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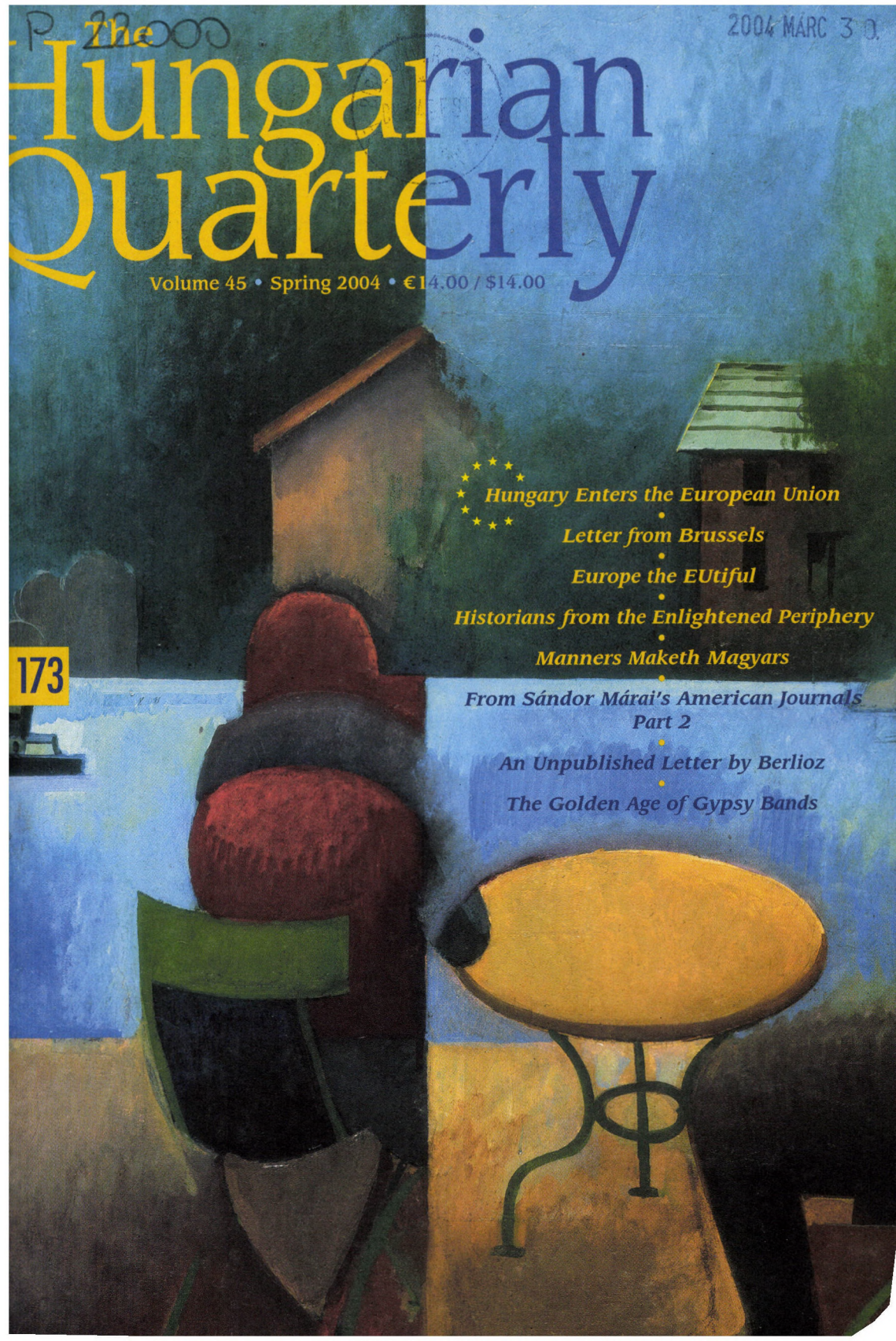

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The Golden Age of Gypsy Bands

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Graham Avery

Hungary Enters the European Union

Thoughts from Brussels

What does membership of the European Union really mean for Hungary? How will this historic step affect its place in Europe? How can Hungarians make the best use of EU membership, towards which they have been striving for so many years? In earlier issues of *The Hungarian Quarterly* Endre Juhász (Autumn 2001) has described the situation at a crucial moment in the negotiations for membership, and Béla Kádár (Summer 2003) has analysed the reasons for Hungary's choice to apply for the EU. As a friend of Hungary, who has observed its progress from a European viewpoint in Brussels, I want to share some thoughts on the lessons of the past and the prospects for the future.

