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Miklós Vajda, Editor
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Language Editors

Kati Könczöl, Editorial Secretary

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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/>

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An Explorer in His Own Country

Zoltán Szabó (1912–1984)

When Zoltán Szabó began to write, in 1932, I was a mere 11-year-old boy. When he published *A tardi helyzet* (The Situation at Tard), in 1936, I had barely turned 14. When his *Cifra nyomorúság* (Fancy Misery) came out, I was 16. My eyes had been opened by the time I read *Fancy Misery*, and the book became an integral part of my life once and for all. Looking back on my life now, at the age of 76, and trying to pigeon-hole the epochs of my personal development, I dare say that reading *Fancy Misery* made me, and has kept me as, a disciple of Zoltán Szabó. His personality touched me only indirectly, since we never met as far as I can remember. I have no picture of him either. Our relationship has always been one-sided and intellectual in nature. If he ever heard of me at all, it must have been in 1957 at the earliest, when I appeared in court together with István Bibó, a good friend of his until the day he died. Zoltán Szabó took leave of Hungary in 1949 for ever. Not of the spirit of the country, not even of the prevailing present or future of the country; only of the land itself. By staying behind, I took leave of the rest of the world beyond Hungary in 1939, if not for ever, unwillingly. I did not, indeed could not, cross the border until 1979, unless I consider prison as a territory outside, in effect below, the soil I call my homeland.

The decade or so that greatly determined Zoltán Szabó's life in Hungary spanned from the evident moral and social decline of the restoration following the 1919 Council Republic to the consolidation of Soviet power (1948) in Hungary; from the years of a Hungary that recognized, and subsequently combatted, the oppression of the people by the upper classes to the years when the country reluctantly came to terms with another type of oppression of the people, this time by the Soviets. This period embraces Hitler's rise to power, Gyula Gömbös as Prime Minister (1932–36), the Spanish Civil War, Prime Minister Kálmán Darányi's armament programme (1938), the

Árpád Göncz,

a novelist, playwright and translator, is the
President of the Hungarian Republic.

The above is the slightly edited text of an
address he gave at Tard on September 26
1998, on the occasion of the unveiling of a
memorial to the writer Zoltán Szabó.

Anschluss, the first (1938) and second (1940) Vienna Awards, the annexation of Sub-Carpathia, the outbreak of the Second World War, the suicide of Prime Minister Count Pál Teleki (1941), the taking of the Bácska (1941), the bombing of Kassa (Košice) (1941), Hungary's entry into the war (1941), the massacre of civilians by the Hungarian Army in 1942 at Újvidék (Novisad), the annihilation of the 2nd Hungarian Army on the Don Bend (1943), the German defeat at Stalingrad, which determined the outcome of the war, the allied landing in Normandy, the German occupation of Hungary, the Regent's foiled attempt to leave the war, the Hungarian Holocaust, the seizure of power by the Arrow Cross, the Soviet occupation, the establishment of the Temporary National Assembly and the National Government in Debrecen, the signing of the Hungarian cease-fire accords, Yalta, the land reform of 1945, the relocation of people both to and from Hungary, the declaration of the Republic of Hungary, the beginning of the Cold War, the communist take-over and the Iron Curtain.

Yet that decade or so, the years of extreme peril for the country, was also the time when an autonomous Hungarian spirit and a sense of reality revived in people. A time of revival, but by no means a time when this spirit was freely expressed. (That is where Zoltán Szabó played a crucial role.) That lack of free expression inevitably meant that this revival could not be carried through in the given historical circumstances. Because in these, two fierce ideologies, two world views clashed and engaged in a life-and-death struggle on Russian soil and, within a short time, in Hungary too.

Zoltán Szabó is rightly called a village explorer. In *The Situation at Tard* (1936) he renders an account similar to that in Gyula Illyés's classic *Puszták népe* (People of the Puszta, 1936), of the lot of poor peasants oppressed by history, while in *Fancy Misery* he recounts the everyday activities of a community of miners and labourers within a larger region, and describes the distortion of society there. Zoltán Szabó's role is quite justly compared to that of Imre Kovács and Ferenc Erdei, likewise authors of books about living conditions in villages and small towns. What they all were engaged in was no mere academic sociology; they exposed in an often emotional, politically charged, compassionate and artistically authentic way the chronic social ills of the time and described the marginalized masses without any rights whatsoever. The fabric they wove was called sociography, an investigative picture of society transcending its fundamental subject matter. What they came up with was stirring and disquieting. And something even more important than the emerging picture itself was the way they painted it and the way they assumed responsibility for it. It was as a supreme example of responsible behaviour.

This group of young writers provoked an intellectual landslide and brought a never-before-seen effervescence to a predominantly conservative and stagnant society. The intellectuals of my generation lapped up their words and learnt to

see the Hungarian world through their eyes. We were proud and conscious of our freely undertaken social responsibility. We were Hungarians but totally devoid of any national or racial prejudice. Yet we were biased: we had love in our hearts for all the oppressed. We were familiar with the causes and processes of social ills. We looked ahead and never longed for things past.

Yet all things considered, I would label Zoltán Szabó neither a village explorer nor a peasant writer, despite the fact that his two outstanding works greatly boosted the political success of both groups. Zoltán Szabó is neither a village explorer nor a peasant writer. Or he might be both, but on a far higher level: Zoltán Szabó is an explorer of reality, the totality of Hungarian reality. He strives to use his knowledge to grasp the essence of reality in all his works, whatever their subject matter.

The above is underscored by his two most-read sociographies as well as his most important undertaking as a political writer: the publication in the national daily *Magyar Nemzet* of a regular column over the years 1939–44, under the title *Szellemi honvédelem* (Spiritual National Defence) and *The Diary of the Spiritual National Defence*. This was an undertaking inspired by the example of Zrínyi, the seventeenth-century poet, a third way, if you will, seeking a way out for Hungary of the trap of the two conflicting monstrous ideologies, a third way that follows neither nationalistic nor “world revolution” ideals. It charted the course of the love of the homeland and the self-knowledge of Hungarians. And it did so with lyrical passion and a deep sense of moral commitment. Clashes with the increasingly severe censorship, trapped in its own snare, became constant. Reading his writings today makes one wonder how this passionate, clear-sighted young man could possibly hope to be able to single-handedly steer Hungarian society, increasingly deviating from the beaten track and more and more hopelessly trapped, back into the mainstream. Later, his *Korszakváltás* (Change of Epochs) faithfully reflected his deep-seated scepticism concerning the state of Hungarian society, which had been freed only of the upper classes when they fled the country, or were uprooted by a radical land reform after the war, but not of their patterns of behaviour. Yet this very country, and he saw this clearly too, provided a shining example of vitality in the “creative anarchy” of the change of epochs, as it “transformed villages into ‘small nations’ through sheer communal instinct”. True, by then another important work and a significant, recorded experience had also shaped his life.

Szerelmes földrajz (A Loving Geography, 1942) is possibly the finest prose poetry in Hungarian literature. This explorer of reality knew the country, far and wide, like the back of his hand. And he knew Hungarian poetry like the back of his hand too. The combination gave birth to this impressionist ode in prose, addressed in many stanzas and a riot of colour to the different regions of the country, an emotional travelogue as it were.

The vital experience that also shaped his life was a bursary he received from the French government. Thus he personally witnessed the fall of France in 1940, which he recorded on paper. He included it in his newspaper column and later published it separately under the title of *Collapse* (Összeomlás, 1940). What he saw induced him to insert the phenomenon of collapse into his vision of Europe and France, and to project it onto his vision of his own country, too. Once this experience had settled in his mind, he lived through another collapse, one which had a far more profound and painful effect on him, for it meant the end of Hungarian statehood in 1944. He summed this up in an article, "Without Lies", which appeared in the first issue (1945) of the revived journal *Valóság*. "The reality is this: the war has trampled over Hungary, liberating the land from the Germans, and set free the democratic forces that still existed here, so that the nation might begin to build a new life in new circumstances. There is nothing surprising in the fact that those who talk of liberation and those who listen feel more the trampling. [...] Any catastrophe will bring personal experience to the fore. This is even more so in a country where preventing this catastrophe never became a public matter but remained a private affair; a country where there was no 'mass opposition', and resistance barely transcended the boundaries of a simple defection from an evil cause; a country where almost everybody escaped the catastrophe either as a private individual, a civilian fugitive or an army deserter. It will come as no surprise, therefore, that the average Hungarian, whose private life and livelihood was devastated by the war, has one and only one first wish, namely to sort himself out. To tend to what is his own. All public matters are judged insofar as how they affect or hinder this. This is why for many people the idea of public affairs and the idea of indifference are so strangely alike."

Bitter, hard but true words, all very distant from the fiery, lyrical prose of *Spiritual National Defence* and *A Loving Geography*. But Zoltán Szabó was there in Debrecen where the Temporary National Assembly and Government were formed while the capital was still under siege, and he took part in putting the country back on its feet again. He could have become minister of culture but he declined. What he did accept was foreign service in France as cultural attaché. Judging his situation hopeless after the infamous Rajk trial (1948), he resigned from office and opted for the harsher but more unequivocal service of being a Hungarian writer abroad.

And here we reach the second half of his life, when he worked in London for Radio Free Europe. He was editor of the Hungarian language magazine *Új Látóhatár* and the Paris-based Hungarian politico-literary magazine *Irodalmi Újság*. What he wrote continued to coincide in spirit and in fabric with his earlier work; he continued to be the same explorer of reality he was before, only this time in a wider, European context.

Of his many valuable writings I wish to refer to only two now. One is his '56 diary called *Kívülről* (From the Outside), which brims with compassion, anxiety

and doubt. It reflects upon the events of the Revolution from a position embedded in English intellectual life. A short quotation provides a counter-point to the piece I have quoted from 1945: "One of the lessons to be learnt from what has happened is that we were wrong in the opinions that we felt obliged to voice in order to avoid the pitfalls of self-deceit and self-praise. [...] We were wrong when we thought, on the basis of our experience in '44 and '49, that the people of Budapest were mostly informers. [...] We were wrong when we thought that Hungarians' conduct in general was best characterized as: 'When I see the masses appear, I try neither to see nor to hear'. [...] At the same time, it must be said that empty commonplaces of the chivalrous and 'brave' and generally 'self-sacrificing' Hungarian nation were not completely unfounded; these were now corroborated in Ferencváros, Angyalföld and along Rákóczi út too. It is only fit to mention, though, that these noble virtues were mostly expressed by the proletariat and, to some extent, the petty bourgeoisie also showed some inclination; honour is as contagious as villainy. The view, voiced even by some Hungarians, that our people are, alas, not inclined to democracy has been totally refuted. [...] While we should be wary of idolizing our people, we must not fail to recognize the facts. The fact, for example, that at that instance Hungarians did more to give meaning to the word Europe, at least in their own country, than all the other European peoples as well as the Council of Europe and the Movement of Europe put together."

And another quote, a short passage from a 1977 lecture, "1956: Revolution, History, Reality", faithfully characterizes both 1956 and Zoltán Szabó: "The revolution of '56 in Hungary was undoubtedly 'national', meaning 'nation-wide', and in a double sense. On the one hand, it was nation-wide because its actions, extra-parliamentary small parliaments or spontaneously created councils covered the territory of the whole country this side of the borders; on the other hand, it was nation-wide in a restrictive sense too—it went beyond the frontiers of the country in none of its efforts and none of the demands it made. It lacked messianism, the type of messianism that strives to set an example as it transcends the boundaries of a country and steps upon the world stage. Thus it had no nationalistic component. [...] The 1956 Revolution in Hungary was not an expression of the national character. It was the Hungarian nation itself that the revolution had forged."

Zoltán Szabó helped this nation and remained a member of this nation, from the very first sentence he put down on paper right up to his death. He served that nation both at home and abroad all throughout his career.

Today this very nation, and on its behalf the village of Tard in particular, expresses its gratitude to him with a sculpture. Tard has more right to do so than any other settlement in the country. It was the recognition of the situation of Tard that made Zoltán Szabó what he was. It was this village living off jobbing labour that unintentionally set him on the path he was to follow. •

Zoltán Szabó

The Situation at Tard

(Excerpts)

(Smallholders farming 5-1 hold)* Almost three-quarters of the smallholdings of Tard are between 1 and 5 holds and almost half of them are less than one hold. Smallholders farming less than 5 holds form the bulk of the peasantry of Tard, they are in the majority, and their sons and daughters are seasonal jobbing labourers. Their diet is typical of Tard. These people exhibit, in a crystal clear and concentrated way, the typical dietary deficiencies. According to a rough expert estimate, what food they eat barely provides half of the required calories. A substantial number eat foodstuffs almost exclusively based on wheat. This is where dry bread begins to serve as breakfast, midday and evening meal. If their circumstances are not so bad, the typical bill of fare is: noodle soup, a main dish made with noodles, bread, which all means approximately the same thing in various forms. Here the role of bacon in the diet begins to diminish, meat disappears completely, while sausage and black and white pudding rarely appear; these people never drink milk, see butter perhaps once a year, and eggs are rarely on the table of those who raised the chickens. The children's sprawling handwriting bespeaks hopeless poverty, the oppressive reek of mud walls and dirt floors, hard lives due to overcrowding, toil and struggle, too much work and not enough food. These bills of fare in themselves account for and cast light on the statistical figures that demonstrate that the death rate from TB is much higher in Tard than in the neighbouring villages, that congenital weakness is a direct and exceedingly frequent cause of infant mortality, and a weakening of the constitution is as frequently the indirect cause of adult mortality.

An eleven-year-old girl, daughter of a smallholder working four holds, gives the following account of what she eats: *"I do not eat meat because there isn't any."* She describes her weekly diet: *"On Monday I ate bread and bacon for breakfast. Midday I ate bread. I usually eat three times a day. On Tuesday morning I ate bread and bacon, midday I ate bread, and in the evening noodle soup. Wednesday morning I ate bread, midday bread and in the evening potato noodles."*

* 1 hold = 0.57 hectares or 1.42 acres

Thursday morning I ate bread, midday meat soup, in the evening I had bread. Friday morning I ate bread, midday bean soup, in the evening bread. Saturday I ate bread, midday noodle soup, in the evening bread. Sunday I ate bread and bacon, midday meat soup, in the evening bread."

Here, even on Sunday, the evening meal is dry bread. Variety is provided by meat soup, bean soup, flour-based dishes, and dripping. Children seen munching large slices of bread, after a cursory glance easily misjudged as greedy and insatiable by visitors, are in fact eating their main meal, and it is on bread that the hard-working parents subsist. It counts almost a feast if there is some fat to go with it, and a veritable feast if there is sausage to accompany it.

The little girl whose father farms two holds, had bread for breakfast, noodles midday and bread in the evening on a given day. The following day she had scones with bread—as the more well-to-do have bread and bacon—for breakfast, bread and bacon midday, and in the evening thick brown soup made of flour. On Thursday she had bread and boiled cabbage for breakfast, bread midday, and potato soup in the evening. On Friday she had bread and sorrel for breakfast, bread midday. She writes: *"I didn't eat eggs, not once. I did not eat eggs because my mother hasn't any money."*

Another little girl's weekly diet (two holds) in January of the same year was as follows: *"Monday morning I ate bread and bacon, midday bean soup, in the evening bread and onions. On Tuesday bread and bacon, midday bread, in the evening noodle soup with sausage. On Wednesday morning bread and bacon, midday baked pumpkin and bread, in the evening bread. On Friday bread soup, midday bread, in the evening bread and onions. Saturday morning bread and bacon, midday bean soup, in the evening bread and pickled cucumbers. On Sunday bread and bacon, midday meat soup, in the evening bread and onions."*

(Less than one hold) Over a third of the "holdings" of Tard are under one hold. What the weekly diet of these "smallholders" reveals is more than poverty, it is a state verging on perpetual privation. One can hardly understand how it is possible to stay healthy, to endure hard physical labour, such as harvesting, under such conditions. How is it possible that the children of these families are able to run around the schoolyard as friskily as the others? One is almost tempted to doubt the indisputable facts, or to go even further and think that some "primeval force" is in evidence here, an unaccountable hardiness for which no sensible explanation exists, which can only be marvelled at. Judging by their outward appearance, the problems are not immediately apparent, the faces of these children are not thinner than those of their companions, but it is they who die of typhoid and other contagious diseases; it is these mothers who give birth to babies for the cemetery of Tard, as the legion of tiny grave-mounds in the corner of the cemetery attest. You can hardly tell by their faces that there is anything amiss, only a few of them, the poorest, are conspicuously pale, they are the ones

who go barefoot even at the end of November, their feet numb with cold from wading through the icy mud. Their teacher will tell you that these children are slow-witted, their powers of comprehension incredibly poor, that they are strangely timorous and incapable of paying attention, totally absent-minded and that they spend their lunch hour running about and playing instead of eating. Let what they have written stand here without commentary, let them reveal the hopelessness of their situation, though their misery may be concealed within the white-washed walls of neat, orderly houses. In Tard, poverty hides itself, it is too apathetic to become embittered. Anyone passing through the village, even if they gain entry into the houses, will see very little of this poverty, this patient suffering is somehow the most intimate secret of their lives. It bespeaks of a direct line of descent from those serfs who were "the patient bearers of every burden" according to Széchenyi, even in his time. "Who is a loyal serf, and how loyal!" even today.

The son of a smallholder (one hold) writes: *"On Monday morning I ate jellied knuckles, midday cabbage, in the evening cabbage. Tuesday morning I ate bread, midday bread, in the evening sorrel. Wednesday morning I had bread, midday bread, in the evening noodles. Thursday morning I ate bread, midday bread, in the evening noodle soup. Friday I ate bread midday, and bread in the evening. Saturday morning I ate bread, midday bread, in the evening bread and onions. I had no milk all month because we haven't got a cow and milk is dear and we can't afford it..."* He ate no meat all month, he ate no eggs all month. He ate bread and ate bread again, like the child of the landless peasant who writes:

"On Monday I ate bread and boiled sugar beet, bread midday, in the evening noodle soup. Tuesday morning I ate onions, bread midday, in the evening caraway-seed soup. Wednesday morning a piece of bread and carrot, bread midday, in the evening pea soup and potato noodles. Thursday morning bread, midday bread, in the evening noodle soup. Friday morning bread and carrot, midday bread and two lumps of sugar, in the evening bean soup. Saturday morning I ate bread, I did not bring anything to eat to school, in the evening bread and onions. Sunday morning I ate bread and bacon, midday a bit of milk loaf, in the evening noodle soup."

But perhaps the saddest of all these documents is what was written by the son of a one-hold smallholder, who instead of listing what he ate on the given days of the week, writes in a strange, childish way, and his boasts and his wording may give a better idea of the situation than all the official figures: *"I have eaten many things,"* he writes, *"but this week I ate mostly bread. I have eaten sausage, bacon, black and white pudding, ham. I have eaten milk loaf and milk, and this week I drank a lot of water. This was my weekly nourishment"*.

(On the large estates) "The food is bad and there is not enough of it," say the young people engaged in seasonal work. Seasonal jobbing labourers are paid partly in kind, are given about half a kilo of bacon per day, inferior, third-rate bacon of course, half of it is rind topped with an inch-thick crust of salt—bad

saltpetre—to make the little weigh more. One of them described how he had tried to scrape off the layer of salt with his jackknife before the weighing, and that he came to grief, was rebuked, and only just escaped a slap in the face. They are given quite a lot of bread, but that too is of “inferior quality”. Five times a week they are given meat soup midday, but there is meat in it only every other day, this is the amount the two-three kilos of meat a month (mostly mutton) portioned out will provide. Twice a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays, the midday meal is a thick brown soup (made of flour) and potato noodles; these are the only days when two items are provided. On Sunday they are given a clear meat soup (without meat), probably with the consideration in mind that on this day the estate has no need of the labourer’s strength; on Sunday no evening meal is given, the labourer must provide for himself. As seasonal labourers try to save as much as they can to have something to live on during winter, providing for themselves means that the labourer will eat what is left of the bread and bacon. The bill of fare is practically the same on all the estates where people from Tard do their seasonal work. It varies only on one or two estates, where the midday meal is sometimes meat soup—sour potatoes, or sour beans—potato noodles. That the labourers consider this fare considerably better than that of the other estates is extremely revealing. They remember estates where, in addition to the food mentioned above, semolina and cabbage noodles were also served, however, in most places meat soup is the main, the only dish. In some places bean soup or potato soup is served twice a week for variety’s sake, and the allotment of poor quality meat for a labourer comes to an eighth of a kilogramme every other day. It is only by way of an exception that a labourer tells of better quality nourishment; the standard can also often be even lower than that described above.

Their circumstances are almost worse than a slave’s, since a farmer thought at least as much of his slaves as he did of his cattle: it was in his interest to keep them healthy and strong in order that they should work steadily and well. But in the case of seasonal labourers, the employer rarely thinks of their health, the principle obviously being that the labourer will recover the strength lost through hard physical work during the long winter months, at his own cost. If not, there are plenty of others to take his place. If he should fall ill while he is under contract, the employer is obliged to provide for his nourishment and medical treatment for eight days, only. And this is usually the way it happens: if the labourer happens to go down with an illness that lasts longer than eight days, he is given the sack. One of the Tard labourers I spoke to about his condition told me he had lost eight kilogrammes the year before while he was working, another lost ten kilogrammes, a third weighed 62 kilos when he left home and weighed only 45 kilogrammes when he returned two months later. And in the autumn, he lost another six kilos in six weeks, breaking maize and digging up beet. He lives in a shack with mud walls and a dirt floor with four others; he is not coughing yet.

The children's writings tell of the appalling conditions in which individual families live; the figures culled from the aggregate of their weekly nutrition reveal the perpetual poverty of society. The greatest problems are:

The poverty of the village is so great that the villagers of Tard have practically no money to spend on food; furthermore:

Circumstances force them to sell their more valuable food.

Consequently, their diet is absolutely unvaried, they use only food they have grown themselves, and often only the inferior parts of those products. Bacon from the pigs is portioned out to last out the year, chickens and eggs are sold, only rarely do one or two aged hens end up in the pot. The only food there is more or less enough of all year round is flour.

Which means that:

The food they consume is for the most part based on flour. Dry bread forms a considerable portion of their diet, other main items, though appearing more rarely, are noodle soup or other noodle dishes. They eat mostly white bread instead of the more nutritious brown. Two-thirds of the food items eaten by the majority of the village are made solely of flour, that is bread, noodle soup or other noodle dishes. This means that of every three meals, two consist of bread, noodles or noodle soup. For the most part bread. On average, dry bread makes up 40 per cent of the food consumed in Tard. Naturally, this percentage takes into account only bread consumed as a main dish; bread eaten with meat, bacon etc. is not included in this 40 per cent.

As the produce totals show, the role of food derived from other plants is minimal. Potatoes are used for the most part for making bread, sometimes for soup. Only rarely do beans and peas vary the diet in Tard, cabbage more frequently. In the spring, thanks to sorrel, the consumption of greens and vegetables increases, but it still adds up to less than 15 per cent of food eaten midday and supper, and only three dishes made of vegetables appear on the table: sorrel, boiled beans and cabbage. The village does not eat fruit, except for grapes in the autumn; in this season grapes make up 12 per cent of the main meals in the form of a midday meal of bread and grapes.

The more valuable food derived from the domestic animals is in part sold, in part portioned out for the whole of the year, and thus achieves a much less important role than would be desirable, let alone necessary. In the autumn, when there is money left over from summer earnings, meat makes up 15 per cent of all food consumed, in the spring, when there is less money, only 6 per cent. These figures are averages relating to the whole of the village and show better conditions than if we were to examine the poorer layers separately. In their case, bacon or sausage make up only 3 per cent of the total food consumed, and fresh meat is rarely eaten. These people live almost entirely on bread and soup, in other words on bread and water.

As the rough estimates show, earnings are insufficient, barely providing for clothing, taxes and the repayment of debts. Shop accounts show that the village,

when it spends money, does not spend it on food, but on the most necessary household items.

Under present conditions, it would be impossible to improve the diet of the majority of the villagers of Tard. It would help to some extent if the village were to change over from the growing of wheat to the growing of quality foods, but there are enormous obstacles to be surmounted, firstly the force of habit, secondly the absence of skills and know-how change-over would require and, thirdly, that the village would have to look far for a market for such products. In this respect, any kind of reform would necessitate an energetic local leader, thorough training for the villagers of Tard, some way of linking Tard with the market and, above all, a more healthy distribution of land. There are few families in Tard, a relatively small part of the population, where financial difficulties are not the reason for the dreariness and low nutritional value of the food eaten, but a neglect shown in cooking, in other words the women do not take pains to ensure variety and cannot cook well and nutritiously.

In relation to individual meals the figures showed the following:

49.5 per cent of the breakfasts consist of dry bread. Milk consumption is extremely low and there is a marked difference between the milk consumption of the well-to-do and the poor. 10 per cent of the children of smallholders with 5-10 holds drink milk for breakfast, milk only makes up 1.5 per cent of the breakfasts of the children of smallholders with 0-5 holds. Generally, milk consumption diminishes in a direct ratio with that of the number of holds of land, and the consumption of dry bread increases directly proportional with the number of holds. Food left over from the previous night is often eaten for breakfast (this makes up 10 per cent of the breakfasts); coffee is rarely, tea even more rarely drunk. And, of course, it is tea of very inferior quality, usually drunk only when there is someone ill in the home. As one of the children writes: *"For breakfast I had aspirin with tea."*

Midday and evening meals consist almost exclusively of one item. 94 per cent of the main meals consist of one item, 6 per cent of two. 45 per cent of the families observed did not eat two items at midday once in the course of a week, and a home where two items were served at a meal more than once a week is a rare exception. 34 per cent of the total of meals is cold, hot meals for the most part consist of soup, in a smaller part of noodle dishes, a smaller part still of vegetables, and an infinitesimal part of fresh meat. The meat eaten by the village for the most part consists of cold smoked meat products such as sausage or ham, and even that is consumed only rarely. Fresh meat makes up no more than 2 per cent of the total of food consumed. In the spring-time the following items featured on the village tables: noodle soup, meat soup, thick brown soup, bean soup, clear soup with boiled potato and noodles, potato soup, sorrel, boiled beans, cabbage, noodle dishes, noodles with poppy seeds. Bacon often appeared, sometimes crackling; eggs, milk, coffee, bread dipped in oil, sprinkled with sugar or spread with dripping not more than once or twice all season.

These lists of meals, beyond being a testimony to the hard life these villagers lead, are not only significant in that they are a revelation of existing, adverse social conditions; poverty shapes society, defines its image and affects the direction of its development. The meals of Tard represent a force that shapes society, one of the most significant forces of all. The lessons and tasks that arise from the situation have not yet been drawn and accepted by politicians or the country, but the lessons have been drawn by the peasantry and their demands and efforts are changing accordingly. The situation betokens an enormous destructive force in the society of Tard. Who, in this country, took this force into account when distributing goods—this force which, under the pressure of present social conditions, may become a force to be reckoned with before long? The social situation places men in jeopardy, but it also places society in jeopardy and today is still an uncontrolled social force. The country or the nation take little note of the dangers that threaten the human resource. It is in mortality figures that they do take note of them.

The spinning room

The acknowledged purpose of the spinning room is to combine the useful with the pleasant, or rather, to provide a useful cover for pleasure. In the village in winter women with young daughters who find pleasure in company set up spinning rooms in four or five places. The girls sit side by side on benches set against the wall, in colourful aprons, their distaffs adorned with ribbons and tassels, beneath brightly painted plates and holy pictures; in the dim light of the paraffin lamp they make a pretty picture. For these occasions they put on their homespun aprons, and sit together in all their finery, wearing several petticoats, their fingers spinning the spindle with brisk, skilful, delicate movements. Generally, they sit along three walls forming a U-shape, with two old women in black forming two dots on the U. These old women use spinning-wheels and listen to the girls' singing as they spin, smiling inwardly at the unrestrained bantering. From time to time the round faces of the lads appear at the windows, noses squashed flat against the panes, and in a little while they will be knocking at the door and come to sit facing the circle of girls in thick sheepskin coats that they will not take off even in the steamy room. Every now and then the door must be opened to let in some cold air, for the lamp burns with an unsteady, flickering flame in the close, stifling heat, in the still and somehow tantalizing air that is only stirred by the singing of the girls. In the confined space the colour red is predominant, conspicuous against the white, and the room is divided into two sections, so to speak. The gaudy, resplendent, beribboned, flowered part belongs to the girls. This part is closed off by the two old women, behind whom the darker group of the lads throng, huddled together and perspiring, watching for the opportunity presented by one of the girl's spindles rolling away. If a lad succeeds in snatching up the spindle, a tussle with an all too obvi-

ous aim begins, accompanied by squeals and laughter and much straying of hands. While this is going on, the excitement and tension in the air is so great that only the daunting presence of the two old women prevents the rolling away of more spindles and the temptingly exciting tussle from becoming general. At such times a slightly panicky erotic tension spreads in the room, an artificially induced excitement that slowly abates when one of the girls starts a new song. With this the singing girls once more detach themselves from and face the listening lads. The two old women look calmly on, in effect one hardly notices their presence, only their feet move, spinning the wheel and their hands, twisting the fluff into thread.

The centre of social life in Tard is the spinning room; there is no cultural centre where old people, wishing to read, or young people affecting seriousness or wishing to study could gather. The four or five spinning rooms are in a perpetual contest, trying to outdo each other at amusing visitors, who are welcomed upon arrival and thanked by the girls when leaving. In Tard as a rule, everyone is thanked for dropping in, not only strangers, in townee clothes, but villagers also are thanked by their hosts for drinking their wine, eating their food and listening to their songs. Every spinning room has its own special attraction. One is famed for its lively conversation and, informal atmosphere, as the young mistress of the house is a good talker, who sets the tone with barely disguised double-entendres. Another is noted for having the girls with the finest singing voices, a third for inventing the best games. The lads, unless drawn to one or other of the spinning rooms by someone special, visit all of them in turn; they like to create a scare, tussle with the girls and sometimes follow them out into the yard. Conversation unambiguously centres around one subject, and this also attests to the purpose of the spinning room.

It may largely be attributed to the spinning room that there are so many living folk-songs in Tard, that peasant costume is more often worn than elsewhere, that popular traditions have not wholly been forgotten. It is the spinning room that preserves the village songs, the spinning room that domesticates folk-songs brought in from other villages and it is most often the spinning room that rejects the songs written by known authors in the style of folk-songs smuggled in by seasonal labourers, chiefly about "quiet little bachelor quarters".

The girls arrive around five or six in the afternoon and go home around ten or eleven at night. What happens in between corresponds to what the lads admit to concerning their love life. In the sultry atmosphere of the spinning room, the most insignificant word has sexual overtones, as usual among adolescents. Most often it is one of the lads; but sometimes the mistress of the house herself, who takes good care to steer the conversation in the sole exciting direction, taking a word with a double meaning as a starting point. Once begun, one word quickly leads to another, conversation is lively and unrestrained, repartee is smart and the laughter of the girls intimates that they have taken nothing amiss

and are pleased and grateful for the attention. There are powerful traditions and set ways of wresting innuendoes from or commenting upon the most innocent remark. Two or three girls slip out of the door giggling, two put their arms around each other's shoulders to make up the horse. The third clammers up on their back and the bizarre little group enters the room to set upon and bump against one of the lads, and the ensuing rough-and-tumble, accompanied by much laughter, ends with their rolling about on top of one another on the floor. The old women calmly continue to spin and smile at the tomfoolery of the young people. The main thing is that in the midst of all the jollity everyone must get their work done.

It is practically inevitable that conversation cannot be pursued except in the tone that has become traditional. A visitor to the spinning room inadvertently gave a sigh during a momentary lull in the singing. The young mistress of the house immediately pounced on him: "Of course the young gent needs a woman!" "Well—to cook for me!" the visitor retorted quickly. Laughter, a short silence, the young woman sweetly offers her services: "I'd cook for you!" "What would you expect as payment?" asks the honoured lad. "Have you got a good sofa?" the woman replies and looks openly at the girls, who burst into uncontrollable laughter, which fills the room for minutes. Another of the lads gives a sigh. "What ails you?" asks the woman. As she receives no reply, she asks again: "Can it be helped in daylight?"

The piquancy of the punch-line is enjoyed irrespective of age, by the old and the very young alike. Many of the girls are no more than thirteen or fourteen, and in one of the spinning rooms the centre of attention is a young lad barely twelve years of age. He sat on a footstool within the circle of girls and kept on snatching the spindles that rolled away from under the noses of the lads standing about in the background, monopolizing the much-desired tussling that accompanies the returning of the spindle. He took part in the bantering as resourcefully and quick-wittedly as the others, took every opportunity to prove he was the life and soul of the party and that he was more grown up than his size would make you think. When he had snatched up the runaway spindle for the fifth time running, someone asked him, dropping a hint that his interference was unnecessary: "Well and where shall I commend you to, lad, to hell, to heaven, or to purgatory?" The mistress of the house: "He doesn't want to go anyplace except to the girls' heaven." And the child, grinning broadly: "That's right, right under their skirts!" The circle of girls laughs at this for minutes, the more bashful ones covering their faces with their hands and peeping at the lads from between their fingers. The air is hot and stuffy, the girls are pink cheeked and pretty in the reflected light of the red embroidery, in their finery in front of the walls hung with plates. When I say to the lad standing beside me that these girls would make pretty sweethearts for them, he flashed his eyes at me and said: "The girls from Mezökövesd are prettier." And a little later added: "and more skillful too."

One should not conclude from these facts and their manner that the young people of Tard are immoral. What can be concluded is that their moral standards differ from those of townspeople. It is in this sphere that they take the least note of the commands of their faith. It is certain that there is more sincerity behind the outspokenness of the peasantry than behind the often hypocritical bourgeois sanctimoniousness.

The majority of the innuendoes uttered in the spinning room are unrepeatable. In the spinning room, between narrow houses, after a summer spent working hard, eroticism appears quite differently in the inactive winter than it does in the city. And the tone in which the more embarrassing words are uttered is quite different also. The way they call a spade a spade, the way they banter with each other happens more out of mischievousness than out of immorality. That they must give a name to everything is childlike frankness rather than a protest against conventions which are not in any case their conventions. The unaffectedness and ease with which they talk about anything and everything places the ideas behind the words in a quite different, more moderate light. The commands of nature are taken as binding where they indicate work, and binding also where they indicate pleasure.

Apart from the spinning room, there is hardly any place in the village where the people of Tard gather in larger numbers, few go to the taproom of the co-operative. In Tard the inn does not play a significant role in the lives of the people as it does in other villages. The wine, one of the most important necessities of social life, the light wine of Tard which can be drunk in large quantities with no danger of losing one's sobriety, is grown in their own vineyards and is drunk not in the inn, but in their homes. The older and more well-to-do smallholders of Tard, neighbours and relatives often gather in the home of one or the other of the men to talk and drink. The subject of these conversations is mostly politics, the tone sharper or gentler according to temperament, but they also like to tell each other rustic jokes heard here and there. The tone of these conversations resembles those in the spinning room and the women listen to them as unabashed as the young girls listening to the banter in the spinning room. The villagers of Tard are given to making a joke out of everything, they like to poke fun at everything and laugh openly at often-heard jokes and capers. These gatherings are given colour by the beautiful formal greetings, "God keep you", "God bless you", "God preserve you" are always ready on the lips of the villagers of Tard. The visitor is often and heartily urged to "partake", and even the poorer people often and willingly pay and receive visits, giving a warm welcome to everyone who drops in on them. Only the host and his guest may sit at the table, the others are placed all around the room and rarely break in on the conversation between a host and guest. ❁

Ferenc Gerlóczy
Tard 1936–1998

The people of Tard have ambiguous feelings towards Zoltán Szabó. On the one hand, they are proud of him; his book can be found on the bookshelves of many a home. It is understandable: *The Situation at Tard*, a sociography reprinted four times within a year, became so famous in Hungary that people often associate the word "situation" with Tard. On the other hand, they are annoyed with Szabó for getting the village's name into the newspapers". "I had but one obligation: probe the wounds as deeply as possible, so that I would be able to learn about the weapons that had caused them," Szabó wrote in his foreword to *The Situation at Tard* in 1936. The fact that more has been written about Tard than about any other similar village in Hungary can safely be ascribed to the impact of this book.

Tibor Simó's choice of Tard for conducting a comprehensive sociological survey in the late 1970s was explained both by Szabó's book, which could serve as a basis for comparison, and by the fact that Tard was "a normal village very close to the average", as Simó put it.

It was not always all that average. Upon his return from the Don Bend and a Soviet PoW camp, József Rózsa, a local teacher who had helped Szabó with his book, published an essay entitled *Tard, 1947*. In this he hailed the changes that had taken place, boasting that the village received more land from Prince Coburg's estate following the 1945 land reform than did neighbouring Mezőkövesd and Cserépváralja together, thus "the fields of Tard were extended, with plots allotted to 378 farmers." It was him who collected the data for the most memorable chapter of Szabó's book in which children were asked "What did you eat this week?"

The music teacher Tamás Váczi, whose 1988 book featured characters based on real-life Tard inhabitants, himself posed the same question fifty years after Zoltán Szabó: "What did you eat this week?" "Since I am a day-boarder," one girl answered, "I eat all week what the others do. On Mondays a sandwich in the morning, and vegetables and soup at noon. Soup and pancake at night. On Tuesdays bread and dripping and tea. Bean soup and pasta for lunch. Soup and meat at night." Another girl, also a day-boarder, said however that there was an evening meal "only on Sundays". In this region saying "what a nice, fat child" is still meant as a compliment.

The people of Tard do not look on their place as "an average village". Here people take pride in everything that comes from Tard, and when there is news of a young man's marriage, it always adds to the general delight to learn that the bride is al-

Ferenc Gerlóczy
is on the staff of *Heti Világgazdaság*,
an economic weekly.

so from Tard. Those who have emigrated—above all the “Canadians” and the “Swedes”—regularly return on visits. Even more regular is the return of those who have found work in Miskolc, Eger, Mezőkövesd or Budapest. On All Saints’ Day or at the time of the local fair, Tard seems to be much more populous than it actually is.

In Szabó’s times, more than 2,300 lived in the village, and the population was growing: forty-eight on average died every year, against seventy one who were born. Today Tard has 1,598 inhabitants. Twenty-seven people died last year, and only seven babies were born. To make things worse, of the 1598 inhabitants fewer than 220 are in full-time employment; the others are pensioners (680), unemployed (112), children, and part-time or casual workers.

Ever since the land reform, there have been no estate owners in Tard; the economic elite is formed by three or four entrepreneurs with some capital to invest, who make a living from farming, running agricultural machine pools, or owning forests. Those who have received compensation for properties seized by the Communists now all work their narrow strips of land, with many of them complementing that with a plot leased from the local government. The co-operative is still functioning, and the intention is to keep it that way.

It is not only the people who have declined in number, so too have the animals. Back then there were still several hundred head of cattle and horses. Now there are fewer than a hundred cows, of which no more than sixty or sixty-five are put out to grass in the village’s common pasture. Today there are only two horses in Tard, the 273 cars are now the largest class of “livestock”.

The ethnic and religious composition of Tard continues to be homogeneous. Almost all the villagers are Catholic; the small number of Calvinists or members of other denominations almost all moved into the village as adults. The Baptist minority, a sizable group even in Szabó’s time, has become an accepted denomination. They are regarded as the “hard-working strangers” with a higher-than-average standard of living. From time to time the sectarians, already mentioned by Szabó—Jehovah’s Witnesses and Pentecostals—still come over from neighbouring villages to proselytize, albeit with little success. From an ethnic viewpoint Tard is perhaps even more homogeneous. “There are no ethnics here,” people would habitually say, meaning that Roma no longer live in the village, not even on Gypsy Row.

When Szabó wrote his book, Tard’s only connection with the outside world, meaning Mezőkövesd, was by telegraph. Even in 1993, phones meant a single booth outside the Post Office. For the past few years, almost all the homes have acquired telephones—all those homes whose owners applied for them and could afford to pay the basic rate. This means about 350 subscribers, not counting the public institutions. Around ten people are on the Internet, and there are at least twenty cellular telephones in the village. This is so regardless of the point that—in Zoltán Szabó’s words—the village is “on both sides of the ditch known as the Tard brook”, and therefore the area is inadequately covered. Poor reception often plagues television viewers, too. However, in Tard not even those who could otherwise afford it have time to watch much television: the church bells of Tard first toll at 5:00 a.m., and by 9:00 p.m. most people are fast asleep. (At weekends a couple of dozen teenagers stay up until 3:00 a.m., dancing in a disco set up in a former stable).

Typically it is the women who are the bosses, rather than the men who, like elsewhere in Hungary, have a much lower life expectancy. Which is hardly surprising. The arrangement of the living quarters in the thatched cottage which is the local history museum shows that there was not enough room in the house for both men and children. As soon as the baby arrived, the man had to move out of the matrimonial bed, and into the “male quarters”, a shabby room attached to the stable. ■

István Csukás

Poems

Translated by George Szirtes

Albatross with Shopping Bag

Albatrosz bevásárlószatyorral

*I waddle along like an albatross on the upwardly
sloping deck of Csatárka Street,
winter and summer, clutching my shopping
bag, in winter as it happens, the fences
either side like a ship's railings
beyond which drones the sea
with the infinite sky above,
but I look neither up nor to the side,
only forward, always fixedly forward,
my nose a scarlet compass point
that I must blindly follow, an explorer.
That's what I am, for in their minds
everyone can fly, all are great travellers!
And me especially, in the morning between
eleven and half past eleven, as I trudge
into the store, for it's not time that is important
but place, for the sea drones everywhere
wearing its immortal hat of sky with which we greet
the deity, good morning, good evening, and the time
between is ours, we can take it home with us.
My wings tucked into my striped sailor's vest,*

István Csukás

had published eleven volumes of poems before a volume of his collected verse came out in 1996. Animated and puppet films, both cinema and TV, based on his stories and novels for children are very popular. Bowler Hat and Potato Nose, based on one of his novels, won the Grand Prix and was chosen as Best Film for Children of the Year at a TV film festival in Hollywood in 1975.

*I breathe through the trusty compass of my nose
sniffing a little, even a trifle snotty,
but have no need of any other compass
waddling for ever in a single direction,
the mortal one I always waddle in
here on earth, but where else is there? And,
as I waddle among you, bearing my albatross
shopping bag I mutter a line of verse, "Milk,
a loaf, sliced ham, some brawn and yeast..."
All essential things, everything needful
for the long journey, for the last great voyage
when I shall discover the Land of Nothing,
as have so many other travellers before me,
none of whom have as yet succeeded in returning!
But I am merely practising for now,
developing muscles, developing the spirit,
getting my heart used to it, since that is precious,
and it really isn't as difficult as you'd think,
and getting the world too used to it, so it shouldn't
weep or drop false crocodile tears, for what
would happen if I chanced to return after all?
After three days, say. Now there's a tricky problem.
I think I will also have a sly go at flying,
so my entry into heaven shouldn't take me unawares,
so, standing on tiptoe, I launch myself off
from the pavement. It isn't quite right yet.
I have a quick shufti. Has anyone noticed?
I wouldn't like it generally known
before I was ready in case people laughed at me.
Let them laugh at the way I waddle round,
at my old shopping bag and my rubicund
nose, and, when it comes to the point, we shall see
who laughs last. In the meantime I can greet
the universe gaily with my immortal hat:
waving good morning, good evening to everyone!
And look here is the store, I have got there,
and I hide myself delighted among the loaded
shelves, sniffing and scenting, stroking
the image of the summer apple on the fruit tin,
picking at little pieces of cheese, thinking,
so much to do, no time to die yet, that can wait
till tomorrow. If indeed there is a tomorrow.*

A Little Freefall

Egy kis szabadesés

*A little freefall somewhere between eight
and nine in the morning: after food, toilet,
and bathing, in other words clean and well fed,
full of confidence, having voided the previous day
from the system, after the first sip of coffee
and the first cigarette, I take flight, or rather
fall steeply on wings of raised blood pressure,
which every five minutes dips below 180/80,
but none could deny it was flying, who cares that it's
downward, it's free and that is what matters,
not the direction, since space is endless, even
in my small room, it is endless, no doubt of it,
and, as I fly, I am astonished and conscious
of the brain crammed into the top of my skull
and the world crammed within that, or at least
the part that fits in the space at the top of my skull,
a fossil discovered, soon to be a poem,
a telegraph from one Cretaceous Period to another,
as I crack jokes while falling (there's plenty of time),
thinking: someone will be glad of all that chalk dust,
and I go on sipping coffee, light up a fag,
stop and hover a little, look through the window,
hypnotise the telephone: ring, damn you, ring,
so I can get a break, any excuse will do,
a curtain of fog outside, the telephone dumb,
and I sigh and continue what I was doing,
the falling, and I try to actually enjoy it
as violated women are often advised to do, but
I can only get so far with that, though I'm
a proper old hand at it, and pretty well inured
to the business, you can tell how much by the way
I see myself as if from the outside, but then I close
my external eye, as I'm more attractive to the inner one,
and what a pity I think, as I grow sentimental
and shed a few tears, paddling in a sea of self-pity,
and let's be honest about this, who better equipped
than me for the job, who else has seen me here, and this too
sounds familiar, but is true for all that, though I have a touch*

*of the modernist in me and don't strain too hard
to be loved, not that I don't give a shit, but
it makes me nervous when people brown-nose me,
all that arse-licking, all the saliva that drips daily
on the brows of humanity as their corpses slump
on the shithheap, as we go on sipping coffee, or light
cigarettes in the heated room, so it's more honest
to indulge in a little self pity, with a clean conscience
so to speak, to weep and to curse as seems fit,
at how very much they'll miss me, and what a terrible
loss it will be for them when I finally hit the ground.*

What Happened to Twenty Kilos

Hová tűnt húsz kiló

*Where had twenty kilos of István Csukás
gone? There's a photo of it a year ago,
flesh of my flesh, and well worth thinking on.
Had it ascended to heaven or was it down below?*

*More important perhaps, most important still,
had a commensurate weight of soul too gone?
From where was it taken, the missing part?
How measure it? What scales to weight it on?*

*And that piece missing, flesh or spirit, was it
the better part or just some worthless bit?
Was it expendable? Is that why it went?
But what if the remaining part is without merit?*

*Those twenty kilos were me, since what I ate
had quickly become an aspect of me too!
But what has happened? What power has deprived me?
What purpose is it fattening itself up to?*

*Have those twenty kilos hunkered down
in nothing's swollen impregnated span,
waiting for the end, for the birth in reverse
of an embryo drawn from this full grown man?*

*Is that how it will disappear, kilo by kilo?
And can I talk about myself in the past tense
while living? There's quite enough of me left in any case
so I'll drop the subject while it still makes sense.*

Mad Race

Vad versenyfutás

*It's a mad race beneath my skin,
the forward heart looks set to win.*

*It skips, it throbs, a faint numb ache,
the liver follows in its wake.*

*It bloats, swells, pounds, runs everywhere,
burning on alcoholic air.*

*An ancient wood, my two lungs blaze:
a wheezing blackened cage of days.*

*Kidneys grow stones, a pliocene find,
a pebble to cast at boar or hind.*

*The brain where mind should rule is just
a duff explosive clogged with dust.*

*Sunrise? Sunset? Either is fine.
My organs strain for the finishing line.*

To Whom Are We Accountable in the End

Kinek számolunk el a végén

*To whom are we accountable in the end,
throwing off our flesh like sacks?
Who'll examine our cooling skulls
pitying our quirks and lacks?*

*Who'll itemise and note it down?
Who'll ponder on the infinite
patience it took to assemble it all
then, cell by cell, dismantle it?*

Twenty Kilos Regained

Visszatért húsz kiló

*Twenty kilos of István Csukás regained!
gasping and puffing we put our trousers on.
How to show my gratitude since we don't like sweets,
and bouquets for gentlemen just isn't done?*

*So I raise this glass of beer to it since it no longer matters,
and, it being smaller, quiz it with a superior air:
where have you been, itinerant, errant part of me,
what gods do you worship, what hells do you fear?*

*What angel nursed you, and what dreams did it whisper
into those degenerating cells of mine
floating like stardust about the universe;
what void or lack did its empty pocket confine?*

*Because nothing happens by accident, the great
and the small are opposite ends of the same telescope—
it doesn't matter much which end we peer into
it is God's hollow eyeballs we confront without hope.*

*Is this what my birth was like? And do you think
death will be as simple, so easy come, easy gone?
We don't disappear piecemeal, by degrees, but wholesale,
a monumental lack giving one final yawn.*

Poem for Christmas

Vers Karácsonyra

*The winter landscape looks vaguely neurotic and yet
it is the Christchild's season, nor should we forget
he should be born in our hearts, and his eyes are exhorted to stare
mild-manneredly through each man's very own blood-infected pair,
for we are to killing inclined, all nails and fangs, no reprieve,
ready to blow up the whole caboodle this pleasant Christmas Eve;
my mind is as fogged as the view through the wintery glass
I desperately grab at whatever still aches or might pass
for pain, or simply is and contains me, if anything does,
and assures us the grandiose visions of Genesis need not end with us,
no sentence is incomplete, no words stuck in the gut
no full stops are required, one big bang ends the lot;
so I mumble like a simpleton and trembling form a prayer:
let there be buds on the branches come the spring of the year,
let there be eyes to see them, and let the sun shine for hours,
let ultraviolet rays befiltered and arrow down like showers,
and let there be stories, forged by past and present, late and soon,
and let night show us the charmingest smile of the moon,
in our hearts let there be both evil and good, let hearts simply exist,
let the struggle that makes a man within the heart persist,
let the spirit sparkle, let it win though defeated,
let it set maypoles on rooftops, surmounted and seated,
let there be birth and death, fit for our stature,
so that we may gaily raise our hats at the bodies' departure,
let believers exist, and let flourish those who despair beyond hoping,
those who heal wounds, and those who find fresh wounds to open,
let there, let there, let there be those who toll in tomorrow
that there should be no stillbirth this year, no dead child for sorrow.*

László Beke

The Framing Eye of Péter Korniss

The Péter Korniss exhibition at the Budapest Múcsarnok/Kunsthalle in October 1998 was an unprecedented success. An album of the photographs was published in English and Hungarian versions to accompany the exhibition. (A small selection of photographs from the album is printed in this issue.) The response was one of unqualified admiration, from locals and foreigners, Romanians and Hungarians (Korniss photographs the way these two ethnic communities live together in Transylvania), young and old, professional and lay, avant-garde and conservative, members of the most diverse parties and faiths (his subjects are Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Jewish and Protestant), rural populists and urban liberals, Transylvanists and cosmopolitans. This list contains all categories relevant to the sociological context of Korniss's work.

Péter Korniss is one of the outstanding living Hungarian photographers, possibly the best-known abroad, as innumerable prizes and distinctions attest. His success lies in a combination of simple denominators. There is the sheer beauty of his pictures, a superior mastery of technique, his capturing of a valuable tradition, coupled with a message that is deeply humane and communicated in a language that is easy to understand. Still, Korniss's art is more complex than that.

Although Korniss's work is an awe-inspiring feat of reportage, he is not a reporter pure and simple; although his work can be interpreted in sociological and ethnographic terms, he is no socio-photographer or sociologist, ethnographer or student of folklore. Nor is he an art photographer proper (a photographer, that is, who is building an oeuvre in a singular style). He is rather an "everyday" photographer who is driven by his "ordinary" human interests, whose "channel

of dissemination" is also ambiguous: will it be a book, a picture in a magazine, a photo to be held in one's hand, or looked at in an exhibition. Who is he, at all?

So far ten of his photograph albums have been published. *Inventory*

László Beke

*is General Director of the
Múcsarnok/Kunsthalle and author of
numerous publications on contemporary art.*

contains hardly any text, except for some laconic information from the author, the captivatingly sincere registration of experience, intentions and circumstances such as "There was much that the camera could not capture.", or "I felt a sense of calm around animals". Exhibitions are rarer (and more risky) ventures in his life. In the Múcsarnok, it was fortunate that instead of small pictures mounted for an intimate effect, the massively blown up black and white photographs were shown in heavy black frames. The general impression was that of solemnity and dignity, and several of the pictures gained in plasticity and monumentality.

