. An "Index to the Discography" (Appendix C, pp. 223-39) only slightly alleviates the problem of finding what one is looking for. Here, as elsewhere in the volume, Grymes neglects to fully and clearly document his sources, making it difficult to distinguish or trace the incomplete, misleading, or unverified information that inevitably appears. One example of this can be found in an entry (p. 77), which states that a performance of Dohnányi's Suite for Orchestra in F# Minor (Op. 19), featuring the composer conducting the Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra, can be heard on the album, Hungaroton LP 12334. Scholars in both the Hungaroton Archives and the Bartók Archives have verified that this is impossible, because the cited album is one of the *Bartók hangfelvételei. Centenáriumi összkiadás* (Centenary Complete Edition of Bartók's Recordings, 1981) and contains only recordings of Bartók performing as pianist.

By far the most original and interesting chapter of this volume is the annotated Bibliography (pp. 107–202), and within that, the sub-sections featuring contemporary reviews of Dohnányi's compositions and performances. This is by no means a complete list of press material relating to Dohnányi's career, but it is thus far the only one of its kind. And it is an important one, having been compiled primarily from the twenty-six Dohnányi scrapbooks found in the collections of the American Branch of the Dohnányi Archives (Warren D. Allen Music Library, Florida State University, Tallahassee) and in the British Library. (Although Dohnányi was famous for his disinterest in critics' opinions, some of his family members—including his sister Miczi and his third wife, Ilona Zachár—were enthusiastic scrapbook keepers). Many names of authors, dates, and even titles of journals are missing because they were cut off in the scrapbooks. Grymes offers brief descriptive summaries for each entry, and, of greatest value, key sentences are quoted from the review to capture its overall sentiment. While obviously this cannot give the reader the "entire picture", the many highlights provide first-hand insight into Dohnányi's extraordinary reception throughout his life. The great majority of press clippings included here were originally written in English. Grymes does not credit any translators for the quotes from articles in Hungarian, German, Spanish, French, and Italian.

Mistakes can occur in any work of this scope and complexity, but that is not the real issue here. Rather, it could be concluded that this kind of bio-bibliography is not a one-person task, especially considering the fact that Dohnányi research is still in its infancy. Moreover, it is to the author's disadvantage that he cannot draw as directly and deeply from the numerous primary sources in Hungarian, such as many of Dohnányi's letters, as can one who speaks the Hungarian language. Thus a broad base of international cooperation, including the participation of music scholars from Dohnányi's own homeland, should be deemed an absolutely essential requirement to ensure the greatest possible integrity in a project of this nature and importance, once all of the pertinent source materials of Dohnányi's lifework have been gathered together from the four corners of the earth. Until then, Grymes' very diligent work can serve as a possible starting point for further research. But a complete documentation of the missing information from the various bibliographic entries, as well as a systematic, comprehensive cataloguing of press literature—especially of Hungarian and German sources—, remains the work of the future. ❧

NOTES

1 ■ Podhradszky Imre: "The Works of Ernő Dohnányi", *Studia musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* VI, 1964 (pp. 357–73)

2 ■ Recordings of the Schubert-Dohnányi *Valses nobles*, concert transcription for solo piano include: Ampico piano roll 67013 H (1926), Hungaroton LPX 12086 (recorded 1956, released 1979), and EMI (HMV) ALP 1553 (1958), Ernő Dohnányi, piano; and Columbia ML 4256 (LP)(1955), Edward Kilényi Jr., piano.

3 ■ Elza Galafrés: *Lives, Loves, Losses.* Vancouver: Versatile, 1973, p. 222. Elza Galafrés, Dohnányi's second wife, became the composer's companion in 1913; they were legally married in 1919 and finally divorced in 1949.

4 ■ Ernő Dohnányi to Frigyes Dohnányi, Budapest, 14 September 1894. Dohnányi estate, family letters no. 14, Music Division of the National Széchényi Library, Budapest (the author's translation from the Hungarian).

5 ■ Deborah Kiszely-Papp: *Ernő Dohnányi.* Budapest, Mágus Kiadó, 2001, pp. 6, 9, 30, and 33. In this volume the chronology of Dohnányi's compositions is based on information from Dohnányi's letters.

He fingers round the turn-ups of my trousers, then, as if on a sudden inspiration, fingers them once again. No Napoleonic crown and sceptre trundle out of there either. I have to turn round. Now he lovingly caresses my back, lingering to fondle the coat collar and the shoulder pads. Meanwhile, a spark of life flickers inside him. He makes a statement.

"You are Hungarian."

I corroborate the statement.

"Americans, Turks and Hungarians all cheat at customs."

I stand there in silence, as if I were one in an endless row of sons of these three nations. I cannot help wondering what sort of Americans, what sort of Turks and what sort of Hungarians I was falling into line with, who might have been my predecessors here.

"Be seated. Take your shoes off."

But as though there was something more he wished to say. He stares lengthily, engrossed, first at one of my feet then at the other, as if standing before a tough choice. Finally, with the assurance of a water diviner, he points a finger at my left shoe.

"That one."

From: The Customs Man. In: Gyula Illyés: Variations à la France (1947), excerpted on pp. 28–61.

HU ISSN 1217-2545

02001

9 771217 254005

1200 Ft