Many years ago I was a junior member of the team that negotiated Britain's membership of the European Union—or rather, the European Community, as it then was—and later I moved to Brussels in 1973 to work in the European Commission. I know what it is like to be on the outside trying to get in, and then on the inside trying to make a success of membership. More recently, I have had the privilege to be involved in Brussels in successive stages of the enlargement of the EU.

Probably my reflections are coloured by my British background, as well as my European experience. Hungary's approach to Europe is not the same as that of the United Kingdom: its geographical position and its historical experience give it a different perspective. It is true that, historically, Hungarians have often looked to Britain as a political model, but Britain's relationship with the EU has been a difficult one, and in this case I think it is more a question of Hungarians learning from our mistakes than of emulating us.

Moreover my own perceptions are not typically British, since I have been an expatriate for a long time. One of the problems for us British abroad is that in

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Graham Avery,
who is Chief Adviser in the European Commission in Brussels, writes here in his personal capacity.

other languages we are generally described as English—*anglais* in French, *Engländer* in German, *inglese* in Italian and *angol* in Hungarian. Having been born in Cardiff of a Welsh mother, I sometimes have to explain that my nationality is Welsh, my passport is British, and my citizenship is European—and that these three identities are not conflictual, but complementary. At any rate, I probably have a less insular view of Europe than many of my compatriots.

Hungary's path to the EU

Let me begin with some reflections on progress up to now. Why has it taken so long for Hungary and other countries of Central Europe to join the EU? Between the date of Hungary's application and the date of membership, ten years have elapsed, and that is an underestimate since the aim to join the EU was clear from 1989 onwards. The EU's initial hesitations, its exacting criteria for preparation, and its refusal to give a clear date for membership until the final stage, were a source of irritation. How was it that Hungary could join NATO in 1999, but needed to wait another five years to join the EU?

One of the jokes we had in Brussels—we didn't have many jokes in the negotiations for enlarging the EU, and this one came from Budapest—was that the Hungarians, with their talent for mathematics, always knew exactly when they would join the EU. They would become members in five year's time. Every year it was the same story: membership in five years' time...

Although I understood the frustration felt in Hungary and the other applicant countries, I always believed that the optimal outcome was a well-prepared one rather than a rapid one. Joining the EU is a complicated affair, much more difficult than joining NATO. The common rules and policies of the EU are demanding and sophisticated, and if they are not properly applied the result is likely to be disappointment for old and new members alike. That was the lesson of Greece, which joined the EU without an adequate period of preparation, and then for many years lagged behind the other members politically and economically.

So in my view the long time spent in preparation for joining the EU has been necessary and well-invested. It has equipped Hungary better for membership. Here I want to pay tribute to the way in which Hungarian politicians, negotiators and administrators handled this period of preparation. It was not amusing for Budapest to receive regular reports from Brussels, often critical of Hungarian progress, particularly when existing EU members were not subject to the same rigorous examination. But the injunctions were mostly accepted and used (as they were intended) to encourage necessary domestic changes and reforms. In many ways, the EU's expansion in 2004 is its best-prepared enlargement, and Hungary is certainly among the best-prepared of the new members.

The prize: a voice in Europe

Up to now, the messages coming from Brussels have been mainly about the obligations of membership: the need to apply the so-called acquis of the EU, the rules and policies applicable to its members which are laid down in 80,000 pages of legislation. The negotiations of 1998-2002 were essentially about how and when to apply these rules in Hungary, not about changing them. That was the principle inherited from preceding negotiations for membership: if you want join the club, you have to accept its rules.

But membership of the EU brings rights as well as obligations, and the most important right which a country gains by joining is a voice in the decision-making process, with votes and seats in the European institutions, on an equal basis with other members. The biggest prize of membership is not access to the EU market and subsidies from Brussels, but a seat, a microphone, and a vote in the meetings where important decisions are taken.

Hungary will be represented in all the EU institutions: by Ministers from its government in the Council of Ministers, which takes the main political decisions, by elected representatives in the European Parliament which has powers of co-decision, and by a Hungarian member in the European Commission which proposes and executes policies (however, the Commissioner is not there to speak for Hungary, but to serve the European interest).

Already Hungarians are present in Brussels as observers, and in Strasbourg when the European Parliament meets there. Hungarian is regularly heard in the streets, shops and restaurants. At a recent meeting I saw the representative of Magyarország, placed between Luxembourg and Malta as the alphabetical order of EU protocol requires. From 1 May onwards, this observer status is replaced by full rights of membership.

This new situation has important political implications. After being a 'policy-taker' during the years of preparation for membership, Hungary inside the EU becomes a 'policy-maker', able to influence its future development. Having a voice and a vote in decisions means making a choice of how to use them, and that in turn should be based on a domestic debate on how European policies should develop. That debate already began with the referendum in 2003, and has continued with the Convention on the Future of Europe, in which Hungarian representatives played a full part, leading to the draft Constitutional Treaty which is now on the table in 2004.