At a first approach, the Korniss phenomenon is easily explainable: he turned to the people he felt sympathy for with goodwill, persistently, humbly monitoring their lives over three decades, and his work has been mellowed by time. The master of microtime, of hundredths and thousandths of a second, has experienced long-working processes, has understood that one has to resign oneself to time, for nothing can be wiser.

A person who exposes himself to his environment and the events around him does not bother much about style. Korniss's first approach is that of a "realist". His method and style, however, have changed a great deal over three decades.

Korniss has realized that Transylvanian peasant society abounds in contradictions. On the surface of everyday life, looked on as the material culture of villages, it has gradually become the hunting ground of collectors and dealers; conversely, the artefacts of urban "globalization" have oozed in step by step. "In these two contrasting currents, the world of the village gradually lost its traditional character, things no longer were of a piece." (p. 124) He derived his method from this insight: utter harmony reigns in the pictures, according to classical rules of composition—and it takes the viewer long minutes to realize that something is wrong. The Coca Cola logo "subtly lurking" on the wooden shack behind *Farmer with Grazing Cow* (1996), a T-shirt with a Camel logo, worn by a lad in a village dance house (1992), the gigantic plastic wristwatch hanging from the wall of a village fiddler's kitchen (1997) or the startlingly lifelike poster of Michael Jackson alongside the family snapshots in *Room Corner* (1997). Incidentally, photography itself had its own part in triggering off the "two contrasting currents", for the first portrait photograph brought back from a fair to the traditional peasant home in the last century set the seed of an alien medium there.

In Korniss's photographs the "intact", "idyllic" Transylvanian village of yore can often be seen. This is connected to the fact that in spite of the apparent stylelessness, there are several stylistic references. What is strong in the 1960s is the ethnographer's approach, which came out of the cities to seek (and find) "true sources" in Hungarian villages, rural people, homes and a material environment which occasionally reflected the sunny genre pictures of the "folksy-Hungarian"



Newlyweds. Sic (Szék), 1971



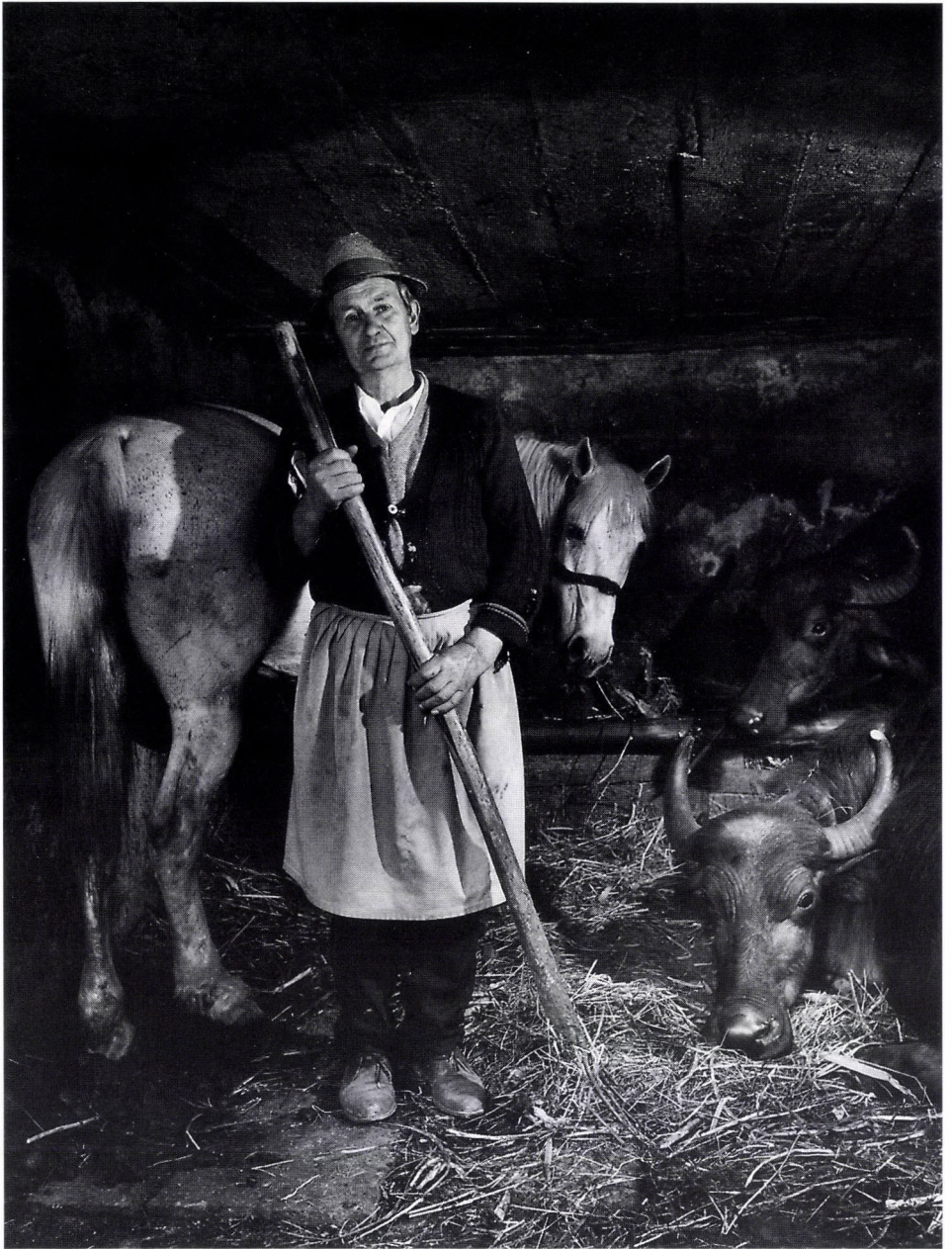
Couples dancing. Sic (Szék), 1967



Sunday on the village's main street. Mara (Mara), 1975



Disabled veteran. Sic (Szék), 1976



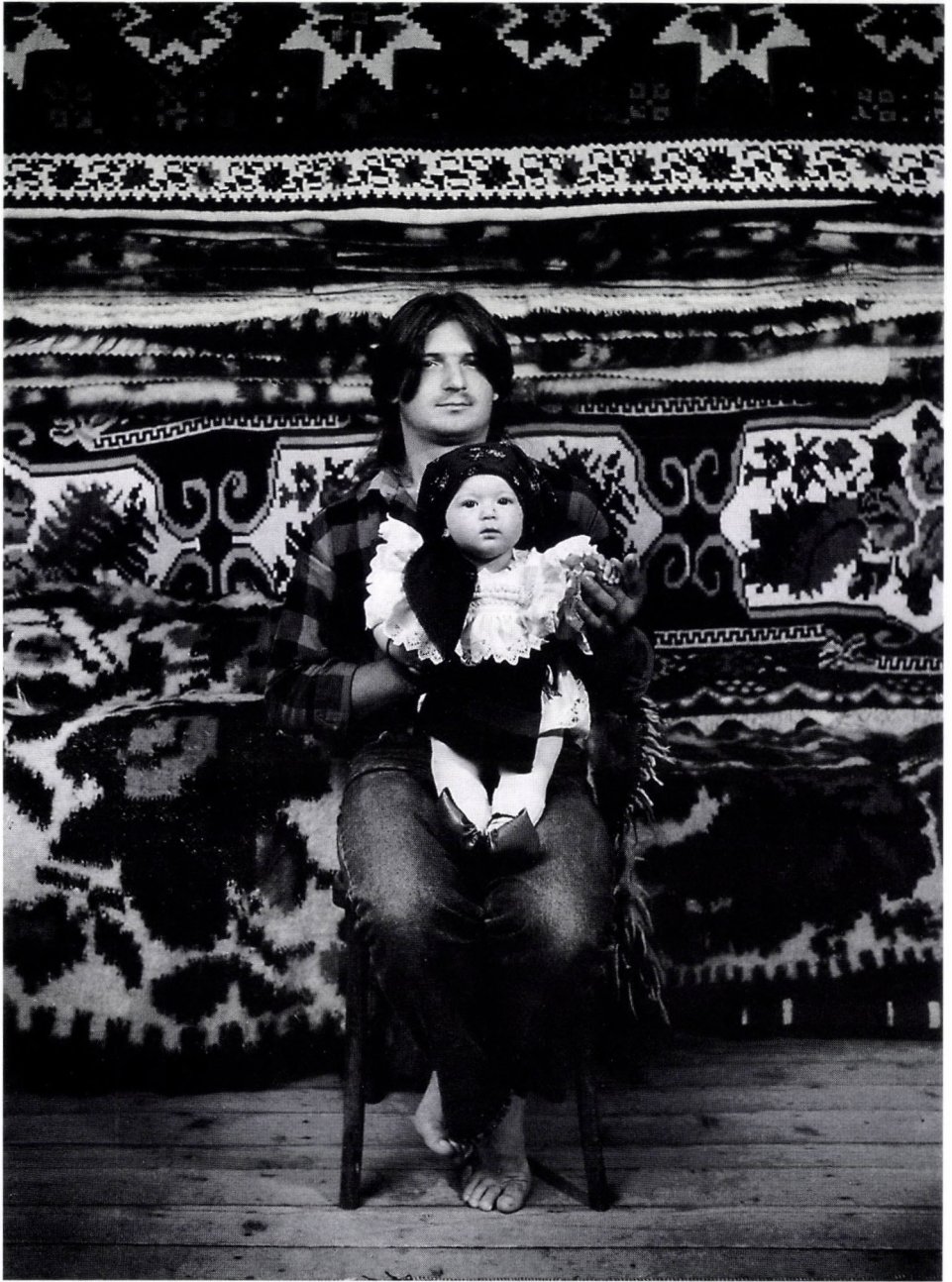
Farmer in his stable: Ferenc Répa Fodor (60). Vișea (Visa), 1998



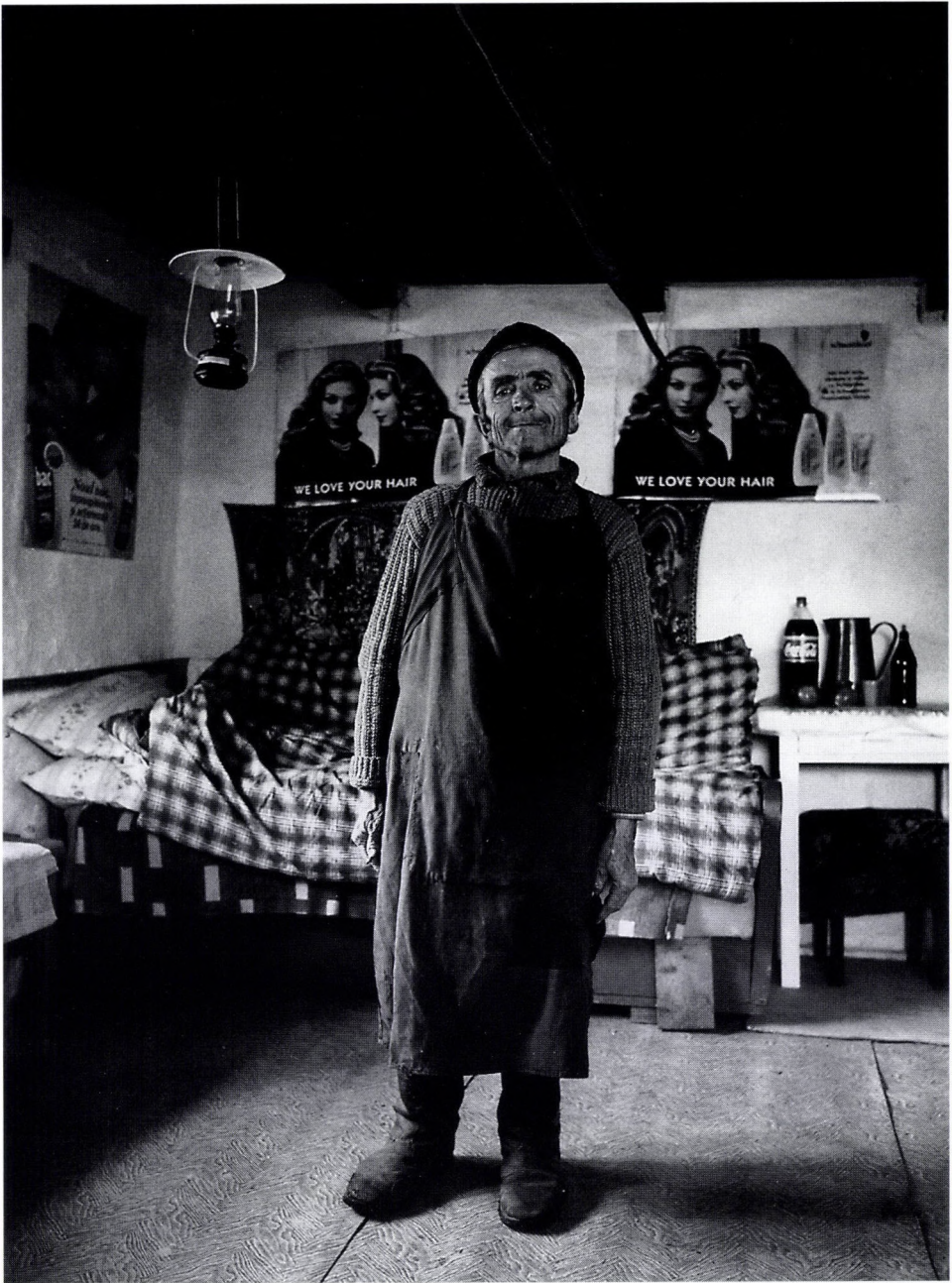
Married couple on the verandah. Sic (Szék), 1994



In the kitchen. Desești (Dezse), 1993



Father and baby girl in their home. Ioan Verdes (26)
and Larisa Verde (8 months old). Şugatag (Sugatag), 1997



Man in his poster-decorated home: Pál Simon (66).
Văleni (Magyarvalkó), 1997



Husband, wife and son in the “fine room” reserved for guests: János Sallai (44), János Sallai, Jr. (18), and Mrs Sallai, née Mari Fodor, (40). Sic (Szék), 1997

style of the interwar period. Analogies can be drawn from the history of art as well: Flemish Madonnas to compare with the young woman in *Woman in the Sheepfold with Her Animals* (1992), Nativities to *Farmer in his Stable* (1998). However, this slightly pathetic chiaroscuro allows a somewhat greyer, somber heroism à la Robert Capa or Cartier Bresson to show through, for example the shocking *Disabled Veteran* (1976) behind whose silhouette the snow-covered corn stubs transform themselves into a war cemetery, or the *Schoolgirls* (1973) trudging in deep mud transform themselves into the tail-end of a defeated army. The café of Sic (Szék) 1992, or a kitchen at Desești (Dezse) 1993, pair themselves to Robert Frank's bleak hotel room when the television screen crops up in it. The pictorial imagery of the sixties is also evoked by shots such as *Woman on a Tractor* (1996) and *Milking in the Fields* (1997).

Korniss's most fascinating photographs are the recent ones. Working from local specifics, he produces a highly complex type of picture. Using the decorations of the "fine" rooms, the colourful patches the hand-painted plates create as they stand in a soldierly line on the wall, a picture field that recalls a carpet or a cheap rug on the wall, he places one or more of his subjects in front of this backdrop. The composition rises up from its details, and, as with a young man from Mera (Mérea) 1998, or the boys in hats and bow-ties in *Brothers in the Fine Room* (1997), what we see before us is a sort of Diane Arbus waxwork show set in the Kalotaszeg region.

Korniss is able to produce symmetrical group pictures arranged in hierarchical tableaux; this he does not only in interiors but also in diverse settings—outdoors, in wood sheds or farm yards, sometimes with a multitude of cables, lights and scaffoldings making a studio seem small. These tableaux revive the archetypical poses of photographic history. "These occasions conjured up many things—forgotten gestures, solemn glances, postures inherited from grandparents—the old magic that was photography." (p. 80) That is the method that Korniss appears to excel in.

In bygone days, the set pose was imposed by the need for long exposures. Following Eugène Atget, August Sander and their fellows, this inevitable rigidity became a tool for sociological interpretation, and later, from the 1960s—as Diane Arbus or Tibor Hajas show—a disciplined collaboration evolved between the photographer and the model. The psychological interplay becomes highly intricate. The more "sincere" the portrayed person wants to be, the more rigid he becomes, but the stiffer the pose, the more of the model is revealed from within. Korniss's models add one more psychological element—respect for the stranger—and another one on his part, tactful and interested sympathy. The loving friendship evolving from the interplay of the two feelings comes out from the picture and the viewer too is drawn into its current. •

László Krasznahorkai

The Melancholy of Resistance

(An excerpt from the first chapter of the novel)

Since the passenger train connecting the icebound estates of the southern lowlands which extend from the banks of the Tisza almost as far as the foot of the Carpathians, had, despite the garbled explanations of a haplessly stumbling guard and the promises of the stationmaster rushing nervously on and off the platform, failed to arrive ("Well squire, it seems to have disappeared into thin air again..." the guard shrugged pulling a sour face) the only two serviceable old wooden-seated coaches maintained for just such an "emergency" were coupled to an obsolete and unreliable 424, used only as a last resort, and put to work, albeit a good hour and a half late according to a timetable to which they were not bound and which was only an approximation anyway, so that the locals who were waiting in vain for the eastbound service and had accepted its delay with what appeared to be a combination of indifference and helpless resignation, might eventually arrive at their destination some fifty kilometres further along the branch line. To tell the truth none of this really surprised anyone anymore since rail travel, like everything else, was subject to the prevailing conditions: all normal expectations went by the board and one's daily habits were disrupted by a sense of ever-spreading all-consuming chaos which rendered the future un-

predictable, the past unrecalable, and ordinary life so haphazard that people simply assumed that whatever could be imagined might come to pass, that if there were only one door in a building it would no longer open, that wheat would grow head downwards into the earth not out of it, and that, since one could only note the symptoms of disintegration, the reasons for it remaining unfathomable and inconceivable, there was nothing anyone could do except to get a tenacious grip on anything that

László Krasznahorkai

is the author of three novels and a collection of stories, all of which have also appeared in German. His first novel, Sátántangó (Satan Tango) was made into a highly praised seven-hour film by Béla Tarr.

The English version of Az ellenállás melankóliája (1989) will appear in February 1999 as The Melancholy of Resistance, published in paperback by Quartet Books, translated by George Szirtes.

was still tangible; which is precisely what people at the village station continued to do when, in hope of taking possession of the essentially limited seating to which they were entitled, they stormed the carriage doors, which being frozen up proved very difficult to open. Mrs. Pflaum, who happened to be on her way home from one of her customary winter visits to relatives, took full part in the pointless struggle (pointless since, as they soon discovered, no-one actually remained standing) and by the time she had shoved aside those who stood in her way and used her tiny frame to hold up the crowd pressing behind her in order to assure herself of a rear facing window seat, she could no longer distinguish between her sense of indignation at the intolerable jostling she had just endured and a different feeling, oscillating between fury and anguish, occasioned by the awareness that she, with her first class ticket, which was quite worthless in this stench of garlic sausage blended with the aroma of mixed fruit brandy and cheap pungent tobacco, surrounded as she was by an almost menacing ring of loudmouthed, belching "common peasants", would be faced by the acute uncertainty faced by all those engaged in what was in any case the risky business of travelling nowadays, in other words not knowing whether she would arrive home at all. Her sisters, who had lived in complete isolation ever since age had rendered them immobile, would never have forgiven her if she had neglected to pay them her regular early winter visit and it was only on their account that she refused to abandon this dangerous enterprise even though she was as certain as everyone else that something around her had changed so radically that the wisest course under the circumstances would have been to take no risks at all. To be wise, however, to soberly anticipate what might lie in store, was truly no easy task, for it was as if some vital yet undetectable modification had taken place in the eternally stable composition of the air, in the very remoteness of that hitherto faultless mechanism or unnamed principle—which, it is often remarked, makes the world go round and of which the most imposing evidence is the sheer phenomenon of the world's existence—which had suddenly lost some of its power and it was because of this that the troubling knowledge of the probability of danger was in fact less unbearable than the common sense of foreboding that soon anything at all might happen and that this "anything"—the law governing its likelihood becoming apparent in the process of disintegration—was leading to greater anxiety than the thought of any personal misfortune, thereby increasingly depriving people of the possibility of coolly appraising the facts. To establish one's bearings among the ever more frightening events of the past months had become impossible, not only because there was little coherence in the mixture of news, gossip, rumour and personal experience (examples of which might include the sharp and much too early cold snap at the beginning of November, the mysterious family disasters, the rapid succession of railway accidents and those terrifying rumours of gangs of criminal children defacing public monuments in the distant capital, between any of which it was hard to find any ratio-

The central image of *The Melancholy of Resistance* is an enormous truck that moves at funereal pace through the half-lit streets of an obscure town in eastern Hungary. Contained within the truck is what is proclaimed to be The Worlds' Largest Giant Whale, which is the ostensible attraction of the company that offers it to public view. But also aboard the truck is the real attraction, the evil Prince, a deformed creature whose followers are swayed by his doctrine of vengeful nihilism. These followers come from outlying villages and distant towns. They are gathered here to wreak havoc upon the remnant bourgeoisie who are living out a twilight existence in the last throes of political decomposition. The state is decomposing; things go topsy turvy. Trains arrive and leave and no-one knows when the next will arrive or what its destination might be. The smell of corruption and anarchy infect everything and the town where the Whale and the Prince have arrived has been thoroughly infected.

The characters whose fortunes we follow, characters who move infinitely slowly in this black comedy—a black which is as thick and sticky as treacle—are the widow Mrs Pflaum, a woman utterly fraught with chintz, operetta, houseplants and preserves; her son Valuska, to whom she refuses to speak, he having brought disgrace upon her by his simpleton nature, his hopeless nocturnal wanderings, his idolization of the planetary system and his general vagrancy (the only thing he is good for is delivering papers and amusing the locals in the pub at closing time); György Eszter, once head of the music school but now bedbound in an Oblomov-like withdrawal from the futilities of the world and, indeed from music too, with its impossible system of imperfect harmonies, a man to whose needs Valuska now tends by delivering him meals, doing his laundry and listening to his elegant but cynical monologues on the pointlessness of everything; and, above all, the monstrous Mrs Eszter, Eszter's ambitious and mountaineous wife, whose moral zeal is indivisible from her massive will to power which draws into its ambit the drunken Chief of Police who is also her lover, the vulture-like Harrer, who would, and eventually does, make a perfect secret policeman in Securitate mode, and a number of other dupes and intermediaries. Behind her, yet opposing her, is a terrifying anonymous man in a broadcloth coat who appears in this first extract from the beginning of the book, and recurs, dangerously, time and again, as a leader of the anarchic crowd.

The book is packed with detail, its sentences unwinding in long slow coils that hardly ever resolve themselves into paragraphs. Once the slow lava flow of the narrative begins, there is no break, no turning back, it surrounds the reader and pushes him along, much as the vast truck with the whale might move down the streets of the imagination. It is a dark and monumental work that the outstanding English-domiciled German novelist, W.G. Sebald, has compared to Gogol's *Dead Souls*, and

nal connection), but also because not one of these items of news meant anything in itself, all seeming to be merely omens of what was referred to by a growing number of people as "the coming catastrophe." Mrs Pflaum had even heard that some people had started to talk of peculiar changes in the behaviour of animals, and while this—for the time being at least, though who knows what

yet it is also funny; funny by virtue of its characters, its situations, its dialogue and its sheer slow pace, as a collapsing chimney stack is funny, as Oliver Hardy fiddling with his little tie is funny, the nonsense of ornamentation and deliberation allied to weightless yet physically heavy personae being, by its nature, funny.

It is in fact the book's humour that prevents it sinking under its pessimism, its portentousness. The darker it gets the more wildly funny it becomes. Even at the very end when the reader is provided with a minute description in micro-biological or pathological terms of the decomposition of the body of one of the central characters, there is something funny about the juxtaposition of microcosm with macrocosm, about the portentousness of the human body and its rituals, something funny yet miraculous too in the way it echoes the Carbon episode in Primo Levi's *The Periodic Table*, its existential absurdity and purposefulness.

For the translator, who has slaved four years over it—and to be fair this is still two years less than it took the author to write it—its finishing has represented a significant act of liberation, but when he looks at the vast black river of type his translation has released into English, he is very sorry to be leaving it too. Swimming in that treacherous black river had made life madder and more palatial. The river had swept Valuska's macrocosm of the stars along with the corpse's microcosm of cells and proteins, it had set the ideal of world of musical harmonies against the demonic petty disharmonies of human ambition. It had showed him Eszter's meditations on the proper relationship between a hammer and a nail at the point of swinging the former to bring it into contact with the latter. It had shown him three rats emerging in the dark recesses of Mrs Eszter's bedroom, it had shown the Chief of Police's two feral children in a draughty apartment block, it had introduced him to the languid army officer whose task it is to restore order to the benighted town, and whose fate it is to become Mrs Eszter's virile lover.

For all this, the translator, and the reader in whichever language, have sufficient reason to be deeply grateful, much as they might be grateful for Gogol, for Dostoevsky, for Hieronymous Bosch, for Bruno Schulz, for Franz Kafka, for Tomi Ungerer, for all those medieval paintings of demons under misers' beds or, in a different key, for Charles Baudelaire's haggard and haunting *Sept Vieillards*. The book is a vision. A dark entertainment. A diving bell at the bed of the black river situating itself in the drift of its extraordinary plankton, its weird, dying creatures. Though its theme is disharmony, it itself is constructed harmoniously, every part echoing every other part with a rickety efficiency that amplifies the dumb noises made by the vision's underwater life. As the book begins, we are at a railway station with Mrs Pflaum. Once we board the train, we enter the godforsaken town never again to leave it. ■

George Szirtes

might happen later—could be dismissed as irresponsible and harmful gossip, one thing at least was certain, that unlike those to whom this signified a state of utter chaos, Mrs Pflaum was convinced that, on the contrary, it was perfectly appropriate in its timing since a respectable person hardly dared set foot outside her house anymore, and in a place where a train can disappear “just like that”

there was, or so her thoughts ran on, "no sense left in anything." And this was how she prepared herself mentally for the ride home which was bound to be far less smooth than the outward journey, cushioned as she had then been by her nominal status as a first class passenger, since, as she pondered nervously, "anything might happen on these dreadful branch lines" and it was best to steel oneself to the worst; so she sat like one who would happily make herself invisible, straight backed, her knees schoolgirlishly clamped together, wearing a chilly, somewhat contemptuous expression, among the slowly diminishing huddle of people still tussling for seats, and while she kept a suspicious eye on the terrifying gallery of undefined faces reflected in the window, her feelings swung between anxiety and yearning, thinking now of the ominous distances ahead and now of the warmth of the house she had had to leave behind; those pleasant afternoons with Mrs Mádai and Mrs Nuszbeck, those old Sunday walks under the tree-lined avenue of Friars' Walk, and finally the soft carpets and delicate furniture of home, that radiantly calm order of carefully tended flowers and all her little possessions, which, as she well knew, was not only an island in a wholly unpredictable world where afternoons and Sundays had become merely a memory but was the one refuge and consolation of a lonely woman the orderliness of whose life was calculated to produce peace and calm. Uncomprehendingly, and with a certain degree of envious contempt, she realized that her noisy fellow travellers—most likely coarse peasants from the darkest nooks and corners of distant villages—were quickly adapting themselves to even such straitened circumstances: to them it was as if nothing unusual had happened, everywhere there was the rustling of greaseproof paper being unwrapped and food being doled out, corks were popping, beer can tabs were dropping to the greasy floor, and here and there she could already hear that noise "so calculated to offend all one's finer feelings" but, in her opinion, "perfectly common among common people" of munching and crunching; and what was more, the party of four directly opposite her, who were among the loudest, had already started dealing out a deck of cards—till only she was left, solitary, sitting even more stiffly among the increasingly loud human hubbub, silent, her head determinedly turned to the window, her fur coat protected from the seat by a sheet of newspaper, clutching her clipped handbag to her with such terrified and resolute suspicion that she hardly noticed the engine up ahead, its two red lights probing the frozen darkness, drawing uncertainly out into the winter evening. A discreet sigh of relief was her only contribution to the noises of general relief (grunts of satisfaction, whoops of joy) that after such a long and chilly period of waiting something at last was happening; though this did not last long, since, having travelled barely a hundred metres from the now silent village platform and after a few clumsy jerks—as if the order permitting them to start had been unexpectedly revoked—the train came judderingly to a stop; and though the cries of frustration soon gave way to puzzled and angry laughter, once people realized that this

state of affairs was likely to continue and were forced to admit that their journey—possibly because of the extended chaos owing to the employment of an off-timetable train—as sadly destined to vacillate between lurching forward and lurching to a halt, they all relapsed into a jockey indifference, the dull insensibility that ensues when one has been forced to accept certain facts, which simply goes to show how people behave when, having failed, infuriatingly, to understand something, they try to suppress the fear caused by genuine shock to a system which seems to have been overtaken by chaos, the nerve-rackingly repeated instances of which may be met with nothing but withering sarcasm. Although their crude incessant joking (“I should take so much care when I’m in bed with the missus...!”) naturally outraged her delicate sensibilities, the stream of ever ruder cracks—with which each hoped to trump the one-before-jokes, in any case, now dying away—had a relaxing effect, even on Mrs Pflaum, and, every so often, on hearing one of the better ones—and there was no real escape from the coarse laughter that followed in each case—she herself couldn’t entirely suppress a shy little smile. Slyly and carefully, she even ventured a few momentary glances, not at her immediate neighbours but at those who were sitting further off, and in the peculiar atmosphere of daft good humour—since, while the occupants of the carriage (those men slapping their thighs, those women of non-descript age cackling with their mouths full) remained rather fearsome, they seemed less threatening than they had been—she tried to keep her anxious imagination in check and tell herself that she might not actually have to face the lurking terrors of the ugly and unfriendly mob by which, her instincts told her, she was surrounded, and that it might only be because of her keen susceptibility to omens of ill-fortune and her exaggerated sense of isolation in such a cold and alien environment, that she might arrive home, unharmed it may be, but exhausted by her state of constant vigilance. To tell the truth there was very little real basis for hope of such a happy resolution but Mrs Pflaum simply couldn’t resist the false enticements of optimism: though the train was once again stalled nowhere, waiting minutes on end for a signal, she calmly concluded that they were making “some-kind of progress”, and she controlled the nervous impatience occasioned by the regular—alas too frequent—squealing of brakes and periods of unavoidable immobility, since the pleasant warmth that had resulted from the heating being switched on when the engine started had encouraged her to divest herself of her coat, so she no longer had to fear that she might catch a cold on stepping out into the icy wind on arrival home. She adjusted the creases in the stole behind her, spread the fake fur wrap over her legs, locked her fingers round the handbag swollen by the woollen scarf she had stuffed inside it, and, with an unchangingly straight back, was just looking out again through the window when there, in the filthy glass, she suddenly found herself face to face with a “peculiarly silent” unshaven man, swigging from a bottle of stinking brandy, who, now that she was clad only in a blouse and the little jacket of her suit, was

staring ("Lustfully!!") at her perhaps too prominent, powerful breasts. "I knew it!"—quick as lightning, despite a hot flush running right through her, she turned her head away, pretending she hadn't noticed. For several minutes she didn't move a muscle, but stared blindly into the darkness outside, and tried, vainly, to recall the man's appearance (conjuring up only the unshaven face, the "somehow so dirty" broadcloth coat and the uncouth, sly yet shameless gaze which she was to find so disturbing...), then, very slowly, trusting that she ran no risk in doing so, she allowed her eyes to slide across the glass, withdrawing immediately when she discovered that "the creature in question" was not only persisting in his "impudence", but that their eyes had met. Her shoulders, neck and nape were all aching because of the rigid posture of her head, but by now she couldn't have torn her eyes away even if she had wanted to because she felt that whichever way she turned beyond the narrow darkness of the window, his terrifyingly steady gaze would easily commandeer every nook of the carriage and "snap her up". "How long has he been looking at me?"—the question cut Mrs Pflaum like a knife, and the possibility that the man's dirty raking eye had been "on her" from the very start of the journey made the gaze, whose meaning she had understood in a flash in the very second of meeting, appear even more terrifying than before. These two eyes, after all, spoke of sickeningly "foul desires"—"worse still!" she trembled—it was as if some sort of dry contempt burned within them. While she couldn't think of herself as an old woman, not precisely, she knew she was past the age when this kind of attention—not uncommon when paid to others—was still natural, and so, as well as regarding the man with a certain horror (what kind of person is it, after all, who is capable of lusting after elderly women?) she was frightened to realize that this fellow stinking of cheap brandy wanted nothing more perhaps than to make her ridiculous, to mock and humiliate her, then laughingly toss her aside "like an old rag". After a few violent jolts the train now began to pick up speed, wheels clattered furiously on rails, and a long forgotten feeling of confusion and acute embarrassment took hold of her as her full, heavy breasts started to throb and burn under the man's fixed uncontrollable and threatening gaze. Her arms, with which she could at least have covered them, simply refused to obey her: it was as if she had been roped to a tree, helpless to cover the shame of her exposure, and as a consequence she felt ever more vulnerable, ever more naked, ever more conscious of the fact that there the more she yearned to conceal her thrusting womanhood the more it drew attention to itself. The card players ended another round with an outburst of crude bickering which broke across the hostile and paralysing hum—cutting, as it were, the bands that tightly bound her and prevented her escaping, and she would almost certainly have succeeded in overcoming her unfortunate torpor, had not something even worse suddenly happened, the sole purpose of which, she realized in despair, was to crown her suffering. Driven as she was by her instinctive embarrassment and in an act of unconscious defiance, she was

just trying to hide her breasts by tactfully inclining her head, when her back bent awkwardly, her shoulders slumped forward and she realized in a moment of terror that her bra—perhaps due to her unusual physical exertion—had come unclipped behind her. She looked up aghast, and was not at all surprised to see the two male eyes still fixed steadily on her, eyes that winked at her with an air of complicity as if aware of her ridiculous ill fortune. Mrs Pflaum knew all too well what would happen next, but this almost fatal accident so disturbed her that she only sat stiffer than ever in the accelerating train, helpless once more, her cheeks burning with embarrassment, having to suffer the malicious look of glee in those contemptuously self confident eyes which were now glued to her breasts, breasts which, freed from the encumbrance of the bra, jogged merrily up and down with the jolting of the carriage. She didn't dare look up again in order to check this, but she was sure it was the case: it was no longer just the man but all those "loathsome peasants" staring at her discomfort; she could practically see their ugly, greedy grinning faces encircling her... and this humiliating torture might have gone on for ever had not the conductor—an adolescent lout with a bad case of acne—entered the carriage from the rear compartment; his harsh, recently broken voice ("Tickets please!") finally freed her from the grip of shame, she snatched her ticket from the handbag and folded her arms below her breast. The train stopped again, this time where it was supposed to, and—even if only to avoid having to contemplate the genuinely frightening expressions about her—she mechanically read the name of the village on the faintly illuminated signboard above the platform, and could have cried out with relief at recognizing it from the familiar but exhaustively perused timetables she endlessly consulted before any journey, knowing that only a few minutes from now they would be arriving at the county town where ("He'll get off! He must get off!") she would almost certainly be free of her pursuer. Tense with excitement she watched the slow approach of the conductor through the derisive clamouring of those who wished to know why the train was so late, and though she had intended to ask for help as soon as he had come to her, his baby-face wore an expression of such helplessness in the surrounding racket, an expression so unlikely to offer her the assurance of official protection, that by the time he was standing next to her she felt so rattled it was all she could do to ask him where the washroom was. "Where else should it be?" the boy answered nervously as he punched her ticket. "Where it's always been. One at the front, one at the back." "Ah yes, of course," mumbled Mrs Pflaum with an apologetic gesture and leapt from her seat clutching her handbag to her, scuttling back down the carriage swaying now left now right as the train lurched off again, and it was only once she had reached the place of desolation masquerading as a WC and leaned gasping against the locked door that she realized she had left her fur coat hanging on the hook by the window. She knew she had to move as fast as possible and yet it took her a full minute before—surrendering all thought of dashing

back for her expensive fur—she could pull herself together and, rocked to and fro by the juddering of the train, divest herself of her jacket, quickly pull the blouse over her head and, holding coat, blouse and handbag under her arm, tug her pink slip right up to her shoulders. Her hands trembling with nervous haste she brought her bra round and, seeing (“Thank heaven!”) that the clip was not broken, sighed in relief; she had just begun clumsily to dress when she heard behind her the tentative but clearly audible sound of someone outside knocking at the door. There was about this knocking some peculiar quality of intimacy, which, naturally enough in the light of all that had happened so far, succeeded in scaring her, but then, on reflecting that the fear was probably no more than a monstrous product of her own imagination, she grew only indignant at being hurried like this; and so she continued her half-finished movement, taking a perfunctory glance in the mirror, and was just about to reach for the handle when there came another burst of impatient knocking quickly succeeded by a voice announcing: “It’s me.” She drew her hand back aghast, and by the time she had formed an idea of who it was, she was overtaken less by a sense of entrapment than a desperate incomprehension as to why this croaky strangled male voice should bear no trace of aggression or low threat but sound vaguely bored and anxious that she, Mrs Pflaum, should at last open the door. For a few moments neither stirred a muscle, each waiting for some word of explanation from the other, and Mrs Pflaum only grasped the monstrous misunderstanding of which she had become the victim when her pursuer lost patience and tugged furiously at the handle, bellowing at her, “Well! What is it to be?! All tease, no nookie?!” She stared at the door, terrified. Not wanting to believe it, she bitterly shook her head and felt a constriction at her throat, startled, like all those attacked from an unexpected quarter, to find that she had “fallen into some infernal snare.” Reeling at the thought of the sheer unfairness, the naked obscenity of her situation, it took her some time to comprehend that—however incredible, since... as a matter of fact... she had always resisted—the unshaven man had from the very start believed that it was she who was propositioning him, and it became clear to her how, step by step, the “degenerate monster” had interpreted her every action—her taking off her fur... the unfortunate accident... and her enquiring after the washroom—as an invitation, as solid proof of her compliance, in a word as the cheap blushworthy stages of a low transaction, to the extent that she now had to cope with not only a disgraceful attack on her virtue and respectability but with the fact that this filthy repulsive man, stinking of brandy, should address her as if she were some “woman of the streets”. The wounded fury which seized her proved even more painful to her than her sense of defencelessness, and—since, apart from anything else, she could no longer bear the entrapment—driven by desperation, in a voice choking with tension, she shouted to him: “Go away! Or I shall cry for help!” On hearing this, after a short silence, the man struck the door with his fist and in a voice so cold with con-

tempt that shivers ran down Mrs Pflaum's back, he hissed at her: "Go screw yourself, you old whore. You're not worth breaking down the door for: I wouldn't even bother to drown you in the slop-pail." The lights of the county town pulsed through the window of the cabin, the train was clattering over points, and she had to stop herself falling over by grasping at the handrail. She heard the departing footsteps, the sharp slamming of the door of the compartment, and, because she understood by this that the man had finally released her with the same colossal impudence as he had accosted her, her whole body trembled with emotion and she collapsed in tears. And while it was really only a matter of moments, it seemed to last an eternity that in her hysterical sobbing and sense of desolation she saw, in a brief blinding instant, from a height in the enormous dense darkness of night, through the lit window of the stalled train, as if in a matchbox, a little face, her face, lost, distorted, out of luck, looking out. For though she was sure that she had nothing more to fear from those dirty, ugly, bitter words, that she would be subject to no new insults, the thought of her escape filled her with as much anxiety as the thought of assault, since she had absolutely no idea—the effect of each of her actions so far being precisely the reverse of that calculated—what it was she owed her unexpected freedom to. She couldn't bring herself to believe it was her choking desperate cry that frightened him off, since having felt a miserable victim of the man's merciless desires throughout, she, by the same token, considered herself an innocent and unsuspecting victim of the entire hostile universe, against whose absolute chill—the thought flashed across her mind—there is no valid defence. It was as if the unshaven man had actually raped her: she swayed in the airless urine-smelling booth, broken, tortured by the suspicion that she knew all there was to know, and under the spell of the formless, inconceivable, ever-shifting terror of having to seek some protection against this universal threat, she was aware only of an emerging sense of agonizing bitterness: for while she felt it was deeply unfair that she should be cast as an innocent victim rather than an untroubled survivor, she who "all her life had longed for peace, and never harmed a soul", she was forced to concede that this was of little consequence: there was no authority to which she could appeal, no-one to whom she might protest, and she could hardly hope that the forces of anarchy having once been loosed could afterwards be restrained. After so much gossip, so much terrifying rumour-mongering she could now see for herself that "it was all the same thing," for she understood that while her own particular immediate danger was over, in "a world where such things happen" collapse into anarchy would inevitably follow. Outside she could already hear the impatient grumbling of passengers preparing to get off and the train was noticeably slowing down; realizing panic-stricken that she had left her fur coat wholly unguarded, she hastily unbolted the door, stepped out into the press of people (who, ignoring the fact that there was no point in it, engaged in the same storming of doors on the way out as they had

on the way in), and stumbling across suitcases and shopping bags, struggled back to her seat. The coat was still there but she didn't immediately see the fake fur wrap and while conducting a furious search and trying desperately to remember whether she had taken it with her into the washroom it suddenly dawned on her that in all that nervous excitement her assailant was nowhere to be seen: obviously, she thought, much assured, he must have been one of the first to leave the train. At this moment the train actually stopped but the briefly less stuffy, partially vacated, carriage was almost immediately overrun by an even larger, and, if possible, more frightening mass of bodies, more frightening because silent, and while it was easy to see that this dark huddle would give rise to equal anxiety over the remaining twenty kilometres, there was a still greater shock in store for her: if she had hoped to be rid of the unshaven man she was to be bitterly disappointed. Having gathered up her coat and finally located her wrap under the worn and shining seat she gathered it about her shoulders and had, just for safety's sake, set out to find another carriage in which to continue her journey, when—she could hardly believe her eyes—there was the very same broadcloth coat ("As if he had left it there expressly for me to see"), thrown carelessly across the back of a distant seat. She stopped dead in her tracks, then hurried on, through the back door into the next carriage where she pushed her way through another silent mass of people to find another central forward-facing seat which, in desperation, she immediately occupied. For some time she kept her eyes fixed on the door, ready to leap up, though she no longer knew of whom she was most frightened, nor from what direction the danger was most likely to threaten, then, nothing untoward having happened (what with the train still standing in the station), she tried to gather her remaining strength so that should some awful adventure befall her she would at least be ready. Suddenly she felt infinitely tired, but though her weak legs were practically burning in the lining of her boots and her aching shoulders felt "ready to collapse" she was unable to relax even a little, or only to the extent of slowly turning her head about to relieve the pain in her neck, and reaching for her compact box to cool her tearful flushed face. "It's over, over, there's nothing to be scared of now," she kept muttering herself without believing it: for not only did she lack any such confidence, but she was unable even to lean back in her seat for greater comfort without increasing, as she thought, the risk of leaving herself unprepared. For the carriage was being occupied by a crowd "every bit as ugly as the first lot" and not a whit less frightening than that at the start of her journey, so she could only hope that the three empty seats around her—the last empty seats—might act as some kind of defence and remain unoccupied. There was indeed some chance of that, at least for a while, because, for practically a whole minute (the train blew twice in the interval), not a single new passenger entered the carriage; but suddenly, at the head of a new wave, loudly puffing and panting and carrying an enormous backpack and basket balanced by a few well filled shopping

bags, a fat headscarved peasant woman appeared in the doorway, and turning her head this way and that way ("Like a hen..." it occurred to Mrs Pflaum), took a decisive step towards her, and grunting and croaking, with an aggression that brooked no argument, proceeded to colonize all three seats with her endless baggage which formed a barricade for her as well as Mrs Pflaum from the throng of contemptible (or so her expression suggested) travellers behind her. It would have been useless of course for Mrs Pflaum herself to have muttered a word of complaint and suppressing her fury she came round to thinking how it might even have been a stroke of good luck that, having lost the comforting cushion of space around her, she was at least preserved from the encroachments of the silent band, but this feeling of consolation was short lived, for her unwelcome fellow traveller (all she wanted was to be left in peace) loosened the knot binding her headscarf under her chin, and, without moment's hesitation, launched into conversation. "At least the place is heated, eh?" The sound of that raven-like croaking and the sight of two piercing malicious eyes that seemed to leap at her from beneath the headscarf decided her immediately that, since she could neither repel nor escape her, the only course of action was to ignore her entirely and she turned her head away to look out of the window in protest. But the woman, raking the carriage with a few more contemptuous looks, was not bothered in the slightest. "You don't mind me talking to you? There's just the two of us so we might as well have a good natter, eh? Going far? Right to the end of the line, me. Visiting my lad." Mrs Pflaum glanced at her reluctantly, but seeing that the more she ignored her the worse things would get, nodded in acknowledgment. "Cause," the woman perked up at the encouragement, "it's the grandson's birthday. He said to me, at Easter, he did, sweet little bairn, cause I was there then: You're coming mam, aren't you? That's what he calls me, mam, that's his name for me the little lad. So that's where I'm off to now." Mrs Pflaum felt constrained to smile here but immediately regretted it because this opened the floodgates: there was no stopping the woman now. "If that little bairn only knew what a hard life it is for an old woman like me! Spend the whole day standing about in the market on your poor feet what with the varicose veins and all, no wonder a body gets tired by the end of the day. Cause, you know, tell you the truth, we have a little garden, but the pension hardly stretches. I don't know where all those shiny Mercedes come from, all that money people seem to have, I honestly don't. But you listen here, I'll tell you something. It's thieving is what it is, thieving and cheating! It's a Godless crooked world, God has no say in it anymore. And this awful weather, eh? You tell me what it's all coming to. It's all round you isn't it. Radio says it'll be seventeen degrees or whatever—below freezing, that is! And we're only at the end of November. You want to know what'll happen? I'll tell you. We'll freeze till spring. That's right. Cause there's no coal. I wish I knew why we had all those no-good miners up in the hills. Do you know? There, you see." Mrs Pflaum's head was swimming in the verbal down-

pour but however hard it was to bear she found it impossible to interrupt her, to make her shut up, and eventually, realizing the woman wasn't really expecting her to listen and that she could get away with nodding every so often, she spent more and more time looking out of the window at lights slowly drifting by, attempting to bring some order to her troubled thoughts while the train drew away from the county capital, though hard as she tried she couldn't banish the memory of the carelessly discarded coat which bothered her even more than did the frightening ill-omened crowd of silent faces that confronted her. "Was he disturbed?" she fretted. "Did drink get the better of him? Or has he deliberately..." She made up her mind not to torture herself with vain surmise, but, however risky the enterprise appeared, to ascertain whether the coat was still there, so, wholly ignoring the lumpen woman, she joined those loitering at the end of the carriage, crossed over the coupling and peered as carefully as she could through the gap of the door which had been left partly open. Her intuition that it would be better to investigate the unshaven man's unexpected disappearance was immediately rewarded, for there, to her horror, he was, sitting with his back to her, his head just tipped back to swig at the bottle of brandy. Lest he, or anyone else among that dumb crew, should notice her (for in that event God himself could hardly absolve her of bringing her troubles on herself) still holding her breath, Mrs Pflaum returned to the rear carriage, and was dumbfounded to see that a fur-hatted figure had taken advantage of her brief absence to occupy her seat practically unopposed, so that she, the only lady present, would have to travel standing, pressed against the side of the carriage, and she realized she had been rather stupid in deluding herself that, simply because she hadn't seen him for a few minutes, she had been freed of the man in the broadcloth coat. Whether he had gone to the lavatory or popped out to the platform ("Surely not without his coat?!") to get himself another bottle of stinking spirits was completely immaterial now, as she was not really worried that he would try to get at her again here on the train, since the crowd—providing it didn't turn against her ("A fur coat, a boa or my handbag might be enough for these people...!") and the difficulty of making one's way across it, did, after all, offer some kind of defence; at the same time, her mistake forced her to admit, since she might as well face the worst that could befall her, that in the case of some beastly mishap ("...some incomprehensible, mysterious act of fate") she would be firmly trapped and that this time there would be no escape. Next to her helplessness this was what most terrified her, since with the passing of immediate danger, the greatest threat, on reflection, was not so much that he would want to rape her (though, "Just to pronounce the word is awful...") but that he looked to be the sort of creature who "knew neither God nor man", who, in other words, had no fear of hell fire, and was therefore capable of ("Anything!") anything. Once more she could see before her those ice-cold eyes, that bestial unshaven face, once again she saw his sinister and intimate wink, once more heard that flat, mocking voice saying:

"It's me", and she was sure that she was not dealing with a simple sex maniac but had in fact escaped some vast murderous fury whose nature it was to crush under its heel whatever remained whole, for the very concepts of order, peace, or the future, were to such a monster inimical. "On the other hand," she could hear the hoarse voice of the old baggage who was now directing her never ending stream of conversation at her new neighbour, "you look in a pretty bad way if you don't mind me saying so. I got nothing to complain of, you see. Just the usual troubles of old age. And the teeth. Look," and shoving her head forward she opened her mouth wide for her fur-capped neighbour's examination, drawing her cracked lips apart with her forefinger, "time's ravages, all gone. But I don't let them mess about in there! The doctor can waffle on as much as he likes! I can get along with this set as far as the cemetery, eh? They're not going to get rich on me, all these scoundrels, may their innards drop out, the lot of them! Cause you look here," and from one of her shopping bags she drew forth a little plastic soldier, "what do you think this cost me, this little bit of rubbish! Believe it or not they wanted thirty one forints for it! For this piece of trash! And what's it got for that price? A gun and this red star. They have a real cheek asking thirty-one forints for that! Ah, but" she stuffed it back into her bag, "that's all children want nowadays. So what can an old girl like me do. Buy it. You grind your teeth but you buy it! That's right, eh?" Mrs Pflaum turned her head away with loathing and took a quick look out of the window, and then hearing a dull thump, her glance darted back at them and she found herself unable to look away or stir an inch. She didn't know whether it was a bare knuckle that had done the damage, since the unchanging silence failed to reveal what had happened or why, all she saw in that quick involuntary movement of her eye was the woman falling backwards... her head slipping to one side... her body, supported by her luggage, remaining more or less where it was, while the fur-capped man opposite ("the usurper of her seat") moved from his forward leaning position, his face expressionless, and slowly sat back. Even when it is only some annoying fly being swatted you expect some general murmur, but no one stirred in response to this, not a word was spoken, everyone continued standing or sitting in perfect indifference. "Is it silent approval? Or am I imagining things again?"—Mrs Pflaum stared in front of her, but she immediately rejected the possibility she had been dreaming, because judging by all she had seen and heard, she couldn't but believe that the man had hit the woman. He must have had enough of her nattering and, simply, without a word, struck her a blow in the face, and no, her heart thumped, no, it can't have been otherwise, and in the meantime all this of course was so shocking that she could only stand rooted to the spot, her brow breaking out in perspiration at the fear of it. That woman is lying there unconscious, the sweat poured down her brow, the man in the fur cap is motionless, and so is everyone else, dear God, what terrible low company to find oneself in. She was rooted to the spot with helplessness, seeing

only the window before her, the windowframe and her own reflection in the dirty glass, then the train which had been forced to stall for a few more minutes started up again and, exhausted by the furious succession of images, her mind buzzing, she watched the dark empty landscape swimming by outside under the heavy sky in which, even in the moonlight, the masses of cloud were barely distinguishable. But neither the sky nor the landscape meant anything to her and she only realized she had practically arrived when the train clattered over the unlowered level crossing over the main road leading into town, and she stepped out into the compartment, stood before the door and, bending to the shadow cast by her hand, saw the local industrial warehouses and the clumsy watertower looming above them. Ever since her childhood, such things—level crossings on highways, long flat sties steaming with the warmth of animals—were the first assuring reminders that she had arrived home still in one piece, and although this time she had particular cause for relief, since they would bring to an end circumstances of no ordinary hardship, and she could almost feel the wild drumming in her heart that used to start up whenever she returned from her infrequent visits to relatives, or from the county capital where, once or twice a year, she attended the performance of some favourite operetta together with some members of her dispersed family and the friendly warmth of the town served as a natural bastion protecting her home, now, and indeed for the last two or three months, but particularly now, after the shameful revelation that the world was full of people with unshaven faces and broadcloth overcoats, nothing of that sense of intimacy remained, but a cold maze of empty streets where not only the faces behind the windows but the windows themselves stared blindly out at her and the silence was "broken only by the sharp yelp of bickering dogs". She watched the approaching lights of town and once the train had passed the industrial estate with its sheds and parked tractors and was making its way along the row of poplars lining the track which was only just discernible in the darkness, she anxiously scanned the as-yet pale and distant glow of street lamps and illuminated houses to locate the three storey block containing her apartment, anxiously, for the feeling of acute relief that at last she was home was immediately succeeded by terror, because she knew all too well that the train being now almost two hours late she couldn't count on the usual evening bus service, and so would have to walk ("And, what is more, alone...") all the way home from the station—and, even before confronting that issue, there still remained the problem of actually getting off the train. Small allotments with kitchen gardens and locked sheds sped by beneath the window, followed by the bridge over the frozen canal and the old mill behind it; but they conveyed no sense of release, suggesting rather further, fearful stations of her cross, because Mrs Pflaum was almost crushed by the knowledge that while she was only a few steps from freedom, suddenly there, behind her back, at any moment, some wholly incomprehensible something might leap out and attack her. Her whole

body was covered in sweat. Hopelessly she observed the extended yard of the sawmill with its piles of logs, the tumbledown railwayman's hut, the old steam engine slumbering in the sidings and the weak light percolating through the barred glass walls of the repair sheds. There was still no movement behind her, she was still standing by herself by the door. She gripped the ice-cold handle of the door but couldn't decide: if she opened it too early someone might push her out, if too late then "that inhuman band of murderers" might catch up with her. The train slowed alongside an infinitely long row of stationary wagons, and squealed to a halt. As the door opened, she practically leapt off, saw the sharp stones between the sleepers, heard her pursuers behind her, and quickly found herself outside in the station forecourt. No-one attacked her but by some ill chance which coincided with her arrival, the lights in the vicinity suddenly went out, as did, or so it soon transpired, every other street light in town. Looking neither left nor right but keeping her eyes firmly at her feet so she shouldn't stumble in the dark, she hurried over to the bus-stop hoping against hope that the bus might have waited for the train to come in, or that she might still catch the night-service, should there be one. But there was not a single vehicle waiting, nor could she count on the "night-service" since, according to the timetable hanging beside the main entrance to the station, the last bus was precisely the one that would have left soon after the scheduled arrival of the train, and in any case the whole sheet was ruled through with two thick lines... Her attempts to forestall the others were all in vain, for while she stood perusing the timetable, the forecourt had become a dense forest of fur-caps, greasy peasant hats and ear flaps, and, as she was gathering courage to set out on her own, she was assailed by the terrible question of what all these people were doing here anyway, and the feeling she had almost forgotten, the awful memory of which had been practically washed away by other feelings in the rear of the compartment, now stabbed at her again as she saw, among the crowd loitering to the left of her, on the far side, the man in the broadcloth coat; it was as if he were searching about him, looking for something, then he turned on his heels and was gone. This all happened so quickly, and he was so far away from her (to say nothing of the fact that it was dark and it had become almost impossible to distinguish the genuine from monsters of the imagination) that she couldn't be absolutely certain it was really him, but the mere possibility it might so scared her that she cut through that idle ominous mass of bodies, and, almost at a run, set off down the wide main road leading home. As it happened she wasn't altogether surprised, for however unreal this seemed, (hadn't her whole journey been utterly unreal?!) even on the train, when to her great disappointment she spotted him a second time, something inside her had whispered that her involvement with the unshaven man—and the terrifying ordeal of the attempted rape—was far from over, and that now, when she had not only the fear of "the bandits attacking her from behind" to drive her forward but the prospect of him ("If it really was him,

and the whole thing wasn't just imagination.") leaping out at her from some doorway, her feet stumbled on as if unable to decide whether it was more advisable in such a tight spot to retreat or run ahead. She had long left behind the enigmatic square of the station forecourt, had passed the junction with Zöldág Road which led to the paediatric hospital, but not a soul did she encounter (meeting someone she knew might well be her salvation) below the bare wild chestnut trees of the unswervingly straight avenue, and beside the sound of her own breath, the light squeak of her footsteps and the humming of the wind in her face, she heard nothing, only the steady quiet puffing of what might have been some distant, unrecognizable machine whose sound vaguely reminded her of an ancient saw-mill. Although she continued to resist the force of circumstances which seemed to have been created expressly to challenge such resolution, in the complete absence of streetlight and the still oppressive silence she began to feel ever more like a victim cast to her fate, for wherever she looked seeking the filtered lights of apartments, the place assumed the look of all cities under siege, where, regarding all further effort as pointless and superfluous, the inhabitants had surrendered even the last traces of endangered human presence in the belief that while the streets and squares had been lost, the thick walls of buildings behind which they cowered afforded shelter from any serious harm. She trod the uneven surface of rubbish frozen to the pavements and had just passed the minimal display of the ORTOPÉD shop, a once popular showroom of the local shoe-manufacturing cooperative when, before crossing over the next junction, more out of habit than anything else (owing to the petrol shortage there hadn't been much traffic even when she'd set out to visit her relatives), she took a glance down the darkness of Erdélyi Sándor Road which, because the closed precincts of the law court and the jail with their high, barbed wired topped walls ran along the length of it, was known by the locals simply as "Judgment Street". Down in its depths, around the artesian well, she glimpsed a clotted mass of shadows, a dumb group, who, it suddenly seemed to her, were silently beating someone. In her fright she immediately took to her heels, every now and then casting a look behind her, and only slackened her pace once she knew that the law-courts were far behind and that no-one had emerged to pursue her. No-one had emerged and no-one was following her, nothing disturbed the deathly calm of the deserted town, except the previously noted but now increasingly loud puffing, and in the terrifying ripeness of that silence, to which the unbroken quiet—round the artesian well where some crime, for what else could it be, was being committed—raised an echo (not a single cry for help, not the single smack of a blow) it no longer seemed strange that there should be so few stragglers about, though despite the almost quarantine like isolation of individuals in ordinary circumstances, she should by now have met one or two nighthawks like herself in a thoroughfare as broad and long as the Wenckheim Béla Avenue, especially so close to the city centre. Driven by her sense of fore-

boding, she hurried on, feeling ever more convinced that she was crossing some nightmare terrain permeated by evil, then, as she got ever closer to the source of that now clearly audible puffing, and through the bars of the wild chestnut trees could see the heap of machinery which produced it, she felt quite certain that, exhausted as she was by her struggles against the powers of terror, she was imagining, simply imagining everything, for what she saw in that first glance seemed not only stupefying but downright impossible. Not far from her, a spectral contraption was moving at melancholy pace through the winter night down the middle of the road—that is if this satanic conveyance whose desperately slow crawl in the direction of the town centre reminded her of a steam roller struggling to gain each centimetre of ground, could be said to be moving at all: it wasn't even a matter of overcoming strong wind resistance on the normal road surface, but of ploughing through a tract of dense, refractory clay. Sheathed in blue corrugated iron and sealed on every side, the lorry, which reminded her of an enormous wagon, was covered with bright yellow writing (an indecipherable dark brown shape hovered at the centre of the inscriptions) and was much higher and longer—she noted incredulously—than those vast Turkish trucks that used to pass through town, and the whole shapeless hulk, which smelled vaguely of fish, was being drawn by a smoking, oily, and wholly ante-diluvian wreck of tractor which was making fearful exertions in the process. Once she caught up with it though, her curiosity overcame her fear and she paced along beside the vehicle for a while peering at the clumsy foreign letters—obviously the work of an inexpert hand—but even up close their meaning remained inscrutable (“could it be Slavic...or Turkish?...”), and it was impossible to say what purpose the thing served, or indeed what it was doing here at all in the very heart of this frosty windswept and deserted town—or even how it had managed to get here since, if this was its normal speed, it would have taken years for it to have made it from the nearest village, and it was hard to imagine (though there seemed no alternative) that it would have been brought in by rail. She lengthened her stride again and it was only once she had left the awesome juggernaut behind and glanced back that she spotted a heavily built and whiskered man with an indifferent expression on his face, wearing only a T-shirt on top, with a cigarette hanging from the corner of his mouth, who—once he noticed her on the pavement—pulled a face and slowly raised his right hand from the wheel as if to greet the gaping figure outside. All this was highly unusual (to crown it all, it must have been rather overheated in the cabin for the mountain of flesh behind the wheel to feel so warm), and the more she kept glancing back at the vehicle as she moved away, the more exotic a monster did it seem, encapsulating in its appearance all that life had so recently thrown at her: the past, it seemed to say, was no longer what it had been but was crawling remorselessly ahead below the dark windows of the unsuspecting citizenry. From this moment she was convinced she was in the grip of a terrible nightmare, only there was no

waking from this one: no, she was quite certain that it was reality, only more so; furthermore she realized that the chilling events in which she had been participant or to which she had been witness (the appearance of the phantasmagorical vehicle, the violence in Erdélyi Sándor Road, the lights going off with all the precision of an explosive device, the inhuman rabble in the station forecourt, and above all this, dominating everything, the cold unremitting stare of the figure in the broadcloth coat) were not merely the oppressive creations of her ever-troubled imagination, but part of a scheme so co-ordinated, so precise, that there could be no doubt of their purpose. At the same time she was constrained to make every effort to reject such an extraordinary fantasy, and she kept hoping that there might be some clear, however depressing, explanation for the mob, the weird truck, the outbreak of fighting, or, if for nothing else, for the extraordinary power cut that affected everything; all this she hoped because she couldn't quite allow herself to lapse into a wholesale acceptance of a state of affairs so irrational as to permit the general security of the town to go down the sink together with every other sign of order. Sadly she had to forgo even this slim hope: for while the issue of the blacked out streetlamps remained unresolved, the destination of the truck with its terrible load, and the nature of that load, were not to remain a mystery for long. She had passed the house of the well known local celebrity, György Eszter, had left behind night noises of the park surrounding the old Wooden Theatre and had reached the tiny Lutheran church when her glance happened to light on a round advertising pillar: she stopped dead in her tracks, stepped closer, then simply stood, and, in case she had made a mistake, read and re-read the text which looked like the kind of thing a tramp from some outlying estate might scrawl, though a single perusal should have been enough since the poster which had obviously been freshly pasted over all the others and still showed traces of fresh paste at the edges, offered an explanation of sorts. She thought that if she could finally isolate one distinct element of the chaos, she would find it easier to orientate herself and so ("God forbid it should be necessary..!" of course) defend herself "in case of a total collapse", though the feeble light shed on this by the text only increased her anxiety, the problem all along having been that nothing seemed to provide the faintest shadow of an explanation of the whole cycle of events she had been forced to witness as victim or bystander, till now—as if that "feeble light" ("The worlds' largest giant whale, mother natures' secret wonder") were all too much at once—when she was driven to speculate whether there might not be some firm, yet incomprehensible reason at work in this. Because, well a circus? Here?! When the end of the world was all too imminent? Fancy allowing such a nightmare menagerie, to say nothing of that evil-smelling beast, into the town? When the place is threatening enough as it is? Who has time for entertainments now, when we're in a state of anarchy? What an idiotic joke! What a ridiculous cruel idea!... Or could it be... could it mean precisely that... that it was all over and it was all the same now?

UNBELEVIBLE BUT TRUE

The Worlds' Largest Giant Whale

MOTHER NATURES' SECRAT WONDOR

TO BE SEEN

IN KOSUT SQU. (to the right of Piac squ.)

DECEMBER 1! 2! 3!

AFTER A MOST SUCESFULL JOURNY THE LENGHT
AND
BREATH OF EUROPE!

ADMISSION: 50

(CHILDREN AND SOLDIER 1/2 PRISE!!)

UNBELEVIBLE but TRUE

That someone... was "fiddling while Rome burned"?! She hurried away from the pillar and crossed the road. There was a row of two storey houses on that side, some with a faint light sifting through their windows. She gripped her handbag firmly and leaned into the wind. Reaching the last doorway she took a quick last look round, opened the door and locked it behind her. The banisters were icy cold. The palm tree, which had been the one jealously guarded splash of colour in the house—and which had been plainly beyond rescue even before her departure—was now most certainly past resuscitation, having frozen to death on the landing in winter. There was a suffocating silence around her. She had arrived. A slip of paper with a message on it had been stuck behind the handle of the door. She took the briefest glance at it, pulled a face then entered, turning the keys in both locks and immediately engaging the safety chain. She leaned against the door and closed her eyes. 🐋

László Márton

Where's the Storyteller Running Off To?

The world as escape

Gottfried Benn

The question often comes up in interviews and panel discussions: Why am I running away from present-day Hungarian reality? When this question is put to me, I must ponder it carefully: Am I really running away? Or here's a case in point: I'm sitting in my Budapest flat with a young lady; she has a small tape recorder in her lap, a mike in her hand, and a watch on her wrist, which she keeps looking at while popping the question: Why am I running away from present-day Hungarian reality? And would I please answer briefly, because she has to pick up her child at the nursery, and she hasn't even done her shopping. Before I know it she's gone, and I'm stuck with her question which, when you think about, is a part of present-day Hungarian reality. Or I am on a platform, facing two or three bright lights, maybe thirty pairs of eyes, and a glass of mineral water. I am a bit hoarse because I've just finished reading something that was written sometime ago by someone who is supposed to be me. And then somebody in the audience asks if writers nowadays can make a living; someone else would like to find out which party I voted for, and a third person wants to know why I am running away from present-day Hungarian reality. Then they all leave, and I am left there, stabbed in the heart with that deadly question, which is as much a part of Hungarian reality as is my heart.

But have I really been stabbed in the heart, cut to the quick?

It's easy to dismiss the question, as easy as brushing aside other minor outside irritants. I could say, for instance, that I am present-day Hungarian reality. I could also say that whatever happens in a story can only happen here and now; and furthermore, narrative prose should not be confused with media news, whose producers, it seems, are not confronted with such questions often enough. Or I could answer the question with a question (which I like to do anyway), and say:

At what point does reality stop being current and Hungarian? Today is Saturday, so the reality I am experiencing is Saturday's reality. But what if I wrote that on Thursday, the

László Márton

*is the author of novels, short stories,
essays and plays for the stage and radio.*

day before yesterday, I went to the Central European University? Would I no longer be talking about present-day reality? And if I added that at the Central European University I heard a talk by a Romanian writer, and also got involved in an Austrian matter too complicated to go into right now, then I wouldn't be dealing with Hungarian reality? What happened five years ago may still be considered part of present-day reality. But what if someone related a story from the pre-1989 period? Would he, too, be running away from reality? And if someone described how a self-service restaurant looked in Moscow in the nineteen-seventies (as was done by a friend of mine, a fellow writer, who, incidentally, was hit with the same question, I heard it myself)—would he be turning his back on the here and now? And what about the writer who in a brilliant novel superimposed late nineteenth-century Budapest on the present-day capital? Was he or wasn't he running away? And if he was, which way? From the nineteenth century to the twentieth, or vice versa?

I will not go on expanding time and space, even though I thought I wouldn't stop until I've demonstrated that the late Classical, Mediterranean world of Miklós Mészöly's *Saulus* is as much a part of Hungarian reality as those fields of ice untouched by time in Imre Wirth's *Eskimo War*.

It would probably be more fun to do this than point out again and again that in a piece of narrative prose, or a drama, explicit time and space references are not very important formal elements. It is far more interesting to consider this: At what point does reality stop being real?

Can we speak of only one kind of present-day Hungarian reality at a time, or are there two, three, as many as four realities? Does my right eye see the same present-day Hungarian reality as my left eye? Heaven forbid that I should even attempt to treat these as ontological problems; they are everyday problems for a writer—and the fact that he takes them into consideration, or ignores them, has a far greater effect on the form of the work he is in the process of writing than do the particulars of his outside interests, to say nothing of more private matters like his views as a citizen (though it's these views that are the real subject of those queries about Hungarian reality).

But if there exists, at one and the same time, more than one kind of reality, they can be discovered only through a variety of perceptions; we must contend, then, with the coexistence of numerous different subjective realities, in the real world as well as in the world of the about-to-be-written narrative. To give a very simple example: A man is walking down Király Street.* He started out at Teréz Boulevard and is heading toward Károly Boulevard. At the same time another individual is walking down Majakovszkij Street. He started at Tanács Boulevard and is heading toward Lenin Boulevard. One would assume

■ After 1990, Budapest's Majakovszkij street, Tanács (Council) and Lenin Boulevards reverted to their former names, as given above.

that at some point the two would meet, yet in "reality" they never will, because they move in two different planes of reality, even if—as in this case—the spatial elements of the two realities, down to the tiniest detail, can be said to match perfectly.

The situation becomes even more complicated—here, too, examples abound—in the case of several ethnic groups living together, each one imbued with a different sense of the past, and therefore possessing different notions about present reality as well. In these instances, the same area of settlement only appears to be the same; actually they are two or three distinct settlements, with layers upon layers of disparate but intersecting spatial and cultural realities. To use an example close at hand, I've been several times to the city of Cluj-Napoca in western Romania, I know the place fairly well—as well as an outsider can get to know a city not his own. I purposely wrote the city's Romanian name, on account of its foreignness. The Hungarian name is more familiar and natural to us, and may distract us from an essentially hermeneutic problem, for which this city may well serve as a textbook illustration (but so could other comparable places on the map, which can be referred to by two or three different names, though such places are especially prevalent in this part of the world). Someone like myself, born and raised in Budapest, can—and do—have friends living in Kolozsvár, whom I may wish to visit. But whether I travel there by car or by train, the place I will come to will not be Kolozsvár but Cluj-Napoca. Anyone who has been to this city knows what I am talking about; I am trying to illuminate the problem for those who have never been there. Cluj-Napoca is a dynamically expanding Romanian city of five hundred thousand inhabitants, with a modest past but a promising future. At the same degree of latitude and longitude, though in a different world of reality, is Kolozsvár, a stagnating, and even shrinking city of eighty thousand, with deep-rooted traditions, a rich past going back hundreds of years (which includes the history of a once lively German town called Klausenburg), and a not very promising future. A river runs through both cities: the Somes or, if you like, the Szamos. There is no barrier, no duplication here, for it's been said that you can't step in the same river twice. Besides, the water in both rivers is heavily polluted. Not far from the bank of this river there is a square: Cluj-Napoca's Michael the Brave Square (a translation, obviously), also known as Széchenyi Square. It's the same square, but in two different realities, thus two different squares.

I imagine two people, a girl and a boy, walking toward each other in the square. They are perfectly compatible as to character, and would probably be delighted to find each other somewhere in the middle of the square; but because they are crossing two different squares they will never meet. Or take a writer and a reader. The reader is searching eagerly, passionately for a book that will open a window to another reality, different from the one in which he lives. What he

doesn't realize is that the book he is looking for was written by a man walking toward him in the square. And the writer is longing to meet a genuinely receptive reader who is not interested in knowing if writers nowadays can make a living but in finding out what may be revealed, with the aid of all the resources at a writer's command and by means of a piece of made-up reality, about lived reality; and conversely, what can be learned about made-up reality from lived reality. What he doesn't realize is that the reader he is searching for is right there, walking toward him in the square—the same one, but belonging to a different realm of reality. A meeting between the two would suggest the compatibility of the two realities, but it will never take place, precisely because they move about in different realities.

There is a statue in the middle of this square. I who am a stranger in Cluj-Napoca to the same extent (if not quite the same way) that I am in Kolozsvár might have this to say about this statue: a well-muscled horse rising on its hind legs, with a fearless-looking rider on its back. But I may also note that in one reality this statue is the optical and even theological centre of the square. Much more than a work of plastic art, it is an ideal cast in bronze—like most statues erected in public places: The statue marks the spot from which to view the surrounding historical landscape; from this vantage point the city is retroactively Cluj-Napoca, and thus its past is as rich, if not richer, than that of the Hungarian town, which from this spot can hardly be seen. While in the other reality the statue is barely noticeable, or if it is, it appears as an out-of-place, foreign object, a large piece of metal left here accidentally, which passers-by have gotten used to—to its presence, that is, not to its larger significance, for that evokes strong cognitive dissonance, so they're better off remaining oblivious to it.

I repeat: I consider this not a philosophical or a political problem but a narrative one, and that's how I try to approach it. The city with its double reality is but one such place, a representative example of this type of city, of which there are hundreds more all over East Central Europe. Such narrative problems may well arise in other parts of the world, but my personal experiences are related to this region; that's why I chose it.

Though as far as the above-mentioned particular example is concerned, in reality (in any kind of reality) boys and girls will sooner or later find each other.

Writers and readers, however, seldom do; even within the same reality it happens only in rare, blessed moments. And that recurring question is the best proof that such meetings hardly ever take place.

Why is the writer running away from present-day Hungarian reality? That is, why am I? The real question, though, is whether I, sunk in present-day Hungarian reality and writing this piece, am identical with the writer who is my age, living under the same roof, and responsible for such novels as *Crossing the Glass* and *The True Story of Jacob Wunschwitz*? I am inclined to believe that at the moment this writer is not me, only an acquaintance. I am pretty familiar with

his personality, his way of thinking, his works, but I couldn't really say where he is right now. Running away from present-day Hungarian reality, most likely; and I've no choice but to assume responsibility for his flight—though personally, I have no intention of going anywhere. I am here to stay.

But if we live in a world where more than one reality keeps proliferating in one and the same place, then the question becomes: Is there an objective reality independent of us, an answer to all existing perceptions, and the quirks and prejudices of the perceivers—one reality, in short, with which to counter a multitude of subjective realities? Once again, the question is not philosophical, but related to what the writer actually does. Narrative as process assumes a narrative situation, which has to be maintained, shaped, developed (put more simply: a story must get from point A to point B), and whether this process comes to fruition (narrative as outcome) depends largely on the accomplishment itself. Is the narrator enhanced if he stands above the tangle of conflicting perspectives, attitudes, impressions, beliefs, deceptions and self-deceptions—if he knows more, and what's more important, "knows it better," than the characters in the work?

The answer to this question has practical rather than theoretical implications, and it cannot be answered for all time—it has to be reformulated and rejustified each and every time. Yet let us be clear about it: in the process of writing, deciding on an answer is a fundamental, strategic decision.

If the answer is yes, then the narrator's extra knowledge will become his thorniest problem. What should he do with his extra knowledge, with the incontrovertible validity of this knowledge? How can it be made part of every phase and moment of his narrative as outcome, if he wants to avoid the impression that every single phase and moment of his narrative as process has been decided beforehand?

If the answer is no, then the integrity of the narrator (and of the narrative itself) becomes problematic; in that case the different perspectives and attitudes and beliefs do not meet head on but simply diverge, which may lead to the breakup of the narrative form.

But above all, this strategic decision dictates whether or not the storyteller will take to his heels. I myself have no intention of going anywhere, I am here to stay, yet in the clearest and most painful moments of solitude and self-awareness I must concede, with head bowed, that the writer who is my age and lives under the same roof is in one continuous flight from present-day Hungarian reality.

Why? The specific answer is of no importance. Escape, both as act and gesture, speaks for itself. Just as there were historical periods when it was impossible not to write satire, we now live in an age when it's difficult, indeed impossible, in my view, not to escape from any given reality. Treating reality as a topographical problem is itself an act of escape. Picking out a narrative world, and then building it up, filling it with people, is also a form of escape.

The question is not why the writer is running but where. A contemporary Hungarian writer can only be running away from contemporary Hungarian reality. For him or her to escape from the Persian reality of the Sassanids or from the Byzantine world of Justinian would require superhuman (and not specifically literary) gifts. Somewhere there must exist a secret history of escapes from reality.

I know only bits and pieces of this secret history. But I am fairly familiar with the escape attempts of the writer who lives under my roof. If he stops running long enough, I will relate the story of his escape attempts in appropriate detail. Now I will only allude to them, if only to answer the question posed in the title of this essay.

Escape into an alter ego.

Escape into another language.

Escape into alien art forms.

Escape into subtle correspondences. (This may help explain the sudden interest in the idea of history being just another narrative occupation, a way of shaping and reshaping a story.) But a word of caution: correspondence is not the sum total of things that correspond. It should be fairly clear that questioning the language used to discuss traditions is not the same as fetishizing tradition, or the subjects subsumed under it.

Escape from the beginning of the narrative to near its end. (Another word of caution: what we mean here is not direction but proportion. Is there still narrative space, free scope, near the end of the narrative?)

Escape-like leap from the end of the narrative back to what preceded its beginning.

Escape from narrative as process to narrative as outcome.

Escape from narrative as outcome to narrative as process.

Escape from present-day Hungarian reality to present-day Hungarian reality. And the other way around. And back again. ❦

Translated by Ivan Sanders

Gabriel Andreescu

The Transylvanian Issue and the Issue of Europe

Geocultural tectonics

Gusztáv Molnár (*THQ* 149)* embraces Huntington's thesis with a somewhat incautious enthusiasm. He devotes a number of pages to supporting it against critics such as Horia Patapievici. To be sure, Molnár has every right to rehearse with joy the features of Western civilization, which are "the classical heritage, Western Christianity (first Roman Catholicism, then Protestantism), the separation of Church and State, the Rule of Law, social pluralism and a civil society, and, last but by no means least, that individualism which became dominant by the 17th century. On the other hand, I would be less inclined than Molnár to echo the claim made by the celebrated American political scientist that this combination is unique. Not because

it is not unique—anything concrete is unique, but I do not think that Huntington has demonstrated convincingly that it is only this combination of characteristics which is compatible with those features of modernity that recognize each other and which, in their powerful interaction lay down the foundations of relations that are peaceful in their very nature.¹ Nor was Gusztáv Molnár in a position to add decisive arguments of his own. He appears to opt without any misgivings for the metaphor of geocultural "layers" that float on the asthenosphere of universal existential conditions (resources, economic activities, media, &c.)

This plate-tectonics metaphor has perhaps inspired one of the most profitable observations by the director of the Geopolitical Research Group in Budapest. With reference to Huntington's elaboration of the paradigm of civilizations, Gusztáv Molnár remarks: "Huntington engages in what is called grand geopolitics. With his elaboration of a paradigm of civilization and his firm repudiation of Western daydreams of universality, he may have succeeded in producing the most precise outline so far for an international world order

Gabriel Andreescu

is Chairman of the Centre for Human Rights (APADOR-CH) in Bucharest and is the author of numerous books and articles.

* "The Transylvanian Question" by Gusztáv Molnár, originally published in Hungarian and then in Romanian, also appeared in an English version in *THQ* No. 149, Spring 1998. It provoked a lively discussion in Romania. Two of the more significant Romanian comments are published below, together with Gusztáv Molnár's rejoinder. It goes without saying that the latter expresses Dr. Molnár's right of reply and not *THQ* editorial policy.

in the next century. He does, however, ignore details and finer shades—frontiers within particular countries, or even smaller territorial or administrative units. These are the concern of what is called micro-geopolitics". Gusztáv Molnár insists on the importance of greater refinements. The inspiration derives from the fact that the richest and most unpredictable geologic phenomema appear where tectonic plates meet. Analogical thinking gives rise to the expectation that political processes of extraordinary sophistication would appear where two regions with significant cultural differences march on each other. One would therefore miss out if one did not plough more deeply in the micro-cultural zones where two geocultural plates intersect, since it is there that interesting (rich and unpredictable) transformations of cultural features into political phenomena take place.

In my view the example provided by Gusztáv Molnár is crucial: "In his study on the results of the 1990 and 1992 parliamentary elections and the county results of the 1992 local government election, István Székely points out that while in 1990 the opposition received over 40 per cent of the vote in only the four counties where the proportion of Hungarian population is the highest, in 1992 the counties of Bihar, Arad and Temes also joined Hargita, Kovászna, Maros and Szatmár—with over 50 per cent." [...] "By 1996, however, the Transylvanian vote practically decided the national results."

Transylvania in the post-communist period

If the last affirmation in the passage quoted is true (and it is), and the 1996 political changes were a significant moment in the evolution of the Romanian state (I shall expound below why I consider them to be that), then Transylvania is

the region which tipped history in the right direction. One might ask whether speaking of a crucial moment in the evolution of the Romanian state with reference to the 1996 elections is not somewhat pretentious. That question cannot receive a full answer yet. What I have in mind is the coincidence of political changes in Romania and processes of continental integration. Essential decisions concerning the Euro-Atlantic integration and the extension of the European Union were taken and planned around 1996. It is beyond any possible doubt that the mafioso-nationalist line pursued by Romania up to 1996 excluded the country from the great civilizational structures of the European type. Romania somehow appears to be in a situation where, following an out of breath sprint, she caught the last carriage, holding on tight, without really knowing how long she'll manage to do so and whether perhaps that carriage will not be left behind in some shunting yard. If, in 1999, Romania is nominated for the second NATO wave, then, in another two or three years, she will become a member of that organization. From that moment the country will have found a course to which it will keep, albeit with the occasional wobble, and which will nevertheless safely lead to a more effective and prosperous democracy, in other words a course opposed to that taken by the bankrupt states Gusztáv Molnár cites. On that basis the 1996 political changes would indeed constitute a crossroads ("a significant moment") in the history of this country. But what will happen to Romania will depend not only on what happens in Romania but also on what happens in the outside world. Given that the regional and world context act in favour of the country, 1996 will truly have been the year of the essential crossroads, of a decision owing, as the data show, to Transylvania.

Why did Transylvania vote differently? How come that the option of the uneducated, of the old, of industrial workers, the rural masses, categories of a limited and conservative civic and political understanding dependent on the propaganda of a partisan television or a demagogic discourse,² was defeated in a decisive ratio in this region?³

One of the irrevocable losses of the period of transition was the absence of financial and human resources (in all the region formerly under Soviet influence) needed to study the leap from Communism to an Open Society. We here confront a typically uneven process. Empirical data of great subtlety have to be gathered, conceptual categories have to be refined. Sociological analyses have to be carried out, public opinion polls, politological evaluations; about all of these we know that, in the case of Romania, they do not meet the standards of comprehensive research. In this absence, the only explanations available to us are opinions and observations of the kind cited by Gusztáv Molnár: "thanks to the beneficial influence of the Austrian Empire", the Romanians of Transylvania are "more reliable than those in the Regat." (Horia Patapievici); "The Central European values of the Enlightenment, the Reformation, tolerance and competition, primarily those of the Transylvanian Romanians," he writes, "are joined in Romania by social and political forms of contemplation and passivity and belong to the values of the Orthodox eastern world." (Emil Hurezeanu); Gusztáv Molnár himself declares: "by the specific cultural identity of Transylvanians—Romanians, Hungarians and, naturally, the remaining Germans—I mean primarily a given work ethic and closely related political attitudes."

For a variety of reasons Gusztáv Molnár prefers to refer to the Transylvanian identity; what I should like to stress, however, is

the considerable influence of the Hungarian minority on the formal realities and the practices of the Romanian state. Through their political struggle for the rights of national minorities, the Hungarians have exercised an extraordinary pressure on the mentality of Romanian society. In conditions in which protochronist mythology, the belief that Romanians anticipated many Western technical innovations and ideas, visibly marked public thinking and the majority of Romanian intellectuals of the best sort is still in the thrall of the cultural adventure of the period between the wars, the Hungarian strategy of differences, rights, autonomies and self-determinations appeared as a conceptual torrent that swept over an obsolete architecture. For a society that lives under the impression that Romania was projected by Burebista, King of the Dacians at the time of Julius Caesar, and that Greater Romania is the fulfilment of history, the placing of the problem of Transylvania at the centre of discussion, in such a dramatic manner, almost placed things the right side up. The formula which was oft repeated after UDMR-RMDSz, the Hungarian party, joined the government coalition, that for the first time in the history of Romania the Hungarian minority has been politically integrated, can also be extended to the cultural plane: at the end of seven years of post-communism, for the first time, otherness has been integrated in the cultural fund of Romanian society.⁴

It would appear that, in the context of European evolution, the Hungarian minority in Romania will continue to play an important role. It must be made clear that the extension of the European Union implies a transformation into a fortress. The Schengen treaty simultaneously creates a common European space and raises a wall which divides this space from the less prosperous and less civilized world out-

side. Can Hungary afford to leave the 1.7 million Hungarians beyond the Tisza outside this Great Wall? Speculations concerning Hungarian citizenship for the Hungarians of Romania, given currency by immoderates like Ádám Katona, in my opinion, provide the best synthesis of the anxieties felt by the community represented by the UDMR-RMDSz concerning a situation in which Hungary is "in" and Romania is "out". Hungarians on this side of the Tisza cannot simultaneously be citizens of Romania and citizens of Hungary. What will happen then? Here the logic of nuances proposed by Gusztáv Molnár comes into play. Will Romania and Hungary succeed in cooperating in such a way that the first will adhere constantly and progressively to the civilization on her western frontier, as a solution for her own and the Hungarian community's crucial problems? Romanian society and her Hungarian neighbour will provide the answer to this question in the years to come.

Devolution versus integration

This takes us to Gusztáv Molnár's next conceptual step. "We know all too well that national homogenization breeds conflicts as much as ethnic separation does. Consequently, political actions should be based on territoriality—territorial or local identity—rather than ethnicity or nationality. The unlimited dominance, or sovereignty, if you like, of the state over its 'own' territory today is as repulsive and hazardous as were the efforts of the tyrannical state to retain unlimited control over bourgeois society in the 17th century. As in the 17th century, the theoretical and practical solution to the problem has been found by the British. At the time of the Glorious Revolution it was the division of constitutional competencies between the monarch and parliament; today it is devo-

lution, the rational division of power between central and local parliaments. Devolution means that the exclusive dominance of the state territory, as it is spiritualized by the 'soul of the nation', is replaced by a pluralism of territories. Owing to devolution, local territories (historical provinces or regions of later origin), which are objects of state administration, will now become subjects of the state, themselves states in some sense, just as citizens/burgers became 'sovereign' in 17th-century Western Europe." According to Gusztáv Molnár, there is not much time left for Romania. Surrounded by bankrupt states, all the way from Montenegro to Siberia, she must choose, in keeping with the British model, between devolution and federalism in order to achieve political modernization and internal integration.

I am well aware of the attractions which the idea of devolution has for Gusztáv Molnár. This, however, is no argument for looking on devolution as the sole or principal answer to his important question. "What is going to happen to the fringe territories that historically belong to Central Europe and culturally to the West that, after decades of forced centralization by right and left-wing totalitarian regimes, are emerging more and more conspicuously, in direct proportion to the assertion of democracy, as separate from the Eastern European regions of their own states?"

It is clear that Gusztáv Molnár puts his faith into Huntington's model, down to the detail of drawing the frontier of Western civilization in the middle of Romania, along the line of the Carpathians, to the east of Transylvania. It is also clear that Gusztáv Molnár does not, in principle, see Romania as integrated with the European Union, whatever her future economic performance may be (because she belongs to a different cultural space). He shows himself equally pessimistic as regards contin-

ued NATO enlargement. Then, "these fringe territories" will find a refuge in devolution! This is the essence of Molnár's line of thought, and it has important political implications. There are a number of observations I want to make both on his reasoning and conclusions.

First of all, the myth of great geocultural plates presupposes the inertia of culturally homogenous areas, as if these were subjected to a sort of macro-mechanics. But such a macro-mechanics would in fact be geopolitics dominated by culture. I feel that idea is bluntly contradicted by reality. An obvious counter example is the movement in Romania which had its origin in the 1848 Revolution.

As regards religion, the Danubian Principalities formed part of the same Orthodox space as Greece, future Bulgaria, Russia and Serbia. The last named experienced no 1848 Revolution—and neither did Slavophone Poland. In no way can one say that Moldavia or Wallachia were closer to Western Europe in other respects—cultural or social—than Greece or Bulgaria. They were conservative societies, perhaps even backward, and closed societies—perhaps even hostile. They were certainly part of the Orthodox-Balkan geocultural space, and not of the West.

The Fortyighters movement, of which the revolution was an essential aspect but not the whole, forced an extraordinary growth path onto the Romanian world. Their political demands—a republic and universal suffrage—and their social demands—the emancipation of Jews, abolition of the death penalty and of degrading forms of punishment—confronted the Danubian Principalities with the most advanced European ideals. These were no mere plans, this was a movement which succeeded, within a few decades, in modernizing Romania at an amazing speed. All this was the work of a few dozen *hommes de politique*, an in-

significant proportion of the total of Romanian society, whose human typology was far from that of Balcescu, Rosetti, the Bratianus, the Golescus and others of their kind. This is a spectacular example of a process which, thanks to a highly sophisticated interior web and in an extraordinary interaction with the international community, lifted the Romanian world from a given cultural space into another. In the absence of the deviation of the twenties and thirties which led to two successive totalitarianisms, this shift would have continued to a point of irreversibility.

To return to the present. What is the message of the political debate which has so far produced the Madrid and Luxembourg decisions? Obviously, the Madrid option was for a further extension, and at this moment in time, the least that can be said about Romania is that she is on course towards integration. For the EU the position is even firmer, a decision exists to extend it into regions of Orthodox dominance (Romania, Bulgaria) in as much as these countries satisfy the criteria for integration, criteria which are political and economic and not cultural. To be sure, obstacles in the way of these processes may arise—within Romania too, or outside the country. The satisfaction of criteria is not simply a question of time and goodwill. What then, is the role of Huntington's logic in this evolution? It has none. In fact Gusztáv Molnár embraced the ideology of cultural scepticism for motives that are pure conceptual speculation. He prefers a high-falutin' theory to an analysis of data which are at his disposal and with which he shows himself to be familiar. In other words, he prefers "ideology," turning his back to empirical argument.

Let us now deal with "devolution." I prefer as high a degree of social decentralization as possible, and devolution serves

as a good tool for decentralization. It has proved its usefulness in Italy and in Spain, and appears to be working well in Great Britain. I can say that here I am a sympathizer. The trouble is, however, that Gusztáv Molnár affirms with an exaggerated assurance: "Wedged between two zones of failed states, the post-Yugoslav and the post-Russian, Romania is running out of time. What can it do if, in its long-term interests, it wishes to proceed along the path of integration but the West ignores, certainly in the coming years, its overtures?" Molnár argues that the only option is the federalization of the country or, at the very least, devolution offered to Transylvania and other parts of the country which seek it. Is that how things really are? What, indeed, are the aspects of modernization which oblige you to choose either devolution (federalism) or a fatal recentralization?

The instruments of a modern state are, as I know them: the rights and liberties of the individual, with their extension, the rights of minorities, political pluralism in conjunction with the totality of powers (authorities) which enjoy some independence,⁵ the effectiveness of institutions (in the case of Romania, these are in need of essential reforms), local autonomy, and a market economy. That should serve as a sufficient list. Do these imply the need for devolution? Obviously not. But, according to Gusztáv Molnár, devolution assures a sound handling of ethnic relations. Here again Gusztáv Molnár prefers concepts and principles to observing genuine social trends. The process leading to a "Romanian model" of reconciliation is very close to realization. This "model" implied the acceptance by Romanian political forces of very high standards concerning special measures for the protection of national minorities. On its part, the Hungarian community has implicitly given up its own way of providing protection, that is

a system of self-determination and autonomy that does not fit the Romanian constitutional framework.⁶

How did we reach that point? In the past three or four years we have witnessed an interaction of considerable interest to all political analysts: on the one hand, considerable outside pressure insisting on transcending ethnicity as a source of conflict (in the context of the processes of extension of European structures in which Romania wishes to take part), and on the other, powerful domestic pressure to keep the present Constitution inviolate. It is a sorry state of affairs to prefer "ideals", given the fascinating developments in the Romania of recent years. What appears clear to me is that the system of special measures is as efficient in dealing with interethnic tensions as devolution, and that the former has now imposed itself.

Gusztáv Molnár may well answer that, in time, the trend towards devolution may become dominant, whatever the present process of evolution. He could even refer to the latest idea that has come from Jassy, that is Constantin Simiriad's Party of Moldavians. On my part, I am opposed to the irritation or indifference with which Romanian public opinion has responded to an initiative which is not only absolutely legitimate and of obvious importance but an innovation in Romanian mentalities. Once again, however, I propose an authentic analysis of the situation in Romania rather than day-dreams.

Any analysis of the situation in Romania will show that the British model does not apply. The speed of events in Britain—a special referendum in Scotland, a constitutional reform which produced a parliament for Scotland and an assembly for Wales depended on a British legal and political framework of great permeability as regards devolution in Scotland and Wales.

There is nothing comparable in Ro-

mania. Devolution means constitutional changes, that is a considerable majority in favour of devolution, over two thirds of Parliament over several stages.⁷ When Gusztáv Molnár speaks of the political will of Romanian society, he should consider that this means something highly concrete, two thirds in Parliament needed to amend the Constitution. Let us ask ourselves if a political current in Transylvania and another in Moldavia can be imagined which would produce those needed parliamentary two-thirds. To my mind, certainly not within a reasonable period of time. A rational policy and the present course of political integration of the Hungarian community suffice to produce the modernization of Romania. There are no insurmountable obstacles in their way, of the kind faced by the devolution option.

There is another aspect which must not be neglected. What I have in mind is the temporal competition of concurrent processes. Within a centralized state the problem of the administrative and political structures demanded by the affirmation of regional identities on occasion appears with dramatic intensity. Things are different in an integrated system like the EU. There the regions appear as actual units—geographic, linguistic, economic or whatever—not as mere administrative units.

As we approach the year 2000, this process of joining major international structures appears much speedier than a possible internal development towards devolution.

Gusztáv Molnár's gauntlet is 'opportune, it helps to introduce something of the savour of contemporary debate to the Romanian political discourse. The manner, however, in which he deals with the issue of Transylvania, calls forth basic objections. Let me try to sum up what I have been arguing. It is an error to think of identities, like the Transylvanian identity, as monads.⁸ Thinking in terms of monads, Gusztáv Molnár considers that we must stick a politico-administrative label onto a cultural identity. That is not true. If the Transylvanian identity is itself complex, it manifests itself in different ways, and has no need of a formal cover. (As I said, the major characteristic, that with most effects, is nevertheless the presence of a powerful Hungarian community.)

In the first place, however, I should like to stress the essentially ideological character of his contribution. Ideology is a way of thinking which grinds down reality in making it fit the logic of the desired model. I am curious indeed how ideological and how analytical will be the responses to Gusztáv Molnár's position. ❁

NOTES

1 ■ Huntington's major thesis is not that the cultural boundaries are mere lines of demarcation but that they are inherent sources of political tension.

2 ■ I use these terms non-judgementally, in a descriptive sense.

3 ■ It would be wrong to argue that people voted "against" and not "for." The principle is valid to a degree, but uniformly all over the country, in every region. Thus it is irrelevant in an explanation of differences between regions.

4 ■ We have to be cautious when referring to tradition in an explanation of the present. The German presence was powerful in Transylvania,

and the reception of their influence on the part of non-Germans was high. Nevertheless, I cannot see its role in these processes in which the Hungarian minority happens to be a driving force.

5 ■ The independence of the institutions which administer legislative, executive and judicial powers has become a commonplace. In reality, things are somewhat more complicated.

6 ■ The Romanian Government Emergency Regulations issued in May and June 1997 have dealt with the most persistent problem, that of the use of minority languages in the administration and in education. These norms still have to be passed by

Parliament. They have been further extended by the transformation of Recommendation 1201 into domestic law. A National Minorities Act, projected for 1998 would add the final touches, including the use of minority languages in the courts. (see Gabriel Andreescu, Renate Weber: *Evoluția concepției UDMR privind drepturile minorității maghiare* (The evolution of the UDMR-RMDSz draft concerning the rights of the Hungarian minority) Centre for Human Rights, Bucharest 1995; Renate Weber: "*România și drepturile omului: standarde interne, standarde internaționale*" (1) (Romania and the rights of man: domestic standards, international standards)

Revista Romana de Drepturile Omului Nr 13, 1996, pp 27-38)

7 ■ Since the form of government and the unitary character of the state cannot be the subject of amendment according to the present constitution, Article 148 (1) must be abolished for a start.

8 ■ Hence the objection that even I do not go all that far when drawing all possible institutional consequences from the above. But what could be "further" than to consider that Transylvania has tipped the scales of Romanian political reality and has already essentially changed the self-consciousness of Romanian society.

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Illusions and Facts About Transylvania

I propose in the first place to present a series of arguments Gusztáv Molnár lists in support of an autonomous status for Transylvania (1), I go on to discuss the reception of such theories in Romania and the way in which they can be discussed there (2), furthermore referring to aspects related to the historical identity of Transylvania (3), concluding with the objective correlation of ideas concerning the particular character of Transylvania (4).

■ 1) In a recent, highly interesting article¹ the Hungarian political scientist Gusztáv Molnár pleads in favour of the decentralization of Romania, and of the reorganization of the country on a federal basis. Transylvania would form one of the principal constituent parts, her special cultural identity, her history and traditions being evident justifications for such a status. According to Molnár, such a form of government would best accord with the needs of European integration, since a united Europe tends to resettle on the basis of a three-tier structure; a federal European superstate, which regulates the economic life

of the EU and assures peace at home and abroad, the nation-state, which continues as an intermediary form, and regional units, which will enjoy ever growing autonomy.

The importance of regions and local autonomies, of decentralization and federalization are, to be sure, nothing new in current political thinking. All the world agrees that such forms of organization are a better response to current needs when compared to the centralized nation-state, which has been marginalized by history. The special accent of Molnár's article is given by the manner in which he applies such notions to Romania.

Molnár's starting point is Samuel Huntington's hypothesis that Western values are not of a universal nature.² They appeared in a given, West-European, Roman Catholic and Protestant zone, within which a specific cultural tradition has developed. The *modernization* of the rest of the world, namely of zones in which other types of civilization have taken place, be they Orthodox, Islamic or Japanese, may be possible, but *Westernization* is not. Elements such as the political culture of the West, individualism, or a work ethic that is specifically Catholic or Protestant, cannot be truly achieved within the limits of another civilization.

Huntington charts the limits of Western civilization in this sense. His border in

Sorin Mitu

is a Romanian historian teaching at the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj (Kolozsvár).

Eastern Europe runs to the east of Finland and the Baltic states and it dissects White Russia, the Ukraine and Romania. Transylvania and the Banat are as much within Western civilization as the Voivodina and Croatia, but extra-Carpathian Romania remains outside, together with the Balkans and the rest of the Orthodox world. Thus, in Huntington's opinion, the ancient confines of the Holy Roman Empire and of the Habsburg domains, taken together with the limits of Roman Catholic and Protestant expansion in Eastern Europe, stabilize a limit for the eastern extension of the EU, furnishing a relevant criterion for the admission of new members.

Huntington's provocative theory prompted lively criticism³ in many parts of the world, on the grounds that it is speculative and provides prophecies in the outmoded manner of a Spengler or Toynbee. In Romania it was criticized not only by competent commentators—thus, most unusually, the preface of the Romanian edition contained a pertinent critique of the book⁴—it was also politically exploited. In the 1996 electoral campaign PDSR, the party led by the then President Ilescu, used Huntington's map to demonstrate the way the "external enemies" of Romania proposed to dismember the country in connivance with the Democratic Convention.

Although Gusztáv Molnár is in accord with Huntington as a whole, he stops short of the conclusion that Romania must needs be carved in two, between Western civilization and the Balkan world. On the contrary, he believes that Huntington's general map must be nuanced in given particular cases. What Molnár does is to imagine the way in which the western half of Romania, that is Transylvania, might attract the remainder of the country to a place within the EU.

Molnár insists on the existence of decisive differences between Transylvania and

the other Romania. These are due not only to local ethnic diversity but, in general, to the distinctive traditions of this province, traditions of a nature that generate the essential differences of the kind which Huntington theorizes on. Taking these differences between the Romanian provinces as his starting point, Molnár reaches the conclusion that only provincial autonomy within a federal structure can offer them a proper framework for development. It is precisely the neglect of local peculiarities that would provoke crises.

Obviously, Transylvania is the area which suffers most due to the presence of a centralized political framework out of keeping with both tradition and European standards, being drawn in an unnatural way towards the Balkan world by the suffocating and indifferent ambience of Bucharest. On the other hand, if Transylvania enjoyed governmental autonomy, she could without let or hindrance assert what is specifically Transylvanian, civilizational values of historical origin, integrating much more rapidly with West-European structures. This would have the gift to direct the other Romanian provinces to the same course. This scenario would, in addition, offer the only realistic chance to Romania, for the alternative would be the final allocation of the country, with or without Transylvania, to the circle of the damned, that of the failed states in Huntington's map.

■ 2) To be sure, Gusztáv Molnár's arguments and conclusions do not come to a stop at what I here presented in a diagrammatic way, and even perhaps extended some of the consequences of his statements into a personal vision. No doubt, a proper view of Molnár's position demands a reading of his article. On the other hand, the very idea of articulating an opposed position appears an extravagance, not, to be sure, in relation to what Molnár has to say, but as a function of my own. (I must

admit that, in view of my own reservations and doubts, I would not have undertaken this task, if Gabriel Andreescu had not asked me, as a historian, to do so.)

Romanian public opinion in the broadest sense of the term react to terms like "federalism" or "autonomy", not to mention the less familiar "devolution"⁵ with a knee-jerk rejection. The use of these words compromises whatever is intended. The collective emotions they stir up allow them to be used as instruments of diversion and demagogy. Some time ago Virgil Nemoianu remarked with heavy irony, that as the citizen of a respected and prosperous federal state (the U.S.) he feels offended when that form of government is looked on as something shameful in Romania.⁶

In such conditions autonomy, and even less so federalism, is favourably discussed only in Hungarian minority publications and by certain theoreticians⁷ who do not even address the political elite, let alone the general public. Besides, the Constitution of Romania stresses not only the national but also the unitary character of the country, thus excluding any federal hypothesis. The circumstance that Romanians have for decades now been accustomed to take pride in the unitary nature of their state, not being able to conceive of another form of organization for their country, is thus blessed by the law and the constitution.

Given that "federalism" or the "autonomy of Transylvania" are here discussed by a Hungarian who, what is more, claims that he is mindful of what is good for Romania or the country's European integration, discussing such notions appears to most to be futile and ridiculous, if not downright suspect. A great many Romanians, regardless of whether, in 1996, they voted for nationalist parties or for those of the left, or for those of the centre or centre-right, "know" full well that "the

Hungarians want Transylvania" in the depths of their sinful hearts, and that the tale of its federalization is sewn with a scandalously visible thread. For extreme nationalists it perhaps serves as an occasion for the "unmasking" of an otherwise well-known danger, a violent negation whose function is to permanently alert the vigilance of the nation and to celebrate daily the festivities of confrontation. For moderate nationalists, the majority today, it is a matter that barely deserves attention, a matter that is regrettable, since it brings grist to the mill of the extremists.

This diagram of attitudes totally blocks communication, since a stereotype serves as the starting point. Such a range of expectations offers no scope to dialogue or rational criticism.

As a consequence, the articulation of a position on this question, in terms of a reasonable perspective, suffers much owing to a context unfavourable to its reception, especially if the purpose of the action is an effective public message and not a mere display of a personal conviction.

On the one hand, bearing in mind my own commonplace prejudices, that is that the Western integration of Romania is both possible and desirable, and that decentralization and autonomy are essential aspects of this process, I could subscribe to Gusztáv Molnár's view without further comment. If such decentralization also presupposed the autonomy of Transylvania much like Sicily's or Catalonia's, or even Scotland's or Bavaria's, as far as I am concerned, there is no problem. Well and good!

On the other hand, I am not all that sure that this is possible. A whole series of objections could be raised and reservations could be mentioned in relation to Molnár's specific arguments, not to mention Huntington's theses, which would have to be discussed by competent people

in the context of the theory of international relations. What intrudes at this point is the difficulty I mentioned earlier, that of relevant public action. Does it make sense to add my own criticism of Gusztáv Molnár even if it pretends to be rational since, thanks be to God, there are more than enough others to do the job.

To be sure, in the opposite case, that of acceptance of his point of view, there is the danger of this sticking in the throat of the nationalists. There is no pleasure in seeing yourself sworn at in the papers, but it is nevertheless a risk worth taking. Although to be in disagreement with what Eugene Ionesco has called the rhinoceroses of various kinds is perhaps not a title to glory or an end in itself, it is at least both an index of your own normality and a good example in the eye of public opinion. On the other hand, opposing the idea of the autonomy of Transylvania, shoulder to shoulder with the vigilant defenders of national unity, could place you in a truly embarrassing position, and may be damaging to the public spirit at home, which is anyway oversaturated with such polemic messages.

■ 3) In what follows I shall tackle Gusztáv Molnár's central theme, that of the specific historic identity of Transylvania, which, in his way of seeing things, underlies the possibility and necessity of autonomy or even of devolution.

A highly interesting aspect is that Gusztáv Molnár's view that Transylvania differs from the rest of Romania in her traditions and in civilizational factors such as the work ethic of her inhabitants, is largely shared by Romanians, be they sages or just ordinary folk. The difference is that Romanians, unlike Molnár, do not draw any consequences relating to politics or administration from this observation.

In support of his ideas concerning what is peculiar to Transylvania, Molnár refers to a number of Romanian authors who

generally belong to the liberal part of the Romanian political spectrum, from Horia Patapievici, Emil Hurezeanu and Alexandru Cistelean to Gabriel Andreescu. What is paradoxical about the situation is that he could have garnered the same sort of opinions from the works of the most fiery nationalists, be they Transylvanian or natives of the Old Kingdom. Their respect for the seriousness and orderliness of the Transylvanian, as opposed to the Balkan frivolity of Bucharest, is in no way less than that of the authors listed above. The wide currency of such opinions, in such diverse places, suggests that their source is not a critical analysis of reality but either a well-intentioned statement of something obvious or else a stereotype or conventional wisdom.

Let us consider then the nature of Transylvania⁸ and in what measure she differs in her spirit and civilization from the rest of Romania. This will help us to establish whether these differences are of a nature that could provide a basis for political autonomy.

It is beyond any possible doubt that, as regards history or chronology, "Transylvania" antedates "Romania". Transylvania has unambiguously been a politico-administrative reality since the 16th century at the very least. Romania as an idea appears in the thinking of Romantics, Romanian and foreign, in the early nineteenth, and as a state Romania was constituted after 1859. All this should be obvious to any historian, yet it has not been perceived as such in the way Romanians think about history. Romanian historiography, in projecting present wishes or realities back into the past, has constructed an imaginary Romania which descends deep into the well of time, whose traces are met with at every step, from the "unified state" of Burebista, which imposes itself along the ideal borders of 1918, to the unification

carried out by Prince Michael the Brave. But there is more to it than that, the whole of Romanian history is imbued in this sense, it is profoundly teleologic, progressing as if according to law towards the union of all the Romanian territories as fulfilled at Alba Julia (Gyulafehérvár). All prior efforts of Romanians served that purpose, inscribed in the book of fate of all generations, everything that they achieved in their culture was subordinated to this ideal.⁹

In the light of such an evolution, in virtue of the fact that Romania really always existed as a project, inscribed from the beginnings of time in the geography of the territories which she occupies today, the priority of Transylvania is, on the level of Romanian historical thinking, simply pulverized. The actual formula which Romanian historians, starting with Iorga, have used to deal with this problem is that of "Romanian lands". That can be stuck onto any reality, be it political, ethnographic, cultural or even geographical, in the given space, right from the moment of ethnogenesis. Transylvania herself is considered *par exelsis* a "Romanian land," from right back in the Dark Ages, when there were no written sources, from the time of princes with curious names like Gelu,¹⁰ Glad or Menumorut, all the more so later, as we approach 1918, at a time when she was administratively part of the Kingdom of Hungary, or an autonomous state under Calvinist princes, pre-eminently Hungarian in law and institutions, institutions from which Romanians were almost completely excluded.

The annulment, on the level of symbolic Romanian geography, of the real priority of Transylvania is only one of many eloquent examples of the way in which "Transylvania" is related to "Romania" in Romanian culture. Transylvania is always presented as an integral component part of Romania, not just from the point of view

of the present politico-administrative reality but also from those of historical belonging and the essence of civilization. Considering Transylvania as an autonomous element apart, within the framework of Romanian civilization, is hindered by the fact that Romanians define her not as any old place, but as the kernel of what is specifically Romanian, as the essence and heart of what it means to be Romanian.

This special quality is manifest in a variety of concrete historical hypostases. Transylvania is the fatherland of King Decebal and at the same time the cradle of Romanian Latinity, thus the privileged space of ethnogenesis and of the sources. Later, this becomes the zone where Latinity is rediscovered by the Transylvanian School, thereby constructing the modern model of Romanian identity which then crosses the Carpathians, still in the care of Transylvanians. Later Transylvania becomes the ideal space of the national struggle, presenting to all Romanians a model of resistance confronting denationalization and of the emancipation movement. In general, Transylvania has the role of a symbolic cistern which continuously nourishes, like a heart, replenishing the energies of the Romanian nation, as she did through Prince Dragosh and the Black Prince, through Gheorge Lazar, the educator, or Badea Cârțan, thanks to the ethnic infusion which—according to Romanian historians—Transylvanians have always provided for the somewhat feeble regions on the other side of the Carpathians.

Naturally we are able to assert today that all these manifestations of the myth of unity reflect, or rather construe, historical reality only in an extremely deformed way. But this does not alter the fact that public opinion views tradition through such simplifying spectacles, and that this is the historical reality for Romanians, despite the fact that it is obsolete. There are, no

doubt, many Romanian historians today who, imbued by a critical spirit, offer alternatives to the embarrassingly vulgar traditional historiography. Quantitatively the latter is still dominant, and it is likely that those who profess the traditional version will be able to change their ways. For that reason a dialogue with them does not make much sense. It is only oblivion which will reduce them to silence, turning them into objects for analysis in the museums of the future.

It follows that the manner in which the history of Transylvania has so far been construed in Romanian culture, in an unbreakable correlation with the Romanian past, is categorically unfavourable to an awareness of the local character of the province, at least on the part of Romanians. As we shall see, much the same is true for Hungarians.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle in the way of a distinctly Transylvanian awareness of history which could serve as a foundation for a possible autonomy, is that there is no such thing as a single "Transylvania". There are many Transylvanias. Though the same geographic space may be under discussion, what Romanians mean by *Transilvania* is not what Hungarians mean by *Erdély*; what Saxons meant by *Siebenbürgen* before they seized the day and left the place, was something different again. This is a radical difference between Transylvania and Scotland, Bavaria or Catalonia. There local autonomy is based on a shared mode of understanding and defining the region which does not depend on ethnic origin.

In Transylvania it was Romanians and Hungarians in particular who developed separate visions concerning the place which they both inhabited. Notions of separate development, of segregation and domination, but especially the prospects of conflict and the struggle for the division and possession of this place, were the favoured modes through which each com-

munity construed its very own Transylvania. The idea of joint use of Transylvania by Romanians and Hungarians has had to give way—almost always so far—to processes tending to fragmentary possession, which entail relations of dominance between one group and the other.¹¹

It must be stressed, however, that this ethnocentric, differentiated definition of Transylvania was not always present, for it is the specific product of the nationalism of the modern age. In the Middle Ages, and especially at the time of the Principality (the 16th and 17th centuries), Transylvanian elites professed an understanding of the country which included diversity as a component, that is a mixed, non-homogeneous, character. The basis of common institutions was the 1437 agreement between the three "nations" (that is the three estates), which was complemented, in 1568, by that between the four received religions. Truth to tell, Romanians, like the serfs, were excluded because of their overly pronounced social and religious otherness, but their later mention as "tolerated" completes the image of a Transylvania conceived as a sum of diverse elements.

It is difficult to estimate to what degree this situation can be considered as underpinning habits of coexistence and tolerance, given the presence of different ethnocultural and religious communities. Romanian historiography insists on the discrimination which Romanians suffered, which compromised the very idea of tolerance. Since these historians looked on the Romanians as the most numerous inhabitants, of the longest standing in the province, that is the principal and essential element in Transylvania, their exclusion thus appeared as a conspiracy by a few privileged people, which was directed against the majority of the population. Hungarian historiography prefers to see the glass as half full, setting religious toleration in

16th-century Transylvania against the wars of religion which, at the time, ravished other parts of Europe.

Oversimplification and actualization of this sort, however, ignores precisely what was specific for the period, which is in no way related to the standards and sensibilities of our time. The diversity and particularism which were true of Transylvania were in fact characteristic of medieval society.

The way the historical notion of the diversity of Transylvania was perceived at the threshold of the modern age, towards the end of the eighteenth and at the beginning of the nineteenth century, appears far more interesting to me. Taking a 1746 edition of the chronicle of Anonymus as their starting point, Romanians in the first place, but also a number of Hungarian historians, looked on the legendary pact concluded once upon a time between Tuhutum's conquering Hungarians and the indigenous Romanians, left leaderless after the death of Gelu, as the foundation of the Transylvanian political community.

Such an original contract in its character lays a foundation which belongs to neither the Hungarians nor the Romanians (as it will belong to one or the other, in all later manifestations), but par excellence to both, who can only jointly possess the country, as the organic parts of a single political structure. The first Romanian political programme, anticipated by Bishop Inochentie Micu in 1743, formulated as the *Supplex Libellus Valachorum* in 1791, and implemented up to 1848, had as its objective the recognition of the Romanians in Transylvania as a collective entity enjoying equal rights with the other nations and denominations in Transylvania. This, the Romanians at the time thought, was only possible within the framework of a shared home, Transylvania.

It is true that, in the eyes of Transylvanian Romanians, other founding events,

such as Trajan's conquest of Dacia, lay the foundations of the cultural and national community of Romanians as a people, wherever they lived. At a political level, however, they could not imagine any organizing formula other than that of an autonomous Transylvania within the framework of the Habsburg empire, based on the coexistence of all its nations.

Starting with the 1848 Revolution, this vision of a politically jointly possessed and used Transylvania, symbolized by the treaty between Gelu and Tuhutum, gave way to other images for the political space of Transylvania. The twelfth-century chronicle of Anonymus has continued to this day to serve Romanians as the mythological reference within the scenario of their relations to Hungarians, but their reading of it is now different. It is now evidence for the historical conflict between Romanians and Hungarians and for the dramatic problems generated by coexistence.

What Romanians have stressed since then is the breach of the original treaty manifest in the exclusion of Romanians from the constitutional arrangements of medieval Transylvania. The fact that Hungarians did not respect the treaty entails the right of Romanians to renegotiate their positions in Transylvania. Up to the middle of the 19th century, they desired no more than to regain their equality alongside the others. After this, the idea developed, step by step, that the Romanians had the right to dominate Transylvania, a situation which was bound to feed an eternal state of conflict with the Hungarians. What nationalism as a modern ideology has stressed is the right to self-determination, and not the need for coexistence with a foreign nation on the same territory, and, particularly, within the same state. The formula is a state for each nation. Such a notion compromised from the outset the Transylvanian idea, which implies a contract of

political coexistence on the same territory and within the same state.

In the course of the 19th century the idea of an autonomous Transylvania, jointly possessed by Hungarians, Saxons and Romanians, just about vanished. This change in the direction of development was initiated by the Hungarians, due to their ideological and cultural advances when compared with Romanians. In the 17th century, the autonomous principality of Transylvania was a symbol of persistent Hungarian statehood, in the eighteenth, Transylvanian particularism was a way in which the Hungarian nobility resisted Habsburg centralization, but with the birth of romantic nationalism the idea of the union of Transylvania and the Kingdom of Hungary conquered all Hungarian hearts. In 1865, the last Transylvanian Diet, meeting at Kolozsvár (Cluj/Klausenburg), abrogated the autonomy of the province and decided for union with Hungary.

The Romanians, on their part, somewhat more slowly, ran the same course towards an annulment of the particularism of the province. It is true that for some considerable time they continued to support the autonomy of Transylvania, officially up to 1905, since this was the only imaginable formula in that context, and their attachment towards the Habsburg Empire as such was, in fact, wiped out only by the First World War. But already in 1848, they specially insisted on a separatist form of organization, on a communal ethnic basis, becoming increasingly interested in their national rather than in Transylvanian autonomy.

Hungarians and Romanians thus similarly acted in favour of a homogenization of Transylvania, be it in relation to Hungary, after 1867, or to Romania, after 1918. Their supreme desire was to unify all members of the national community in a single unit, initially of a cultural and sym-

bolic nature, ultimately of a political character. What should be stressed is that both Hungarians and Romanians imagined a centralized, unified, national state not as a possible option, that could be discussed in terms of function and efficiency, but as a guarantee of survival in the midst of "alien tribes", surrounded by the terrors of real or imagined dangers. The autonomy of Transylvania was increasingly considered an unfortunate palliative, in the absence of something better, at a time when the balance of powers did not permit the direct expression of more impertinent longings. The Transylvanianism of part of the Hungarian elite between the wars had such a compensatory function, as did the autonomism of the Romanians in the Austro-Hungarian period.

Historians today, expected to express a judgment in relation to such developments, are faced with the usual problems met with when comparing different sets of values. From a present point of view we can say, if we wish, that the desire to annihilate the political autonomy of Transylvania was a regrettable error. Romanians may well complain that their identity was impoverished by the wiping out of real differences between the provinces,¹² Hungarians may complain that severe oppression by Hungarian governments in the Austro-Hungarian period provoked a reaction on the part of the national minorities, thus perpetuating national conflicts.¹³

The question is, however, whether, in the context of the given period, other courses would have been possible. The answer must needs be negative. Things have happened as they have, one cannot start afresh and experiment with something better. To be sure, confining oneself to stating what is the case is not an excuse or justification for what ought to be condemned, to say that this is how it happened is no excuse for the way it hap-

pened; nor is it the historian's business to accuse, except in very general terms. What matters is that we explain the past, if that is what we are interested in, and that we understand that the sense that we make of it today is very different to the sense it had in its own time, so different that the past as properly understood cannot form the basis of any current conduct.

It must be said therefore that whatever more or less invented historical traditions of Transylvanian particularism may claim, the Romanian and Hungarian inhabitants have, since the beginning of the modern period, preferred a separate to a common political existence, and have preferred to be closer to Bucharest or to Budapest than to each other or to any illusory Transylvanian capital cities. If we presume today that this sort of political national exclusivity damages the Transylvanian political community, we nevertheless have to understand that it has its roots in a certain past. If what we want is a different future, that can only be based on transcending and putting aside this particular past. To do so will be extremely difficult, albeit it is worth hoping that it will not prove impossible.

■ 4) All the same, even if we agree that Transylvanian Romanians and Hungarians in the modern period have subjected their regional to their national identity, that they think of what unites them with their fellow Romanians or Hungarians in other provinces as more important than what links them to each other, we may still ask ourselves whether such subjective collective perceptions do not flagrantly ignore reality. Regardless of what Transylvanians thought, were there not in fact real civilizational structures, values, attitudes, mentalities, capable of conferring a distinct character to this province? The Habsburg heritage—the Empire's well-ordered bureaucracy, or the spirit of Central Europe—has it not imprinted a character on this re-

gion which categorically distinguishes it from the other Romanian provinces?

The answer, in my opinion, is that almost nothing concrete has survived of such a heritage, with the exception of a sea of memories, regrets and nostalgia with nothing to back them. They are like the ancient townscapes made colourful today by a population which is totally indifferent and alien to the medium in which it moves. This grandiose work of destruction was not accomplished by either 19th-century nationalism, nor by the "Romanization" and "Old Kingdom carpetbaggery" of the Romanian authorities between the two wars. It was the efficient and dramatic achievement of the Communist regime.

No doubt much has survived, fragments and relics in the midst of the general misery, monuments, libraries and archives, old people who preserve the memory, distorted by nostalgia, of another powerfully idealized world. Generally, the Transylvanian character is kept up at the level of a collective memory entertained by survivors and by new generations who seek in it a symbolic compensation for the slings and arrows of present reality. To be sure, even this memory would be something in the remaking of attitudes and social behaviour if it had the tiniest backing in reality, if it were not a simple means of evasion, a compensatory myth designed to justify the turning of one's back on reality.

In spite of regional stereotypes, Transylvania today perfectly resembles the rest of Romania. Whoever still speaks of the civic spirit, the insistence on a job well done, the neatness and cleanliness of Transylvanians, obviously does not live in a high-rise housing estate in a Transylvanian town, he has never called on the services of a Transylvanian decorator or plumber, he has never emptied his rubbish bin, picking his way between ever present heaps of refuse and the over-

spill of rubbish lorries, all amid a general inertia.

One could say that these are inessential superficialities. But what remains beside them? Do Transylvanian factories operate better than those in other parts of the country, are there more foreign investors, are public services, schools or health services better than what is on offer in Jassy or Bucharest? Much has been made of the way Transylvanians voted in 1992 and 1996, the fact that President Constantinescu obtained more votes in Transylvania than in other parts of the country. Does this reflect a political particularism? But aren't electoral fluctuations also a superficial matter? All the more so since the anti Iliescu-party attitudes in 1996, which motivated those who changed the balance of power, were very likely even stronger in Transylvania not because more favoured reform but because a section of Transylvanian nationalists no longer wished to share Iliescu's fortunes.

No doubt the de-mythologizing of Transylvania—or, rather, a critical discussion of Transylvania and of the image of Transylvania in Romanian public thinking—is an ungrateful and unpopular task. In the midst of so many negative images of Romanian identity, Transylvanian “seriousness” and “thoroughness” are uplifting elements, designed to put heart into a man. In the last resort, such a commonplace is something likeable, and could even have an active function, perhaps motivating towards the actual assumption of attitudes and behaviours of that kind. From the point of view of Transylvanian particularism, it is indeed the single element on which the sharing of a self-image and of a specific identity or group solidarity could be based.

But what is of at least equal importance is that such an image should not be in dramatic disharmony with reality, that it should

not camouflage sins of omission, or become a source of self-illusion and of an erosion of the critical spirit. Precisely because it is a widely held belief, it can be manipulated with ease, offering an illusion and a desire as a legitimating guiding post in the place of a systematic search for the truth.

Thus, in conclusion, one must insist that, although Transylvanian particularism is a regional stereotype of wide currency amongst Romanians and Hungarians, Transylvanians and natives of the Old Kingdom, nationalists and liberals, what is problematic is that this image has scant backing in either economic or social reality or in the concrete historical heritage. It is based merely on the collective recall of a tradition which was first eroded by the paradigm of an integral national state and then almost totally destroyed by the Communist regime.

Finally, returning to the issue with which we started, that of granting an autonomous status designed to provide a more suitable framework of development both for Transylvania and the rest of Romania, what I have argued so far is that, in the absence of the necessary bases, such a process is not feasible today. Decentralization and local autonomy are no doubt necessary conditions in a democratic state adapted to what the age demands. But what are the regional units which can be considered in the case of Romania, in conditions where differences between provinces have been systematically wiped out, whether by an integrated nationalist model, or by socialist socio-economic planning?

Federalization needs a powerful civil society, with clearly outlined communal interests, and a tradition and skill in the practical defence of these interests. But it is precisely this civil society which is lacking in Romania today, be it that it was too weak from the outset to resist pressure by

the state, or that this pressure was too strong in the course of time. If decentralization is necessary for the proper functioning of civil society, decentralization cannot occur in the absence of a civil society, and we are caught in a highly disturbing vicious circle.

There is nothing to be federalized in Romania today. The only available constitutive elements are a centralized state which administers almost everything inefficiently, and a levelled society lacking the skills of cohabitation in a political community. Turning these elements into the fluid forms of illusionary self-government or of a number of historical traditions whose combination may generate just about anything, would be useless alchemy. At the present moment, existing administrative units, that is the counties, are the only possible basic

units that can be considered in the process of decentralization. If these would at least cease to be simple transmission belts of the central administration, and local collectors of state taxes, if the greater part of the income collected stayed with the county, and local councils used these as they pleased to finance the police, schools and hospitals, it is possible that Transylvanians or Moldavians would in time learn what it means to live in a political community.

Until the centralized state withdraws from the economy through privatizing, from the life of local communities by decentralizing and from the minds of men through emancipating them from the tutelage of a state-centred collectivism, Romania will have no Transylvania that can be federalized, but will continue in her condition of general, integral and national misery. ♣

NOTES

1 ■ Molnár Gusztáv: "Problema Transylvana". *Altera*, 1998/8. English version: *The HQ*, No. 149. 1998, pp. 49-62

2 ■ Samuel P. Huntington: *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York, 1996.

3 ■ Horia-Roman Pataievici: *Politice*. Bucharest, 1996, pp. 235-236.

4 ■ Iulia Motoc: Preface to the Romanian edition of Huntington op. cit. Bucharest, 1998.

5 ■ Devolution = the transfer of some of the constitutional functions of a state to a regionally elected parliament.

6 ■ Virgil Nemoianu: "Diagnostic românesc: prezent, trecut, viitor." (Romanian Diagnosis: Present, Past, Future) In: Iordan Chimet (ed): *Momentul adevărului*. (The Moment of Truth.) Cluj/Kolozsvár 1996, pp. 144-145.

7 ■ See the outstanding Daniel Barbu: *Șapte teme de politică românească*. (Seven Themes in Romanian Politics) Bucharest, 1997, pp. 124-127.

8 ■ The expression "What is Transylvania" refers to the title of a historical pamphlet by Stefan Pascu, Ceausescu's "court" historian, published in 1984, in several languages (The Ed.).

9 ■ For a historiographic analysis of the myth of unity see Lucian Boia *Istoria și mit în conștiința*

românească (History and Myth in the Romanian mind, pp. 145-176.

10 ■ Gelu has become quite a popular Christian name thanks to a poem by Coșbuc. It no longer bears the exotic overtones of the other two names.

11 ■ See Enikő Magyari-Vincze: *Antropologia politicii identitare naționaliste* (The Anthropology of Nationalist Identity Policy) (Cluj, EFES, 1997) for a persuasive presentation of Transylvania as a dual space, defined in different ways by Romanians and Hungarians, to which I am indebted for some of the above ideas.

12 ■ Sorin Antohi: *Exercițiul distanței. Discursuri, societăți, metode* (The Exercise of Distance. Discourses, Societies, Methods) Bucharest, 1997. pp. 304-305.

13 ■ Indeed, sometimes one wonders whether the identification and stressing of such errors, going back to 1848, on the part of Hungarian historians, is not an expression of an unconscious regret. In the absence of such "errors," given greater understanding of the just grievances of the national minorities, such historians implicitly argue, the national minorities might not have helped to break up Hungary. See e.g., Makkai, László: *Magyar-román közös múlt* (A Common Hungaro-Romanian Past) 2nd ed. Budapest, Héttorony Könyvkiadó, pp. 218-220).

Gusztáv Molnár

Transylvania—A Rejoinder

In an article written in August 1997¹ I resorted to arguments taken from geopolitics, political philosophy and from history to shore up an acceptable scenario for Romania. The otherness of Transylvania, the fact that, compared to other parts of the country, it is clearly more Western, is a quality that I prize and which I think can and should be used to further Romania's integration in Europe—in spite of her being left out of the first round of NATO and EU extension—and even if this process is likely to be lengthier than originally expected. Political and work ethics, characteristics historically rooted in *Mittleuropa*, place Transylvania nearer to the West and these could be buttressed by the federalization of Romania, or by, at least, devolution of the Scots type. In the absence of something of that sort, Transylvania could not become that motor which, dragging the whole of Romania with it, a hostage to fortune, would ensure that the country, continuing a modernization commenced a

hundred and fifty years ago, would reach a point of no return.

What I stressed was that this would serve Romania's long-term "outside" integrational interests, at the same time furthering inner integration, making it irreversible. In meeting the ever stronger regional demands of the more developed Banat and Transylvania, the political elite of the Old Kingdom (pre-1918 Romania), which is interested in the ultimate success of political, economic and cultural modernization, would also be able to bring about the political and psychological integration of the Hungarians of Transylvania, the lack of which has been a running sore these eighty years. What Romania could not achieve as an "integrated and indivisible national state", and, unlikely to do in the future either, would need no exceptional effort if Romania were radically decentralized. As soon as nation or ethnicity, which symbolize exclusivity, are replaced by a reinterpreted territoriality, that is as soon as the pluralism of spaces became the framework of political interests made manifest in parties and ideologies, the "Hungarian question" would take itself off the agenda.

In my article I naturally also reckoned with the contingency that the new anti-communist President, supported by close to 70 per cent of the votes cast in Tran-

Gusztáv Molnár,
a philosopher, heads the Geopolitical
Research Group of the Teleki László
Foundation—Institute for Central European
Studies, Budapest.

sylvania, and the right-of-centre coalition,² which truly made Western integration their strategic aim, would not make this basic constitutional change part of their policy, let alone carry it out. In that case, however, I argued as the final conclusion of my 1997 article, the left-wing nationalist faithful advocates of recentralization will seize the political initiative once again. Stressing the need for a new salvation of a state and nation that was "swept into jeopardy," they will "integrate" the country not with the West but in the zone of "failed states," stretching from Montenegro to Eastern Siberia, caring nought that such a fatal decision would put at risk the inner coherence of the state of Romania.

Much interest was shown in my basic idea in Romania and the reaction was surprisingly tolerant. Not that they considered the idea practical—or, with one or two exceptions—even necessary.³ Hungarian Transylvanians naturally sympathized with my geopolitical and historical arguments but by and large they kept to generalities.⁴ It would appear that they do not really wish to draw the theoretical, ideological or political conclusions which follow from my suggestions. The source of the clearly palpable embarrassment may well be, as Miklós Bakk tellingly puts it: that "such a long-term strategy would transgress the [political] self-image of the RMDSz (the Hungarian party in Romania). This is so because the success of the regional idea would imply the transformation of the Romanian party system, and this would directly affect the RMDSz."⁵

The range of options open to Romania has considerably narrowed in the two years that have passed since the right-of-centre government and President Constantinescu, a member of the dominant party of the government came to power in November 1996. In the first

place, as regards Euro-Atlantic integration, it became clear that—in spite of the stress on an open doors policy—no new members will be invited at the NATO jubilee summit to be held on April 4th 1999. Thus even that kudos is lost which Romania enjoyed thanks to the country's name being specially mentioned at the June 1997 NATO Conference. Furthermore, the EU Brussels committee's report, published in October 1998, permits the conclusion that the strategy of selective extension will be even more unambiguously applied in the future. It is presumed that the circle of countries with which negotiations have already started (Slovenia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland and Estonia) will be perhaps extended to Slovakia and Lithuania (which does not, however, imply that those countries will become full EU members at the same time). Meanwhile, a kind of queue is forming amongst the countries on the waiting list. Thus the committee report mentioned emphasizes Bulgaria's recent economic and financial achievements, but also the grinding to a halt of reforms in Romania and an unambiguous worsening of the economic situation there.

The conclusion that can be drawn from the above is that, in the next ten years, which promise to be a key decade for the Western integration of Central and East European countries, the gap between Romania and a Europe undergoing integration—and those of its neighbours (primarily Hungary) which are taking part in this process—will not narrow but grow, with all the expected consequences. What this means can already be discerned: as the prospects of integration become faint, the options open to politics at home are alarmingly narrowed.

The coalition based on the Democratic Convention, the Democratic Party and the RMDSz, a coalition which in its policy statements has shown itself reform and

market friendly and, at the very least, not hostile to decentralization and minority rights, appears to have exhausted its resources. On the other hand, the former governing party, led by Ion Iliescu, is labouring on the organization of a National Left that will make a comeback after defeat. In a recentralization impetus, it wishes to recover all that it "lost" owing to the "anti-nation and anti-state irresponsibility" of the Right of Centre coalition. It suffices to glance at things said by a number of *ci-de-vants* about the transformation of Transylvania into "a zone of joint Romano-Hungarian sovereignty and governance" (a former undersecretary in the Ministry of Defence); the need to re-introduce "protectionist measures" (a former Minister of Finance); "the challenge of institutional devolution and the drafting of other concepts which will lead to the federalization of national states and their later disappearance" (a former Chairman of the House of Deputies); the "huge threat" of the radicalization of Transylvanian Romanians, which may lead to an "ideal of Transylvania that stands above the imperative of an integrated Romania" (a former Chairman of the Senate); "the crime of treason which will soon be followed by a just judgement" (a former Governor of State Television); not to mention all those "threats" which may well lead to the carving up of the state as the "communiqué" of the Central Bureau of the PDSR (Iliescu's party) lists in such minute detail. After all that, it is not difficult to imagine what will happen if the old post-communist group came to power again in Bucharest, and in alliance with the extremist, nationalist, anti-West and anti-minority PRM (the Party of Greater Romania).

All this is of great importance, both from the point of view of the general situation of Romania and from that of the Hungarian minority which lives there.

Likely political developments call for answers to two basic questions.

1. Why didn't a coalition, considered to be the heirs and successors of a modernization process that follows the Western pattern, a coalition for that very reason supported by the majority of the electorate, fulfil the hopes placed in it?

2. Will there be a Transylvanian question in Romania after the predictable failure of the one hundred and fifty-year-long process of modernization, and if so, what will be the political and cultural consequences?

My answer to these two questions will, at the same time, be my response to Gabriel Andreescu and Sorin Mitu's critical observations. As Heraclitus says, we cannot twice step into the same river. Debates that are part of a living political process only make sense if, transcending each other's arguments, we pay heed to modifications to the basic questions which unavoidably occur with the passage of time.

The essence of Gabriel Andreescu's train of thought can be summed up in two closely interrelated propositions. According to him, a process of modernization, started in 1848 and carried through in interaction with the international community, transposed the Romanian world from the Orthodox, Balkanic space into a Western one with amazing speed. The second proposition argues that since the nationalist-maffioso political line effective until 1996 in practice excluded Romania from the major structures of European civilization, the coming to power of a Right-of-Centre coalition in the European tradition must be considered an essential moment or crossroads in the evolution of the Romanian state. Naturally, this can only happen if, as after 1848, the regional and world constellation is favourable, in other words if domestic changes are confirmed by the inclusion of Romania in the second

round of NATO extension in 1999, and if the EU does not exclude predominantly Orthodox countries like Romania or Bulgaria from the extension.⁶

The question is why a new decisive moment was needed in 1996 if the Romanian world had already been transposed from the Orthodox Balkanic space in the decades that followed 1848. Why, given these extraordinary modernization efforts, was the ingrafting of institutions and customs characteristic of European civilization aborted, why did Westernization not prove irreversible? What is at issue here is not only between-the-wars break-downs, or the succession of the two totalitarisms but primarily the reasons why the collapse of Communism was followed by the nationalist-maffioso line mentioned by Andreescu, which widened the gap to the West instead of narrowing it.

These are problems of a more or less theoretical nature; what we have to confront now, two years after the new coalition came to power, is a most serious political fact: the political élite, which undertook to employ a systematic policy of reforms to restore the historical continuity, including the country's own Western traditions and to create the economic and legal conditions for joining Western structures, proved unsuccessful.

The best Romanian intellectuals were well aware, as Adrian Marino had already argued in 1994, that it was part of the essence of the nomenklatura, a ruling class educated in Moscow, or in the spirit of Moscow, that it could not be honestly and creditably pro-Europe. Its social origins, ideological and cultural upbringing, its interests and endeavours all set it a long distance from genuinely European standards. At the same time, according to Marino, the new geopolitical realities and the new international balance of power after the collapse of the Soviet Union force

the nomenklatura to put on a show of being European, to accept on the surface all, or as many as possible, of the basic European principles, institutions and forms. In Marino's view, the duplicity is obvious, nor can one deny that such a picturesque European Potemkin village is evidence of a certain facility and arranging skill.⁷ What the past two years have shown is that the coalition of a National Peasant Party, which claims to be Christian and democratic, the National Liberal Party and the Democratic Party have not changed the situation. (The RMDSz, which represents the Hungarian minority, was only asked to join to improve the coalition's image.) It cannot be denied that some of the new government's measures were truly important and established a break with earlier conditioned reflexes but, characteristically, they were regularly forced to make use of the not exactly democratic instrument of emergency government regulations. The ideal of an integrated, authoritarian, oppressive, closed and severely centralized national state,⁸ rooted in the 19th century, manifest in a consolidated form after 1918, and taken to its ultimate consequences under Communism, stood in the way of every reform that wished to weaken the economic and administrative powers of the state. And, unfortunately, not only under the post-communist administration, when Adrian Marino expressed the views I have mentioned; the questioning of this ideal has since maintained its status as a taboo.

The situation is dramatic. PDSR, the former governing party, and the former members of the nomenklatura who have found a home in it, only pretend to being European, something made obvious by their collaboration with extremists, parties that are openly anti-Western, who advocate fascist methods in dealings with the Hungarian, Gypsy and Jewish minorities.

The anti-communist Democratic Convention, however, is distinguished by its impotence. Political leaders, veterans of the prisons of the fifties, were unable to rid themselves of political élites who had been moulded by the Ceaușescu period, relying instead on so-called functional élites, committed to democracy, who are interested not merely in Euro-Atlantic rhetoric but in comprehensive economic reform and in the dismantling of étatism. The latter imagined that the victory of the Democratic Convention was their own, but now, in a state of shock, are forced to experience that the present power élite is behaving just as the earlier. The political scientist Emil Hurzeanu maintains that the élites of the Ceaușescu era dominate the whole of the political spectrum, that, in this respect, the state of affairs in Romania resembles that in Russia rather than that in Hungary, the Czech Republic or Poland.⁹

What makes the Romanian situation so special—and so hopeless—is the ever widening chasm between a nascent civil society and political life as a whole. This has been true of modern Romanian history throughout, the difference being, however, that the issue is not what it was in the 19th century and early in the twentieth when the élites were far in advance of an archaic society, but precisely the reverse: the élites are unable to meet social expectations. There are really no parties in the true sense of the term in Romania (in this respect too, the situation recalls Russia). There is nothing like the situation in Hungary, the Czech Republic or Poland, where alternative poles were created by new parties based on the organized anti-communist opposition and the reform communists. The structurally inorganic nature of the system of political institutions as a whole confronts the electorate with a difficult choice. Interest groups wearing different party colours take their turn, which

only leads to the devaluation of democracy, the only alternative—which has its precedents in Romanian political history—being a coup staged by the ruler à la Prince Cuza in the mid-nineteenth century, or by Carol II on the eve of the Second World War.

The causes of this political paralysis must be sought in precisely that mid-19th century switch of civilizations to which Gabriel Andreescu refers. Sad to say, however, this does not deny but in fact confirms one of Huntington's basic propositions referring to the essential difference between Westernization and political modernization which too many interpret superficially and criticize overhastily. According to Huntington, the 19th- and 20th-century imitation of Western political and legal forms produces not new Western states but torn countries. "A torn country has a single predominant culture which places it in one civilization, but its leaders want to shift it to another civilization. They say, in effect, 'We are one people and belong together in one place but we want to change that place.' [...] Typically, a significant portion of the leaders... decide their society should reject its non-Western culture and institutions, should join the West, and should both modernize and Westernize. [...] the political leaders imbued with the hubris to think that they can fundamentally reshape the culture of their societies are destined to fail. While they can introduce elements of Western culture, they are unable permanently to suppress or to eliminate the core elements of their indigenous culture. Conversely, the Western virus, once it is lodged in another society, is difficult to expunge. The virus persists but is not fatal; the patient survives but is never whole. Political leaders can make history but they cannot escape history. They produce torn countries; they do not create Western societies. They infect their country with a cultural schizo-

phfrenia which becomes its continuing and defining character."¹⁰

Romania is a typically torn country, something she was long able to cover up thanks to her unbelievable powers of adaptability. The seminal Romanian thinker Mihai Ralea thought this the principal characteristic of the Romanian soul. In a famous 1927 book he argued that this was a double-edged sword. "It may mean evolution, intelligence, cunning, suppleness, progress, but it can also mean baseness, perfidy, superficiality."¹¹

It seems that exaggerated accomodation to national-communism extinguished a capacity for a proper adjustment to the requirements of Western civilization in the Romanian political élite. There is perhaps no better proof for this than the way in which the language rights of the Hungarian minority, and its demands for an independent university, were dealt with.

In the autumn of 1997, Gabriel Andreescu, obviously writing with undoubted *bona fides*, claimed that a Romanian model for overcoming ethnic tension, which consisted of the acceptance by the Romanian political forces of very high standards concerning special measures designed to protect the national minorities, was close to realization. Since then Andreescu himself has felt forced to state on numerous occasions that the Romanian political forces interpreted these measures in such an odd way that their implementation has come to nought in practice. The finesse of Romanian nationalists, their subtle exploitation of the diversionary tactics of the former Securitate and their tricks of mass manipulation were met by cowardice, the duplicity with which the coalition partner was overwhelmed with promises, the cunning shown in dealings with the West, and superficiality in handling self-imposed moral standards: these were the empirical data available to Andreescu already at the

time of writing his article; he, however, preferred the ideological dream of systematically making up the lee-way to the West.

A year ago we still both had faith in the hopes that came with the change of government in Romania, albeit our hopes were framed in different ideological visions of the future. Today, it would appear that we share the bitter experience of failure. The question today is: what conclusions should be drawn from the present Romanian political cul-de-sac, which also severely tests Hungaro-Romanian relations as a whole.

On my part I am of the opinion that, although—for the time being—Transylvania is not ready for an independently initiated regional political movement, this could well occur as a retaliation to the predictable re-centralizing and re-nationalizing attempts by a nationalist left eager to get its own back. We will then be able to state, and some will be forced to accept in astonishment and sadness, that it is not the Hungarians who are the Achilles heel of Romania but the Romanian political system itself, based on the supremacy of Bucharest, which insists on its preponderance not only vis à vis a stubborn national minority but also the majority in particular regions. The latter cannot be damned in using the methods—be they accustomed or less so—which were so facily mobilized against the just demands of the Hungarians.

That is when Romania will confront what will perhaps be the most critical moments of its post-1918 history. In 1940 the Axis Powers and the Soviet Union jointly acted against Romania in the interests of a frontier revision, because they directly—or via their allies—claimed certain territories which then belonged to Romania. The new challenge comes from within, and for that very reason its consequences will be more far-reaching.

Once Hungary joins the EU, very likely around the year 2002, the Hungaro-Romanian border will truly become a fully-fledged geopolitical frontier with all that this implies. As the power of attraction of the new Western *Reich* including Hungary increases on an unbelievable scale with a common currency and homogenized European stock-exchanges, Hungary will, in practice, cease to be a "dangerous" nation-state. What this means is that, *pace* waves of whipped up hatreds, the inhabitants of Transylvania will be perfectly aware that a single actual Hungarian "threat" will continue: that, because of Schengen, they will be excluded from Hungary as well, and that, on the other side of the frontier, the relatively easily obtained forint will be replaced by the Euro as legal tender.

In that situation, Transylvanian separateness will appear with elementary force, naturally not in the form of a devolution due to the wise foresight and common sense of the central administration, but as anti-Bucharest opposition.

In my earlier article I already referred to historical and present facts which, in the words of Sorin Mitu, the Cluj historian and author of a recent work on the cultural identity of Transylvanian Romanians,¹² mean that the existing centralized political structures are out of keeping with both historical traditions and European norms. As regards the history of Transylvania, Sorin Mitu and I are largely in agreement, nor does he object to devolution in principle, it is, however—in the absence of the needed foundations—out of place in Romania. Just about nothing of Transylvania's Central European heritage survives. For that very reason there is nothing left to federalize.

Mitu's arguments are weighty and should be heeded. No doubt, the idea of an autonomous Transylvania was abandoned in the 19th century, first by Hungarians,

then by Romanians, in neither case, however, did this lead to a denial that there was something special about the region. It is also a fact that, by now, thanks to the manipulations governing attitudes to history in Romania, the priority and otherness which Transylvania, as a political and administrative entity going back at least to the 16th century, enjoyed vis à vis a Romanian state which de facto did not antedate the union of the Danubian Principalities in 1859, was successfully obliterated. In Romanian symbolic geography Transylvania is one of the Romanian lands, thus retrospectively an indivisible part of Romania. A Romania of the mind was created which is homogenous and therefore cannot be reconciled, in theory or practice, with notions of federalism or even devolution. Finally, the ravages of the communist system, and the sociological state of a levelled society no doubt favour an étatist collectivism fed by general, uniform and national pauperization rather than a decentralization that presumes the powerful structures of civil society.¹³

Nothing, however, lasts for ever in history and politics. Given that traditions of autonomy that were of great importance amongst the Romanians of Transylvania could suffer a sea change, the present situation, which appears hopeless, could alter too. What is specifically Transylvanian and thus possibly influential on the political and administrative structure is not some kind of geo-cultural essence, but something protean, undergoing constant change, that can be deliberately abandoned but just as deliberately renewed.

It is obvious that Romania no longer offers those advantages which, when feeling threatened in one way or another by Hungarians, made adherence to an integrated nation-state not only acceptable but expressly advantageous for Transylvanian Romanians. They have done away with the

handicaps under which they laboured vis à vis the Hungarians in Transylvania, they no longer need the crutches which Bucharest, as the centralized state, offers. The latter has changed into a burden.

GDP in Transylvania is at least twice that of the rest of the country. Ilie Serbanescu, a respected economist and Minister for Reforms in the Ciorbea government, draws the surprising consequences, which are, however, typical of the present situation in Romania, that "the conditions are given for the loss of Transylvania." Serbanescu no doubt rightly argues that "given growing differences in economic levels, centrifugal tendencies will not be reduced but will be amplified", but only those who basically support an obsolete, overcentralized and all-powerful state will interpret such seemingly unavoidable centrifugal tendencies as a signal of approaching catastrophe, advising the Bucharest government that, having lost the economic battle, "it is a national duty to make use of every possible weapon to make sure that Transylvania is set within the framework of an integrated Romanian nation-state".¹⁴

The perception of Romanians in Transylvania is entirely different. What they object to is that they pay too much into central funds. Sabin Gherman, who lives in Cluj, the spiritual centre of Transylvania, shocked Romanian public opinion with a manifesto.¹⁵ He is indignant because less is spent on Transylvania as a whole than on Bucharest alone.¹⁶ Every survey so far

has shown that Transylvanians systematically favour less state and more individual initiative, a smaller role for the state in the economy and more private property, and as far-ranging privatization as possible. This is also expressed in political preferences. Since 1990, from election to election and in an increasing measure, Transylvanians have backed parties which urged radical reform and the liquidation of loss-making state enterprises, showing growing opposition to parties mouthing left-nationalist slogans, and showing anxiety concerning the integrity of the state and radical reforms. Recent public opinion polls also bear out this trend. They show that the allied left-nationalist opposition (PDSR, the post-communists and the Greater Romania Party) and the Government coalition (Democratic Convention, Democratic Party, RMDSz Hungarian Party) regionally relate as follows in November 1998: Wallachia 49–43, Moldavia 47–40, and Transylvania 30–59 per cent.¹⁷

If this trend continues, than the expected opposition victory on the national level projects an unprecedented acute difference between Transylvania and the Old Kingdom. This creates an entirely new situation. What will most likely happen is what happened in Scotland after the 1987 elections when, according to David McCrone, "the division over social policy along national lines propelled Scottish opinion towards interpreting the problem in constitutional terms."¹⁸

NOTES

1 ■ "The Transylvanian Question" *Magyar Kisebbség* (Cluj-Kolozsvár) 1997/3–4 (in Hungarian), *The Hungarian Quarterly*, No. 149 Spring 1998 (in English) *Altera* (Târgu Mureş/Marosvásárhely) 1998/8 (in Romanian).

2 ■ In the Old Kingdom Ion Iliescu minimally came out on top. It was primarily Transylvanians who voted for the Democratic Convention and Emil Constantinescu. See Gusztáv Molnár: "Electoral

geography", *Magyar Narancs* (Budapest) December 1996.—The former President and leader of the post-communist PDSR, campaigning in Moldavia for an early dissolution, said in August 1998: "You are the principal victims of the present economic crisis. It was the errors of others which made you victims. It was the Transylvanians who voted for the Democratic Convention". (*Adevărul* – Bucharest, August 18, 1998).

- 3 ■ *Altera* (Târgu Mureş-Marosvásárhely) printed a Romanian version of my article, together with comments by Gabriel Andreescu (Bucharest) (published in English in this issue) and Victor Neumann (Timișoara-Temesvár).
- 4 ■ For comments by Transylvanian Hungarians, see *Magyar Kisebbség*, 1998/1-2.
- 5 ■ Bakk, Miklós: "Romania and Central Europe: Two Compromises." *Magyar Kisebbség* 1998/1.
- 6 ■ See Andreescu, in this issue
- 7 ■ Marino, Adrian: *Pentru Europa. Integrarea României. Aspecte Ideologice și culturale* (For Europe. The integration of Romania. Ideological and Cultural Aspects), Jassy, 1995
- 8 ■ op. cit.
- 9 ■ Herezeanu, Emil: "The élites". 22 (Bucharest) Nov 17-23, 1998
- 10 ■ Huntington, Samuel P.: *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York, 1996.
- 11 ■ See Ralea, Mihai: *Fenomenul românesc* (The Romanian Phenomenon), 1997.
- 12 ■ Mitu, Sorin: *Geneza identității naționale la români* (The Genesis of National Identity Amongst Romanians), Bucharest 1997.
- 13 ■ See Mitu, Sorin in this issue.
- 14 ■ See Serbănescu, Ilie: "Will Romania Lose the Political Battle in Hungary as She Has Lost the Economic One?" *Adevărul*. October 8 1998.
- 15 ■ See Gherman, Sabin: "I Am Fed up with Romania" *Monitorul de Cluj*, September 17 1998.
- 16 ■ Gherman, Sabin: "Why I Am Fed up with Romania", *Transilvania Jurnal* (Braşov-Brassó) Nov. 14, 1998
- 17 ■ Barometrul de opinie publica Romania November 1998. A public opinion poll carried out for the Foundation for an Open Society.
- 18 ■ McCrone, David (University of Edinburgh): "Scotland and England. Diverging Political Discourses." 1998. Paper presented to the Conference on Regionalism, Budapest, September 5-7, 1998.

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Éva Voszka

From Spontaneous to Post-Privatization

Tamás Sárközy: *A rendszerváltás és a privatizáció joga* (Political Transition and Privatization Law). Budapest, Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 294 pp.

Having already written two books on privatization (1991, 1993) Tamás Sárközy has now turned his attention to discussing the events of an entire decade and placing them in an international comparison. He claims that the fundamental difference between the Western and the Eastern European methods is that "Eastern European privatization is aimed at changing the system, while the Western European serves to preserve it... In countries of the former socialist bloc privatization eliminates state ownership and restores private ownership, while in Western Europe the reduction of the state sector serves to strengthen a full-fledged market economy" (p. 27). Consequently, the process of reducing state ownership in different former

socialist countries has shown certain similarities with regard to objectives, existing conditions, legal framework and methods. Yet the dissimilarities are just as obvious. On the basis of the rate of change, Tamás Sárközy divides the countries concerned into three categories. Although he does not state so explicitly, the picture obtained from this categorization, shows a close correspondence with the depth of the socialist reforms and, not independently from this, the methods applied. Apart from privatization in East Germany, a region in a unique position, there is the group of the "bigoted" socialist countries, with a relatively slow privatization, based mostly on redistribution. This process produced some form of state capitalism, rather than a market economy—with very frail economic results, we might add. The second group is that of the "reform countries" bent on introducing market methods, where the two successor states of Czechoslovakia are the odd ones out for two reasons: one is the traditional form of the planned economy, and the other is a significant volume of free, coupon-style privatization. Readers will get a detailed picture of corporate law and of the legal and institutional framework of privatization in the region from East Germany, through Belorussia and Albania, right on to Estonia and Latvia. This description—

Éva Voszka

is Senior Economist at Pénzügykutató Rt., the financial consultants. Her main area of research has been the transformation of ownership structure and the changing strategies of the government and of firms. Her most recent book, *A dinoszauruszok esélyei* (The Prospects of the Dinosaurs), Pénzügykutató—Perfekt Kiadó, 1997, is on the fate of the large enterprises of the Socialist era in the years of transition.

primarily drawing on German sources—concentrates on legislation: as to the empirical processes, conflicts and results concerning the transfer of state property into private ownership, Tamás Sárközy makes no claims to providing a detailed account.

For readers outside the legal profession, the book has one particular merit. In describing the Hungarian case, which covers almost half of the whole, the author considerably transcends this level of analysis. As a key person in the economic legislation of the 1980s, and as an active participant in the several rounds of the privatization laws, Tamás Sárközy knows just about everything about the expansion of the Hungarian private economy, and much of it he discusses in his book. Here he quotes numerous articles by Hungarian authors (conferring a honorary Hungarian citizenship on the American David Stark), including economic and sociological analyses.

"Hungarian privatization has, by and large, been successfully completed," he describes the situation pertaining in late 1997. By and large successful? Or by and large completed? And what does the expression "by and large" mean? This element of uncertainty prompts the reviewer to contemplate the meaning of success (and the reader is invited to do likewise), as indeed Tamás Sárközy himself does in raising the question whether it could have happened in any other way. Another topic worth thinking about is how privatization can be brought to an end and on how we should proceed from there.

Let us start at the beginning of privatization, often referred to as "spontaneous privatization". It is somewhat confusing that Sárközy often calls this process as "decentralized" or "self-privatization", regardless of the point that this term was reserved for a later, specific construction for the transfer of property in Hungary. Still,

we all know what he speaks about: the controversial and often tempestuous organizational and ownership changes of 1988–89, initiated by the firms themselves. Tamás Sárközy stands by his original view, and to my mind convincingly demonstrates it, claiming that these changes were set off not by the much-criticized Transformation Act of 1989 designed to facilitate the re-organization of firms, but by the resuscitation of two much earlier bills, of 1875 and 1930. ("Even poor Emperor Francis Joseph helped the Communists' clutch on power," Sárközy comments ironically.) What the managers of large firms wanted was to avoid bankruptcy and to procure tax relief, not privatization. With a few exceptions, the result was merely change of organizational and legal forms, rather than privatization.

"Spontaneous privatization" was not a Hungarian speciality; it seems to have become a synonym for corruption in all the countries concerned, although outside Hungary the expression covered different phenomena in different countries. (In many places, for example, it was used to describe the practice of the work force's renting out the firm's assets collectively.) A specific Hungarian feature was, however, that following the establishment of works councils in 1984, the initiatives and decisions of firms were put on a legal basis. In other words, this was the direction of organic development in Hungary. Back in 1991 Tamás Sárközy would already have preferred, for firms outside the strategic industries, a privatization based on an agreement between the management and the outside investor—under government control; thus, he would have liked to see the mechanism of decision-making (respecting the tradition of enterprise autonomy, and taking over other elements of spontaneous privatization) to be decentralized as a general rule. Although this

idea was applied to a small group of firms, sales after 1990 remained basically centralized.

While the political and economic reasons for this solution are made clear in Sárközy's analysis of 1997, he still insists that a construction based on a combination of government supervision and company decision might, in principle, have developed into "a functioning system within a few years. Perhaps Hungary could have been the only country where privatization, based on the status quo of enterprise self-ownership, could be conducted voluntarily to some degree" (p. 182.). I happen to be one of the few who agree with this conclusion, suspecting that the centralized and bureaucratic methods did more harm than good. But what criteria can we use to measure success?

Sárközy sees the most important achievement in the relatively rapid reduction of state ownership; in other words, in the realization of privatization as an end in itself, and I tend to agree. Another important consideration is that the majority of the former state-owned firms passed into genuine private ownership rather than into some kind of indirect state ownership or institutional ownership without small shareholders' control. International experience confirms the view that the presence and interest of such core investors—complemented by adequate management experience and capital—form indispensable conditions for restructuring production. This reorganization of markets has been a vitally important task for almost every firm after the late 1980s. This made deep changes possible, enabling most of the state-owned firms to stabilize their situation, paying off their accumulated debts, and to become competitive on developed markets.

Tamás Sárközy adds a comment: "As for the conducting of the process, Hun-

garian privatization has not been a success story—and for reasons fundamentally objective, it could never have been one" (p. 273.). The "objective" reasons were the economic crisis and the volume of the assets to be privatized, capped by such "subjective" reasons as incompetence, the lack or frequent change of governmental strategy, as well as the over-politicization of the issue and corruption. This was why "some people exploiting their privileged positions were able to amass large fortunes in the process of privatization. Nevertheless, there are already numerous examples to show that unless they prove to be competitive on the market, they will inevitably disappear, and no longer (or in any case not to a significant degree) will the state, or politics, be able to bail them out" (p. 275.).

Indeed, the key question is whether market competition, at least now with privatization behind us, is working at all. Does competition eliminate the weak? Are new actors allowed to enter the market freely and easily? Or is there still a network of personal connections, a form of state protectionism, which continues to shelter incompetent owners? Unlike Tamás Sárközy, I believe that today these are still questions rather than statements. In the matter of "yes" or "no", the outcome is important not only from a narrower economic point of view, but also in a long-term social context. It would be difficult to deny that the legacy of ownership is uncertain, as the population broadly views the fortunes accumulated from privatization with growing suspicion. It will be difficult to quell the public outrage fuelled by the deficiencies of public control, by the evidence of direct political intervention and by the kidglove handling of the scandals reported. Public opinion will change if our everyday experience shows that good performance is rewarded—some-

thing that is an optimistic expectation at best, rather than a fact.

Therefore, the evaluation of privatization as "by and large successful" still needs time to be approved. As for "by and large completed", the author himself emphasizes that the declaration of the end of institutional privatization does not—and cannot—mean the end of the process: "the continuation of privatization tasks should be expected" (p. 265.), and the sector of permanent state-ownership should also be "revised comprehensively" (p. 267.) In Spring 1998, the portfolio of ÁPV Rt., the company managing the privatization process, still contained 278 firms, with assets worth nearly HUF 500 billion (\$2.325 billion). In addition, there are 65 companies in long-term state-ownership, subordinated to branch ministries, including giants like Hungarian Railways (not mentioning here the treasury's assets, and mainly of a non-profit character, worth about HUF 500 billion, as well as the property owned by local governments).

Bringing privatization to a close and "managing" the remaining state property pose new challenges. Existing laws and institutions, according to Sárközy, are unsuitable for meeting them. "A brand new show needs brand new actors" (p. 262). I have to repeat what I have said in connection with the evaluation of spontaneous privatization: I am one of the few who agree, without reservation, with all the basic principles expounded in the book: "in search for a new institutional framework, we should come up with a construction that is decentralized on the one hand, and is based on a variety of institutional forms

on the other" (p. 262). According to the proposal, the legal successor of the privatization agency, the ÁPV Rt., should be a budgetary organization subordinated to the treasury, mostly to fulfil outstanding obligations. Having the necessary experience both in re-organization and in marketing, the fully state-owned Hungarian Development Bank would be put in charge of selling the assets that are still to be privatized. As to the small number of companies remaining on long-term ownership, their supervision would be returned to the ministries.

While one could argue about some details, at the time of writing, in the Autumn of 1998, this seems unnecessary. It would be unnecessary to elaborate on a model of a differentiated institutional framework, when people in decision-making positions favour centralization—just as was the case at the beginning of the privatization process. One might even say that whoever gets into power will automatically become a centralization addict. The successor of ÁPV Rt. was left essentially unchanged in a proposal ("Magyar Holding") submitted to, but not discussed by, the previous government. The new government has taken over the old organization, and has declined discussions about both the conclusion of privatization and the new framework of state asset management.

Tamás Sárközy still appears in his old roles: he proposes reforms, debates passionately and, if necessary, drafts bills; he is tireless in publishing one book after another. This old role, unlike that of the state, is good. It is always worth reading Tamás Sárközy. ■

Rosie Johnson

Why Budapest?

My apartment is in a slightly seedy central part of Budapest, and I am a little afraid of being murdered by a guy in a sweat suit who looks like a hockey player. Coming home one night after a late supper, I had trouble opening the heavy wooden door that leads into the courtyard from the street. I was trying hard to be patient with my iron key when up he came. He towered next to me and reached past the key through a fist-sized square hole in the door that I hadn't noticed. He flicked the latch and then, looming there above me, started to scream.

The street around us was deserted. Of course. Anyone with sense would be inside behind a wall, away from this black yelling that streamed out of him like lava. I couldn't catch a word, I was petrified. I rushed out to the reassuring boulevard and from a public phone called my American friend Sweetheart (she calls me Sweetheart, Honey, Darling, in a café society way). At that time the telephones were working for me: I didn't understand why people went on and on about how problematic, money-grabbing, and nightmarish they were.

Sweetheart told me to hop into a cab and gave me her version of the name of her street, which was so far-fetched that even in my panic I had to take the time to ask her to spell it out as it would be written on a street sign. A cab flew me over the Danube, and my night became peaceful and safe.

Back to my building the next morning, knowing that the big door would be open for the day, I vowed never again to come back alone after eleven or whenever it is that they choose to lock the place.

I live on the ground floor. My only acquaintance here is a man with platform shoes and a thick cane and thicker spectacles. One Saturday afternoon he knocked on my door. He excused himself, seemed to say a teacher used to live here (could Erzsébet, silent and brittle, be a

Rosie Johnson

is an American teacher of English as a second language and a writer. She spent some time in Budapest in the early '90s, and wrote this more than two years ago.

teacher?) and kissed my hand. Then he passed me two large bags filled with groceries.

He told me his name and pointed diagonally up across the bleak cement courtyard, saying "second floor." Hugging his provisions, I padded in my slippers (everyone in Hungary wears slippers at home) up a floor and onto the balcony that surveys the courtyard as in a prison movie. None of the little metal tags on the doors matched what I had thought was his name, so back down the marble stairs I went.

"Second, second," he said, and "Oh yes, *second*," I echoed in Hungarian, grasping my confusion at their second floor being our third.

Back upstairs I saw windows with *white curtains*—on the ground floor we have old blankets and cardboard over our windows. A different social class on high, with different customs? Longer-term residents who bought curtains in better days, as opposed to desperate newcomers devastated by unemployment and inflation?

I hung the bags on his door handle. He thanked me by telling me his life story, or something that brought in the Hungarian word for "waiter". But maybe he was asking me to be his waitress.

I had a sneaking hope that this would become a ritual, his knocking at my door with his groceries, but it hasn't happened again. I feel quite isolated in this courtyard, isolated but not left out, because everybody seems to keep to themselves, and life goes on without a city's usual rhythms. I never hear a rush of people leaving for work in the morning, or a cluster returning in the evening. I don't hear TVs or alarm clocks, music, or meals. At times I find myself wondering whether a lot of the apartments are deserted, or inhabited by invalids.

Actually, maybe it's that the people here, with the exception of the hockey player, are quiet, which is my way of saying depressed. Even drunk, faces flat and bruised, they stumble upstairs in silence, like stunned animals. The most expansive person in my building is a woman who likes to stand out on the street in her bathrobe and slippers to smoke.

Why here?, foreigners living in Budapest tend to ask one another. Nobody knows. People shrug, mutter a phrase or two about the city, and then, as though it were an in-joke, roll their eyes and smile with the camaraderie of victims. Hungarians too ask "Why here?", teetering between the gloaming of their ethnic spirit and their longing to be in Vienna with its cleanliness, its goods, and those hard smug faces that make one wonder if consumerism means the end of gentleness and grace.

Budapest is like Paris, like London, like New York. Budapest is beautiful. When I leave my apartment and step out into the city I feel elated. Buses scud one after another like dolphins, the light falls soft and yellow on the dirty streets and the gray faces, and the eye never stops being drawn up and around, over

somber people with fillips of colour at their necks, over buildings whose proportions seem to soothe, over ochres and greens, statues and gratings: there is no end to the eclectic prettiness of Budapest. And as soon as you start to walk around in the balmy polluted air, the story of the country starts gently to unfold. Bartók Béla út, Liszt Ferenc tér.

If you climb Castle Hill to visit the National Gallery, you'll be struck by the weird agony of the statue of a man named Dózsa. In 1514 he led a peasant uprising that failed. Victorious nobles seated him on a red-hot iron throne and crammed a red-hot iron crown onto his head; his followers were forced to eat chunks of his scorched flesh. Therefore, forever vivid, Dózsa György tér. At every corner the history of Hungary is a constant presence.

My guidebook says that there's a Hungarian word, *honfibú*, that means "patriotic sorrow", and behind that word is the grief of generations, a grief common to all for their ill-fated country. "We are sad people," my students tell me. They don't want to talk about politics, at least not to me. I must have had fifty students by now, and I've never seen any of them with a newspaper, even though there are seven or eight dailies in Budapest. All I get from my students are generalities, asides really, like "Antall and Csurka aren't real politicians, they're clowns."

The school I teach at is pleasant enough. As one prospective teacher put it, "Unbelievable. You come and you go, you can expect the school to arrange substitutes for you whenever. You wear what you want. What a great place."

I got the job simply by walking in, with my Cambridge Certificate of Teaching in my hand—the result of a brutal one-month course in Barcelona a couple of years ago. The school needed teachers at that time, and I've noticed that every three or four months the need comes again; English teachers in Budapest turn over rapidly, because so many of them are not particularly dedicated to teaching. Sweetheart, for example, left New York because she wanted to live in Europe. Visiting a friend in Budapest, she found that there was plenty of work and not much red tape. Then she fell in love with the guy she was visiting. So she taught English in the fall, and when she needed more money, found a job as a secretary for an American company.

Most of the teachers are, like her, in their twenties. I feel removed from them, part of a different generation. The students, though, are all ages—this being a language school, not a high school—and I feel especially appreciated by the older ones. Several women have invited me to their homes for a meal, an event which goes on for hours in enthusiastic English. They all had to learn Russian for years, but they insist they never spoke it. I drink the delicious wine and babble on as though I were at home, happy to have company and forgetting that they pick up about a fourth of what I say, though they politely pretend to understand everything.

Now and then someone says something that reveals how much thought, as well as time, has gone into the festivities.

"Here. Margarine. Americans need margarine if I remember it well."

I've visited families with microwaves, VCRs, and framed photographs, who take holiday trips "abroad"—meaning out of Hungary. Most people, though, can't afford the four-hour train trip to Vienna, have no credit cards, (no one uses cheques, it's all cash), and have to save for decades to buy a car.

Many students are sent to the school by their places of employment. On Mondays and Wednesdays, for example, a group of scientists leaves its institute together after lunch to come to my three-hour class. Many unemployed students are paid for by the government, but I haven't found out what the deal is, daunted by the reproach of the British teacher I asked: "That doesn't concern you."

Budapest has been besieged thirteen times: surely the current influx of foreigners, especially businesspeople, is a reminder of patriotic sorrow as well as a sign of much-anticipated progress. Substituting for a friend, I gave a private English lesson to an executive at a company taken over by G.E. To get him talking, I told him to interview me, which made it perfectly reasonable for me to then interview him.

I asked what the main changes in the company were.

"Now, everyone has to smile," he said.

"Because they tell you to?"

He shrugged. "Because it's the American way."

Now, he has to work twice as hard; efficiency, he said, wasn't valued under communism. G.E. thinks G.E. knows everything, and "maybe they do in America, but Europe is different." In America, it's all done by computers and the customer is always right. In Europe, people go out to dinner, talk about the family, and then buy.

"It's a culture problem," he concluded.

It must be very hard to be working for Americans if to an executive the customer-is-always-right concept seems stupid or demeaning. I wonder how it feels to learn English in order to be able to talk to the boss—as opposed to learning English as a desirable asset in international life. He told me there are twenty-five Americans in his company in Budapest, and only one who speaks Hungarian.

American teachers tend to be supersensitive to the concept of English as a form of imperialism. One of Budapest's two English weekly papers published the story of an American who stopped teaching English because as a teacher of English she felt part of a force destined to destroy Hungarian culture. I assigned the article to one of my classes. Their reaction was that Hungarian culture can cope.

British teachers of English, meanwhile, have different concerns:

"Are the Brits going to lose out yet again to a load of colonial upstarts?" asks an impassioned English teacher from England. "It used to be so nice in Hungary's English classrooms—so, well, English. Until American English arrived

with the Americans. Now Budapest is swarming with ex-colonials in horn-rimmed glasses being overly intense all over the place."

The British, ready to charge into a lift-vs.-elevator riff immediately upon introduction to an American, don't seem to register the fact that we're not antagonistic about these language differences.

My school sporadically offers its teachers free Hungarian lessons. This gives the British a chance to make fun of, say, Thanksgiving. Otherwise the classes don't make much of a dent, the Hungarian language is just so different. Sweetheart isn't interested in learning her boyfriend's native language; she gets by just fine, as do, I'm sure, most foreigners. Sweetheart did, though, have a problem with a dentist who filed three of her teeth down to tiny stumps when she went in for a cleaning.

"I thought they understood English," she told me, livid.

Every morning I prepare my classes for the next day. What are we doing? How and when will I get them away from the book and into conversation? Each class has a different character, as well as a different level. My evening class, for example, is filled with shy young adults who know English but refuse to speak it. If I can't get them to talk, who can, I wonder. So I try to figure out how to keep them talking almost the whole time. I can do this, but it takes planning and inspiration. After which I usually drink a dark beer and ricochet around my apartment.

Sheepskins litter the sofa, the skins of some other animal are splayed over the floor and the walls, and the radio sounds as if it's being broadcast from the bottom of the Caspian Sea. I usually eat a couple of hot dogs and maybe some boiled potatoes or spaghetti. Jarred peppers, for color and taste. Tiny containers of natural yogurt for health. Sometimes, as a treat, expensive Austrian bread, shot through with fruits and nuts. Usually Hungarian loaves, which I finish within two days, I get so ravenous. Food costs about the same in Hungarian supermarkets as it does in American supermarkets. Not the same proportionally, but the same in exact currency exchange. I can't tell with food in regular markets—merchants have a habit of raising their prices as soon as they realize they're dealing with a foreigner.

It's hard to stay alert to what the currency means. First you have the literal dollar-into-forint exchange, which prices a monthly bus pass at around ten dollars, an espresso at 25 or 30 cents, a movie at less than a dollar. But an average monthly wage for someone who needs a bus pass is about \$120. An apartment costs maybe \$110. So how much is a bus pass, really? Sixty cents for a ticket to the wonderful Katona József Theatre, how fantastic. Three dollars and fifty cents for a good seat at the ballet sounds equally cheap. But if you have the equivalent of two dollars set aside for entertainment for the month... And although it could be argued that it's great, foreigners are supporting the ballet and the opera through a difficult time of transition, still we're squeezing the natives out. In the

intermission at the ballet I heard so much English spoken it was as if I were at a spectacle put on for tourists.

On the streets all over the city I see KENYERET scrawled. "Bread." Prices have doubled in the last year and sky-rocketed the year before. The teachers at my school just got a raise of twenty-five forints an hour. Jasmin, whose mother is Hungarian, father Yugoslav, and who speaks English like a native of Australia, was disgusted.

"Twenty-five forints. Nothing," she said.

Twenty-five forints is about twenty-eight cents.

"I have no time. And no money to set aside. Two years ago, on this wage, you could have the house and the cat."

"You could have *what*?"

"An idiom. Now prices have gone up."

"But don't we get an awful lot compared to regular Hungarians?", I asked.

"Why should we compare ourselves to regular Hungarians?", she said.

Beggars are everywhere. Gypsies camp on the subway steps, displaying their greatest tragedy, whether it's a scabby child or the stub of an amputated limb. People with pleading eyes, in tidy frayed tweed coats, walk around collaring strangers. And maybe because poverty seems less threatening in Hungary than in America, I find myself wondering why I so carefully give so little. Am I afraid they'll be able to stop begging before they've put in their full begging hours? Am I afraid of acknowledging that I have more money than they?

I visited a mountain area in the northeast where there were 180 men, 170 of whom are now unemployed. They must have worked for some hopelessly inefficient business which cannot stand up to free trade. Could anyone have warned them that the switch from communism to capitalism would be so devastating? They waited so long for freedom, and here it comes, flattening them into poverty. Privatization aims to streamline, to get rid of unnecessary workers, not to support them. Unemployment is a new phenomenon, and the people, who are used to being taken care of by the government—full employment was a policy of the centralized communist government—either lack the skills or are psychologically unprepared to dash out and join the rat race. The government unemployment allowance lasts for a year and a half.

When I was first here, I just couldn't understand why the economy doesn't work. The people seemed so contained and intelligent. But now, now that the telephone has turned against me and I'm getting used to it here, my fixit attitude is fading. The situation seems to be getting worse all the time. Sweetheart told me she stands rather than sits on the subway so that she won't have to be on eye level with the people. I understand. For us, it's a short-term adventure.

The whole system is being changed. The national debt is enormous. And meanwhile, the nations all around Hungary rustle with nationalistic feelings.

Since the dismemberment of Hungary at Trianon in 1920, 3.5 million people of Hungarian origin find themselves living in neighbouring countries, about half of them in solid ethnic blocs just across one new border or other. The rights of Hungarian minorities is a constant issue, like—surely—the land they live on.

But, "No, we don't want our land back," my students assure me casually.

"You don't?" I say incredulously. "I do."

Then I remind myself that I'm not Hungarian, I don't understand the nuances. For all I know this is sarcasm, privacy, or despair.

All these American women in Hungary," said János, interviewing me for a teaching position.

"It's not so easy to live in America right now," I said. But he didn't want to chat about our inflation any more than he wanted to talk about Hungary's.

"America is my dream," said János. "Jack Kerouac."

"Jack Kerouac," I echoed, smoking because he was smoking. "Was that thirty years ago? How old were you? That was fine then, but now you'd have to get a job."

Was it the driving around that had appealed to János? I took the little old metro line to the American library. I found Kerouac's definition of "beat".

"...furtiveness. Like we were a generation of furtives... with an inner knowledge there's no use flaunting on that level, and a weariness with all the forms, all the conventions of the world."

It sounds Hungarian.

I took out a book about American Indians because I'm envious of the Hungarians having their peasants. Selling flowers, tablecloths, garlic in their costumes. I feel superficial, alien to the land, I have no garden or superstitions. On Saturday nights I go to a folk dance place where people are taught the steps and peasants sit along the edge, nodding, with skirts and blouses draped over their knees, for sale. At first I thought I'd eventually get up my courage and try dancing, but the husband of one of my students said, "That's for young people." So I just sit with the bright-eyed hard-skinned old peasant women who are delighted to have me with them because they know I'll be tempted by some beautiful handmade thing which I'll buy as soon as I translate the price into dollars.

The small band wails scratchy, lurchy music. The dancers take a break and are taught a folk song. They care so much. I was so desperate to leave America.

I've seen the hockey player walking across my courtyard. So he lives here. Everyone in my building knows about him, I think, but they're quiet, they assume I can take care of myself, with my four pieces of luggage and my airmail letters from home.

Last night there was shuffling outside my window. I lay frozen with fear. Shuffle shuffle shuffle, things being moved, the hockey player approaching,

everyone else dead to my world. Why was he taking so long? Didn't he know I had only the lightest lock on my door, the thinnest bars over my window, and no telephone? On and on he went with his preparations, his approach, whatever it was. My poor mother, I thought, "MURDERED IN BUDAPEST." How will she ever be able to come to grips with that?

Hours passed. I lit a candle (a bright light might make me visible). I tremblingly scratched a description of the guy in my journal. Then I willed myself to sleep. I refused to ruin my last hours with thoughts of him.

I woke to silence outside. Morning, like a dying fire, brightened the orange blanket over my window. When I set off for school I saw an old pushcart standing on the other side of the courtyard, in front of a door that was ajar. The pushcart was piled high with cardboard. Someone had worked through the night, folding and stacking. He was going to pull that cart through the streets to someplace where he'd get something, anything, for his long hours. I vaguely remembered seeing a child go into that apartment, or that room—I had no idea who the parents were.

I glanced in as I walked by. More cardboard strewn around, a haggard disorder.

In the late afternoon when I came back, the cart was standing there empty. Tired and homesick, I hopped into the tub and drank some cherry brandy. Then I sat at my fold-out kitchen table with my calendar, crossing out the weeks already spent in Hungary, counting up the ones remaining. After dark I stealthily scuttled across the courtyard and put a box of Austrian cookies in the old cart, weighting down a hundred forint note. Nothing. ■

Nicholas T. Parsons

Custodians of the Future

Scottish and English Influences on Hungary in the Reform Age

“Steamboats cannot stand the smell of feudalism”,¹ wrote Count István Széchenyi in his diary on August 1st, 1830. On that day Széchenyi had observed a team of sweating labourers hauling a boat round one of the infamous Danube “reaches”, men who were treated little better than the “half-wild” horses often employed for the same job. A large number of haulers was required, but labour was cheap: the muscle-power was recompensed with the equivalent of a few pence a day, or no wage at all if conditions were too bad to proceed. One year later, the first steamship (with engines supplied by Messrs Boulton & Watt) was put into service on the Danube—doubtless the same boat, with its morose and supercilious English captain, on which one Michael Joseph Quin was to travel in 1835.² Quin

not only gives a vivid description of steam travel in its infancy, but also notes that the Hungarian Diet, after long deliberation, had just passed a resolution instituting a toll for the projected bridge between Pest and Buda. “Slight as this incident may seem to an Englishman,” he remarks rather self-righteously, “it will probably lead the way to many useful reforms (in Hungary), on account of the principle of equal taxation which it involves”. The new possibilities of progress down and progress across the Danube were, as Quin accurately perceived, harbingers of something far greater than mere convenience of movement: they heralded the protracted birth of a civil society that was also to be a national rebirth.

Confronting industrialization

Széchenyi, for his part, instinctively realized that steam power, with its enormous potential for increasing production and mobility, both symbolized and embodied the nexus between economic progress and social transformation. England itself stood on the threshold of the railway age, which was also to be the age of the Great Reform Bill. The poet William Wordsworth, by this stage of his life a romantic reactionary, disapproved of both: of railways because they encouraged an unreflective

Nicholas T. Parsons

is the author of *the Xenophobe's Guide to the Austrians* (Ravette Books, 1994) and *The Blue Guide to Vienna* (1996).

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rushing about which was decivilizing, and of the Reform Bill because he thought it weakened a time-honoured framework of social cohesion and opened the way to demagoguery. Over thirty years later, the novelist William Thackeray ironically looked back on the coming of the railway, writing in the *Cornhill Magazine*: "We are of the time of chivalry as well as the Black Prince... we are of the age of steam. We have stepped out of the old world on to Brunel's vast deck, and across the waters *ingens patet telius*. Towards what new continent are we wending? To what new laws, new manners, new politics, vast new expanses of liberties unknown as yet, or only surmised... We who lived before railways, and survive out of the ancient world are like Father Noah and his family out of the ark."³ These perceptions, albeit jocularly expressed, were also an intimation of what the economist Joseph Schumpeter was later to describe as the "creative destruction" inherent in the new order of rampant capitalism, a force to which few corners of Europe were to remain invulnerable.

As Széchenyi well knew, modernization and what we now refer to as "technology transfer" had enormous—and not always happy—implications for its beneficiaries. Above all, it had implications for the old order of society, as Samuel Smiles, that complacent apologist for progress and bourgeois values, made clear in his life of the railway engineer, George Stephenson. "It was some time," he wrote drily, "...before the more opulent classes, who could afford to post to town in aristocratic style, became reconciled to railway travelling. The old families did not relish the idea of being conveyed in a train of passengers of all ranks and conditions, in which the shopkeeper and the peasant were carried along at the same speed as the duke and the baron—the only difference being in price. It was another deplorable illustration of

the levelling tendencies of the age."⁴ Such attitudes may have been typical of a reactionary British élite, but it is interesting to see the specifically Magyar spin put on them by a visiting Hungarian, Ferenc Pulszky, as he contemplated the democratic fall-out (and financial excesses) of the first railway boom on his visit to England in 1836. In his diary he wrote of his fears that "the age of the railway may also become the age of superficiality, and that instead of love of the fatherland, there will be a levelling cosmopolitanism." He found much to admire in Britain—more than he expected, given the preconceptions with which he arrived, fully expecting to be confronted with a land where "utilitarianism rules", one far too like America, which he calls "the fatherland of égoism... a republic on Bentham's model where the spirit is oppressed, life loses its greatest charm, its shining colours, and everything ends in surfeit." While he admires London (but chiefly because of its green parks with cattle grazing in them), Manchester is "wreathed in thick factory smoke, like a city on fire, the sparsely windowed houses depressing, anything more noble extinguished by the oppression of the steam machines"; in the city's spinning factories, these machines "all but made workmen dispensable."⁵ This is the sceptical spirit to be found also in the attitudes of Lajos Kossuth, and powerfully expressed in his speech to the new Hungarian Parliament in February 1848: Hungary, he says (quoting Isaac Newton), should "emulate the dwarf that grows taller and sees further than the giant himself on whose shoulder he has climbed ... our nation—though backward—may profit from the experiences of other nations; let us avoid following them in everything, and endeavour to avoid their mistakes."⁶

In Britain, concern about the social consequences of the industrial revolution were expressed both on the left and the right of politics (by the Chartists on behalf

of the exploited workers, by a conservative radical like William Cobbett who lamented the despoliation of England, the growth of cities at the expense of the countryside and the materialistic greed of the new rich).

Likewise in feudal Hungary, the *obiter dicta* of the two towering figures in the politics of the Reform Age, Count István Széchenyi and Lajos Kossuth, demonstrate the extent to which both were aware of the social costs involved in the modernization process. In particular they were sensitive to the obliteration of the personal ties characteristic of feudalism and their substitution by the anonymity and anomie engendered by systems of greater economic efficiency. After all, children working down the mines was hardly a humanitarian improvement on the feudal exploitation of labourers. Nevertheless, there are clear distinctions in the attitudes of the two men, distinctions that ultimately led not only to them proposing markedly different solutions to Hungary's problems, but also to an irreversible personal split between them, which highlighted the historically grounded dilemma in which Hungary found itself at this time.

When Széchenyi visited England for the first time in 1815, his letters to Count Zichy brimmed with enthusiasm for new technologies. "He visited workshops and factories," writes his biographer, George Barany, "and was fascinated by steam engines, gas pipelines, sawmills, sausage-cutting gadgets and the 'extraordinary' sight of forty workers producing 500 pairs of shoes a day." Yet almost in the same breath he remarks somewhat naively that steam power could not compete with cheap labour in backward countries like Hungary, and that Hungarians were a "warlike nation... of innate ferocity, unlikely to adjust to a spinning mill", going on to "thank God there are no factories in Hungary".⁷ Thirty-seven years later, Imre

Madách wrote a scene for his *Tragedy of Man* in which Adam is likewise bowled over by the liberty and energy-releasing dynamism of London's capitalist society:

*No more taboos, restrictions, segregation,
no gruesome phantoms stalking from the past
to be enshrined and glorified by custom
the curse and plague of future generations*

—only to be abruptly disillusioned by its downside ("no competition where their rules are crooked", "no independence where the hungry millions / must bend to someone's yoke to keep alive").⁸

Differing perspectives on reform

Ironically it was the Catholic Széchenyi who was later to change his view to a positive one about the necessity of efficient manufacturing, although his aristocratic attitudes retained a strong colouring of religious humanitarianism. His great projects grew from the mind of a visionary romantic and apostle of national aspiration, yet they were firmly grounded in utilitarian logic. In the views of the Lutheran Kossuth, who is rightly regarded as Hungary's first professional politician, a narrower focus of political calculation may be discerned: certainly he espoused a radical, egalitarian agenda for modernization and embourgeoisement; but the agenda was skewed towards the interests of the lesser nobility from which he came, the chief upholders of the autonomous county system. These differences in outlook led to a significantly differentiated reception of ideas that originated in the French, British and American Enlightenments. Széchenyi, for example, remained a steadfast protagonist of free trade, while Kossuth (under the influence of the ideas of Friedrich List) argued for protectionism (or at least a defensive tariff zone) and indeed set up a Protective Industrial

Union. Then again, Széchenyi (in common with the liberals Baron Eötvös and Ferenc Deák) saw the absolute requirement of a strong centralized administration (in the British context indicated by the autonomy and legislative monopoly of the national parliament), if his country was to be successfully modernized; but Kossuth still saw the political milieu of the venerable counties in which he had been nurtured as the core of democracy and national identity. Often he seemed to gloss over the fact that they could also be the bulwark of anachronistic privilege, hostile to any change that did not enhance the interests of the gentry. Lastly, Széchenyi, a child of the Enlightenment in so many respects, believed in the leading role of the aristocracy (who should be far-sighted and virtuous men, rather like Plato's philosopher kings), even in a state where feudalism had been dismantled. The populist Kossuth, on the other hand, was a man whose appeal was increasingly shaped by a mass audience, just as he also aspired to articulate the will of the masses. It was this very gift that could be fatal to him, leading eventually to disastrous miscalculations on the nationality issue; here, Széchenyi displayed greater insight and vision in his articulation of the problem, notwithstanding a certain ambivalence in his attitude to Jews. The great Austrian dramatist of the 19th century, Franz Grillparzer, movingly articulated the sacred mission of a dynasty; Széchenyi, by contrast, believed in the sacred mission of individual nations, but not that these missions should be mutually exclusive. Indeed, he shared Grillparzer's anxiety (which proved to be well-founded) about mankind's ever-imminent fall from grace through nationalism, whereby esteem of one's own national culture is maintained chiefly by fear and hatred of others—as Grillparzer puts it, the

descent "*von der Humanität durch die Nazionalität zur Bestialität*".

Most of the issues on which Széchenyi and Kossuth differed are fundamental to the history of Britain and Europe in the 19th century, even if the way in which they were argued was determined by the particular national context. Hungarian intellectuals and political activists watched closely to see how the political establishment of Victorian Britain dealt with the free trade issue, or responded to pressure from middle-class commercial interests for more say in government, or failed to respond to the demands of the working man formulated by the Chartists, or even more lamentably failed to free itself from its Protestant, imperialistic *Weltanschauung* when dealing with Ireland. (Baron Eötvös, for instance, even published a long essay on *Poverty in Ireland* in 1840). However, the lively interest in Britain, what conservative opponents of reform in Hungary disparagingly dubbed "Anglomania", had its roots further back in the spread of the Enlightenment in the 18th century, and in particular in the dissemination of ideas mediated by freemasonry. A brief survey of this phenomenon may help to illuminate why reformers in a Catholic-dominated, agrarian, land-locked country, that was subordinate to a foreign dynasty, believed that the experience of an aggressively expanding maritime power with fast developing industrialization and a strong bourgeois layer, a state moreover founded on Protestant supremacy, was (or should be) relevant to their own country.

The Enlightenment and Freemasonry

In the late 18th century travel abroad for Hungarians was a privilege of the nobility, although they might carry a train of retainers with them, as did Ferenc Széchenyi

(father of István), who travelled to England in 1787 with his wife, his Hungarian secretary, his Swiss doctor and two servants.⁹ Even the nobility, however, had to negotiate a passport with the Vienna court, not always easy in the climate of official paranoia which increased to fever pitch following the French Revolution in 1789 and a subsequent failed Jacobin conspiracy in Hungary (1794). Both the American and French revolutions had a powerful impact on the élite of Hungary, while the ideas brought into circulation by the thinkers of the French Enlightenment (most notably Montesquieu's *De L'Esprit des Lois*) not only influenced Habsburg rulers like Joseph II and his successor, Leopold II, but also contributed to the admiration for England and its supposed preservation of ancient freedoms somewhat rhapsodically described by the great French thinker.

One of the most agreeable aspects of Montesquieu's writing was his openness to other civilizations and the lessons they might have for one's own, a tendency ridiculed by that pillar of English conservatism, Dr Johnson. ("Whenever Montesquieu wants to support a strange opinion," wrote the coffee-house sage, "he quotes you the practice of Japan or of some other distant country. To support polygamy he tells you of the island of Formosa, where there are ten women born for one man.")¹⁰ A major feature of the Enlightenment, therefore, was the tendency to look for hints, if not role models, in societies previously considered as threatening rivals (or, if non-Christian, as barbarous). It was in this spirit that Hungarian intellectuals looked *inter alia* to England, just as Anglo-Scottish intellectuals, such as Adam Smith or David Hume, drew inspiration from France. Montesquieu's empirical respect for other cultures was transmuted in the Romantic era, most conspicuously in the work of Johann Gottfried Herder, into an

almost mystical notion of the sacred mission of individual cultures (assuming they were strong enough to survive), and there is a great deal of Herder's attitudes (in a positive sense) in the thinking of Count Széchenyi. The sorry history of nineteenth century nationalism should not be adduced to degrade the dignified love of country that Széchenyi typically exhibited, a love which assumed that the homeland could be subject to improvement by studying the experience of others. The charge of "Anglomania", levelled against him, was particularly absurd insofar as he was critical of many things in England (referring perceptively to a strain of "intolerance" underlying the mask of liberal thought) and (in common with Kossuth) specifically stated that each country should only take from another what was suitable for local circumstances.

If these factors are borne in mind, it becomes easier to understand the socially conservative, yet (by the standards of the day) politically liberal stance of many reform-minded Hungarian nobles and some of the county officials (*honoratiores*), who equated their own interests with those of the nation. They did so quite naturally, since they were indeed, in a quasi-constitutional and legal sense, the *natio Hungarica*, insofar as that had been fixed in stone by the famous *Tripartitum* drawn up by István Werbőczy. Published in 1517, three years after the bloody suppression of the great peasant revolt led by György Dózsa, Werbőczy's legal code had notoriously delivered the Hungarian peasants into perpetual serfdom. On the other hand, the point has been well made that many of those from the middling and lesser nobility who were to espouse reform in the 1830's were the very people who, on paper at least, stood to lose most by peasant liberation and tax reform: the magnates had enough assets to adapt to anything the

new dispensation was likely to demand of them, but the lesser nobles lacked capital to hire labour and invest. It may be that poverty-stricken privilege within a society where the majority of the population was oppressed by the law, while a small minority enjoyed virtual legal immunity, had by then become an embarrassment to them.

Whether or not that was really the case, it is clear that the influence of speculative freemasonry, which had spread from England to the continent in the early and mid-18th century, had provided the impetus for the reconsideration of some of the most treasured assumptions about the Hungarian constitution and about governance in general. A large number of intellectual Hungarian aristocrats had become adherents of freemasonry, including such leading figures as Draskovich, Erdődy, Festetics, Batthyány, Podmaniczky, Csáky and even Széchenyi's ultra-loyal father as a young man. Like his son, he found himself torn between loyalty to the Emperor (although he resigned all his official posts in 1786, when Joseph II began consistently to ignore the constitution) and his Hungarian patriotism.¹¹ The Masonic *Constitutional System of Liberty*, drawn up by Draskovich in the 1770's and heavily influenced by the ideas of Montesquieu, seems to have won his complete approval.

The British Grand Lodge, founded in 1717, approved and strongly influenced continental lodges until the Berlin one was set up in 1740, possibly as a device of Frederick the Great to gain influence in Central and Eastern Europe. Nonetheless, as Margaret Jacob has pointed out, German freemasons in the 1780's still identified "our freedom [as] the tradition of the British nation", a tradition which "embodied British cultural values associated with the potentially subversive religious toleration, relaxed fraternizing among men of mixed and widely disparate social back-

grounds, an ideology of works and merit, and not least of constitution and elections."¹² This somewhat romanticized picture (the bitter struggle for Catholic emancipation in Ireland gives a truer picture of British "religious tolerance") nevertheless illustrated how deep the rosy picture of the English polity painted by Montesquieu had sunk into the consciousness of continental Europe. It is perhaps in the context of these attributes, or supposed attributes, that a leading mason, József Podmaniczky, (according to a secret police report) secretly offered the Hungarian throne to an English duke in 1788, if the Habsburgs could be successfully toppled. (It ought to be said, however, that offering the Hungarian throne around was then in fashion: Louis Philippe d'Orléans, a possible ruler of a projected independent Austrian Netherlands, had also been considered, as was Duke Karl August of Weimar. The latter was tempted to accept, until a magisterial blast from Goethe put him back on the straight and narrow).¹³

The disillusion of the multi-talented József Podmaniczky with Emperor Joseph II, under whom he had made a glittering career as a Lutheran from the gentry class promoted to a baronetcy in the hope of winning over potentially troublesome elements, was doubtless sealed, if not determined, by Joseph's *Freemasonry Patent* of 1785. This subjected the free-thinking masons to central, indeed to police supervision. Joseph (who had once been suspected of being a mason himself, his father Franz Stefan of Lorraine, having been initiated in 1733 at the English ambassador's residence at The Hague) thereby destroyed much of the good will engendered by his enlightened *Tolerance Patent* of 1781. This had extended religious tolerance to Protestants, formerly banned from the imperial civil service under the terms of the *Carolina Resolutio*. Since about a third of

the Hungarians were Protestant, it comes as no surprise to find that there was also a Protestant preponderance in Hungarian freemasonry in the 1770's and 1780's; of the one thousand or so members of Hungarian lodges, three-quarters were landed gentry, for the most part either Lutheran or Calvinist.¹⁴ As George Barany points out, Protestantism actually came to be identified with the very notion of reform, insofar as Catholic conservatives were to refer to the "Reform Party" and the "Protestant Party" interchangeably, when commenting on the proceedings of the Lower Diet between 1832 and 1836.¹⁵

Notwithstanding this clear connection with Protestantism, caution should be exercised about attributing too much direct British influence on Hungarian lodges. Religious tolerance was an issue fundamental to continental masonry, yet only lip service was paid to it in the English lodges, whose members came from the hegemonical Protestant majority of the political establishment and did not bestir themselves on behalf of Catholic or Jewish emancipation. Theirs was a very different perspective from that of a Hungarian Protestant, who was part of an officially mistrusted minority—which probably explains why the Draskovich Observance mentioned above followed so closely the spirit of *De L'Esprit des Lois*. However, English freemasonry did have other indirect effects, both by making issues in political economy and even commerce, a less alien topic for the social élite in Hungary, and by exerting an emblematic aesthetic influence, for example in the aristocratic cult of parks and gardens. Géza Hajós has made some suggestive remarks about Viennese gardens (including one laid out by the Esterházy) and the way in which their symbolic architecture and libertarian English design may be linked to freemasonry.¹⁶ In Pest, the first park to which the

public had (albeit limited) access was laid out in 1799 in the English style by László Orczy, a member of the First Innocence Lodge; subsequently both the Palatine's park on the Margaret Island and the City Park showed strong English influence, particularly in the planting of different species of trees from many lands and the design of meandering paths that allowed the private experience of unspoiled nature in a romantic setting. Elsewhere (at Hédervár, Tata, Csákvár, Martonvásár and Kismarton) formal Baroque gardens were replanted in the English style with the help of gardeners who had studied their craft in England, or entirely new English gardens were laid out.

The stress on the individual's right to his private experience of the garden (and perhaps to meditate in the garden's masonic shrines) was a departure from the regimentation and rhetorical display of Baroque garden design, which also made little allowance for private space. However, this should not be allowed to obscure the fact that in England itself the great landscaped parks were still for the most part an assertion of the landocracy's rights of ownership, on which *hoi polloi* had no rights at all. Exceptional were the great royal parks of London (Hyde Park, St James Park, Green Park) that had once been Henry VIII's hunting grounds, and whose opening to the public in the 17th century was emblematic of a more contractual basis for the relationship between monarch and people. Yet, one hundred and fifty years later, John Nash's speculative development of Regents Park was initially conceived as a manifestation of the property-based liberties of the prosperous middle and upper middle classes, the whole spirit of which (as for the nobility) elevated individual rights by maintaining exclusion and exclusiveness. The park was not in fact opened to the public until 1838,

which was ten years after its completion, and Nash himself had said he wanted to create the illusion that each villa overlooked its own park: with no other villa in sight it would seem as if "the entire park belonged to it."¹⁷ This was the English version of what Adolf Loos attacked as insupportable pretension in *Ornament und Verbrechen*, contemptuously dismissing "his Majesty the Plebs", who lived in a modest dwelling concealed behind the façade of a palace. Still, the English bourgeoisie may have seen it differently—as a laudable aspiration to the aristocrat's perception of his property, a levelling up of society rather than the levelling down to mediocrity which cultural pessimists (and also liberals like Ferenc Pulszky) were ready to denounce.

From enlightened abstraction to practical measures

The origins of freemasonry lay in mastery of the geometrician's complex skills, a mastery that naturally developed into monopolization of knowledge (a commercial weapon) and the control of initiation (leading to the formation of an artisan, later an intellectual, *élite*). However, the original criteria of craftsmen's skills, and then of more general intellectual ability in the period of the Enlightenment, gave masonry its meritocratic tinge, while also suggesting an alliance between the empiricism of 18th-century scientific inquiry and a progressive *Weltanschauung*. Moreover, Newton's discovery of the laws of gravitation at the end of the 17th century suggested to thinkers of the Enlightenment that universal laws might also be discovered to apply in the social world of man, specifically in methods of governance and economic behaviour. Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian philosophy (in which the Széchenyis, father and son, were well

versed, while Kossuth was to read his works when imprisoned for reporting the proceedings of the County Administrations from 1837) represented an attempt to regulate societies according to how men are, not how they ought to be in the light of some abstract moral or religious precept. The same could be said of Adam Smith's more sophisticated account of the unintended benefits of the pursuit of economic self-interest. Both thinkers preferred the concept of improvement to that of perfectibility and both assumed that progress could actually be achieved by the adoption of certain modes of behaviour and the avoidance of others. Not only did this imply a complete liberation from the static and still, in many ways, medieval view of the world that prevailed under Hungarian feudalism, it also suggested a willingness to take calculated risks, to invest for long-term results and to adopt many other features of bourgeois capitalism. There are innumerable remarks by Széchenyi that suggest the influence of this way of thinking in general and of Bentham or Smith in particular, but one example from his book on credit will suffice, where he states that "not fertile plains, mountains, minerals, climate and so forth make up the public force, but the mind that can utilize these. The real power of the nation is revealed in the number of educated heads...."¹⁸

However, the rewards of sophisticated commerce and industrialization that Britain was beginning to enjoy would not have been possible without the wealth generated by the preceding revolution in agriculture. The young Széchenyi had perhaps been more perceptive than he knew when he opined that a backward country like Hungary should not make a dash for industrialization, but concentrate on improving the productivity of agriculture, since an accumulated agricultural surplus was indeed the base and *sine qua non* of

Britain reaching what economic theorists describe as the "take-off point" for economic growth. Some reforming Hungarian nobles, and more especially their factors, were fascinated by the ideas of English agronomists such as Arthur Young and Jethro Tull, but were hampered in their efforts to employ the new methods in agriculture, partly by differences in soil and climate, but more often by the feudal system. Whereas in Britain an entire class of capitalist tenant farmers had grown up, Hungarian serfs were still paying tithes and performing socage. Leases were unstable because of the notorious and ubiquitous entailment of properties, but worse than all this—as Széchenyi protested in his polemic entitled *Hitel* (Credit)—was the virtual absence of credit on reasonable terms, which prevented long-term investment and modernization. Raising the necessary mortgage to improve the land was almost always ruinous, since potential lenders knew that the aviticity law (*ósiség*), whereby land was entailed to the landowner and his successors in perpetuity, effectively prevented the distraint of property offered as collateral security.

Széchenyi himself, although a wealthy landowner, was refused credit by a Viennese bank shortly after the occurrence of one of the most notorious Hungarian financial scandals involving the powerful Count Grassalkovich, whose agents induced Viennese savers to invest in interest-bearing bonds in 1825 to raise two million forints on the collateral of the Grassalkovich estates. Given the bad reputation of Hungarian loans, special prospectuses were issued purporting to offer guarantees of repayment and interest and a Viennese bank underwrote the offer. Specifically, the Count undertook to forego the protection of Hungarian feudal law in case of dispute and to make himself accountable to an Austrian court. These as-

surances proved to be worthless. When the interest ceased after a couple of years, creditors found that the Viennese bank washed its hands of the matter; although a Viennese court found in their favour, Count Grassalkovich blandly invoked Hungarian law to refuse payment and was backed by the County. The latter even issued a judgement condemning the usurious practices of his creditors.¹⁹ If this sort of behaviour was possible by one of the leading families of the land, one could be forgiven for thinking that many nobles were simply drones who dressed up their parasitic crookery in legal niceties and the rhetoric of patriotism. Although the Grassalkovich case was probably exceptional, it lends force to Széchenyi's heartfelt writings on the necessity of a *ius cambio-mercantile*, a mercantile code that would make commercial undertakings binding on participants. The usurious rates of interest of which Hungarian nobles self-righteously complained (e.g. Count Carl Andrássy in *Umriss einer möglichen Reform in Ungarn*—1833) were of course primarily the consequence of the high risk attached to dealing with a layer of society that had formed the law in its own image. Széchenyi's thinking reflects the insistence of Adam Smith that enlightened self-interest had come "to respect property rights and to regard the keeping of contractual promises as 'reasonable expectations'... As commerce increased, there was a greater social need for honouring contractual promises, and a greater sense of disappointment felt by those subjected to broken promises. Contract law was a response to that need."²⁰

Apart from the above considerations, Hungarian agricultural reformers were hampered by the imperial revenue system which required the maintenance of mass peasant holdings on which the taxes were raised from which the nobility were ex-

empt. The liberation of what nobles contemptuously called the *misera plebs contribuens*, and the spreading of the taxation burden, were items high on Széchenyi's agenda, and by the same token, the insistence that nobles should pay the toll on the projected Chain Bridge between Buda and Pest was of immense symbolic importance as representing an irreversible step in the direction of a civil society. Significantly, it was the Lord Chief Justice who burst out weeping when the institution of a toll was agreed by the Diet in 1835, correctly—from his point of view—forecasting that it would lead to the downfall of the Hungarian nobility and proclaiming that he would himself never cross the bridge as long as he lived. Nothing illustrates better than his reaction the point made by Bentham and Smith that laws generally reflected the interests of those who framed them, and all too often therefore offered a refuge for those who wished to circumvent natural justice. The lesser Hungarian nobility were indeed obsessed with law, and in the 1840's it was the proud boast of Pest "to possess more lawyers than Bohemia, Styria and Dalmatia combined."²¹

If the feudal law was an obstacle to land transfer and innovation in agriculture, there was still the possibility of practical measures. In this respect the founding of the *Georgikon* in 1797 on the Keszthely estate of Széchenyi's uncle, Count György Festetics, was of considerable significance. Here a new spirit was evident, to counter the wasteful "slash and burn" mentality of traditional feudal agriculture, which had only been encouraged by the fact that Hungary was relatively rich in cultivable land per head of the population, and that under the one hundred and forty years of Turkish occupation much land (with no peasantry to work it) had been left to "rest". This apparent blessing was now also a spur to inefficiency, for if one strip

was exhausted, it was often simply abandoned and an unworked one brought into cultivation. Inefficient cultivation meant that yields were low under the feudal system. The English agronomist, Arthur Young, spoke of producing 22 hectolitres of corn per hectare (2.471 acres) in 1770 on the best land in Britain, while the peasant farming of France was estimated to produce only 16 hl/ha; some thirty years later Germany with Central Europe were still said to be producing only some 10-11 hl/ha.

The English methods for increasing productivity were mediated by German writers: in particular, Albrecht Thaer's *Einleitung zur Kenntnis der englischen Landwirtschaft* (1798-1800) was influential (and sometimes misleading), while a Hungarian writer, Ludovicus Mitterpacker, was clearly drawing on a German translation of Arthur Young's *Six Months Tour in the Northern Provinces of England* in his *Elementa rei rusticae in usum academiarum Regni Hungariae* (Buda, 1777-1794). The first Principal of the *Georgikon* agronomic academy, János Nagyváthy, took many of his ideas from Mitterpacker, but later attributed the agricultural slump after the Napoleonic Wars to the introduction of novel methods. However, Ferenc Pethe, a *Georgikon* lecturer who had visited England, enthusiastically promoted English methods of varied crop rotation and intensive stock farming. Pethe's frustration at the damage to character, as well as to efficiency, caused by the feudal system mirrors the views of Széchenyi and is amusingly expressed in his *Pallérozott mezei gazdaság* (Refined Husbandry, 1805-1814): "The Englishman when he is not working sleeps while wide awake; when he is working, he is all fire. The Hungarian, when he is working, sleeps while he toils; when he is not working, he gets tired fidgeting."²²

Inherent conservatism and lack of interest in productivity gains is indeed the

eternal lament of reformers, some of whom were at least half aware that the basis for the great economic revolutions in Britain was laid with enclosures and wealth incentives for tenant farmers; that these in turn led to agricultural innovation and a surplus, then to the development of financial services for longer term investment in agriculture, but also in business and trade; and the further surpluses from these activities went to investment in the technology and infrastructure of industrialization that would produce higher profits and buoyant consumer markets. Miklós Vay (1756–1824), a Calvinist and a Freemason, was one who perhaps dreamed of kick-starting this process in his homeland, following two visits to England (1786–88, 1790–92). To finance an eye operation in London, he sold the patents of his English weaving and spinning machines to Count Batthyány for 15,000 forints and set off with some crates of Tokaj aszú in a vain attempt to interest the English in this unique product. On his return he brought with him a carriage full of English machines and seeds, and a good supply of potatoes, which at that time were viewed with suspicion in Hungary. He succeeded in popularizing the potato in Borsod, Szabolcs and Zemplén counties, once remarking that he was happy to hear that the peasants were beginning to steal his potatoes, since this meant that they had finally accepted their usefulness as a staple.²³

Feudalism was in unholy alliance with another great obstacle to material progress in Hungary, namely the mercantilist system, imposed under Maria Theresa, that relegated the country to colonial status as the producer of cheap food for the Empire, yet provided no incentives for making agriculture more efficient. By the same token, prospects for industrialization were blocked by maintaining Hungary as a captive market for Austrian manufacturers. The issue of free trade was of course not

resolved in Britain until 1846, when a Conservative Prime Minister repealed the protectionist Corn Laws and split his party in doing so. The shortcomings of mercantilism had, however, been brought into debate sixty years earlier when Adam Smith published his epoch-making *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, a book avidly read and greatly admired by Széchenyi, whose father had visited and been enormously impressed by its author. Smith's ideas were also to a greater or lesser extent absorbed or embraced by Hungarian intellectuals of the Enlightenment, such as Miklós Skerlecz, József Podmaniczky and János Szapáry. The Piarist educated Károly Koppi, whose career was cut short by involvement in the Jacobin conspiracy, even wanted to found a proto-Business School in Pest's Pázmány University, where students would learn about natural produce and manufacturing, as well as commercially useful topics such as currencies, languages, orthography, calligraphy, mathematics and economic geography.²⁴

In general these intellectuals divided their allegiance between the ideas of Smith and his French predecessors such as Turgot (who coined the phrase *laissez-faire* in 1757) and Francois Quesnay, the protagonist of physiocratic doctrines. It is not hard to see the appeal of physiocracy in countries with relatively vast land reserves, like France and 18th-century Hungary, but its fundamental thesis that only an agricultural worker actually *produced* anything (everybody else, including merchants and the bureaucracy, was merely a sterile manipulator of what the peasant produced) was disastrously wrong-headed, as Adam Smith understood only too well. In our own time a similar nostalgia has been expressed about obsolescent types of manufacturing vis-à-vis the service industries and finance, a recycling of the same

superstition that wealth is created only by the *production* of tangible commodities. Worse still, physiocracy encouraged a quasi-ideological mythologization of the land and a blindness to Adam Smith's great insight "that labour, not nature, was the source of value."²⁵ The wasteful Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union today is a tribute to the lingering power of the land mystique in Europe.

It is interesting that Széchenyi, with his customary perception, fully understood the implications of Adam Smith's labour-oriented espousal of free trade, while Kossuth, the protectionist, often displayed lingering traces of physiocratic idealization of the land. In a letter (November 17, 1855) to a Chartist newspaper, written during his English exile, he compared the condition of exploited labour in England and the Hungarian peasantry as follows: "In Hungary ... the social evil is not so great. Why? Because the leading feature of the country happily remained chiefly agricultural—manufacture and commerce are only subordinate, auxiliary elements. And agriculture in general always secures the daily bread; a field labourer may be short in cash, but bread he has. We have therefore but to preserve this character of our country and the social condition of Hungary never will become as sick as that of England is; the daily existence of millions never will be precariously subject to market prices and speculation."²⁶ And further: "the condition of (English) society has been framed by and under the paramount influence of the commercial interest; which is not productive itself, only stimulating and exchanging." It is true, of course, that Széchenyi had once "thanked God there [were] no factories in Hungary," a reaction to the often appalling social cost of industrialization that he may have witnessed on his English travels. On the other hand, he undertook a careful study of English, Swiss, German and Italian

milling industries before introducing the first steam mills in Hungary. In Barany's words: "He pointed out that such a development would benefit farmers and at the same time give an opportunity to otherwise resourceless people to make a living as millhands, as coal miners in the Mohács region, or as carpenters preparing the wooden staves to hold the flour. To assure the success of the new enterprise, Széchenyi asked the abolition of price controls in the flour business."²⁷

Such remarks throw his differences with Kossuth into sharp relief, for Kossuth often comes close to sounding like a Hungarian version of the conservative radical, William Cobbett (1763–1835), with whose writings and political career he would certainly have been familiar. The similarities become apparent in any reading of Cobbett's nostalgic and fiercely indignant account of England in the depressed phase of the agricultural revolution in the 1820's. As George Woodcock puts it in his introduction to Cobbett's great masterpiece, *Rural Rides*, the old radical was outraged "by the cottager evicted from his holding in the great enclosures of the common lands, the farm labourer living on potatoes while he grows beef and wheat for the city dwellers, the Catholic suffering under political disabilities, the factory worker in Bounderby's Mill, the pauper insulted by overseers and thrust into the workhouse by utilitarian philanthropists: of all these Cobbett was the Quixotic defender."²⁸ On the other hand, Széchenyi, as a great landowner, but also a perceptive observer, still believed that successful industrialization depended on prior development of agricultural production, which was indeed the experience of Britain. As for the mills, by the end of the 19th century they were Hungary's most important export industry, acting as catalyst to the rapidly growing business of food processing.²⁹

Progress and nationalism

In the clear distinctions between the politico-economic stance of Széchenyi and that of Kossuth is adumbrated a more profound difference of approach to Hungary's problems. Széchenyi was early attracted to the ideas of Jeremy Bentham, as the title originally planned for his book on credit suggests (he wanted it to be called *About People, or the Bases of Happiness*). There are in his thought a number of creative tensions—that between the Benthamite principle of the happiness of the greatest number and the respect due to the individual, or that between the notion of economic efficiency and the potential inhumanity of a system whose criteria of success seemed to elevate monetary value over human compassion, or that between love of his country and contempt for the apathy, ignorance and backwardness that prevailed there, and finally that between a belief in the sacred mission of individual national cultures and a realization of the necessity for supranational thinking and cosmopolitan sympathies.

In this last respect, the Anglo-Scottish contribution to European culture is of particular interest, and the position of Scotland culturally, politically and economically with regard to England has some thought-provoking implications for that of Hungary in the context of the Habsburg hegemony. David Hume, Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith and other giants of the Scottish Enlightenment were the products of a Presbyterian-based, democratically organized educational system coupled with the economic benefits that flowed from the Act of Union with England of 1707. As Jerry Muller has pointed out, their Calvinist heritage linked Scottish academe to the tradition of the great universities of the Netherlands, the Scottish

development of Roman law brought its legal institutions closer to the continental legal framework than were those of England, while a historically determined tendency to draw inspiration from non-English sources, as well as links going back to "the auld alliance", created a powerful axis with the thinkers of the French Enlightenment. Scottish intellectuals were often more genuinely cosmopolitan than their English counterparts (the Grand Tour of English milords being more an Olympian survey of foreigners coupled with a little opportunistic antiquity purchasing); but theirs was a "provincial cosmopolitanism" implying a strong and pragmatic impulse for self-improvement.³⁰ In other words, these "North Britons", as the Lowland Scots intelligentsia preferred to style itself, capitalized on their distinctive cultural traditions to bring something distinctive to the notion of "Britain" and "British", just as their descendants were to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear by going out and running the British Empire, since they were denied the plum jobs in the English establishment. Perhaps it is no accident that the upwardly mobile Scot, Adam Clark, was the one who went abroad and grew in stature in his job as *Baumeister*, while his superior, the Englishman Tierney Clark, was content to be (and could afford to be) a stay-at-home administrator of the project. Equally it may be significant that Adam Clark nobly supported the cause of his adopted Hungary in the 1848 War of Independence, while Tierney Clark was notoriously contemptuous of it.

The North Britons were anxious to be distinguished from the folk museum of the Highlands on their back doorstep—it was usually Lowlanders who, as factors to the hated Dukes of Sutherland, were responsible for some of the most brutal of the so-called "clearances", when the feudal subsistence economy of the Highlands was

being destroyed to make way for intensive sheep-runs, and whole clans were driven into exile in North America or the Antipodes. On the other hand, it was the Lowlander and antiquary, Sir Walter Scott, who rekindled the national myth of the Land of the Gaels that reinforced Scottish identity, succeeding in large measure in the invention of a *Kulturvolk*, despite the discredit potentially attaching to such an enterprise after the literary forgeries of *Ossian*. Much of Scott's almost unparalleled international success as an author, not least in Hungary, may be attributed to his achievement in re-inventing a nation that had lost its independent statehood, and doing so by invoking a historical continuity that upheld national dignity. Robert Walsh in his *Narrative of a Journey from Constantinople to England* (1832) encounters a bookseller in Transylvanian Hermannstadt (Nagyszeben/Sibiu) who has just placed a huge portrait on his wall of "Le sieur Valtere Skote, l'homme le plus célèbre en toute l'Europe". French and German translations of Scott's novels formed a sizeable part of his stock.³¹ John Paget encountered an impoverished Jew on his Hungarian travels, who pulled from his pocket a well-thumbed German translation of *Ivanhoe*, assuring the Englishman that he had read many others of Scott's works and expressing profound dismay on learning that the great man was no longer alive.³²

From the point of view of a progressive conservative, Scott's genius lay in reconciling national aspirations with historical and political realities. His stage-management of George IV's visit to Scotland in 1822 managed to flatter all interested parties: the Highlanders with the myth that the roots of Scottish identity lay in the (substantially invented) culture of the Gael, the "North Britons" with an emphasis on their contribution to the British weal and the Hanoverian monarch with a show of

loyalty and affection, which survived even the spectacle of the corpulent German libertine sporting a kilt. The kind of ingenious marriage of myth and political convenience that Scott pulled off was closer to the "synthesis of enlightened Empiricism and romantic nationalism" to be found in the thinking of Zsigmond Kemény and others of the "Literary Deák Party" than to Széchenyi's quasi-mystical Herderian idea of the individual nation's unique mission, still less the myopic populism of Kossuth.³³ Interestingly, Kemény, who stood for "mediatory liberalism", was a popularizer of Lord Macaulay's intensely Whig-orientated, Protestant and materialistic *History of England* in Hungary, drawing lessons from it for his homeland in a long review of Antal Csengery's translation into Hungarian of the first part of the history, published in 1853. Baron Eötvös was also of this group and it was he who coined the pregnant phrase "peaceful co-existence" (*békés együttélés*), a pragmatic locution that suggested a way of reconciling national aspiration with political and economic reality long before it acquired its particularized twentieth century meaning.³³

An inverted perspective: some concluding thoughts on the influence of the British political culture in Hungary

As will have become clear from the foregoing, the positions of Hungary as a nation and its reformers as a political class rendered the attraction of British ideas strong, their application difficult, in many areas impossible. If British Protestant freemasons represented an influence close to the heart and summit of the establishment, Hungarian Protestant freemasons represented a distrusted (albeit substantial) minority, even when, as in many

cases, they were at least nominally loyal to the Habsburg regime. The greatest proponent of free trade in Britain, Adam Smith, was able to argue his case in the spirit of enlightened self-interest, by suggesting that a blind adherence to mercantilism prevented all classes from becoming as prosperous as they might otherwise become. Moreover, there was a sense in which Britannia, ruling the waves and a large slice of the world's markets, could afford to take the risk of abolishing the trade barriers behind which its hegemony had actually been built up. A Hungarian proponent of free trade was at once in collision with the interests of the Cameralist government in Vienna, as also of the entrenched forces of feudalism, the whole structure of which was predicated on protection from the competitive dynamism of a capitalist economy.

Even if feudalism was done away with, Kossuth's fears for the nascent bourgeois economy exposed to the blasts of competition from economically more powerful states was understandable. Even today, competition is not very welcome in some sectors of what was once part of the Austro-Hungarian economy, yet it was already instinctive to the thinking of Adam Clark, who mounted a robust defence against critics of Tierney Clark's bridge design with an argument drawn from the British experience of industrialization: "Perhaps no other country in the world," he wrote, "offers a broader field for the practice of large-scale hydro-engineering as Great Britain, whose insular location and highly developed trade makes it necessary to build innumerable bridges, harbours, docks, canals and so on, *whereby a lively and open competition is of the utmost importance*, if such works are to be carried out at the smallest possible cost."³⁴ (My italics).

Secondly, an Anglo-Scot or "North Briton", after the Act of Union, could pre-

serve his national dignity while vigorously trying to eradicate "Scotticisms" from his English speech and formal writings (as did both Adam Smith and Walter Scott); for a Hungarian the opposite was the case, and the revival of his native tongue in opposition to the German of the regime became perhaps the single most important constituent of his national identity. And lastly, a supremely successful nation, apparently in charge of its own destiny and largely unthreatened externally after the defeat of Napoleon, could accommodate social and political change in which new wealth opportunities consoled for loss of privilege. In Hungary the dismantling of privilege and the modernization of society could plausibly be presented by conservative vested interests as an attack on the nation itself. It was these difficulties that Charles Dickens described in his brilliant and moving account of the career of Széchenyi ten years after the latter's death. "Who but a dreamer," he writes, "would expect a whole people, and a singularly impulsive people, to outspeed time and pass at one stroke without stumbling from centuries of feudalism into the most experimental and complex form of modern society?"³⁵

What especially appealed to Dickens was Széchenyi's passionate moderation, since he himself belonged to the "change of heart" school of thought (as George Orwell termed it in his essay on Dickens), which believes that persuasion and reason, an appeal to conscience, will lead to a "change of heart" on the part of those who abuse their position in society. In the same way, Dickens applauded Széchenyi's views on ethnic minorities, which he describes as "to this day (i.e. 1870) far in advance of those of his countrymen—far in advance indeed of the opinions that still prevail in England respecting the treatment of alien races" and capable of being studied to advantage by any Englishman "who shares

the inherited responsibility of governing Ireland and India."³⁶ Like Széchenyi, the progressive liberal in Dickens sought to square the circle, to achieve both liberty and justice. Yet as a pragmatist, he would probably have seen the force of Baron Eötvös's argument in *Der Einfluss der herrschenden Ideen des 19. Jahrhunderts auf den Staat* (1851–54), namely that equality, liberty and nationality were often mutually contradictory ideas. In Eötvös's view, levels of civilization were hard to judge, since greater freedom for some was always at the cost of greater inequality and economic repression for others (he cites the English treatment of the Irish and the American exploitation of slaves and slaughtering of native Americans). Nonetheless, Dickens is drawn to Széchenyi's moral position, which is close to his own: he quotes approvingly Széchenyi's exhortation to remember that "our salvation depends, not on the assertion of political power, but the cultivation of personal virtue." By the same token, he is hostile to Kossuth, citing Széchenyi's famous denunciation of the populist, where he puts words into his opponent's mouth that could have come from one of the more histrionic passages in a Dickens novel: "...I aspired to command others, I could not govern myself. It was my boast to be the benefactor of my country. It is my shame to have been only the puppet of her popular passions."³⁷

When faced with officially sponsored injustice, English bourgeois radicals like Charles Dickens were eloquent in their de-

nunciation, but they were no revolutionaries. Somewhere, they believed, a middle way could be found between quietism and violence, even if 19th-century Britain had seen plenty of both, not to mention Ireland. It was perhaps this middle way of working with the grain of political realities, yet trying to appeal to the enlightened self-interest of their opponents, that seemed to offer a way forward for the moderate, centralist reformers in Hungary. Széchenyi himself gave expression to this often paradoxical mixture of moral passion and conservative caution when he proclaimed: "I have awakened my countrymen in order that they might walk upright and conduct themselves like men; not in order that they may throw themselves out of the window."³⁸ Symbolically, as well as materially, the erection of the Chain Bridge was part of his great project to awaken his countrymen to new life; the best that Britain had to offer (pragmatism, commercial skills, technology), had a vital role to play in that noble undertaking. Whether or not we can speak of British influence on his strategy for change, the latter was certainly (and despite the evident impulsiveness of Széchenyi's personality) very close in spirit to the methods of piecemeal reform favoured in Britain: "I prefer," he told Baron Langsdorff in 1837, "to catch the bull by the tail rather than by the horns: the secret of political forces, as also of mechanical forces, is to use only the amount required for the aim that one wants to attain."³⁹ ■

NOTES

1 ■ This and other quotations from Count István Széchenyi's diaries or correspondence are taken from George Barany: *Stephen Széchenyi and the Awakening of Hungarian Nationalism, 1791–1841*. Princeton, 1968. This remark is cited on p. 268.

2 ■ Michael Joseph Quin: *A Steam Voyage down the Danube*. London, 1835. Vol 1. pp. 3, 6–7.

3 ■ W. M. Thackeray: "De Juventute" in *Roundabout Papers*. Cited in *The Victorian Mind* Ed. Gerald B. Kauvar and Gerald C. Sorensen. London, 1969. p. 119.

4 ■ Cited in *The Victorian Mind* p. 118, and taken from Samuel Smiles: *The Life of George Stephenson, Railway Engineer*. Chapter XXV: "Advance of Public Opinion in Favour of the Railway".

- 5 ■ Ferenc Pulszky: *Aus dem Tagebuche eines in Großbritannien reisenden Ungarn*. Pesth. 1837. pp. 2, 3, 101.
- 6 ■ Quoted in É. H. Haraszti: "Contemporary Hungarian Reactions to the Anti-Corn Law Movement" in *Acta Historica* VIII Nos. 3–4, 1961. p. 397.
- 7 ■ Barany: op. cit. pp. 74–75.
- 8 ■ Transl. by Iain MacLeod pp. 348 and 349–350 in *Quest of the Miracle Stag: The Poetry of Hungary* Ed. Adam Makkai. Chicago–Budapest 1996.
- 9 ■ Vilmos Fraknói: *Gróf Széchenyi Ferencz*. Budapest, 1903. pp. 112–116
- 10 ■ Cited in David Thomson: *Political Ideas*. Harmsworth, 1969. p. 81.
- 11 ■ Éva H. Balázs: *Hungary and the Habsburgs, 1765–1800*. Budapest, London, New York, 1997, p. 305.
- 12 ■ Margaret C. Jacob: *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth Century Europe*. Oxford, 1991. p. 151.
- 13 ■ For this information and that in the following paragraph I have drawn heavily on Éva H. Balázs's remarkable study *Hungary and the Habsburgs: 1765–1800*. See Note 11.
- 14 ■ Éva H. Balázs: op cit. p. 43.
- 15 ■ See George Barany: "The Liberal Challenge and its Limitations: The Religious Question at the Diet of 1843–1844." In: *Hungary and European Civilization*, Ed. György Ránki. Budapest, 1989. p. 33.
- 16 ■ See Géza Hajós: *Romantische Gärten der Aufklärung: Englische Landschaftskultur des 18. Jahrhunderts in und um Wien–Wien*. Köln, 1989. Chapter IV: Die Freimaurerei und der englische Garten in Wien.
- 17 ■ Quoted in J. Mordaunt Crook: "Die Erneuerung der Hauptstadt — John Nash und das "Malerische"" in *Metropole London: Macht und Glanz einer Weltstadt 1800–1840*. Recklinghausen, 1992. p. 81.
- 18 ■ Quoted in Susanne M. Balpatak: *Stephen Széchenyi and his Socio-Economic and Political Ideas*. MA Research Paper prepared for Professor C. Brock. Toronto, 1972. p. 45.
- 19 ■ For a coruscating account of this episode, see: B. G. Ivanyi: "From Feudalism to Capitalism: The Economic Background to Széchenyi's Reform in Hungary." *Journal of Central European Affairs*. Vol. 20, No. 1. 1960. pp. 282–284.
- 20 ■ Jerry Z. Muller: *Adam Smith in His Time and Ours*. Princeton, 1993. p. 116.
- 21 ■ Paul Ignotus: *Hungary*. New York, 1972. p. 60.
- 22 ■ For this quotation and much of the information on English agricultural ideas transferred to Hungary, I am indebted to János Barta: "The English 'New Agriculture' in Contemporary Hungarian Agricultural Literature." Debrecen, 1974. *Angol Filológiai Tanulmányok* VIII. pp. 77–89.
- 23 ■ For information about Miklós Vay, I am indebted to an article by Orsolya Szakály: *Vay Miklós és az 1807. évi országgyűlés* in *FONS*. Vol. IV. 1997. 3. No. 3., pp. 301–323.
- 24 ■ Éva H. Balázs: op cit. pp. 296–297.
- 25 ■ Robert Heilbroner: *The Worldly Philosophers*. 6th Ed. London, 1991. p. 49.
- 26 ■ Quoted in É. Haraszti–Taylor: *Kossuth as an English Journalist*. Boulder, Colorado, 1990, pp. 393–395.
- 27 ■ Barany: op. cit. pp. 335 and 337.
- 28 ■ Introduction by George Woodcock to William Cobbett: *Rural Rides*. London, 1967 (1830). p. 8.
- 29 ■ Barany: op cit. p. 337.
- 30 ■ See Muller: op. cit. pp. 22–23.
- 31 ■ Robert Walsh: *Narrative of a Journey from Constantinople to England*. London, 1832. p. 302.
- 32 ■ John Paget: *Hungary and Transylvania* (2 Vols.). London 1839. Vol. 1. pp. 120–121.
- 33 ■ For a detailed examination of the synthesis achieved between Romanticism and the empiricism of the Enlightenment, see Mihály Szegedy-Maszák: "Enlightenment and Liberalism in the Works of Széchenyi, Kemény and Eötvös" (from which this remark is taken) in: *Hungary and European Civilization*, Ed. György Ránki. Budapest. p. 24.
- 34 ■ Adam Clark: *Einige Worte über den Bau der Ofner-Pesther Kettenbrücke*. Pest, 1843. p. 5.
- 35 ■ Charles Dickens "All the Year Round" in *New Series* Vol. III. 1869–1870. p. 480.
- 36 ■ Dickens: op. cit. p. 455
- 37 ■ Dickens: op. cit. p. 456
- 38 ■ Quoted in Dickens, op cit. p. 454
- 39 ■ Cited in Barany: op. cit. P. 460. (...— *parce que j'aime mieux tirer le taureau par la queue, que le prendre par les cornes: le secret des forces politiques, comme celui des forces mécaniques est de n'en employer que la quantité nécessaire au but qu'on veut atteindre.*" The source is Baron Langsdorff's report to the French Ambassador Sainte-Aulaire, Pest 10th June, 1837.

■ The author would like to thank Erzsébet Tokaji-Nagy and her colleagues at the Országos Széchenyi Könyvtár for valuable assistance rendered in tracking down sources for this article. In addition thanks are due to Robert Evans, Mórítz Csáky, Eva Csáky, Géza Galavics and Orsolya Szakály for information generously given. Last but not least Ilona Sármany-Parsons patiently assisted with Hungarian translations and read the first draft with a sharp eye. Responsibility for any errors that remain are the author's alone.

Miklós Kun
Kádár
and the Prague Spring

The story of 1968, of the Prague Spring of hopes of reform, and the Prague Fall, of Soviet tanks invading in August, has become much better known after the velvet and other revolutions swept the socialist systems of Eastern Europe and hitherto closely guarded archives became accessible to historians. Still, many blank spots remain. We still do not know why the Soviet leadership urged the departure of Antonin Novotny, the tried and proven dogmatic leader of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, with such vehemence, albeit well aware of the dangers of thereby strengthening the reformists in Prague and Bratislava, who demanded his replacement. When and why did his unexpected successor, Alexander Dubček, who had earlier been proud of his Soviet past, realize that the role of a puppet whose strings

were held by the Kremlin suited him less and less? How did his Hungarian colleague, János Kádár, manage to manoeuvre so cleverly between Moscow and Prague that many believe to this day that he uneasily agreed to take part in the August joint action of the Warsaw Treaty states only because he felt anxious about the fate of the Hungarian way of reforms? That intervention too was much more drastic and bloody than we had been aware of so far. These are the aspects from which I approached the 1968 Czechoslovak events, relying almost exclusively on hitherto unpublished archival sources.

Hungarian politicians showed great restraint at international forums, but did occasionally support Moscow in the manner of their counterparts in East Berlin, Warsaw, Sofia, and, up to spring 1968, in Prague. However, in top-level—always verbal—instructions, a few high-ranking Hungarian diplomats cleverly let it be known in certain capitals (London, Paris, Belgrade) that they could not always act as they wished. In addition, the Hungarian media initially handled the Czechoslovak events with greater subtlety than the media in the rest of the socialist camp.¹

One of the reasons for this was that the Kádár leadership understood that, barely twelve years after the crushing of the 1956

Miklós Kun

teaches history at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. His field is the history of the Soviet Union and the former socialist countries in Europe, on which he has published eight books. The present article is based on a chapter of a book to be published both in Hungarian and English by Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest.

Revolution, a considerable number of Hungarians looked on the Prague Spring with sympathy. The Hungarian Socialist Workers Party (HSWP) leadership was also aware that the aims of the Czechoslovak "new economic mechanism" had much in common with the identically named Hungarian economic policy introduced in January 1968. In connection with this, in spring 1968 there were cautious feelers about the reaction in the West to a possible Budapest-Prague-Belgrade axis based on closer economic cooperation, which would have opened the way to trade relations independent of Comecon.² The Hungarian military leadership also showed understanding toward its Czech and Slovak counterparts during "Operation Sumava" (June–July 1968), a Warsaw Pact exercise held on the territory of four countries, virtually for the purpose of taking temporary occupation of important Czechoslovak regions.³ Furthermore, János Kádár's speeches concerning the Czechoslovak situation also seemed conciliatory both at the Dresden conference of the "Six" in March—which the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCS) delegation attended—and at the Moscow (May) and Warsaw (July) discussions of the "Five"—which it did not. The keynote of these speeches and of those at the HSWP Central Committee meetings was in many ways the same: the Czechs are not yet on the verge of an open counterrevolution, said Kádár, therefore it is advisable to resolve conflicts through "domestic political solution," rather than through armed intervention.⁴

During the first months of 1968 Kádár sympathized more with Dubček than Novotny, the former First Secretary, who had behaved arrogantly with the Hungarian leadership at the end of 1956 and in early 1957. The Hungarian party leader found it psychologically satisfying to be giving "paternal" advice to Dubček, a man less experienced and ten years his junior.

It pleased him to expound his favourite notion of the necessity of engaging in a two-front struggle against sectarian and revisionist forces, and he also took the opportunity to warn the younger man against needless confrontation of the Kremlin.⁵

On the basis of recollections of conversations, Kádár's behaviour in 1968 has been judged to date in East- and Central-European countries, and primarily in Hungary, to have been more sympathetic to Dubček than that of the other party leaders. However, there is a flaw in this image, namely, that the documents that have become accessible in the Soviet Union and Hungary show that every time before his "spontaneous conversations" with Dubček, the Hungarian leader discussed the main issues with Brezhnev over the phone or through mediators, providing a detailed report afterward. On occasion, at the Kremlin's request, he pretended "to give his own well-intentioned opinion" when he told the CPCS leaders things that would have been awkward for Brezhnev himself to say,⁶ as for instance, that the Russians would have to adopt a harder line in case they were not ready to go along, etc. In spite of his native common sense and long years in the party apparatus, Dubček failed to notice that his paternal Hungarian friend was playing with loaded dice. After the Velvet Revolution—when he had the opportunity to read archival documents revealing Kádár's duplicity—he bitterly remarked: "Now I know that Kádár met me on Brezhnev's instructions. And I also know that he was as much a product of 'Leninist morality' as the others."⁷

Dubček probably learned from these documents that Brezhnev all but ordered Kádár, before the latter's visit to Moscow at the end of January 1968, to talk informally to the new CPCS leader, and then inform the Soviet leaders of his impressions. At the meeting near Nové Zámky on

January 10, Dubček and Kádár sought to discover each other's intentions. Their discussions, recorded by their associates, was made up of long monologues, after which Dubček returned to Prague evidently under the impression that he had an ally in Kádár. The latter, on the other hand, came to the conclusion that the tug-of-war between Dubček and Novotny was far from over, and that the course of the Czechoslovak reform process would be rough.⁸

During the ensuing weeks, the Kremlin decided on a wait and see stance. Kádár, too, decided not to sound the alarm. In any case, Moscow and Budapest were more concerned at this time with Romania's policy of going her own way and with the situation in Poland. However, diplomats and KGB agents in Prague did not let the Soviet leadership's attention waver, bombarding it daily with reports of the impending "loss" of Czechoslovakia.⁹ In addition, at the beginning of February, Dubček and his followers resorted to a clever move—using the Kremlin—in trying to permanently sideline Novotny, who was engaged in a last-ditch battle to retain his influence. This is what the "memo", written in the usual party jargon on Brezhnev's phone conversation with Kádár on February 13, 1968, indicates:

During Comrade Dubček's Moscow visit they agreed to send a delegation to the Czechoslovak celebrations led by a P[olit]b[uro] member (they had Comrade Podgorny in mind). They have now received a coded telegramme from Comrade Dubček, explicitly asking—for domestic and foreign policy reasons—that Comrade Brezhnev lead the Soviet delegation... Comrade Zhivkov said that if Comrade Brezhnev goes to Prague, he'll go, too. Comrade Gomulka, who is chairing the Central Committee plenum just at that time, finds the question hard to solve, but they will discuss it all the same and he'll give his answer to Comrade Brezhnev tonight.

Comrade Brezhnev asked that Comrade Kádár also come to Prague, even if for only a day.¹⁰

The telephone lines connecting the socialist capitals were overheating. After lengthy consultations, every Central and East-European communist leader, except Tito, attended the celebrations commemorating the 20th anniversary of the February 1948 events in Prague. However, Dubček, who hoped to bolster his own legitimacy by this event, was greatly disappointed. The fact was that the guests who viewed Czechoslovak reforms with hostility from the start were flooded by complaints from the dogmatic Czech and Slovak politicians. None of the speakers—Dubček included—questioned the grounds for celebrating this spectacular anniversary, the commemoration of the day when in 1948 armed bands and Soviet diplomatic pressure together produced the end of parliamentary democracy in Czechoslovakia.

A few days after the Prague celebrations, the leaders of the socialist countries met again in Sofia at the usual Warsaw Pact conference where, also under the influence of their Czechoslovak impressions, they discussed the latest news from there with increased anxiety. During the break they all saw Brezhnev, urging him to do something about Czechoslovakia. By this time, János Kádár, along with Gomulka and Zhivkov,¹¹ was arguing against Dubček. Later, in their absence, Brezhnev blamed them for not telling him what exactly they meant by "restoring order". Nevertheless, the simple pledge of support from its allies came in handy for the Kremlin, since henceforth Brezhnev could safely refer to the "collective will" of the socialist countries when taking steps against Dubček. But following the Sofia summit—where he made many solemn promises to "control the situation" soon if

only they would leave him alone for a while—Dubček started to play hide and seek. Sometimes, without giving a reason, he did not take Brezhnev's calls. Sometimes, he reported sick like a reluctant student before a test. At other times, he avoided meeting the Soviet Ambassador, Stepan Chervonenko, who spent hours in the antechamber waiting to see him. Something that Novotny, this "cunning old fox", as his Soviet partners called him, would never have dared.¹²

Strangely enough, over the next few months this childish tactic of gaining time often worked. In this way, the first secretary of the CPCS Central Committee managed to avoid being ordered to report to Moscow on three occasions: in April, June and July 1968. At the same time, he also undermined the remaining respect he still commanded in the Kremlin. Furthermore, the total failure to "hem in" Dubček made Brezhnev draw Kádár into this peculiar game. In March already, the Kremlin, with Kádár's assistance, tried to force Dubček to sit down to negotiate, the idea being to make him curb the "licentiousness" of the printed and electronic media and to reinstitute censorship which, by then, existed only on paper, to limit the liberal economic reforms that had gone in the direction of capitalism, as well as a cultural policy promoting "outmoded bourgeois values". But, even more important than these changes, was the Kremlin's demand that Dubček stop the dismissal of the Czech and Slovak *nomenklatura*.¹³

The fact that Leonid Brezhnev called his Hungarian counterpart eight times, sometimes twice a day, between March 11 and 19, 1968, is indicative of the Soviet leadership's unease. Kádár, who did not speak Russian and relied on an interpreter in private conversations, often left a message for Brezhnev the same day or the next if he wanted something clarified. The two politi-

cians, accustomed to the party norms of the Stalin era, were convinced the line was tapped. For this reason, they mostly talked in—actually quite transparent—riddles; in addition, long sections of the conversations were often left out of the "memoranda" written afterwards. On the eve of the armed intervention they decided to send their trusted men to each other rather than discuss the possibilities of curbing the "Czechs"¹⁴ over the telephone. The "memos" of these discussions show that East Berlin and Warsaw at this time supported a solution resembling the subsequently adopted "Cierna" variant. In other words, they proposed that the entire Soviet and Czechoslovak leadership meet in person. Kádár, on the other hand, thought that "...The Soviet comrades cannot agree to this."¹⁵

The Soviet leader did, in fact, come up with another idea, that, "the first secretaries, premiers, and the Central Planning Office chairmen of the six countries would go to Prague" to discuss economic cooperation. It was a transparent pretext and met with Kádár's disapproval. He thought it was inadvisable to go to Prague again, but at the same time it was "necessary to tell Comrade Dubček the truth." For this reason, "Comrade Kádár proposed Uzhgorod in the Ukraine, [as the meeting place], with only the first secretaries attending. It would also seem feasible to have the representatives of not six, but only four countries (the Soviet Union, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary) meet over the weekend."¹⁶

This meeting of the Four proved abortive. Meanwhile, Wladyslaw Gomulka came forth with his compromise proposal of meeting in Moravská Ostrava, Czechoslovakia, instead of Uzhgorod. "Together with Comrade Dubček, Comrade Novotny would also take part" at this meeting.¹⁷ Perhaps this was why the multilateral negotiations came to a standstill. Due to the

speeding up of events, which soon became uncontrollable, panic seized the Kremlin. The Soviet leadership was dismayed when Dubček removed Defense Minister Lomsky without their prior approval. Brezhnev asked Kádár to go to Brno in Moravia, where Dubček was addressing a district party conference, and convey their "shared misgivings".¹⁸ On March 16 the Soviet leader spoke to Kádár more affably than ever before in order to get him to consent: "Comrade Dubček... suggested that he would call Comrade Kádár, and perhaps come to Hungary for discussions. It was noticeable that he was looking forward to meeting Comrade Kádár, he was feeling good about it as their relationship is very good and the trust is complete.

According to Comrade Brezhnev, this meeting would be very advantageous, Comrade Kádár could talk about shared ideas and prepare the ground for the enlarged meeting of the Four."¹⁹

Dubček was again evasive and again eluded his allies' "embrace". But now, in addition to the Soviet leaders, he was also avoiding Kádár. After Dubček returned from Brno, "he told me he could not meet Kádár. But he did not say why," an annoyed Brezhnev said at the March 21 meeting of the CPSU CC Politburo.²⁰ It was obvious that Kádár also took offense and abandoned his plan to visit Czechoslovakia. After all the delays, Moscow finally managed to organize a meeting of the "Six". Oddly enough, Dubček, the chosen victim of the planned attack, was allowed to pick the venue. On March 19, 1968, Brezhnev sent word to Kádár: "He [Dubček] thinks that it would be best to meet in Dresden because he has never been to the GDR and it's neutral ground, so to speak."²¹

The question of who should attend the meeting again became a matter for speculation. It was not decided until the last moment whether or not to invite the

Bulgarians. The Soviet party leader again shared his concerns with Kádár. "With regard to inviting Bulgaria, Comrade Kádár's opinion was that the adverse effect on Romania would exceed the favourable effect on Czechoslovakia. Comrade Brezhnev agreed, and Comrade Dubček also had only the neighbouring countries in mind."²² But, in the end, Todor Zhivkov had his way and was also present at this auto-da-fé.

For nearly two months after the Dresden conference of the "Six", Brezhnev relied less frequently than before on Kádár's services in bargaining with the Czechs and Slovaks. Throughout this period, consultation on the Czechoslovak question continued among the "Five". It was the number one issue for the socialist countries. There was some realignment. Following the conference, Zhivkov wholeheartedly joined Ulbricht and Gomulka, who advocated a radical ("surgical") solution and who were manifestly dissatisfied with the Kremlin's hesitancy. In their eyes, by being the "odd man out", Kádár proved himself to be an utter weakling. At the same time, Brezhnev, by no means decided on the question of armed intervention at this time, seemed to make himself better understood when talking to Budapest.

Meanwhile, the Moscow hawks, including Yuri Andropov, head of the KGB, and his associates, were not idle. A good many times they resorted to a frequently used method, that of intimidating their allies. On April 5, 1968, Fyodor Mortin, deputy head of Soviet intelligence,²³ called on János Kádár in his office in Budapest, then flew to Zhivkov in Sofia. Simultaneously, "another responsible representative of the Committee [that is, the state security committee, the KGB]" briefed Ulbricht, Gomulka, and Dubček. They were told of an alleged American "operational plan" of military intervention, prepared in 1962

which the "Soviet security organs obtained." According to this secret document, probably devised by the KGB disinformation section, "Only an insignificant part of the population of Czechoslovakia will offer resistance to foreign troops: the party members, the party sympathizers, and those who rely on the Communist Party for their well-being."²⁴ This, too, was part of the Kremlin's preparatory steps for the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia.

The Soviet general staff had been working on contingency plans for the invasion since the end of February 1968. The formal reason was that rockets with nuclear warheads were deployed—in the greatest secrecy—in Czechoslovakia. The contingent, which deployed them near the western border of the country, was too small to repel an expected attack by American and West-German diversionists. For this reason, the hawks in the Soviet Politburo almost automatically opted for a solution that had proved so effective in Hungary in the autumn of 1956. However, Brezhnev, who was more cautious than almost anyone else, would have preferred to invade Czechoslovakia "through the back door," with the knowledge, and in fact, prior consent, of the Czechoslovak leadership. Therefore, they returned to the plan of trying to win over Dubček.²⁵

On April 16, Brezhnev called Kádár again and told him that he "suggested to Comrade Dubček that they should meet in private, unofficially... He thought that he would give a political evaluation of the events based on Czechoslovak data, and if he meets with understanding on Comrade Dubček's part, he will propose various steps for improving the situation. For instance, the holding of a joint Soviet, Czechoslovak, Hungarian, and Polish military exercise on Czechoslovak soil."²⁶ But, naturally, Dubček didn't like the idea of the marshalling of troops that would have

resembled the subsequent "Sumava" exercise. On April 25, Brezhnev defined for Kádár the tactic to be followed as follows: "The task before us... is to consider collectively before it is too late how to help Comrade Dubček and the healthy forces standing by his side."²⁷

Not counting the brief period around May 9, 1968—when the Soviet leadership was considering overrunning Czechoslovakia²⁸—this stop-go tactic lasted up to early July. However, before the advocates of "surgical intervention" gained the upper hand in the Soviet Politburo, Moscow directed all its efforts to winning over the best known Czech and Slovak officials for the thankless job of restoring order while the "healthy forces" in Prague were on the defensive. At first they intended to entrust Dubček and Černík with the task, then the otherwise constantly denigrated Smrkovsky (the speaker of the House, a reformist politician—because he made a very good impression on Brezhnev when they met in May and June.²⁹ But by the beginning of July it became obvious that the Kremlin's emissaries in Prague and Bratislava could expect a positive response only from politicians like Drahomír Kolder, Alois Indra, or Vasil Bilak.³⁰

Brezhnev expected the leaders of the neighbouring countries to adopt the CPSU's frequently changing position on the Czechoslovak question. On June 12, he called Kádár asking the usual question, has the situation improved in Czechoslovakia? Then he gave new instructions: "We sincerely wish to help Comrades Dubček, Černík, Bilak (the last we consider a very honest and sober-minded man); it would be very important and we ask you, Comrade Kádár, to have a serious talk with Comrade Dubček, that he should assess the situation correctly, and recognize the dangers that threaten the CPCS, socialism, and himself as well (though this last ques-

tion is of secondary importance, it has no bearing on the party's fate who the CC first secretary is). We'd like to help him, too, which is why we do not publish articles that would make his position more difficult. However, we think that they should act with greater resolution, for example, by taking control of the propaganda agencies. We think that Comrades Dubček, Černík and Bilak should be prevailed on and advised to break with and distance themselves from the revisionist group, in which case the party's healthy forces will support them."³¹

In June, János Kádár and the Czechoslovak delegation led by Dubček (which was given a conspicuously warm reception in Budapest) had a several hours-long meeting at the Hungarian party headquarters on Jászai Mari tér. Kádár subsequently reported to Moscow what Dubček and Černík said in the talks, adding cautiously that perhaps it was not really expedient to criticize Prague as harshly as *Pravda* did in those days.³²

In any other situation Brezhnev would have taken offense at such a comment, but now he let the criticism pass, offering only a few shallow demagogic arguments.³³ This, too, indicated the great change in communication among the leaders of the socialist camp during these months. In the wake of Czechoslovak developments and Romania's efforts to follow a separate course, Ulbricht and Gomulka sometimes spoke to Brezhnev in a condescending tone, raising their voices. Dubček, on the other hand, tried to gain time and room to maneuver by stubbornly adhering to old-style Byzantine homage practices. Zhivkov, on his part, refused to give up, praising the Russian Big Brother even in serious discussions which demanded concrete and concise answers.³⁴

Kádár assumed a position somewhere in the middle: he expressed his own opinion coating it with praises of Soviet friend-

ship.³⁵ Otherwise they would hardly have excused him the demonstrative ceremony he organized for Dubček and Černík in Budapest at the end of June 1968. Astounded, Soviet Ambassador Fyodor Titov called the Brezhnev Secretariat's attention to it. This notwithstanding, Brezhnev told Kádár in their next phone conversation that they in Moscow "...view the results of the Czechoslovak leaders' visit in Hungary as very positive, they think it will be useful for Comrades Dubček, et al. They consider Comrade Kádár's speech at the mass rally very positive: he found the appropriate form wherein he assured the Czechoslovak leaders of his support while also pointing out the dangers and the tasks on the basis of the Hungarian experience."³⁶

Kádár understood the message well: Brezhnev expected him to take a firm stand against the reform wing of the Czechoslovak leadership and "back" Dubček's left-wing opposition. Kádár could not have thought the latter idea disagreeable in view of the fact that by then the HSWP leadership had for some time informal relations with the Prague and Bratislava conservatives. Two of the five signatories of the subsequent letter of invitation—Oldrich Svestka and Vasil Bilak—kept in regular touch with Hungarian diplomats and with officials visiting Czechoslovakia on the pretext of taking a vacation or for an exchange of views.

The information Kádár received in the first half of June did not fully convince him that the time had come for military intervention,³⁷ but articles published almost simultaneously in Prague, did. Ludvík Vaculík's manifesto, "2000 Words", enumerating the democratic non-communist values of the Masaryk period, which caused quite a sensation even in Czechoslovakia, hit him and other HSWP leaders like a cold shower. Kádár took the other,

an article by the eminent Czech historian, Machatka, commending Imre Nagy on the tenth anniversary of his execution, as a personal affront, virtually as a slap on the face.³⁸

These two circumstances were Kádár's psychological motive for giving in at the official negotiations in Moscow in early July. But on his return to Budapest he kept quiet about having given his consent to Czechoslovakia's expected occupation. The report prepared for the HSWP CC Politburo—that is, for the party leadership comprising barely a dozen men—omitted the fact that in Moscow he voted in favour of armed intervention in the presence of Prime Minister Jenő Fock, György Aczél, Kádár's closest associate, a member of the Political Committee, and Károly Erdélyi, Deputy Foreign Minister, Kádár's confidant and former secretary, a KGB agent. This would never have come to light had the working notes of the Soviet Politburo not been made accessible recently. The document, of which only one copy was made, strictly for internal use, contains the following: "Comrade Brezhnev said that during their last conversation he informed Comrade Kádár of the Czechoslovak situation and of our position. He said that the CPSU Central Committee Politburo is working on the letter to the CPCS Central Committee Presidium. He recounted what it approximately contains.

Comrade Kádár reacted as follows. He said that the document titled "2000 Words" is a counterrevolutionary programme aimed at overthrowing Soviet power, subverting the party, and turning its leadership over to the social democrats.

Furthermore, he said that, unfortunately, even after this document [was published] the CPCS Central Committee Presidium failed to take firm action. It is employing methods that are ambivalent and inconsistent.

He agrees that the CPSU letter has to be sent. They, too, will draw up a similar letter addressed to the CPCS Central Committee Presidium in the forthcoming days.

Comrade Kádár agreed that the meeting of the Communist Party leaders of the socialist countries in the matter of the Czechoslovak question is urgent. He's ready to take part in such a meeting at any time. In his opinion, a large delegation of Czechoslovak comrades should be invited to these talks.

Speaking about the Czechoslovak situation, Kádár then went on to say: the way the situation now looks, Czechoslovakia will probably have to be occupied. If this becomes necessary, we'll go ahead without any doubt. He also said that they will discuss this at the [Hungarian] Political Committee meeting. But he is certain that the Political Committee will back his standpoint on this question.

Fock, Aczél, and Erdélyi participated in this discussion on the Hungarian side. Fock tried to say something, but Kádár cut him off by starting to speak, so he remained seated, pale and silent.

This discussion was very useful and, in my opinion, entirely frank...³⁹

From that moment on Kádár could not retreat anymore. Although, as opposed to the position he took in early July in Moscow, he used a more conciliatory tone again at the beginning of the Warsaw discussions of the "Five" on July 13–14—under the influence of his Komarno meeting with Dubček and Černík, which he attended after he "checked with" Brezhnev over the phone.⁴⁰ This was not a contradiction: Kádár knew that it was one thing to be a "hawk" in a closed circle in the Kremlin, and quite another to speak to a large audience. Furthermore, due to his talk, attempting to mediate with Dubček and Černík, he was late in arriving in Warsaw and, as a result, did not have a chance to sound out Brezhnev who had finally decided to take the "surgical" step against the

Diplomacy in the Pissoir

Members of the Soviet Politbureau, preparing for a military intervention as far back as the Spring of 1968, in their deliberations weighed up the advantages of obtaining an invitation from Czech and Slovak "healthy forces". In the middle of March, even the former Czech First Secretary, Antonin Novotny, was considered as a possible signatory of such a "request for assistance".

Weeks passed and the letter did not arrive. This upset the masters in the Kremlin. A membership list of the new Prague Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Government (a name coined by Kádár back in 1956) made up of healthy forces was already available, a number of volunteers had presented themselves in both Prague and Bratislava, but the dogmatics always finally cried halt. That is why Brezhnev, on July 20th 1968, exactly a month before the invasion, sent Pyotr Shelest, who headed the Ukrainian CP, to Balatonaliga in Hungary, where Vasil Bilak, a trusted Czech friend of the Soviet Union was staying at the holiday home for party leaders. The idea was to persuade Bilak to set to and draft a letter asking for assistance, collect signatories for it, and transmit it to Moscow through KGB channels.

Negotiations were held in great secret, and no more than half a dozen individuals, including Andropov, who headed the KGB at the time, and Kádár, were aware of them. According to Shelest's diary, at the end of a conversation lasting several hours in Kádár's lakeside villa, which KGB officers, concealed in a neighbouring room, recorded on tape, Shelest put it straight to Bilak: "We need a letter from you which states that you are asking for our help. We give you guarantees that it will not be published and that no-one will discover who signed it. I said to him: there can be no delays concerning this letter asking for help. We need this declaration today."

Vasil Bilak had, for months, encouraged his Soviet friends to be as firm and tough as possible, and who was ready to figure as collaborator, suddenly took fright. Finally, he undertook the job, albeit reluctantly. In the following days Stepan Chervonenko, the Soviet Ambassador in Prague, and the KGB residents there approached a number of Czech and Slovak politicians with similar requests. The result were a number of separate letters asking for help, in Russian or Czech. One of these was handed over to Shelest by Bilak in a public pissoir in Bratislava. "I agreed with him that he would turn up there at 20.00 hours," Shelest noted in his diary. The scene is out of a spy thriller. "I was to turn up at the same time and he would pass on the letter to me with Savchenko of the KGB acting as intermediary. We met in the pissoir as if by chance. Savchenko received the letter without anyone noticing it, and then passed it on to me. It discussed the situation in the Czechoslovak Communist Party, the impertinence of the right-wing elements, the ways of anti-communist politics and the moral terror. Anti-Soviet revelry is present in the country. The economy and the politics of Czechoslovakia have taken a completely Western turn. The letter includes the request to interfere in case of need, and to take a stand against civil war, blood-letting and the counterrevolution..."

Why the Soviets insisted on a letter they promised to keep secret remains a mystery to this day.

Prague leadership. This was the main reason for Kádár's ensuing very obvious isolation in Warsaw. He listened to the Polish, East German and Bulgarian party leaders' pointed remarks with his usual, almost immobile expression. He became alarmed only when Brezhnev—for the first and last time in the 1968 Czechoslovak crisis—publicly turned against him. Kádár quickly asked for the floor again and began to explain himself with unusual humility—a detail left out of his report prepared for the HSWP top leadership—and promised full support for the coming armed intervention.

Then he left for Budapest. All the way home he worried over not having noticed the change in the "line" in time. However, it was not in Brezhnev's interest to offend Kádár and make him sulk, especially since he wanted to use him again during the impending intervention. He was aware that strong national unity was being forged around Dubček and Černík, who had pointedly stayed away from the Warsaw meeting, while the "healthy forces" were increasingly relegated into the background. The Kremlin needed to obtain a letter of invitation as soon as possible, in order to set the Warsaw Pact war machine into motion. The Soviet party centre's and the KGB's joint plans called for Kádár's participation in the "operational moves" to obtain such a document that had a mythical significance even before it was drafted.

Before this, Brezhnev demonstratively made up with Kádár. He had a ninety-minute friendly talk with him over the hotline connecting their offices. He acted as if nothing had happened. In fact, he stressed that at the CPSU CC plenum the day before "... he talked warmly about the speeches of the leaders of the fraternal parties, including Comrade Kádár's, and particularly about Comrade Kádár's second speech delivered after the Soviet delegation's address."

At this, speaking obliquely, Kádár himself mentioned the dispute he had had with Ulbricht and Gomulka in Warsaw: "Our situation with the Central Committee is not as simple as theirs. We weren't enthusiastic in Warsaw and we could have given an answer to certain comrades." Brezhnev, who really needed Kádár's help now, spoke as if he had shown solidarity with Kádár in Warsaw. "Comrade Kádár, I would like you to know that we view your situation and position with great understanding, we value your speech in Warsaw highly, and we think that the leaders of certain fraternal parties should not do things in this way," he said. "I think that we made this plain to them in our speech."⁴¹

The events of the following few days were decisive in the history of the intervention in Czechoslovakia. The Soviet party leaders, who assembled in the Kremlin on July 19 in order to prepare the operation, did not conceal their nervousness. Brezhnev admitted that the "healthy forces" kept retreating, "and are not likely to turn to us for help [on their own]." Premier Aleksei Kosygin expressed annoyance because Gomulka lacked sufficient men to take part in the "radical variant." With elegant simplicity, Kosygin proposed that they blackmail Dubček: "We should let him know during a personal meeting or in some other way that we have in our possession material that incriminates him, Kriegel, and Cisar. The KGB should prepare this and have it handy."

Foreign Minister Andrei Gromiko, called Mr Nyet in the West, said: "There's no danger of a large-scale war now. The situation is favourable in this respect. However, if we let Czechoslovakia go, others might be tempted, too. But keeping it will strengthen us. The international situation has nothing unexpected in store for us right now."

Konstantin Katushev, the party leadership's youngest member, the Central Committee secretary in charge of relations with the socialist countries, was also blunt: "Time is indeed against us. Naturally, Dubček, Černík, other rightists have to be disposed of [sic!]. We must prepare for the radical variant, and with meticulous care at that, on the assumption that they will not request help. In the course of the meeting with the Czechoslovaks they must be told when we're going to make that decision. They must be told that we're going to help the Czechoslovak people either with or without them."⁴²

Pyotr Shelest was not present at this meeting, Brezhnev called the first man of the Ukrainian party organization, in the morning of July 20, 1968, in his office in Kiev and instructed him to leave for Hungary immediately, where he was to meet Vasil Bilak with Kádár's assistance. By the time Shelest hurriedly packed after the brief phone call, a military cargo plane sent from Moscow awaited him at Borispol airfield and took off for Budapest at five p.m. He was accompanied by his secretary and several KGB officers, including a wiretap expert. For conspiratorial reasons Kádár's car, rather than an embassy car, was waiting for the important guest at the Soviet airfield near Budapest⁴³, and it took him to the Hungarian party headquarters instead of the Soviet embassy. Shelest informed Kádár, who was in all probability the first of the leaders of the "Five" to learn, that the final decision with regard to X-Day had already been taken in the Kremlin although still only in principle at that stage. Again, Kádár's response was affirmative.⁴⁴

Soon Brezhnev called Kádár again, talking in the usual roundabout way.

He expressed his deep gratitude to Comrade Kádár in the name of the CPSU leadership for his positive response in the matter at hand. This is so invaluable for our party and our friendship that there are no words for it. I will not forget it as long as I live.

Kádár's answer was similarly oblique:

he informed Comrade Brezhnev that the said matter was going well: he mentioned Tito's message, and that we convened the Central Committee meeting for Wednesday.⁴⁵

Henceforth, Kádár was drawn ever more into the preparations for solving the "matter at hand." In mid-August, the Soviet leadership even invited him to the Crimea where they discussed the minute details of the invasion. The Hungarian military and internal security machinery was also put in motion. Already on August 1, 1968, Interior Minister András Benkei sent instructions to a relatively wide circle of his subordinates concerning their duties in the event of a "radical solution" of the Czechoslovak crisis.

As soon as the armed forces of the "Five" crossed the borders of the Socialist Republic of Czechoslovakia late at night on August 20, Kádár's importance as a mediator diminished for the Kremlin. The Soviet leaders gradually themselves took the initiative in Prague and Bratislava.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, occasionally they resorted to Kádár's assistance even after Gustáv Husák's succession to the head of the Czechoslovak Communist Party.⁴⁷

NOTES

1 ■ Unger 1998: 34–35.

2 ■ Vondrová and Navrátil 1995: 162–163.

3 ■ Pataky 1993: 42, 54–69.

4 ■ Valenta 1991: 47, 78.

5 ■ Dubček 1993: 133, 135, 162; Williams 1997: 65, 84.

6 ■ Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, Konstantin Katushev, cynically remarked during a break in the meeting of the "Six" in Bratislava at the very beginning of August 1968, that the Soviet leadership deliberately used this ploy.

7 ■ Dubček 1993: 173.

8 ■ Vondrová and Navrátil 1995: 35-39.

9 ■ Pkhoya 288, file 47, unit 743

10 ■ HNA fonds 288, file 47, unit 743

11 ■ Based on a numbered xerox copy of the work notes of the CPSU CC Politburo, placed at my disposal by the Russian historian Rudolf Pikhoya, for which I wish to express gratitude. *Rabochie zapisi* 1968: 123.

12 ■ *Rabochie zapisi* 1968: 124-125.

13 ■ It was this that most angered the other opponents of the Prague Spring, too, who kept telling each other preposterous stories. For instance, on April 17, 1968, Gomulka warned Soviet Ambassador Aristov that the "transformation of socialist Czechoslovakia into a bourgeois republic has already begun." He urged Soviet intervention in order to prevent the fulfilment of "counterrevolutionary plans" in Prague. He told Aristov that the purging of the Polish party of "Zionist elements" was not yet complete, but already they had to face a new threat posed by the contagious Czechoslovak example. On May 21, Gomulka notified the Kremlin through the ambassador that a secret alliance was being formed between Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia. All three countries had links with the West, moreover, anticommunism is rampant in Czechoslovakia. "I don't know how much of it is true," Gomulka added, "but according to information available to us, nearly 200 communists have committed suicide in Czechoslovakia." He told Aristov meaningfully that he, contrary to Kádár, recognizes the danger of counterrevolution in that country. The first secretary of the HSWP Central Committee, on the other hand, "continues to consider Comrade Dubček a politically reliable and mature leader." True, during his, Gomulka's, recent visit to Budapest, "Comrade Kádár mentioned to him that the elements of anarchy are conspicuous in Czechoslovakia, but it's only temporary, and this country will not swerve from the socialist course. Moreover, according to Comrade Gomulka, Comrade Kádár also declared in their talk that in the given circumstances it was hard to imagine the [Czechoslovak] communist party without Dubček." According to the Hungarian ambassador in Prague, Imre Kovács, barely two and a half months later Kádár "no longer believed Dubček, who is said to be led by the nose by the rightists." In Kádár's view, in the case of Dubček we're dealing with a clever Slovak peasant, who wants to lead the CPSU and all of us by the nose." Bukharkin 1991.

14 ■ Hungarian politicians often called their colleagues in Prague "Czechs" even if they were Slovaks. The Soviet leaders, on the other hand—perhaps be-

cause it came into vogue at the time to use the term "Soviet nation"—preferred the term "Czechoslovak nation."

15 ■ HNA fonds 288, file 47, unit 743.

16 ■ HNA fonds 288, file 47, unit 743.

17 ■ By this time, the leaders of the "Five"—including Brezhnev, in spite of the important part he had in Novotny's removal—were very worried by the likely replacements in the Hradcany and the Czechoslovak government. Soviet Ambassador Chervonenko managed to persuade Dubček to negotiate with Novotny on March 11. Since the President's personal secretary was a Kremlin plant, Brezhnev learned immediately what the discussion was about. He then directly notified Kádár: "In Comrade Novotny's opinion, Comrade Dubček understands the situation, but for the time being cannot see a way out. He has no backers among the C[entral] C[ommittee] secretaries, and he gets no help from the Central Committee departments.

"The next Presidium session will be next week, and the Central Committee session is planned for the period after the party conferences. C[omrade] Novotny advised Comrade Dubček to convene the plenum only after the action programme is worked out to give them a platform for uniting C[entral] C[ommittee] members. According to the informer, Comrade Novotny is holding out and isn't considering resigning. He would rather have the National Assembly remove him and leave defeated, than capitulate. Comrade Brezhnev called Comrade Dubček in hospital this morning. He's had a high temperature for two days (39°C/102°F), he feels a little better now. He informed Comrade Chervonenko, who was with him just then, about the state of things. It was noticeable that Comrade Dubček didn't want to go into details over the telephone. His answer to Comrade Brezhnev's straightforward question was that the nationwide situation has improved somewhat but it has deteriorated in Prague. He declared that the comrades are all working, but much work has to be done until the plenum, in order to be able to stabilize the situation.

"Comrade Brezhnev mentioned the plans pertaining to the meeting with Dubček... Comrade Dubček was noticeably pleased by the idea, but did not give an answer, he will probably let Comrade Chervonenko know that, too." (HNA fonds 288, file 47, unit 743) As so often before, Dubček tried to mislead Novotny and Brezhnev in respect of the "cadre replacements." In March and April 1968, he approved, indeed initiated, almost every important removal and appointment in the party and state leadership.

18 ■ HNA fonds 288, file 47, unit 743. Cf. *Rabochie zapisi* 1968: 124.

19 ■ HNA fonds 288, file 47, unit 743.

20 ■ *Rabochie zapisi* 1968: 124.

21 ■ HNA fonds 288, file 47, unit 743. The Soviet leadership was surprisingly irresolute before the Dresden conference of the "Six." Pondering how pressure could be exerted on Dubček, Aleksandr Shelepin proposed that Kádár inform them of his own negative experiences in 1956. "Our point of departure should be that we're not surrendering Czechoslovakia to anyone," Shelepin said. "Dubček is obviously a transitory figure. It is right for us to show resolution, but we must also consider how to proceed... We should be prepared to use radical methods, Novotny probably can't be saved, but as long as they—he, Lenárt, and Lomsky—are [in position] we must somehow get them to turn to us for help before [the CC] meeting. Whatever happens, we would be in possession of their request. It's clear that we must help. This help will sober everybody, first and foremost our enemies." Pikhoya 1994: 13–14.

22 ■ HNA fonds 288, file 47, unit 743. At the CPSU CC Politburo conference convened on March 25, immediately after the meeting of the "Six," Brezhnev spoke much more openly than at the Dresden City Hall. He said that what irritates him the most is that the new Dubček leadership "undermined the foundations of the foreign policy that the Socialist Republic of Czechoslovakia hitherto pursued. Cadres are being removed in successive waves. It must be noted that 80 per cent of the removed cadres are people who had studied in Moscow. Could it be accidental that regional and district secretaries were resigning in succession?... Comrade Černík (the Prime Minister) came over to me during the break. He was bitter, and he said: "Why didn't you invite us, Presidium members, to Moscow? Why didn't you tell us these facts? Why didn't you open our eyes?" Brezhnev also said that he had a word with Kádár, too, during the break, who seemed nervous at first, but "during our talk it became clear that he was fine and agreed with our speech." *Rabochie zapisi* 1968: 149–154.

23 ■ His name was erroneously spelled "Martin" in the memorandum prepared for Kádár. HNA fonds 288, file 47, unit 743. The key role this highly placed *chinovnik* played in the KGB is discussed in Andrew and Gordievskii 1990:538, 541.

24 ■ "In view of the highly confidential nature of the document, and of the importance of the channel through which the Soviet comrades received it, only the leaders of the five fraternal parties are informed. They leave it to Comrade Kádár to decide

whom he's going to take into his confidence in his immediate surroundings," was the KGB's request. HNA fonds 288, file 47, unit 743.

25 ■ Pikhoya 1994: 13–14.

26 ■ HNA fonds 288, file 47, unit 743.

27 ■ HNA fonds 288, file 47, unit 743. Here the CPSU leader still included Dubček among the "healthy forces," indicating that the final decision on the tactics to be used against him had not yet been made. According to a memorandum dated nine days earlier, Brezhnev had then made a very different statement: "...very little was left of the trust he had in Comrade Dubček. Personally, he considers him an honest man, but doesn't feel confident that he [Dubček] will be able to master the situation." HNA fonds 288, file 47, unit 743.

28 ■ Latis 1995: 311–312. Václav Slavík (a reformist secretary of the CC) remembers the date as May 9.

29 ■ Pikhoya 1994: 15–17. "Comrade Brezhnev judges the Czechoslovak situation to be very grave and complicated. He considers it a serious mistake that the rightists continue to control the means of mass propaganda... Recently, Comrade Brezhnev received the parliamentary delegation led by Comrade Smrkovsky. During the conversation, the Czechoslovak delegates spoke with tears in their eyes about friendship with the Soviet Union, what the Czechoslovak people owe the Russian people. Even before Smrkovsky returned home, he was being discredited and attacked directly in the press," reads the June 22, 1968, memorandum prepared for János Kádár. HNA fonds 288, file 47, unit 743.

30 ■ Valenta 1991: 140–144.

31 ■ That day, after his long monologue about the Czechoslovak situation, it seemed as if Brezhnev suddenly forgot what he was talking about with Kádár. He rambled on about how, after a difficult spring, "there has been plenty of rain, crops will be good along the Volga and in central Russia, sunflower, sugar beet, cotton are abundant." He complained that "crop prospects are very poor in Bulgaria," as a result of which "Comrades [sic!] Zhivkov have already requested assistance." HNA fonds 288, file 47, unit 743.

32 ■ HNA fonds 288, file 47, unit 743. The cause of Pravda's furious outburst was a theoretical study by Cestmír Císar (a reformist Secretary of the CC). It dealt with the application of the Marxist-Leninist idea under divergent "national" circumstances, listing numerous, what are considered today, dogmatic theses. At the time, however, it was a bombshell.

33 ■ "...Comrade Brezhnev said that the reason for publishing the article was that Císar offended not the CPSU but Marx and Lenin, which the CPSU as a Marxist-Leninist party could not let pass, be-

cause it would have met with incomprehension among its members. The whole article was devoted to Cisar originally, but they changed that later." HNA fonds 288, file 47, unit 743.

34 ■ Weit 1973: 195–214.

35 ■ Aleksandrov-Agentov 1994: 156.

36 ■ HNA fonds 288, file 47, unit 743.

37 ■ "The Dubček leadership can be seen to take several measures that may help them realize the correct course," was how he occasionally defended the followers of "socialism with a human face" to Brezhnev. HNA fonds 288, file 47, unit 743. Some Czech and Slovak conservatives shared Kádár's opinion. One of the experts of the Hungarian party leadership "in charge of Czechoslovak affairs" at the time, the editor-in-chief of the party daily, *Népszabadság*, János Gosztonyi, arrived at the same conclusion when he recorded what his Czech colleague, Svestka, said on July 11, 1968: "...according to him, the situation in Czechoslovakia is not counterrevolutionary, on the other hand, they told the Soviet comrades several times that should it come to that, they still possess the force to face it, but if their forces were to fail to defeat a possible counterrevolutionary attempt, they would be the first to call in Soviet troops. ...In answer to the question of what happens if the right-wing gains complete control, he said that in that case the danger of a split in the Party arises. He considers even the Party's division into a Slovak and a Czech party disquieting. However, in his opinion, even if the right wing was to gain complete control, it would not automatically mean a counterrevolution and definitely not a bourgeois restoration. In his opinion, in this case something like the Yugoslav formation would be established, but of a definite anti-Soviet character." HNA fonds 288, file 47, unit 743.

38 ■ Kádár protested against both writings in the name of the HSWP leadership in a letter addressed to Dubček. HNA fonds 288, file 11, unit 2436. The Machatka article was very embarrassing for the CPCS leadership, particularly for the conservative forces and one of their influential representatives, Jozef Lenárt, who, as a CC secretary, was in charge of the Party's foreign relations in the summer of 1968. This is what the information sent by the Hungarian chargé d'affaires in Prague to Budapest on July 9 refers to: "In connection with Comrade Kádár's letter, Comrade Lenárt expressed indignation over the Machatka article, calling it shameful filth. He called the people in Prague cowardly and jittery, who don't have the guts to react to the article. He added that they were already thinking of

asking somebody from *Új Szó* [the Bratislava Hungarian language paper] to react. Comrade Lenárt continued this line of thought by saying that if a Czechoslovak leader were attacked in the press, there would be a great outcry right away. He stressed that similarly to the Machatka article, the answer, too, has to appear in the press [the *Literárni listy*]. He implied that a party-inspired reaction to the Machatka article was to be expected soon." HNA fonds 288, file 47, unit 743.

39 ■ *Rabochie zapisi* 1968: 399–340.

40 ■ HNA fonds 288, file 47, unit 743.

41 ■ HNA fonds 288, file 47, unit 743.

42 ■ *Rabochie zapisi* 1968: 413–432.

43 ■ Shelest 1995: 346.

44 ■ HNA fonds 288, file 47, unit 743.

45 ■ HNA fonds 288, file 47, unit 743. In the course of this conversation Brezhnev openly told Kádár that they must hurry because the CPCS Extraordinary Congress must not be allowed to convene. In his view, even the fact that the Dubček leadership "agrees to certain replacements" became unimportant. "It seems," Brezhnev said, "that in the end we'll have to put into operation what is now being prepared. I see no other way out."

46 ■ Even so, HSWP leaders occasionally gained unique information in Prague. Thus, for instance, in the morning of August 20, 1968, already, on the day of the famous CPCS CC Presidium session, Oldrich Svestka said that the "healthy forces" knew about Kádár's and Dubček's negotiations in Komarno. Specifically, that the latter refused to yield, and that Brezhnev sent a stern letter to the CPCS leaders. *Rudé Právo's* editor-in-chief also alluded that the thing would come to a head that day.

47 ■ For instance, in May 1969, on the eve of Husák's visit to Budapest, Brezhnev called Kádár and, since he wasn't in his office, left the following message: "Comrade Brezhnev told Comrade Husák plainly in Moscow that a troop withdrawal was out of the question now. Husák agreed and he, too, believes that the conditions do not yet warrant it. Comrade Brezhnev asks that should Comrade Husák raise this question here, Comrade Kádár is to convince him that it's not timely now.

"Comrade Brezhnev would like to call Comrade Kádár's attention to a second question. It is very important not to have the Czechoslovak comrades trust in 'evolution', but to persistently fight against the right-wing forces until they are completely crushed. Comrade Brezhnev thinks that Comrade Kádár's words will carry appropriate weight with Comrade Husák." HNA fonds 288, file 47, unit 744.

Miklós Györffy

Fragments of a Generation's Autobiography

Attila Bartis: *A kéklő pára* (Bluish Mist) Budapest, Magvető, 1998, 111 pp.

Gyula Zeke: *Anderson-taktusok* (Anderson Beats) Budapest, Seneca, 1998, 171 pp.

Gábor Németh: *A huron tó* (Lake Huron) Budapest, Filum, 1998, 125 pp.

Attila Bartis's basic experience was in a region of particularly evil memory in the recent past (his short fiction can easily be located in time and space), therefore I am filled with some satisfaction that the innocence of his senses, the sincere longing of childhood were not destroyed by despotism; the intrinsic purity breaks through the filth and beams on the horizon of remembrance in the form of spell-binding short stories." This comment on the cover of Attila Bartis's new volume of short stories, *Bluish Mist*, comes from Ádám Bodor. The latter, a publisher's editor and an older fellow short-story writer, has produced weird and enchanting short stories—rare gems of recent Hungarian literature—that were also conceived in "a region of particularly evil memory in the recent past", that is Transylvania in Romania. The thirty-one-year-old Attila Bartis was born and brought up in Transylvania, and despite the several years he has been living in Hungary, his work so far has been inspired by childhood memories.

The association with Bodor is difficult to avoid, for the view of this world and its

representation in Bartis's stories are close to those of Bodor's. His stories, expressed in accurate, measured and elegant sentences, balance on the edge of reality and grotesque mystery. The volume contains fifteen short stories, arranged in three cycles, with a quotation from Wittgenstein as the epigraph of each. The title also comes from one of these, "But one might also say: no one can be great who misjudges himself, who draws a bluish mist over his eyes." In his work, Bartis tries to shatter this bluish mist that envelops in his memory the sense of that lost world, and his simple stories shed the bluish mist of distance and personal involvement, while they are unconsciously wrapped in a fog of a mysterious parable-making.

The first cycle, *Lies for Bohumil*, adds another model to that of Bodor. "Bohumil or the Story of Breadcrumbs" is about the grandfather of the narrator, an inn-keeper of the mould of Hrabal's characters. From the '20s to the '50s he used shrewd cunning to protect the huge chestnut tree in the yard of his inn from the local Romanian authorities. His last trick was to allow half the leafy crown of the tree to be lopped off in return for the "appointment" of his grandchild as headwaiter. The tree shaded the dining-room of the council chairman's brother-in-law. Luckily, the old man was no longer alive when another

Miklós Györffy

is our regular reviewer of new fiction.

council chairman had the tree felled so that his mistress could "have an overview of things" from her apartment. At his death, the old man metamorphosed into the later Hrabal (or Hrabal was the soul incarnate of the Transylvanian inn-keeper): while feeding his pet pigeon, throwing out the breadcrumbs, he fell off the church tower.

In another one of these "lies", an official arrives from the county authorities with an order to the cemetery keeper for the skulls of the Bolyais, father and son, two great Transylvanian-Hungarian mathematicians, to be exhumed for an exhibition. The name in the document has been misspelt as Bokai, and since the cemetery happens to have a father and son by this name, the law-abiding and intransigent keeper is willing to provide their skulls for the noble purpose—the more so as he too is a Bokai. Maybe up there, in the mathematical infinite, everything is different as the Bolyais declared, "but that's far away, Mister Sáfrány, very far. And here you are anxious about your job, and the two Bokais will also be stared at here."

The "genesis stories", autobiographical in inspiration, of the second cycle include the best pieces in the collection. They excel with openings such as: "In the spring of nineteen-seventy three a shepherd called Ágoston Szöcske sheared a total of a hundred kilos of black wool off the famous sheep of the parish priest of Sáromberke. The noble wool was washed, combed and taken to the loft of the presbitery in five sacks." Or: "There used to live in Marosvásárhely a young man called Károly Piros, who exterminated cockroaches. He had come from beyond the forest, one of his legs was 4 cm shorter than the other, and until March 6th nineteen-seventy three, no one loved him." Both the five sacks of coalblack wool and

the lame cockroach exterminator appear sooner or later on the horizon of the writer and his family, all mentioned by their real names. They provide the title or dominant motives of other short stories, they become more than just anecdotic elements, story themes in themselves, and provide a cool and reserved irony, a dry and acrid manner of presentation casting the nightmarish light of a chaotic and grotesque world upon the stories. "Oszkár or the History of Physics" is about a dwarfish genius of a physicist, Oszkár Dóczy, who discovers a sensational constant after sixty years of brain-racking and calculation, and mails it to the relevant authority together with its demonstration. After some weeks of waiting, a student of his asks him one day: "What is the opinion of Comrade Professor about Voinic's constant described right after the editorial in today's Red Flag, to which Dóczy replies that unfortunately he does not read newspapers, but Comrade Voinic, the academician, is highly competent in his field both as a physicist and as the nephew of the Comrade Chief Party Secretary, and if he has calculated a constant, then it will be valid at any point of the earth." All there remains for Oszkár Dóczy now is to forget even Newton's laws after appropriate psychiatric treatment, and to tell the pensioning-off commission: "to hurry because at three he has a meeting with UFOs under the metal owl guarding the entrance to the Teleki Library." Oszkár Dóczy does go to the library for a few days and ostentatiously scrutinizes the sky as if waiting for UFOs. All this may, or may not, sound a grotesque exaggeration. This is precisely the secret to the world of Bartis's (and Bodor's) fiction that you never know whether the things that appear grotesque are not simple, everyday facts "from a region of particularly evil memory in the recent past".

Gyula Zeke is in his forties and his new book, *Anderson Beats*, is his second. His former volume, another collection of short writings, *Idős hölgy három ujjá vállamon* (Three Fingers of an Elderly Lady on My Shoulder), appeared three years ago. Zeke is a one-off, not to be placed with any of the currently fashionable trends or groups. He is actually the latter-day (belated) heir to a Hungarian or, rather, Pest tradition: wandering scholar of Pest, the knower of its secrets, a *flâneur*, a bohemian tramp, a Budapest Villon. A word on his predecessors is in order; they include Gyula Krúdy, Dezső Kosztolányi, Zoltán Jékely, Iván Mándy. Mándy is relevant here; some years ago, when he died, he seemed to be the last inhabitant and writer of Budapest who knew and protected the spirit of the place, knew everything of its everyday life and miracles. In Zeke's stories this knowledge seems to live on, but the town he inhabits is the Budapest of those who travel on trams and buses, the boozers, the homeless, a city that has collapsed in rubble. What connects Zeke with his predecessors is his love and understanding of the city, his being at home in its crumbling state as it bleeds from thousands of wounds, his urge to walk its streets, and his calling at its watering holes day after day, as if he cannot have enough.

There is also another aspect that links Zeke's writings to a Pest tradition. Most follow in the line of the feuilletons that used to be a feature of pre-war Budapest papers. These humorous-anecdotal pieces, often polemic in intention, reported petty events, personal impressions which tried to grasp the local essence that underlay the everyday life of the city. Zeke moulds this genre to his own image: he extends its intimacy to the confessional subjectivity of poetry or of entries in a diary, intensifying the language to this purpose. At places, his texts are expressionist interior mono-

logues, stumbling over bizarre associations. Very likely matured for a long time and executed with great care, his stories are in a meaningful tension with their main theme: the fragmentary and improvised nature of the city and the life of an inhabitant, the first-person narrator. The occasionally forced and arbitrary linguistic stunts are tempered by an acrid resigned humour that instills an invigorating sap in most of his stories.

Anderson Beats, just as Bartis's book, is also a three-cycle work. The first consists of short disconnected lyrical sketches. A similarly stylizing perspective asserts itself in the third cycle, *String of Death* (the last cycle of Bartis's volume also contains three legend-like "death stories"): these pieces of two or three pages, introduced by quotations from *Gilgamesh* are variations on the theme of death and self-destruction that lurk throughout the book. Just as with Bartis, the size and character of the central cycle is decisive, and in quality, the best. It is in these pieces of the "Buda Fugue" that Zeke apparently feels at home. They take place mainly "in the street" or on the metro or on the tram, in pubs and cafés. They are simply the narrator playing in his typical and self-contained manner a prosaic melody elicited by a certain subject. "Coffee Prose, Beer Prose" is about a day of his when some inner restless gets him up and into the streets well before daybreak. He roams his regular places, drinks coffee, beer, wine and soda, bitters, sweet Tokaj wine, smokes, eats meatballs, scrambled eggs, meets friends and strangers and, in the meantime, keeps watch, observes.

Unlike his contemporaries and colleagues, Zeke is in no hurry, he looks around with a sort of peacetime leisureliness, and so he perceives the tastes, smells, sounds, lights. He chats with chronic alcoholics—one of them, an old

woman of aristocratic origin, quotes Baudelaire to him in French after he stands her a small glass of wine and soda ("Farewell to the Aristocracy"). He is accosted by beggars and the homeless all the time, who ask him for money. Once a stranger, an "urban Hungarian", asks him for 700 forints in the street, promising to return it at the same place, in three months' time. After some wrangling, the narrator hands over the money to get rid of him ("Heading for the Wine Tavern). Zeke's narrator feels compassion for the downcasts and victims of the new world of thievery, feels that he partly belongs with them, yet he is an educated man who "has written a special study putting a segment of the world at rights", he has a family, home, car and enough money on him to provide hand-outs and order the odd beer or glass of wine.

While he walks the deepest recesses of the city, he ponders, reflecting ironically upon himself and his situation: "This is a basin," he says of the geographical feature of Hungary, "no sea, no perspective, things settle down, hatred accumulates, strength and passion rotate in their circles. Melancholy blackens not only the souls but also the soil, there is always something tragic and final in joy, there is a premium on death." Yet this is where Zeke is at home. "Where else could I go? My feet know the way, they take me to the Tabdi wine-bar at the beginning of Király utca. The soda does not lessen the horrid taste of the hog-wash, yet I am at home. Yes, this draughty, coarse smell of tobacco, the urn-like aluminium ashtrays, these toothless corpses, that's what I have specialized in with my lungs, my guts." ("Flower of Flowers").

Gábor Németh (1956) belongs to the same generation as Gyula Zeke, whose name is even mentioned in *Lake Huron*. The book, containing short prose pieces,

displays several similarities with *Anderson Beats*. *Lake Huron* also offers personal notes, sometimes like feuilletons, sometimes like diary entries. In his writings published so far, Németh combines loosely connected fragments into prose pieces, which only temporarily—if at all—create a larger narrative context and, in the final analysis, demonstrate the impossibility of story-telling. (In this he bears affinity with the fiction of several of his contemporaries, Parti Nagy, Darvasi, Garaczi, Hazai, Podmaniczky, Kukorelly and others.) That Németh can create lifelike situations and authentic dialogue—when need be—is shown by the outstanding 1998 film, *Presszó*, which he co-scripted.

One of the epigraphs of *Lake Huron* is taken from Thomas Bernhard: "No one has ever discovered anything, or will discover anything either". By the same token, Németh writes things that have not been made out by him but happened to him, are about him, and does not even make an attempt to pretend that it is not he who speaks. The same applies in broad outlines to Zeke and Bartis as well, but while Bartis's recollections, emerging vaguely on the border of reality and fiction, are often almost anecdotal, and Zeke accurately outlines his narrating self, Németh speaks about himself in such a way that neither autobiography nor stories unfold; what happens is the articulation of a person's manner of speaking laden with digressions, insertions, omission, interruptions.

The title piece, (lake huron)—the pieces have lower-case titles in brackets—evokes the figure of a "haughty, noble and sweet-faced" childhood classmate who wore an Indian string of beads for a belt. Today, she is a thin, worn-out, sad wreck of a woman. The piece (black rings) also lists girls who were classmates together with the first experiences of women associated with them ("Every pussy is different.")

Similarly to Zeke, several pieces confront the reader with images of Budapest misery, the homeless begging: (let it be light), (sentences for money), (how nice it would be, if). (silver Kossuth) evokes the cigarette brand of this name and Radio Free Europe wittily so named after the Budapest Kossuth Radio, and what it meant at that time to get to the West. "There was the radio, you could listen out from in here, into the colourful and fragrant. You could know, or guess that things could be different. You could pity here, 'under the Soviet tanks' my tiny homeland 'bleeding from a thousand wounds'. Here is captivity and there, beyond the noisy fog, made explicit in the words, was Free Europe. And I knew then that it would always be like that. I would live like that. I would beget imprisoned children. We would listen together into the colourful and fragrant. Odd as it may sound, being a captive is a sort of dignity. It certainly is not you who does the evil to yourself. Certainly everyone was good, if you didn't need to be bad..."

(are you jewish?) starts from a traumatic school camp and from a war documentary seen at that time, to evoke the child's question: "are you a Jew?", and if yes, "why didn't they tell me?" "Some years passed. I learnt new words. I understood that they were not lying. That I am not a Jew. Nor Roman Catholic, or communist that I see the sky empty, while hell is here <he'd think that's exaggerating> and works quite well. / Yet, were there some-

one to ask if I was a Jew, I could only answer with this story."

Every text abounds in remarks, comments between the < and > signs. These are a posteriori comments by the author to some of his statements, utterances—at least they pretend to be. Probably they are not later added but signs of multiple reflection and hence organic elements in the pieces. Beyond a certain point, all these many corrections, relativizations, retractions, additions turn against themselves—and the reader. If the writer is so uncertain and cannot decide how it really was, how is one to understand things and what he should write about, is it worth writing at all and, more important still, is it worth leaving all this for the reader to decide? These doubts are reinforced by those texts in which the writer refers to utterances by his friends and other writers, to events connected with the literary or theatrical scene or which are simply private events. Cases in point are not really writings like (living paragraph), in memory of Iván Mándy on the occasion of his death and burial, though it is also closer to feuilleton, but those that need a certain amount of initiation (see the frequent mention of Zeke and other writers) and those that deem events worth to be read just about because the protagonist of the events reflected upon them in writing. *Lake Huron* shows Gábor Németh as an able and sensitive feuilleton writer—not utterly free of some Esterházy epigonism, who cannot decide at present what to write about as a writer of fiction. ■

George Szirtes
The Visible City

Géza Buzinkay: *An Illustrated History of Budapest*. Corvina Books, 1998. English translation by Christina Rozsnyai. 130 pp., 137 illustrations. Ft 5,000.

ISBN 963 13 44746.

All cities are invisible cities. The reader will remember the premiss of Italo Calvino's book of that title, in which Marco Polo regales Genghis Khan with tales of the imagined cities he has visited. These are fantastical places, beyond human comprehension but not out of reach of the imagination. All cities are fantastical in this respect because their histories transcend the experience of any single generation. They are invisible for the same reason: constructed, covered over, sacked, covered over, bombed, covered over. Time and again they are effaced, then drawn up again. Villages turn into towns, towns into suburbs, suburbs into expanded city centres. Then everything goes and has to start again. There are wild swings of fortune involving wars, plagues, betrayals, intrigue, earthquakes, crop failures, famines and explosions in gunpowder magazines. The citizens fall prey to prophetic visions such as lions in the streets, blood seeping from

statues, or the invasion of strange birds, snakes, scorpions and toads. Events pass into one or other form of narrative: history, myth, aspiration, grudge. Simply thinking of these narratives involves the making of vast notional lists, endless inventories of people and goods. Once you try to imagine the people, their invisibility becomes acutely painful and you cannot help but look fearfully at your fellow human beings as inhabitants of some invisible city.

The popular historian is both valuable and terrifying. He has to move so fast we cannot help but become aware of the vast torrent of unremarkable lost lives sweeping by under us, unnoticed and unremarked. Look, there goes a crowd of them, he says, and they have gone before we can even begin to focus them. Compared to the continent, the earth, the universe, they are nothing but a speck of dust flying from nowhere to nowhere, but if you stand where our historian does the dust storm must seem formidable, perhaps even blinding. Etcetera is history's other name, as Péter Esterházy said in *The Glance of the Countess Hahn-Hahn*. We are blinded, etcetera.

The invasion of the birds comes from an eyewitness quoted by Géza Buzinkay. This witness saw them as auguries of a new battle in 1686, the successful storming of Buda—then in the hands of

George Szirtes's

Selected Poems 1976–1996 was published by Oxford University Press in 1996.

His latest collection, Portrait of My Father in an English Landscape, was published also by OUP in 1998.

Abdurrahman Pasha's ten thousand Turkish troops—by the allied forces of Christendom. "On that day came thousands upon thousands of peculiar birds cheeping in an ominous manner... for a day and a half all rivers, all springs, even the Danube stream, were stricken with snakes and scorpions, and whenever a person went to draw water, his jug would be filled with snakes and scorpions that looked like small, red insects..." Then follow the lists: Buzinkay gives us the forty-five thousand strong allied Christian army with its "186 cannons and mortars, 560 thousand kilograms of gunpowder and 300 thousand kilograms of fuse, 25 thousand kilograms of lead... the armies of the Holy Roman Emperor, Bavaria and Saxony," who are joined by "considerable Prussian, Franconian and Swabian forces, in addition to 15 thousand Hungarian soldiers, hussar cavalry, and Haiduks, Italian, English, French and Spanish mercenaries", along with "an indescribable number of boats and galleys". The numbers game defeats us, as it did the Turks on that occasion, and reminds us also how far the notion of an insular Hungary diverges from reality.

Being in the middle of Europe means being a crossing place for Celts, Romans, Huns, Avars, Pechenegs, Magyars, Tartars, Turks, Austrians, Germans and Russians, each in due season. Each group leaves behind some residue of its presence, as do the other communities who have settled and flourished on the banks of the Danube. Here be Serbs, Bosnians, Swabians, Slavs, Romanians, Jews, people dwelling within and without the city walls, all or most employing the Magyar tongue. Today these are supplemented by many others, including Americans, English, Chinese and Japanese. And so this endless process goes on, the nations passing through like water through a colander,

running away and leaving some solid matter behind: a church, a synagogue, a tomb, some baths, a hotel, a café, some architectural trick or device, a word or two, no to mention the names: Tatár, Lengyel, Horváth, Moldován, Svábi, Szerb, Tóth, Török, Németh, Román, Oláh, Orosz. History's etceteras. Buzinkay's history of Budapest could be read as a series of footnotes to the city's genetic narrative.

Capital cities are the inevitable focal point of this process. Of course, the point is often, and rightly, made (Buzinkay himself makes it in his introduction) that the capital is not to be confused for the country or the nation as a whole. Paris is not France, London is not England. Nevertheless, these cities act as filters, voices, figureheads. The capital is, after all, the head of the body and it is through the head the voice emerges in response to the needs of the body. That, at least, is the theory: that is where the analogy goes. The centre of the nervous system is located in the head, and when you take an aerial view and see the roads and railway lines converging on the capital, the sheer physical force of the metaphor comes vividly alive. This is not even to mention that which is less visible on the surface: cables, wires and pipelines, still less the invisibles. Trade, directives, thoughts. People. Invisible cities.

There are endless anecdotes, incidents and coincidences. It is rather wonderful to know that the academy of literature in Valencia announced a poetry competition to celebrate the occasion of the Christian liberation of Buda, that Casanova might have stayed at the still surviving White Cross inn in Batthyány Square and added to his list of conquests there, or that another Venetian, Mazzucato, set up a silk-winding factory that still stands in Miklós Square, Pest. Half the pleasure is in being able to visualize the location of events

precisely at this or that street corner. Buzinkay realizes this and is happy to populate his historical street map with both vanished and surviving landmarks. In fact, as far as the illustrations of this very handsome book go, it might have been even better with even more maps.

However, if we are short of maps, we are certainly not short of faces. One double spread gives us portraits of the major city officials and leaders of Buda, Pest and Budapest from the early eighteenth century onwards. And it is in the eighteenth century that the expansion of Budapest begins. From only 34,000 counting all municipalities in the 1770s (London's population was 860,000 at the time), the populace climbed to 50,000 within ten to fifteen years. In 1793 the naturalist, von Hoffmannsegg, thought Pest might in time rival Berlin. Development was rapid. First the Catholic religious orders were dissolved, and the Protestant and Orthodox churches rose. Jews returned in numbers. The various districts of Pest received their names: Leopoldstown, Francistown, Theresatown. A new market site was decided upon. Hungarian nationalism took root and Hungarian language newspapers began to appear. This went hand in hand with the development of café society, the literary café. Magnificent balls were held, theatres were built. Pest forged ahead of more conservative Buda as a social and financial centre. And so life progressed to 1795 and the execution of the leaders of the Hungarian Jacobins. But though political repression followed, the modernization of Budapest continued, busy as ever. When, in 1806, Napoleon imposed a ban of trade with England, the importance of the Danube as a trade route was vastly increased, and this instigated a boom which resulted in a frantic spell of building. The National Museum rose, founded on the basis of Count Ferenc Széchenyi's gift of his

library. Pest was illuminated, if fitfully, by new oil lamps for its dark streets. The Ludovika military academy was established. By 1810, Géza Buzinkay tells us, the population of Pest, Buda and Óbuda reached 88,000. Twenty years later it was 130,000. The combined city was becoming less German and more Hungarian in its culture, while, at the same time, becoming more international, "a centre for all [nationalities and religions] in the eastern part of Europe." Even the tragic flood of 1838, which covered Pest for three days and killed some hundred and fifty people, failed to slow its growth. The building that followed the flood set the pattern for present Inner City Pest with its restrained neo-Classicism. And so we could go on, through the building of the Chain Bridge, the revolution of 1848, and the increasing sense of readiness for independence that was centred on Pest. Buzinkay gives a brief and lively sketch of the events of 15 March, 1848, the day the revolution broke out, and traces the main landmarks of the revolution itself over a single chapter, always keeping his eye on the effects this had on the physical fabric of the city.

And so he traces his story to the present day, to 1996 at least, the 1100th anniversary of the founding of the Hungarian state, through reconciliation, unification of the three cities into Budapest in 1873, the rapid expansion that followed, the bourgeois flowering of 1896, the disasters of our own century, and the rise and fall of various state structures, each of which stages might take the reviewer several paragraphs to summarize.

The point is that Buzinkay is in full control of his material. Whenever the story might be tempted to lurch into one direction, to follow this or that aspect of history, he returns the reader to the subject, which is, after all, a single city. A single city made out of three. Understanding this

history should be a process of humanization. It should perhaps make its citizens more generous with each other and with the tides of people that pass through and settle. The city's strengths—resilience, vivacity, openness, innovation—have developed out of its vulnerability. Without the vulnerability the city would have been bright and jewel-like, with a touch of

evanescence. With it, it has developed a heroic and tragic power. If Buzinkay's book moves a little too fast to convey that power, it is only because he has a lot to get through and because the invisible city is bound, almost by definition, to slip through the historian's fingers. But the citizens know it. It is all around them: they have only to look. ■

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Sándor Kányádi

The Book of Cleansing Sadness

Péter Korniss: *Inventory. Transylvanian Pictures 1967–1998*. In English. Officina Nova–Kreatív Média Műhely, 1998, 160 pp. ISBN 963 548 8165

Péter Korniss's pictures are like our childhood photographs, taken when we were of nursery-school and school age, or like photographs of family members in military uniform, proudly displayed beneath the large mirrors in the finely furnished and rarely used sitting rooms of village houses. Portraits of the ramrod-stiff bride and groom, photographs that preserve the most memorable moments of the wedding, familiar to us all, framed by our golden smiles. Posed photographs. And with people aware that they are being photographed. So too the objects, the animals, the trees, the houses, the chairs. This was the first thing that struck my eye at the exhibition. Then, in this magnificent picture-book, I read: "I began taking posed pictures only in the last two years of my project."

It is strange to see the return of old-fashioned picture-taking, and the festive atmosphere aroused by the miracle of photography. Even friends and acquaintances are apparently thrilled by the sight of the camera on a tripod. Of course, we

can say that the earlier pictures are posed photographs as well. Not that the subjects needed to be posed, they just felt the charisma of the born photographer. Even the house of mourning seems to find the right pose by itself, inspired by the compassion and kindness of his gaze. This is how it can come to happen that—as Korniss writes—"The image was determined even before I pressed the shutter."

What messages did Péter Korniss wish to send with these pictures, and whom did he wish to send them to?

First of all, a good thirty years ago, on the occasion of his first foray into Transylvania, he wanted to send a message from home to home as it were. A native of Kolozsvár (Cluj) himself, he began recording, in photographs, the national costumes and, where possible, the customs of the Hungarian villages in tradition-preserving Transylvanian districts and regions—such as Kalotaszeg and the Mezőség—for the Hungarian people, for the future. He wished to save what was still salvable of the existing past with the determination of a documentarist.

He began photographing in villages inhabited by Romanians in Máramaros only later. It was by mere chance that he found himself there, on the morning of a send-off for friends called up to the army,

Sándor Kányádi

is a Transylvanian-Hungarian poet and translator.

but he ended the day as an old friend in the house of one of the conscripts.

Their hospitality drew him back several times. In the beginning he saw only the differences between the two languages and cultures and it was only later that he began to see the similarities, not in their languages of course, but in their everyday lives, even in their gestures. He found it natural to take photographs there too. He had found Bartók's way. Not only with the realization that people living side by side have more to unite them than to divide them, but also in that—perhaps I am not far wrong to say—his material recorded on location and presented at exhibitions and in books was subjected to the same kind of finishing, and refining leaving the essence untouched, as were folk melodies from the moment of their collection to their final arrangement and adaptation under Bartók's hands. Thus the completed message, following the pressing of the shutter, owing to the extraordinary character and skills of the photographer, will serve as a message to an ever-growing public.

No doubt there are pieces in this *Inventory* which do not cut the viewer to the quick as they do us Transylvanians, to whom, even if we do not live in the village where they were taken, they say something quite different than they do to a Hungarian, let alone to a non-Hungarian. Something different, something more bitter. The man in *Waiting for the Bus*, with a loaf of unwrapped bread under his arm, evokes for us a whole, sad era, because it is we who know his gaze, because the face that he wears is our own, or was our own, and not too long ago. The same thing goes for the *Old Man Heading Home* in huge wellington boots, with the same loaf of bread under his arm.

For us, at first glance, these pho-

tographs are documents rather than anything else, and would probably be the same for those living a hand-to-mouth existence in the third world. But they may be an experience for others, living in more fortunate countries, an aesthetic one if nothing else. The portrait of the *Schoolgirl*, from Sic (Szék) taken in 1967, with the mullion could be a painting by a Dutch or Flemish master (Vermeer). Also the *Romanian Girl* from Bixad (Bikszádfüredő), the *Attendants and Musicians in a Bridal Procession*, and then, by himself, the *Musician in his Home*.

Mourners. *Pilgrims Sleeping in Church*. Age-old traditions torn asunder, and through the widening crack sports shoes tramp into the place of boots, T-shirts displaying logos take the place of homespun cambric shirts, a little girl wearing moccasins sitting in the lap of her barefoot, jeans-clad father. From high spirits to the deepest mourning, from subtle irony registering the changes to chaste love, there are so many things, so much light and shadow, such great belief, so much love and so many colours contained in this black and white book! I could list them one by one, and someone more competent than I could write a whole treatise on a single picture, practically any picture. These pictures present the great moments of human life in a world created by man, the same things that all the other arts try to immortalize, the everlasting in the everchanging, the joys and pains of weekdays and red-letter days, the sustaining power of love and affection. And the terror engendered by man as a culmination of his misery.

The *Disabled Veteran* limping towards the stripped field of maize, as if towards some overpopulated cemetery, could be the counter-symbol to Picasso's *Dove of Peace* on this globe of mud sown with antipersonnel mines.

The wonderful thing is that all the pictures are beautiful in themselves, even if their subject is not, even if they are cheap or kitschy. Not only beautiful but somehow also ceremonious. It is the festive excitement of photographing, of being photographed, of recording and being recorded for posterity, that elevates and presents even week-days as high days. The province, the provincial is made universal through these pictures.

This may seem a little too full of pathos. Let me try to make it easier to understand.

Péter Korniss's photographs are elevated by an invisible extra something, the imprint of experienced suffering. This is not identical with the physical and mental fatigue and misery—though it contains that too—that the photographer in all probability had to experience every time he visited Transylvania, especially during the Ceaușescu regime. The suffering is that of the artist identifying himself with the object,

the subject, the message of his work. And the human sorrow of the moment taken from real life is contained in that imprint of suffering. And perhaps—though this may be anticipating things—the breakdown of naive beliefs is contained in it too. Because we believe that, with our pictures, our poems, our books and music, the world will move ahead on the right path toward better things. And then it does not move. We believe that it is possible to live this way, in undisturbed, unprovokable peace, as people live in these Transylvanian villages, peacefully and together, side by side though speaking a different language, in the beautiful home of the spirit.

These pictures call poems to mind, small wonder since the book is full of the poetry of images. And there is no need for it to be translated, for the sons and daughters of any nation can understand it. Though they are in Hungarian. In a straightforward Hungarian, conceived in a sublime state of grace. ■



Iván Bächer

The Taste of Old Transylvania

Baroness Elemér Bornemissza: *Kipróbált receptek* (Proven Recipes). Edited and with an Introduction by Ildikó Marosi. Csíkszereda–Budapest, Pallas—Akadémia Könyvkiadó, 1998, 153 pp.

A friend of mine brought a heartrending cookery book from Transylvania. At first sight the slim little volume looked ordinary enough; I expected some amusing oddity when I picked it up and read the name of the author—Baroness Elemér Bornemissza née Karola Szilvássy—and the title: *Proven Recipes*.

The cover showed a copperplate print of Marosvécs in the last century—I was able to identify it by the four sturdy corner towers. This Renaissance building on the site of the Roman *castrum* was, until recently, in the possession of the Kemény family—the descendants of János Kemény (1607–1662), Prince of Transylvania, who had fought the Turks and had been abandoned by the Habsburgs and Montecuccoli.

When I read the first recipe, I still thought I would be treated to a bit of “blue-blooded” diversion. Who in their right mind could take a recipe of *Goose-liver paté à la Salzburg* seriously, which requires three whole goose livers, of which two have to be soaked in lukewarm milk overnight, then fried with onions and white

bread rolls previously also soaked in milk, then pounded in a mortar, pressed through a sieve, mixed with finely sliced truffles which had been soaked in sugared wine, then with more wine added, with cloves and pepper, and the whole mixture finely layered with the third goose liver, which had been fried, cut into thin slices, and then the whole thing finished in a hot oven.

Who would have time for all that today?

It was only when I read the foreword of more than thirty pages and then went through the recipes that my heart suddenly sank. Every single recipe permeated the air with transience and death. What I held in my hand was the frozen, fossilized evidence of a social class, a culture and a world, which have been obliterated from the face of the Earth.

This class was the Hungarian aristocracy of Transylvania, which, as well as distinguishing itself in the culinary arts, maintained an extremely rich Hungarian tradition, culture and literature.

As Ildikó Marosi's Introduction reveals, the book is the first publication of a handwritten cookery book. Besides being a fascinating document, an original collection of recipes found among the estate of János Kemény, the last titled resident of Marosvécs, it is invaluable also because in the case of most of the recipes the author also names the source: when and where the

Iván Bächer,

a journalist and critic, is on the staff of
Népszabadság, a national daily.

baroness had learned the secrets of preparing the dish concerned. And if we use Ildikó Marosi's guide to keep track of the sources, then the book will, indeed, make heartrending reading.

Let's get a foretaste of the names of people who cooked for Hungarian writers, poets and editors in Transylvania between the two world wars.

The author of the cookery book was Baroness Bornemissza née Karola Szilvássy, daughter of the landowner Béla Szilvássy and Baroness Antónia Wass.

Karola's character was captured in two novels by two twentieth-century Transylvanian writers of aristocratic blood, Count Miklós Bánffy (1874–1950) and Baron János Kemény (1903–1971).

Ever since her youth, Karola was a stunningly beautiful, unbridled and proud woman with a passion for fine food as well as for interesting, eccentric and talented people. She liked to have excitement around her, and when there were no scandals at hand, she personally intervened to remedy the situation. For many years, Karola had a housekeeper, who had been a convicted murderer's lover, and whom she took into her house along with the hanged man's child. Accompanied by one of her friends, herself a baroness, Karola travelled to South Africa—on rail, by boat and on a donkey—to erect a tombstone for her cousin, Albert Wass, who had died there while fighting for the Boers.

This extraordinary woman had a difficult time to find herself a husband; eventually she married Baron Elemér Bornemissza, but the marriage was a failure, and their only child died, so they lived separately, with Karola receiving a handsome allowance from her husband.

Between the two world wars, Karola made herself the heart and soul of the Kemény Zsigmond Society of Maros-

vásárhely, the publishing house Erdélyi Szépmíves Céh, and the magazine *Erdélyi Helikon*. (Erdély is the Hungarian name of Transylvania.)

The society, which bore the name of the Kemény family's greatest son, the novelist and liberal thinker Zsigmond Kemény, was formed after the writer's death in 1876, and functioned until 1944. It acquired a unique role after Transylvania's annexation by Romania in 1918, organizing and rallying the Hungarian writers and maintaining links with the mother country.

Erdélyi Szépmíves Céh was the most prestigious book publisher in interwar Transylvania, and *Erdélyi Helikon*, the magazine started by János Kemény, was published by them.

The writers who were associated with the publisher and the magazine—Károly Kós, Aladár Kuncz, Károly Molter, Jenő Dsida, Benő Karácsony and many others—annually gathered in János Kemény's château in Marosvécs. On these occasions, Karola's attendance could always be taken for granted, and all the memoirs name her as the spirit of the company.

In this way, Karola, the compiler of our cookery book, was at the centre of Transylvanian literary life, and her kitchen produced, from "proven recipes", the fine food enjoyed by the writers and editors.

Take for example, the horseradish with oranges: cook the juice of an orange with sugar, add a large portion of grated horseradish and a diced orange, then serve chilled.

Karola died in Kolozsvár in 1948, at the age of seventy-two. Her grave in the Házsongárd cemetery of Kolozsvár was covered in red roses by Miklós Bánffy, the same man who wrote a trilogy on the decline of the Transylvanian aristocracy; who designed the set for the Budapest première of Bartók's *The Wooden Prince* in 1917;

who was Hungary's Foreign Minister in 1921 and 1922; and who, upon his return to Transylvania in 1926, took the helm at the *Erdélyi Helikon*. Complete with its ups and downs, his not particularly secret liaison with Karola lasted for decades, and he followed her to the grave within a couple of months of her death.

However, let's carry on leafing through the cookery book.

Here is the second recipe, a tomato jelly, coming from one of Karola's friends, a certain Olga.

Peeling tomatoes or putting the saucepan on the stove for this dish will never again be the same, knowing that the Olga, who provided this recipe, was none other than Mrs. Óváry, née Olga Purjesz, whose salon in Kolozsvár served as a sanctuary for the Hungarian arts in Transylvania in the mid-1930s; in addition to the local literati, such as the poet Jenő Dsida and the writers Benő Karácsony and Aladár Kuncz, the salon was visited by just about everyone who happened to pass through the town coming from Hungary: thus Béla Bartók, and the writers Zsigmond Móricz and Dezső Kosztolányi. We add the herbs and the gelatine differently, we chop the tomato with different feelings, knowing that the Olga, who had recorded this recipe, was machine-gunned, along with her entire family and dinner guests, in September 1944 by a Russian soldier, or by a soldier of some other nationality—possibly Romanian—wearing a Soviet uniform.

Then there is the *Turkey galantine*, which will not taste the same, no matter how closely we follow the recipe, adding all the ingredients—turkey, milk, white rolls, butter, eggs, goose liver, bacon, ham, macaroni, cucumber, lemon rind, mushrooms—when we find out that it comes from Záh, the estate whose last proprietor, Artur Horváth, was lynched by a Romanian mob in 1944.

Several English recipes are included in the book, the source of which in most cases is given as Augustza.

Augustza, to whom Karola bequeathed the cookery book, was Mrs. János Kemény, the host of Helikon evenings. Born as Augusta Paton in a Scottish family, she arrived in Transylvania some time in the 1920s to visit her brother, who found himself stuck there after being interned during World War One. The brother wished to study a variety of pig species bred in the Mezőség region, but could only witness the disintegration of the Empire and Hungary instead. Augusta, too, got "stuck" in Transylvania, after marrying Baron János Kemény. This was how the sister of a Scottish pig expert became the *châtelaine* and, incidentally, also one of the main patrons of Transylvanian literature between the two wars.

All the exquisite recipes in the world—the Shepherd's pie, the Turkish speciality *Imam bald* or the sweet bread with honey and almonds—cannot make us forget that they came from the kitchen of János Kemény, a man not only dispossessed of his mansion and thrown into poverty, but also banned from writing. All he was left with in the end was a plot in the graveyard.

János Kemény and his wife are buried in the once beautiful park of Marosvécs, overlooking the turbulent River Maros. If your nerves are steady, you can visit the tombstone—but be warned that you will probably be accompanied, as the beautiful Renaissance palace of Marosvécs now functions as a mental hospital.

Written above the recipe of *Veal cutlets béchamel* there is the word Sáromberke.

Sáromberke was the name of the place where Gemma Teleki's château stood. Among the direct descendants of Count Sámuel Teleki, the founder of the famous library and chancellor of Transylvania in the 18th century, was the identically

named explorer, from whom Gemma inherited not only the huge château full of elephant trunks and lion skins, but also a genius of a cook, Róbert.

Róbert Pirckhan's father was an Austrian gamekeeper, originally brought to Sáromberke by Sámuel Teleki to start a game reserve; however, he also started a family there, and since his youngest son Róbert was born hunchbacked, Uncle Samu arranged for his training as a cook.

To that effect, he sent the boy first to the National Casino of Budapest, and then to the kitchen of the German Prince Waldeck, where among the frequent guests was the Russian Tsar, a gourmand.

Later on Róbert became the chef of Sámuel Teleki's boon hunting companion, Crown Prince Rudolph; he was there, in Mayerling, on that wretched Sunday, when tragedy struck. Of course, Róbert discussed the Crown Prince or Mayerling with no one; instead, he returned to his former master in Transylvania. He was a genius of a chef, who at Sámuel Teleki's hunting parties was sometimes known to cook for three or four kings at a time.

Róbert ended up as a pauper, despite being entitled to a fabulous pension; having turned deaf first, and then blind, he was finally run over by a car.

Now, as we continue leafing through the booklet, and as we stumble on another recipe from Sáromberke, the *Crème Galushka*, dumplings made of whipped egg white cooked in syrup, drained, layered with vanilla cream and apricot jam and

served chilled, our thoughts should go out not only to the trampled-down cook, but also to the lady of the household where he was employed.

Gemma Teleki is still alive. Her family fled to the West, but she chose to stay in Transylvania. For decades, she made ends meet as a street vendor selling vegetables; since 1989 she has received a small pension from the Hungarian Association of Political Prisoners of the Revolution of 1956. Having passed ninety, the former mistress of the Wesselényi château at Zsibó and the Teleki palace at Sáromberke now lives in a basement in Marosvásárhely. Recently, she featured in a moving Hungarian television documentary, in which she talked about the past with an amazing power of recollection.

You can still visit her.

And that is how a Transylvanian cookery book looks today. Published in 1998, it came out in Csíkszereda, Transylvania, under the aegis of the Pallas-Akadémia Könyvkiadó of Budapest, supported by the Hungarian Ministry of Culture and Education.

This cookery book deserves a place on the shelves of the Great European Cookery Book Library, next to the cookery books of the Saxons of Transylvania and the Zipsers of Slovakia; of the Swabians of Bácska and the Germans of Bratislava; of the Hungarians of Kassa, of the Sudeten Germans, of the Königsbergians, of the Bosnians, of the people of Kosovo—and of the unmarked graves, and of the mass graves. ❁

Tamás Koltai

Three Villages

Lajos Parti Nagy: *Ibusár*; Zoltán Egressy: *Portugál*;
György Schwajda: *A rátóti legényanya* (The Boy Mother of Rátót)

Ibusár, Irgács and Rátót: three villages—two of which are fictitious—provide the settings for three new plays in performance. The real one, Rátót, figures in folk-song and in oral tradition as the notorious home of the dim-witted.

Ibusár was first performed in Debrecen some years ago and has received several productions since. A new version by Budapest's Játékszín gives it a novel twist. The author, Lajos Parti Nagy, once called his play a "musical hussaretta", neatly combining the most popular theatre genre over the last hundred years and the personification of Hungarian virtues. (Naturally, the hussar figures as the patriotic and chivalrous hero in more than one operetta.) A hussaretta then is an operetta concerned with the quintessence of chivalry, patriotism and the Hungarian character. Parti Nagy's play is a sardonic treatment of the Hungarian mind-set. Its heroine, Jolán Sárbogárdi, is a booking clerk at Ibusár's railway station, where she daydreams about having an operetta of hers played at the

Operetta Theatre in Budapest. Not just daydreaming, for she scribbles away and mails her copious output to the editor of a Budapest journal called *Magyar Boldog* (roughly "The Happy Hungarian"). Her play, naturally about hussars, is performed within the play. Her hussars bear a clear resemblance to the passengers who use the station, and the leading man is very much like Jolán's boyfriend, who as an amateur musician is expected to set her libretto to music. The station-master, a frustrated admirer of Jolán's, is identical with the operetta's villain, a traitor who sells the country to the Russians. (Her piece is set in the 1848 Revolution, crushed a year later by the Habsburgs with Russian help.)

Parti Nagy's play is built around the confrontation, or rather juxtaposition, of the rose-coloured world of the operetta and the pedestrian reality of Ibusár. Sitting in her booking office all day, with the heroines of nineteenth century romantic fiction whirling in her head, Jolán finds that her choice is between a crude drunkard of a station master and a flighty flautist. Given this, she is happy to imagine herself as a prima donna, a ringletted and crinolined baroness. All previous productions of *Ibusár* unravelled this fantasy. The operetta hussars parading around in pelisse and flat railwayman's cap proved to be an unending source of comedy, likewise

Tamás Koltai,

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

the Russian spy's reports transmitted via the station's telegraph and telephone. The puns and wordplay add to all this: both the "real" and the operetta characters speak an absurd and corrupted language, with enhanced contemporary clichés.

The *Játékszín* has taken commendable risks in exchanging (or reprogramming) its regular audiences used to straightforward popular entertainment. Within the small space available to him, the director, Sándor Zsótér, makes *Ibusár* and the operetta world compatible. Unlike previous productions of the play, his does not have them fade in and out of each other, but brings them together in a visual unity. There is some theatrical stylization involved, a portrayal of Jolán's stage-struck mind. Thus we see marching through her booking-office the hussar mounted on a phallic gun-barrel of a railway engine (an image in keeping with the play's language) or a group of children as Red Indian hussars. The background is the Parliament—a blown-up picture postcard—as a metaphor for Hungarian *Ibusár* provincialism. Jolán's passionate imagination is brought alive. (The same director pulled this off last year at Szeged, in his *Death of a Salesman*.) Enikő Börcsök, who plays Jolán in two incarnations as clerk and prima donna, plays the figure for irony, using her wickerwork chair as a pergola, or as a crinoline, or as a confessional box, making "bandages" for the wounded with the spools of rail tickets, using her rubber stamps as binoculars, tapping out the heartbeat. All this she does in the usual pouting sugary operetta style, in which there is still a degree of empathy for a worn and futile life.

The grand finale of her operetta achieves a fevered vision in which railway and patriotic musical play overlap: a railwayman's badge glitters on the transvestite hero's evening dress, the waltz is

played with passion. This we may indeed laugh off. But what is left if wanderlust has to be suppressed? Only the clack of a railway carriage's wheels.

Wanderlust is also the theme of Zoltán Egressy's first play. The setting for *Portugal* is also a fictitious village, Irgács, and its hostelry. "This is a space in which things happen without any significant magnitude," the playbill tells us. "Monday is Monday, summer is summer, a bar is a bar and this is going to be so right to the end of days. In other words, the story of Monday is very much like Monday, and the highlight of the summer is the shooting range; freedom is the swimming pool, the bar, beer, football, the paltry versions of repetitive conversation..." The bar is the setting for non-events. There's the barkeeper, who gathers all the items of local news, like the theft of a bike left propped up against a wall. His daughter, unlike many other of the village young, has stayed in the village and is being courted by a local boy who wishes to marry her. Among the other regulars is the priest, who pops in between christenings, weddings or giving the last rites, to toss back glass after glass of brandy without any visible effect. A would be wheeler-dealer is another, with several attempts to get businesses going behind him; he has tried his luck in the capital and will probably do so again, just to get away from his alcoholic wife. Another fixture is a man they call Satan, sunk in alcoholism and willing to do anything for a drink to be sent his way.

An unnamed young man turns up in the bar. We learn that he is usually called by his nickname (*becenév* in Hungarian), so the barkeeper's daughter dubs him Bece. He has the air of an intellectual, uses words no-one understands and generally shows off. He claims to be just passing

through, on his way to Portugal, with only his rucksack as luggage. Why Irgács, of all places, remains a mystery but he takes a room in a nearby house for a few days. The following day he explains to the barkeeper's daughter that the attraction of Portugal is that it lies at the edge of Europe, with only the boundless ocean beyond; in the fishing villages, the fishermen finish their day by sitting in front of their houses gazing at the vasty deep. And this is what Bece would like to do.

Alienation from our high-tech and over-intellectualized life, or simply from the everyday, has been the topic of a number of works in various genres. Most famous of all is perhaps Marco Ferreri's *Dillinger is Dead*, a film in which the protagonist paints polka-dots on his revolver which is wrapped in a newspaper page devoted to the notorious American gangster; he shoots his neurotic wife and then boards a dreamboat to waft him to the South Seas. Most probably Bece has not murdered anyone—he is simply fed up. Now he has reached Irgács and the comforting curves of the barkeeper's daughter. Her local swain is none too happy, but we are spared any confrontation between the two with the sudden arrival of Bece's wife, who has tracked him down after discovering a scrap of paper he left behind accidentally. She is your ubiquitous new Hungarian business type, flaunting her luxury car, her cash and generally behaving obnoxiously. She makes a hysterical scene, which leads to a brawl involving everyone, present, before dragging her unresisting husband off home. In the meantime, the village suitor arrives drunk and starts shooting, killing an innocent bystander.

Criticism is as much directed against the hopeless everyday of Irgács as against the abortive wanderlust of intellectuals. The desire to be free within us is acknowledged, but we are seen as cowards whose

attempts to break free are merely illusions. This is conveyed through a quiet poetic naturalism despite the occasional dramaturgical hiccup. (The note left behind by Bece is somewhat laboured, and it is not clear whether it was perhaps left behind on purpose, in which case it is surely another sign of Bece's indecision.) Yet the powerful use of language and the lively dialogue make this a promising start from a young writer.

The production is staged in the Katona József company's studio theatre and is directed by the actor Andor Lukáts, who approaches it from the role potential the play offers. The tone shifts from naturalism to grotesque comedy, with the cast ringing the changes on intoxication; not so evident is the gentle poetry or the irony of the dreariness of the bar, the hopelessness, the desire to get away. All the same, the production comes off well as it is.

The *Boy Mother of Rátót*, staged at the Szigligeti Theatre in Szolnok, is also set in a village inn. (The inn seems to have become the agora of contemporary Hungarian drama, where action does or does not take place.) The villagers of Rátót are, by folk tradition, the butt of tales in which they carry ladders crosswise through the woods or dig another hole in which to rid themselves of the soil from their previous hole. They are also said to be fond of their drink, with the inn counting almost as a place of worship. It is here where the villagers congregate when "democracy comes to the village."

The author, György Schwajda, gives the Christian myth a new and profane twist. Thus, to start with its ending, we find a closing scene in which Christ's successor is crucified with the assistance of the Holy Family. This victim's sin is that his name is Józsi (short for József) in a village where all the men bear the name Béla (a name associated now with the dimwitted). Be-

cause of his otherness Józsi feels he has a calling. Immaculate, he conceives a child and wishes to give birth to it too. The village has to decide on this, and not only on Józsi (incidentally, twenty years old at his unexpected birth) but on democracy, also unexpected, which they have read about in the papers. In Rátót, everything is upside down and neither faith nor the family, hitherto the best model of human cohabitation, can produce miracles. So it is useless for the Holy Family to have access to the home of Mariska, Józsi's mother, if the Virgin Mary is no more than your average housewife making her arrangements over her cell-phone, St Joseph henpecked and addicted to Coca-Cola, and the Christchild a gum-chewing surly adolescent. It is also in vain for Béla (Mariska's husband) to find himself elected as a village councilman in the most democratic way possible—she is the only woman to recognize his naked backside—when, once in power he loses his head—or so he thinks, looking in the mirror. They can only be convinced of the miracle of a male mother by crucifying Józsi, who, at an unguarded moment, whispers to his mother that there will be no resurrection for him.

Schwajda thinks that the rules of human coexistence—as replacements for voided myths—are unable to hold back the erosion of human values. "The causes are well-recognized: rapid technological, social and economic change, the sudden depreciation of ancestral beliefs, and an overwhelming sense of the ground being taken from under our feet," says his playbill. "All the world's major religions are in their final agony... Most of Christian theology is already in decay. Our demythicized world can only perceive as real that which can be grasped by the senses; the sensitivity to miracles is dying out. However, myths can only be perceived according to their own internal laws, otherwise the

roots of our culture, the erstwhile unified visions of the world, become no more than tall stories."

This parody of the Christian myth is sure to be offensive to some, given that it comes through an emotionally charged, provocative production. Criticism is melowered by how the dimwittedness of the Rátót villagers is handled—and of us too, for Rátót is us; the humour is charitable and the dysfunctional parliament-in-the-inn is handled with the appropriate dose of self-irony. What the characters say is funny, the dialogue crackles with the wisdom of the folk-tale, silly or cunning, depending on which angle we view it from. There is hardly drama in the conventional sense, but the plot is pushed along through the mischievous absurdity of the dialogue, something we are familiar with from Schwajda's earlier plays. A pity, then, that the eponymous figure is so featureless, and does not take up the dominant position for the plot to revolve around.

Instead this is assumed by Mari Töröcsik, a *grande dame* of the Hungarian stage, who plays Józsi's mother. And a charming, pious, and talkative busybody she is too, even reeling off for the Virgin Mary the recipe for a traditional potato and pasta dish during the "Last Supper". Those present for it, in the inn naturally, sit with their backs to the audience—Schwajda the director fully understands the upside down vision of Schwajda the playwright. In fact, the production enhances this strain, providing mischievousness and pace, allowing the cast more room to work out the clichés of their characters. The ending is too serene, as if Schwajda stops short of drawing the conclusions from his own premisses and of giving the villagers of Rátót a severer dressing down.

But then any criticism of Rátót is to be handled delicately. For we all live in Rátót. Or in Ibusár. Or Irgács. ❧

Tamás Koltai

Plays and Players

György Spiró: *Shakespeare szerepösszevonásai*
(Doubling in Shakespeare's Plays). Európa, 1997, 278 pp.

My essay certainly meets the criteria of what is called 'conjecture' in the English-speaking world, one of the worst investives there," György Spiró says in his book, the most intriguing work on the theatre in Hungarian in recent years.

Before turning to the work, which has created a stir, a few words about the author are in order. While provocative statements of this kind are typical of him, his work is too broad in scope and too serious for him to be dismissed as an *enfant terrible* of literature or scholarship.

György Spiró, born in 1946, studied Hungarian, Russian and Serbo-Croat at the Faculty of Humanities of Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. He started working at Hungarian Radio, later became a theatre critic, an editor, a research fellow of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, a dramaturge for both the National Theatre in Budapest and for the Kaposvár company, one of the best in the country. For three years he was director of the Szigligeti Theatre at Szolnok. He teaches at Eötvös University and the Academy of Theatre and Cinematography. He has published three novels, two volumes of short stories and two volumes of plays. He is probably the most performed current Hungarian playwright, with his plays frequently staged abroad too—yet he has announced recently that he has stopped writ-

ing plays. His books include one on Miroslav Krleža and one on East Central European drama from the Enlightenment to the First World War. His translations include plays by Wyspianski, Gombrowicz, Krleža, Chekhov and G. B. Shaw.

Despite the provocative sentence quoted above, Spiró's book on Shakespeare is a well-documented work which reveals a thorough knowledge of the literature of the subject. (The most important quotations are given in footnotes in the original language, most of them are English.) His introduction sums up the work of other scholars as regards doubling, such as Thomas Whitfield Baldwin, Howard Skiles, Gamini Salgado, M. C. Bradbrook, William J. Lawrence, Andrew Gurr, Alan C. Dessen, David M. Bevington, Thomas James King, Alexandr Abramovich Anyikst, John C. Meagher, and refers to a thesis by Richard G. Mansfield, which he came across in the library of the University of Iowa. All these works take as their point of departure the historically authenticated fact that, at its peak, Shakespeare's company had a maximum of twelve permanent members—who shared in the income—as well as boy actors and actors they hired. Consequently, doubling was inevitable in any production involving more roles than the company's total number of actors. By examining the structure of Shakespeare's plays, scholars

have drawn various conclusions as to the possible doublings. The difference between these works and Spiró's is that he goes much further. Here a working playwright and dramatic scholar sets down some thoughts on Shakespeare, whom he regards as "one of the greatest sensation-alists". He avers that there is a conscious design in the doublings; they are based on careful considerations "aimed at achieving a higher artistic quality—and effectiveness—for the play."

Spiró certainly does not deny that in working out his thesis he was primarily influenced by theatrical practice. "From the 1970s onwards, doubling of some kind was employed in several productions, one of the most famous being Peter Brook's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He could have been familiar with theoretical considerations prevailing at the time on the question of Titania-Hippolyta and Theseus-Oberon. I am not aware if his production may have directed me towards the subject of my essay, all the more so since I raised this question in an article on theatre as early as the autumn of 1969, before Brook's production was staged, unaware that the problem had already created a literature. However, some other doublings offered me food for thought, e.g., in the Kaposvár production of *Hamlet*, director Tamás Ascher contracted the roles of the Ghost, the First Player and the First Grave-digger [...] I understand that in the early 90s there were attempts in several places, e.g., in France, to produce Shakespeare's plays with no more than ten actors. Doubling is in the air."

In Shakespeare's time, scholars tell us, in essence, two kinds of doubling were practised. *Suppression* occurred in the case of a figure who ended his role on the stage and appeared no more. The actor who had played this role would re-appear as another

figure. *Alternation* took place when an actor played two or more roles alternately; that is, he kept changing the figures performed, without these ever disappearing from the scene for an extended time. And there was also a third form, *substitution*, when two actors played a single figure, alternating in one role within the same production. This version extended to one or two short scenes and is the opposite of, yet closely interconnected with, doubling.

Spiró describes his methods of investigation: "Though laborious, it is not too difficult to count up the potential doublings in a play; you divide it into scenes and then count up who encounters whom, who misses whom in all these scenes. Figures who never meet may be considered for doubling. [...] Figures who never meet may indeed, in principle, be played by the same actor; without any dramaturgical or aesthetic meaning, however, doubling of this kind remains irrelevant. Dramaturgical or aesthetic significance is attained in a case when doubling contributes towards the interpretation of the play, enriching it or making it more complex. Shakespeare may have employed doubling extensively out of necessity, in his histories, for instance. If, however, the particular roles are insignificant in themselves and have a mere decorative function, it is largely irrelevant how they are doubled. Genuine, meaningful doubling must be suspected in cases when significant roles are contracted or the potential for doubling is revealed after this counting up."

Spiró applies this approach to all of Shakespeare's plays, aiming to map out as extensive as possible a system of doubles. The laborious effort produces results of a kind that will certainly enrich Shakespearean studies. For the general reader, those conjectures offer the most intriguing

details in which the author attributes philosophical-ideological depth to the doubling of roles. Spiró avers that in Shakespeare's time the Porter in *Macbeth* was played by the actor who also played Duncan, for the text provides verification that the Porter is a diabolic reincarnation of Duncan who is murdered in the previous scene. (The murderous act itself does not take place on stage precisely because the actor has to change costumes in the meantime.) Spiró goes even farther, saying that Hecate is also a diabolic reincarnation of Duncan's, for unlike the Witches she also makes her first appearance after the murder. This is, then, the second doubling for the actor. What is more, he also played the Doctor who "treated" Lady Macbeth (as is well documented in the text version of a contemporary performance, the instigator or murderer on such occasions confessed to the victim, now a ghost, as though in a horror film), as well as Seyton, whose very name is suspected by many to be a slightly distorted version of Satan. The Witches, for that matter, do not reappear at the end of the play, as would be fitting for a frame story, Spiró says, because they are in fact present in other, similarly meaningfully, i.e., effectively doubled roles.

M*acbeth* is only one pregnant example of Spiró's hypothesis that Shakespeare based his system of doubling on certain pairs of opposites—the living and the dead; good and evil; gentlemen and commonfolk; Englishmen and Frenchmen; Montagues and Capulets. Such pairs of opposites represent extremes in human qualities, treating Man as a collective idea rather than as an individual. The doubling of roles taken as a basic principle of the Shakespearean method leads to exciting conclusions in his essay. On occasion, however, one play or another escapes the net of the doubling theory and will not

lend itself for such an interpretation. Of the best-known plays, *King Lear* is a case in point, even if traditionally the roles of Cordelia and the Fool are frequently put forward as an obvious doubling. As we know, the Fool vanishes from the plot without a trace, while Lear speaks about the dead Cordelia as "my poor fool". Spiró, however, does not consider this particular doubling probable. "We may, of course, substantiate it, in a very twisted way; however, the Fool who is wise and Cordelia whose heart is wise but is a fool in real life, do not belong together—more precisely, they do not make a pair of opposites. [...] This type of doubling is untypical of the mature Shakespeare." According to Spiró, several roles may be contracted in *Lear*, and the whole play may be performed by a company of twelve actors and a couple of apprentice actors, but "no doubling in it offers anything of artistic significance".

Then he arrives at a strange conclusion: "Though doubts as to Shakespeare's authorship have never been raised, it may nevertheless be more than just coincidence that, as regards doubling possibilities and dramatic significance, *Lear* is out of line, and the most talented detractors of Shakespeare, such as Leo Tolstoy and the Hungarian novelist Zsigmond Móricz, singled out for criticism the forced solutions in *Lear* and projected this onto other plays as well. The secondary plots, when examined, show that the Edmund and Edgar line as set against the Lear line is conspicuously dilettantish. The former is psychologically flat, a poorer version of the Richard III story, hinting of re-echoing, while Lear's outbursts—his soliloquies—appear as though floating in loneliness over the whole play. The motifs of the secondary plot were much admired and imitated in the Romantic Age, not entirely by accident, perhaps, in view of the fact that the Romantics' insight into character was

inferior to that of the Elizabethan Age. Shakespeare either kept nodding off when writing *Lear* or else contributed only the great soliloquies, and left the makeshift structure the way it had been supplied."

As the above shows, Spiró does not need much nudging to produce provocative views on his subject. We may well suspect that the academic engaged in the examination of doublings is a match for the philosopher and established playwright concerned with the Shakespearean work. This is particularly seen whenever his examination produces new insights on the major plays.

Of *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, he writes: "The doubles play opposite figures, and this ambiguity endures in the play to the end. The ambivalence of human nature is thematic: good and evil both form part of each particular role. What Friar Lawrence has to say about the poison is relevant for both the individual and the doubling actors. Similarly, Queen Mab's charms affect everyone, whether they appear in one or more roles: at one movement of hers, sexuality, murderous intent, uncontrolled impulses burst forth and become suicidal. (Romeo and Juliet are in this world, not opposed to it.) Language is capable merely of making jokes about whatever is to become fatal. The wealth of puns is functional. It is the figures embodying the good (the Nurse, Friar Lawrence) who precipitate doom and cause disaster, and what is evil or weak may also dwell in them. When "risen", a friend may turn foe or rival. A slain foe may arise and take revenge in his guise of the good. Patricidal impulses may erupt in the gentlest (Juliet), and the most loving of fathers may put a curse upon his child (Capulet). Thus blinded, Romeo rushes into danger and, eventually, ruin ... From whichever doubling we view it, the play is

hardly the apotheosis of Renaissance love; it is dreadful, fit for a horror film."

Spiró thinks that the *dramatis personae* in *Romeo and Juliet* are guided by "the forces of frenzied temper, of which the animosity between the two houses is but one". Consequently, the two title figures do not double, because "for those who have no doubles—those who are guided by a single passion, love—the world is a world dominated by one ghost fading into another, where you can never know who is good or up to no good, and in reality people may hide in themselves." Doubling, or we might say double vision, therefore, penetrates the entire play: "More than a mere alternation of tragic and comic scenes, what may happen at any time is the changing of a tragic scene into a comic one. Lamenting the seemingly dead Juliet is comic—and no less comic is lamenting the individual who is really dead. Such scenes cannot but be written by design. The source of comedy admittedly—or unadmittedly, to be perceived only by the audience—is fright. Fright, and this is what the play is about, is justified. It is not the dramaturgy of coincidences, apportioned to greater or lesser degrees of cleverness, that leads to tragedy, as even Georg Lukács surmised, but human existence itself. Ever since Greek tragedy, this is the first truly tragic moment."

Discussing *Julius Caesar*, Spiró supposes that the title role can be contracted with the role of Octavius, the Emperor Augustus to be. This implies that Caesar is murdered in vain, for he is replaced—the office survives. On *Antony and Cleopatra* he says: "If aiming to upset his audiences, then Shakespeare could easily have sent the actor playing Antony onto the stage again as the Clown, thus the lover from beyond the grave helps Cleopatra die through the bite of the asp. And why would he have refrained from upsetting his audience? This

was his profession." Bolder still is his conjecture on *Henry IV*. He thinks it is conspicuous that the King and Falstaff meet only four times throughout the play, and even then Falstaff utters no more than one sentence. "Lesser dramatists than Shakespeare would not pass up confronting the two characters, and at least once would engage them in a major polemic. Yet Shakespeare did pass up such a tempting opportunity. And I think this author is one of the greatest sensationalists, who would never willingly or unwillingly give up an effect, except for an even greater one. The question that arises is: Was it not the same actor that played King Henry and Falstaff? When they do encounter one another, any actor could have substituted for Falstaff, in his costume, and he had only to produce a single sentence in Falstaff's voice. Even a hired actor could have done that." And the aim could have been nothing other than to mock the King as performed by Falstaff—more complex than a simple parody: the actor playing Falstaff parodies himself, the way he plays King Henry's role.

Spiró admits that the probability of certain doublings he suggests—Henry/Falstaff is one—may be strongly debated. Yet he maintains that "possible doublings are at the same time probable as well: a dramatic structure that harbours so many occasions for doubling can only be built up by design." And this leads to one essential conclusion of his work: "In Shakespeare's dramatic oeuvre, the rich choice of possible and probable versions of doubling lead us to believe that, for him, writing each particular play involved a series of choices and decisions, and because he was free to do without doubling, he was also free to opt for doubled roles; he was also free to experiment with widely different versions of the doubling structures. Literary critics and historians are wont to treat certain literary works as though hav-

ing been written by an automaton, a robot licensed to write plays, which was expected to 'give voice to' or 'reflect the age', the 'spirit of the age', or 'class struggle or 'the Renaissance vision' and who knows what else, supporting, as it were, the views later analysts hold on the philosophy of art—as though a work can only exist in the very form it has been left to us and could not be any different, as though some divine or historical predestination was at work when the writer chose that particular form and nothing but that form; as though he could not have picked, had he wished, any other form or any other figure except that one he did. Those who have no personal experience of the creative process usually exclude from the work precisely what is most important—the element of creation."

The author's working hypothesis certainly leads to a series of other questions. For example, Spiró asks, whether the actor who plays in double roles within one performance did make it clear in one of his roles that he, the actor, played another role as well; and if so, did the audience appreciate this or not; if not, did they appreciate that the actor played both roles with genuine and deep identification, not stepping out of either, and it is only the audience member who knows that these roles are akin through the person of the actor. Was the aim perhaps that the identity of the actor in various roles must not be revealed? Did the "Brechtian" or rather the "Stanislavsky" method work in the Elizabethan Age? And later, did this "doubling principle" operate, if only in a changed form, in other centuries and in the work of other playwrights, such as Ben Jonson, Webster, Goethe, Kleist, Schiller, Pushkin, Büchner, Wyspianski, Shaw and Chekhov?

The answers attempted conclude that "doubling—and whatever lies behind it—did not altogether disappear at the end of

the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre, and survives in a latent form to this day, showing up at times in unimportant works thanks to one or two exceptionally sensitive artists. What is missing, though, is the knowledge guaranteed by the audience, which kept this strange, unique collective knowledge alive—a knowledge never before or after realized in any theatrical form in a crystallized state." Against the naturalist flatness of the Hungarian, and the contemporary theatre in general, Spiró sets the Shakespearean golden age, in which theatre and audience both possessed a creative imagination enabling them to interpret theatrical stylization in a complex way. In his description, the Elizabethan theatregoer is someone who works till midday, has lunch, goes to the theatre in the afternoon and to the tavern in the evening or else home to his family, and who as part of a "human-faced crowd", perfectly understands the works, "at times very deep, very complex", churned out by Shakespeare one after the other, as played by actors far more popular than today's stars. In contrast to audiences today, who are a "world mass", "a mob of faceless clones who are flagrantly easy to manipulate". This is why it is "so difficult, almost hopeless today to perform Shakespeare's plays ... with success."

To me the message of this book, rich in astonishing statements, observations of detail and metaphysical conclusions, lies in the following lines: "If an actor shows up in a play in different roles, establishing contact between the different, at times akin, at times antagonistic figures by his physical presence—and this contact has

been planned by the playwright—then we enter the intoxicating and pagan medium of eternal existence, and death is eliminated from the story. It may be a surprising statement, if we think of the blood that is spilt in Shakespeare's plays and the deaths of most of the characters by the end of the play. Yet the actor who plays several roles in the play, who at various times die, still remains on the stage in one incarnation. In this structure, both thematic and technical resurrection is possible. The statue of the dead Hermione can come to life in *The Winter's Tale*; Polonius, stabbed, and Ophelia, drowned, may return as grave-diggers; the actor playing Julius Caesar, slain in front of our eyes, may soon return to the stage as Octavius, and so on. What we see in these plays is not the weight of Man's mortality—Hamlet is not deterred from committing suicide by death itself—but by the dreams that may come "in that sleep of death". Hamlet is afraid of terrible dreams—of which Shakespeare makes us see quite a number on the stage. By which Shakespeare means that life is a dream, sometimes terrible, sometimes funny; nor is death something special—certainly not terrible. Those who pass away do not differ in any way from those who stay alive. If the boy who plays Ophelia does indeed reappear on the stage as Fortinbras at the end, when all the slaying is done, the great devastations and blood-lettings on the Shakespearean stage, owing to the physical presence of doubling actors, never mean that something radically 'better' is about to begin; the 'old' world is never gone and no 'new' world begins. Neither does life end though." ❧

Clara Györgyey

Lost Dreams, Missed Opportunities

Hungarian Plays: New Dramas from Hungary. Selected and introduced by László Upor. London, Nick Hern Books in association with Visiting Arts, 1996.

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With the exception of some widely popular works of Ferenc Molnár and, more recently, on a much more modest scale, the absurdist plays of István Örkény, Hungarian writing for the stage is little known in the English-speaking world. This lack of interest, of course, is not just the fate of Hungarian works; the fate of most plays in other lesser known languages is painfully similar. Thus, this pioneer collection of four contemporary Magyar plays—a long overdue volume indeed—reflects the constantly transitory state of the region (following the “second liberation” of 1989): old forms had become outmoded, new forms have not fully developed yet. The uncertainties primarily manifest themselves in technique and style. Each play, albeit distinctly unique, is similarly surreal in tone, grim in subject matter, chilling

in outcome; the often grotesque dialogue is replete with archaic phrases, professional & trade jargon, strange, often distorted idioms, sour humour, political rhetoric, philosophical platitudes, awkward metaphors, uncanny symbolism and a plethora of pointless inventiveness. Yet, through their visual and verbal ingenuity and candour they engage us almost despite of ourselves.

There is no apparent clue to any rationale of selection other than the editor's (the talented *dramaturge* of the Budapest Vígszínház, László Upor) preference for a given play or the measure of its success on stage. Thus, this “democratically variegated” choice of tragedies, farces, and post-modern dramatic texts provides an overview of the kaleidoscopic palette of contemporary Hungarian plays.

The playwrights, András Nagy, Andor Szilágyi, Ákos Németh and Péter Kárpáti, are more or less of the same generation (born in the 50's–60's, during the Kádár era), the spoiled products of the pseudo liberal goulash-communism, whose *modus operandi* included an astonishing collective amnesia. The four young authors introduced here—equally brilliant, talented, contumelious, and arrogant—believe neither in old dramatic structures, nor in the Aristotelian unities, nor in any traditional element of stagecraft. Ultimately most of

Clara Györgyey

is a writer, critic, translator, and Director of the Humanities in Medicine Program at Yale University. She publishes in both English and Hungarian.

Her book, *Ferenc Molnár* (Boston, Twayne Pub.) appeared in 1980, her latest volume, a collection of criticism, appeared in Budapest in Hungarian in 1998.

them despise sustained action (plot is frequently supplanted by language, whose rhythms and silences allude to, rather than elucidate, character), conflict or catharsis in the classical sense. Precious little happens in these plays, but there isn't half a lot of talk! Indeed, verbalism is the order of the day here. Also absent are a genuine exploration of stasis, real metaphysical, moral or ethical themes (although a vague attempt is made in Nagy's play). Even in *Everywoman*, where the title connotes a modern version of the Medieval morality play (is it political correctness that prompted the author to feature a female protagonist?), it seems to serve only as supreme irony. The appropriate where-withal common in these plays seems to be that any old cliché might suffice: at each denouement, the blue bird of happiness flutters away irretrievably as the individual protagonists woefully bury their dreams.

The eldest, and most mature, of the featured dramatists is András Nagy (1956), who was born and grew up in Budapest, worked as an editor and a university lecturer before becoming a full-time writer. Of his background, Nagy admits that, "because of the obligatory national amnesia", his attention turned to classical literature and historical themes, which proffered a rich storehouse of topics for adaptation. Of his dramatic credo, he says: "my main interest is to find where sensuality of the spirit ends and the spiritualization of the sense starts." (Whatever that means!)

His first play (1984) presents the plight of the legendary, ill-fated Transylvanian countess Elizabeth Báthory. Up to now he has written fourteen plays, including *The "Anna Karerina" Railway Station*, an original adaptation of Tolstoy's novel, *Hungarian Three Sisters*, based on Chekhov's masterpiece, and *Alma*, a one-woman show on Alma Mahler. Nagy has also published three novels, volumes of short stories, es-

says and screenplays. He participated in the Iowa International Writers' Program, and shot an impressive documentary in the Himalayas. This collection features his *The Seducer's Diary*, whose anti-hero is Soren Kierkegaard's alter-ego.

The play opened in 1992 in Budapest as the closing event of an International Kierkegaard Conference. Its text is loosely based on the autobiographical writings and diaries of the "mildly eccentric" Danish philosopher. A seemingly religious and public play, while seeking the ancient harmony, contrasts irreconcilable extremities: passionate love versus passionate polemics; action versus thought, freedom of will versus freedom of choice (of doubt), etc. On the surface, the plot in fact appears rather trivial; it meanders about an elaborate, cunning seduction and an equally trite desertion with a cruel tour-de-force at the end. The fervid love affair is designed to resolve the philosopher's ("clever" Johannes, a theology student in the play) basic doubts about God. The seduction of Cordelia is a game whose conclusion is granting the heroine "the ultimate victory: the return of her freedom" (from the Dane). In effect, our noble hero abandons "the love of his life, his very essence" in the very same way (and for the same reason?) that God has abandoned him. Since his fate is to be "exaggeratedly metaphysical, he is spared the disillusion of fulfillment." Johannes, true to his Deistic supernaturalism, expounds many a Kierkegaardian existential axiom, and verbosely disseminates his views on truth and reality, and inter-subjectivity. Such constant spillage of existential anguish, the excessive philosophizing taxes the actors; also, the abundance of clever talk arrests the dramatic flow and makes the text complicated and exhausting. At one point, even the lovelorn heroine has had enough; saturated with her suitor's barrage of para-

doxical syllogisms and cynical witticisms, she screams: "No more words! No more talk! Try to feel instead!" In the end another illusion is lost; Johannes refrains from eating the "fruit" of his seduction and the incipient hero gradually becomes a tragicomic, buffoon-like victim of his own manipulations. Despite the overwhelming number of speeches of philosophical intent, more knowledgeable audiences might recognize that the basic dialectics of this twisted love plot have already been written up by the lines of like Molière, Sheridan, Wycherley, Goldsmith, and many more.

Nagy's dramatic approach is basically ambivalent: he appears to observe the human menagerie with an indiscernibly ironic smile, yet remains an essential true humanist unable to shrink from emotional involvement. According to Nagy/Camus/Johannes/Kierkegaard, the world is a monstrous, calamitous enigma replete with contradictions, to which there must never be a surrender; through deeds man must fight, even if conditions cannot be changed. This mixture of irony and compassion grants his plays a certain glowing warmth as well as a poetic vision, despite the occasional intimidating verbosity and absurdity of both basic premise and theme. András Nagy's rich tapestry is characterized by an innate decency, veracity, relentless propagation of morality, and a versatile, sardonic style.

Andor Szilágyi was born in Szolnok, a town in the Great Plain, he graduated as a history teacher, before becoming a journalist. After moving to the capital and experiencing the depth of his own roots, he chose radio as his vocation. His first novel came out in 1989, his first play, *The Dreadful Mother*, was staged in 1990, a short story collection appeared three years later, followed by scores of children's plays, pieces for the puppet theatre,

dozens of screen, TV and radio plays. All his writing is strange, grotesque, often sour, and full of irony, the tone is surreal, the style highly original, and most inventive. His funny, enigmatic, poignant *Unsent Letters: A Play With Life*, is unfortunately a victim of its translation.

This play, or rather the conundrum, does not offer too much in plot development; it is a static, misleading fairy tale about two "angels" (Captain Angelus and Agelina) who meet at a railroad station, fall in love then leave, thinking they will never see each other again. Yet, perpetually seeking one another in every person they encounter, the two actually meet several times but always in changed circumstances, in a different time, in different disguise, and with their ages reversed.

In this elusive, absurd drama (Szilágyi's most accessible play to date!) the "angels" are in a kind of Beckettian holding pattern. Parallels, connotations and allusions to *Waiting for Godot* are rampant: two homeless derelicts, endless waiting, preoccupation with shabby, pinching shoes (with notes hidden in them), quoting ditties about the changes of the moon, conjuring up round apples (instead of carrots) and more. The dialogue is studded with pseudo poetry, clichés, archaic phrases, gibberish, the rhetoric of street language, curses, twisted idioms, nonsensical teasing and repetition:

"...God may appear even in the form of an uncomfortable shoe, Sir.

But I am hurt by two shoes, Madam, although God is one and indivisible..."

After a while, the proliferating "heavy" symbolism winds down, sinking speedily into plain mumbo-jumbo: "(I have...) the prosthetic heart, Madam... The prosthetic heart..." "Oh, my Golden Oriole, my Ruby-Red Dove..." "...Man is just a peculiar animal, nothing else..." "...I have always

known that captains are great womanizers!"

"Angelus: (wearing black glasses) ...my miseries have been associated with passing nothing..." "Angelus, the consecrated bell-ringer of my heart's church, my All..."

One has a feeling that such gimmicks are used to express a type of modern romanticism, a rock-version of sentimentality—with no little sweetness, it should be added. Szilágyi's couple are raucously simple and they can express themselves only through melodrama, at once heart-warming and lachrymose. The "angels" never illuminate their inwardness and this fact also deducts from the play's assumed complexity. Their "tragedy" may be construed as a portrait of the treacherous gap between what is real and what is imagined and how it relates to the past that is buried and not-so-buried. A couple adrift survey the eroded paths and the ruins of their lives. The message here again is a dirge for missed opportunities. The subtitle (*A Play with Life*) warns that you can't play with life or with time, no one can turn back the clock. Ultimately, when absolution approaches, it comes too late to save them—and our play. The play's intertextual surrealism seems to have evolved from the playwright's deliberately downsized literary ambition—or, perhaps, a sort of Örkény-like irony?

Alas, as stated previously, the play's translation is not just weak but often silly, verbatim mirroring of idiosyncratic Hungarian idioms, for example: "...why are you watering the mice?" stands for: "Why are you crying?" or "The Golden Swallow of Hope" standing for "the blue bird of hope," and the like. Examples abound, there is no need to elaborate. This obscure English rendition in this form is not really stageable. Nonetheless, readers are at least introduced to an unorthodox, promising, daring new playwright.

Ákos Németh, another young master of stagecraft, was 22, in 1986, when he saw his first play, *Lili Hofberg* (on a Viennese theatre in 1933, and the plight of its company), performed by one of the finest Budapest theatres. This was followed by ten other plays, among them *The Last Days of the Heidler Theatre*, *The Red Ball*, *Julia and His Lieutenant*, each unveiling the author's remarkable ear for the language of theatre people, each exuding fresh political/historical/theatrical commentaries in almost perfect dramatic form. Németh was born not too far from Budapest (Székesfehérvár) in 1964, graduated in history and literature at the University of Budapest. "I come from the narcissistic/ self-worshipping generation born in the '60s 'welfare society.' Ours is a spoiled generation." Well, he was spoiled indeed; even in "newly-liberated" Hungary, his dazzling dramatic output received enthusiastic accolades.

The volume's choice, *Müller's Dancers*, can be viewed as a bitter-sweet political allegory of the dissolution of the 40-year-old "protective" regime and its dire consequences. On the surface, we simply witness a dance troupe falling apart when its charismatic leader, Müller, for no apparent reason, abandons the company he has founded. Without a leader, the dancers' careers and their private lives disintegrate. Now they must learn to be independent and stand on their own feet both as persons and as artists: Mama-State and Papa-Müller are no longer there to hold their hands, to ensure their livelihood and provide support. In the chaotic aftermath the dancers are at first confused, frustrated, almost paralysed before they gradually disintegrate, sinking deeper and deeper into a political and economic (and artistic) quagmire: some run away, others unabashedly cheat, steal, rape, even commit murder. Horrified, we witness their sordid

and thwarted love affairs, corrupted ideals, and failed attempts to eke out a living via practicing their art, in short their spasmodic fatal rondo toward self-immolation. Eventually, the whole company is enveloped by contempt and hatred, as they obsessively articulate their leader's "crime," and their sense of loss.

Although the political implications are explicit, these worn-out dancers know (or care) precious little about the dictatorship of the proletariat; instead, they still rehearse in earnest, intrigue with gusto, and suffer enormously simply to survive. Social ramifications are also of secondary importance. Németh's primary goal again is to present a realistic (and thoroughly authentic) slice of performers' lives. These forlorn dancers subsist on the alms of feeling (of loyalty, for instance), rather than on the labour of evocation. Thus the play, in a way, is all spokes, it has no hub because Müller, who is supposed to be that hub, no longer exists.

Alas, the translation of this work is similarly unfortunate: oversimplified ("You're very rude indeed!" instead of "Did anybody tell you that you're a cheeky bastard?"), artificial ("It puts me to the blush."), forced ("You can boss your trollop about but not me"), forcefully "British-Anglicized", at parts completely nonsensical ("You go into a nervous pant at the thought of it"), misunderstood ("I have a case of the hairline crack"), even misspelled (loose instead of lose), and so forth.

Inadequate translation, of course, is not the fault of the playwright. Németh's models, Georg Büchner and the Hungarian Milán Füst, have taught him the dexterous handling of dialogue and dramatic situations. Although no philosophical dramatist, Németh produces the darkest mood in his plays as he lines up all the elements of the myth of a lost generation: drugs, murder, AIDS, lesbianism, partner-swapping,

etc. In total, he has a unique flair for the stage and his topical and linguistic inventiveness puts him in the vanguard of new Hungarian playwrights.

Péter Kárpáti was born in 1961 in Budapest, and he formally studied drama at the Academy of Theatre and Cinematography. In his late twenties he saw the staging of his plays in the leading theatres of the capital (*Singapore, Terminus; The Unknown Soldier; The River at the End of the Road*, and the much-awarded *The Golden Orb*). Juxtaposing playful, witty, comic scenes with heart-wrenching tragedy, utter squalor, bloody horror and total physical and mental devastation with poetry, irony and affection, Kárpáti achieves maximum effects onstage. He smoothly incorporates Gypsy folk-tales, soldiers' slang, the tricks of fairy tales and puppet theatre, and even Gypsy folk-music into his texts. Of the authors here present, he is the most accomplished and celebrated.

Everywoman, first performed in 1993, is a free adaptation of the medieval morality play, this time with a female protagonist. Set in today's Budapest, it delineates in meticulous detail the last day in the life of the simple, middle-aged, lower middle-class Emma, who is dying of cancer. She is desperately trying to make her arrangements with everyone and everything before dying. During this preparation for the end, the whole history of her tragic relationships and ruined life is laid out. We watch the countless missed opportunities evoked in her pathetic final moments.

This is a spiritual play, moral as well as ethical—probing questions about the purpose of life, challenging, like Job, men's (women's) incessant struggle and suffering. Religion is omnipresent, and the implications are explicit: in addition to the presence of Death as a character, there are direct references to God, Heaven, Hell, re-

demption, pilgrimage—a compendium of intrinsic Christian concepts.

Yet the play is not religious in the strict sense of the term; according to Kárpáti, the play's "themes are quite universal and its aesthetics is profoundly Hungarian; the social fabric of life in Budapest causes Emma's spiritual crisis." In other words, this poor woman is so overworked, underpaid, and harassed that only now has she time to take stock of her life—readying for "the final loss of all small dreams while preparing for the long, eternal one." Thus, in a totally secular Hungarian ambience, despite being flanked by Our Maker, Lord Jesus, Heavenly Father, et al., all through the text, Emma is undertaking a bona fide pilgrim's journey toward salvation and forgiveness. This hybrid morality play has a heart-tugging, twisty plot full of "situations" that could have appealed, say, to a Victorian dramatist, except that no Victorian could (or would) have used the device that is the springboard of the action here. The play's other fascinating aspect is how it persistently sentimentalizes anger: every person around Emma's orbit is angry; the play is a specter of anger. In any event, it is not the impending demise but the bathetic order-making, the final heavy-footed moralistic sauntering in search of redemption that provides the thematic structure. Allegories and parables, if they are to work, need some ballast—hence the excess of ugliness, the physical evidence of social deterioration. By the same token, Kárpáti occasionally allows a note of comedy to creep in to break the solemnity and enhance vitality.

Unencumbered by her bad luck, Emma, the prototype of a simple woman in any epoch, is moving forward into the void at such a fervid pace that it is difficult to do justice to the subtlety of the dialogue. We

concentrate merely on the theme, painfully watching this afflicted, disillusioned creature leaving behind a multitude of unfulfilled desires and as many half-burned candles. Hers is the fate of Everywoman of every age.

Kárpáti is rapidly becoming a fine stylist; his voice is authentic, his linguistic inventiveness is remarkable, both dialogue and the frequent long soliloquies are cleverly manipulated. In addition, he is fortunate to have been well served by his translators (Jack Bradley, verse passages by Tony Curtis), making the piece highly playable in this English rendition. On the other hand, it is regrettable that in most of his works he still fails to employ the necessary structural control. Kárpáti's plays, with their grim overtones, keep remonstrating on universal traumas, clearly adhering to their basic premise even when the stakes are high and not remunerative. To his credit, he never resorts to escapism, and avoids solutions that cloud our vision, nor does he avoid the playwright's social responsibility.

In these experimental dramas of vibrant, nervous energy, the measuring of reality by the absurd and the absurd by reality illuminates the East-Central European experience in the most chaotic decade of our century. *Hungarian Plays, New Drama from Hungary* fills an important gap. László Upor's selection is a happy one. The volume also includes an informative, erudite introduction by the editor, providing a brief history of Hungarian drama in general and an overview of the most notable modern playwrights in particular. In addition, Upor provides a concise biographical and textual introduction for each play. All in all, it is a useful volume, all the more welcome for further disseminating Hungarian drama in the West. ❁

John Cunningham
Soft Focus

Bryan Burns: *World Cinema, 5: Hungary*. Flicks Books, Trowbridge, UK and Associated University Press, Cranbury, NJ, USA, 1996.

[The 5th Volume in a series on World Cinema] 234 pp., with 30 illustrations.

A new book on Hungarian cinema is only to be welcomed, particularly as it is some years since previous accounts appeared (notably Jean-Pierre Jeancolas' *Miklos, Istvan, Zoltan et les Autres* (1989), Graham Petrie's *History Must Answer to Man* (1978), and István Nemeskürty's *Word and Image: History of the Hungarian Cinema* (published in English in 1974). Coming some seven years after the changes, Bryan Burns' book was an opportunity to update, re-assess, and go beyond many of the truisms and clichés which have often blighted writing about Hungarian, and East European cinema in general. Unfortunately, it is an opportunity missed. For although Burns has produced a worthwhile addition to the existing stock of Hungarian film literature in English, it falls short of what is required of such a work.

First, ironic in a work that is structured around chronology, the historical dimension is often missing or very "thin". The book itself is in three sections: 1. The

Beginnings and the 1930s; 2. The Great Generation, 1956-72; and 3. Our Contemporaries, 1972-95. Each section has a historical overview of two or three pages, followed by summaries of the lives and films of individual directors. The overviews, however, are generally inadequate and only occasionally complemented by information in the subsequent directors' sections. Crucial events are sometimes given such cursory mention that the reader gains the impression they had no implications for film. For example, the 1919 Republic of Councils is only briefly noted, with no mention of the 31 films which were completed during the four-and-a-half months of the Council (some of which, of course, had been started prior to it). Perhaps even more surprising, Admiral Horthy is never mentioned, nor is Trianon, though the consequences of the Treaty must have had some impact on the market for Hungarian-language films. All in all, the reader is left with very little sense of the connections between history and film.

Second, the concentration on directoral input leaves little space for consideration of other aspects of cinema and filmmaking. We are told, for example, that, "by 1912, a film culture had begun to grow in Hungary" (p.1), but there are precious few details of what this entailed (e.g., film reviews in *Nyugat* as early as 1908, regular

John Cunningham

is a British Council lecturer teaching film and media studies at Janus Pannonius University, Pécs. He is writing a full-length study of the films of Zoltán Fábri.

film columns in *Pester Lloyd* and journals such as *A Mozi* and *Mozgófénykép Híradó*, 1905). Likewise, there is no mention of Sándor Korda's regular film column in the Budapest daily *Világ* (probably the first ever). And the list could go on. But the most damning criticism of Burns' myopia regarding Hungarian film culture is the perfunctory discussion of the work of Béla Balázs. Despite being easily available in English, there is no engagement with his major theoretical writings (in particular *Theory of the Film*) nor his struggles with Party officialdom on his return to Hungary in 1945. Balázs had 11 film projects turned down in the immediate post-war years while, paradoxically, being revered in other countries—he was a visiting lecturer at Prague University, the Sorbonne, and was asked to become the head of East German film production. Consideration of these and related developments would have perhaps shed some light on the complexities and contradictions of post-war film production in Hungary. Nor is such information that difficult to get hold of. There is an excellent English-language account of Balázs (*Béla Balázs: the Man and the Artist*, by Joseph Zsuffa) and *Filmvilág* has published some of Balázs' correspondence, to name only two possible sources.

Generally, in fact, the research behind this work is often quite limited. Amazingly, there appear to be no Hungarian-language references at all, though the author does use Italian and French, as well as English-language material. In the sub-section on Zoltán Fábri, for example, no use is made of the interesting interview with István Szabó in *Filmkultúra* 65/73 or the obituary articles in *Filmvilág* (XXXVII, 11. Nov. 1994). Section 2 of the book includes 128 notes, of these over 60 are from one source only—the *Hungarofilm Bulletin*, an English-language bulletin (now defunct) issued on behalf of the Hungarian film industry. While the *Bulletin* is extremely useful, the preponder-

ance of references to it suggests that either the author simply didn't know about other sources or had neither the time nor commitment to find them. Either way, citing phrases from István Nemeskürty or Yvette Biró is no substitute for scholarly research and the importance of critically reviewing past assumptions. When Biró writes (and Burns repeats) that Hungarian movies are "a means of destroying myths", the question needs to be asked what, exactly, is she talking about? Repetition simply creates another set of myths or, worse, yet more clichés.

The sub-sections on the individual directors are the strongest part of Burns' work. Directors such as Félix Máriássy, Pál Sándor, and Judit Elek, many of whose films are either nowadays neglected or relatively unknown in the West and, alas, sometimes in Hungary, are treated in detail. Predictably, Miklós Jancsó and István Szabó receive the bulk of the limelight and Burns' ideas about the former are particularly illuminating and interesting. The directoral accounts are, however, often marred by a rather gushy, impressionistic style of writing which owes more to the world of literature than of film. Burns rarely uses words or phrases such as "pan", "tracking shot", "wide angle", "close up"—in short, the stock in trade of filmmaking terminology. Instead of any detailed discussion of filmmaking techniques and approaches, we are offered a literary and imprecise flow of adjectives. We are asked to admire the "delicate pointedness of András Kovács" (p. 71); István Gaál's "gloomy evocation of the age" (p. 83); Sándor Sára's "eye for striking, self-conscious compositions" (p. 144); etc., etc.

As so often happens, the publishers have illustrated the book with production stills. For a volume costing £27 (!) with less than 200 pages of text, it is surely not remiss to ask why we couldn't have been provided with frame enlargements taken from the actual films. ■

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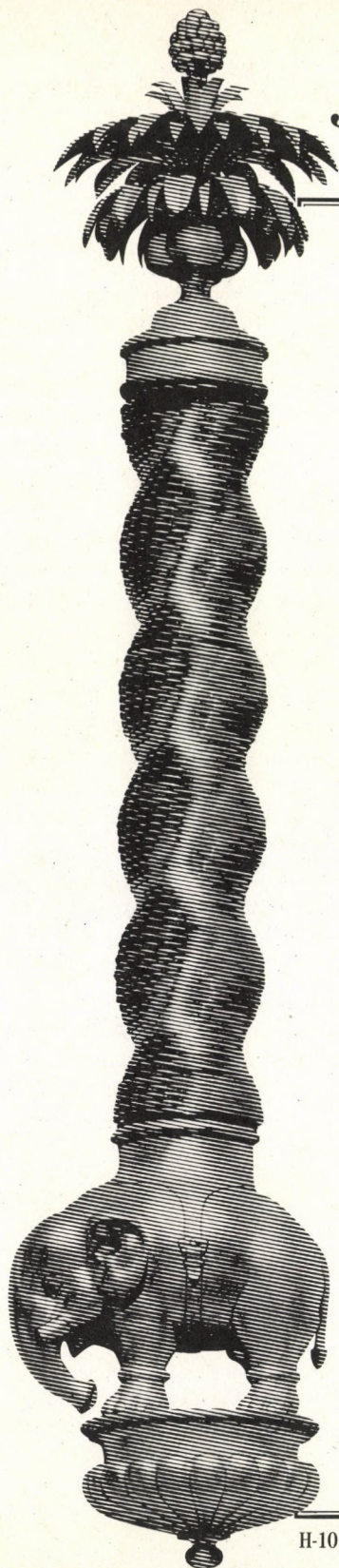
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Why here? foreigners living in Budapest tend to ask one another. Nobody knows. People shrug, mutter a phrase or two about the city, and then, as though it were an in-joke, roll their eyes and smile with the camaraderie of victims. Hungarians too ask "Why here?", teetering between the gloaming of their ethnic spirit and their longing to be in Vienna with its cleanliness, its goods, and those hard smug faces that make one wonder if consumerism means the end of gentleness and grace.

Budapest is like Paris, like London, like New York. Budapest is beautiful. When I leave my apartment and step out into the city I feel elated. Buses scud one after another like dolphins, the light falls soft and yellow on the dirty streets and the gray faces, and the eye never stops being drawn up and around, over somber people with fillips of colour at their necks, over buildings whose proportions seem to soothe, over ochres and greens, statues and gratings: there is no end to the eclectic prettiness of Budapest. And as soon as you start to walk around in the balmy polluted air, the story of the country starts gently to unfold. Bartók Béla út, Liszt Ferenc tér.

From: Rosie Johnson: Why Budapest? pp. 88-95.

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