But the Constitutional Treaty is mainly about organising our institutions (how Europeans are to work together) not about the development of our policies (what Europeans want to do in common). The debate on those policies, and the definition of Hungary's long-term interests as a member of the EU, needs to get under way. For that debate to be well-informed, Hungary needs to mobilise not only the political circles (government, political parties, administration) but also the non-govern-

mental organisations (social and economic interest groups, research institutes, 'think-tanks', and so on) and the public at large. As a non-member, Hungary was essentially in a 'reactive' mode, but now it needs to become 'pro-active' in European affairs. That requires an important political and psychological adjustment.

Another aspect of the EU which is not fully appreciated is that most of the decisions taken in Brussels are not matters of foreign policy, but touch directly on domestic national policies. Although Foreign Ministers have a role in preparing big decisions of the European Council—the 'summits' of Prime Ministers which take place three or four times a year—most EU decisions in fields such as economics and finance, agriculture, transport, energy, justice and home affairs are taken by national Ministers responsible for those fields, meeting in specialised Councils. Foreign correspondents of the Hungarian media based in Brussels —press, radio, television—are not reporting foreign affairs, but national issues.

Within government, because so many domestic issues are involved, the coordination of European affairs in member countries is often made by the Prime Minister's department, although Foreign Ministries have a role in defining strategy. The fact that, with membership, EU business becomes less 'external' and more 'internal' reinforces the argument for a wide-ranging debate in Hungary about European affairs—a debate not limited to diplomats or 'Euro-specialists' but engaging many interested in public affairs and social and economic policies.

Upcoming issues in Europe

The key issues that are likely to come up in the early years of Hungary's membership of the EU include many that merit in-depth study by Hungarian policy-makers and analysts.

To begin with, a European debate is beginning on the common budget for the period from 2007 onwards: how much should the EU spend—should its budget stay at the present modest level, or be expanded to take account of enlarged membership, or even be reduced. How should the budget be allocated between the different areas of policy? If agriculture retains a large share, what priority should be given to other policies?

In the field of economics, the management of the euro, and the path of new members such as Hungary towards adopting it, will be another priority question. The EU also has to fulfil its self-declared aim of making itself 'the world's most competitive knowledge-based economy by the year 2010' by means of the so-called 'Lisbon agenda'. Above all, the EU has to ensure that its financial and economic policies help members to achieve high rates of employment and sustainable growth, with a continued catching-up by the economies of the Central European members. At present, the 10 new members enjoy rates of growth on average about 1 per cent higher than the 15 old members,. We need to maintain such a differential to promote economic convergence within the EU. If we fail to

do that, and wide gaps of social and economic development persist between members, the political cohesion of the EU itself could be compromised.

One of the fields in which EU activity is rapidly increasing is the protection of citizens' security: that is, cooperation between police and justice throughout Europe to fight organised crime, trafficking in drugs and humans, terrorism, and so on—threats which can be tackled only by international cooperation. Since Hungary has frontiers with non-EU states, it is in the front line of these developments, and has increased its efforts of cooperation. In return, it expects to join the EU's 'Schengen' area which allows free movement of persons within the EU without internal frontier controls.

After the arrival of 10 new members, future extensions of the EU are in prospect, with negotiations well advanced with Bulgaria and Romania, and a decision due in 2004 on negotiations with Turkey. The 5 countries of the 'Western Balkans'—Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia-Montenegro, Macedonia and Albania—all expect to join, while Ukraine and other East European countries also aspire to membership. The development of the EU's policy towards these countries in its neighbourhood, including its biggest neighbour, Russia, will be of vital interest for Hungary, and we expect an important contribution to discussion from Hungarians with their experience and ideas.

Last but not least, the EU has to develop a common foreign policy, and its mechanisms for external security and defence. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 was accompanied by a deep split between EU members concerning relations with the USA, which must not be repeated if Europe is to make its voice effectively heard in the world.

Hungary's influence as a member

In the accession negotiations and preparation for membership, Hungary acquired a reputation in the EU as an efficient, reliable partner, able to make judgments and take positions quickly and realistically, without unnecessary problems and complications. That is not to say that Hungarian negotiators were weak or ineffective: on the contrary, they stated clearly what they wanted, and were determined to obtain it. Many commentators considered that Hungarians were—or at least, tried to be—the 'the best pupils in the class'.

That is an enviable reputation on which to build as a member. But Hungary as a country of 10 million, in an enlarged EU of 25 members with a population of 450 million, has to work hard to make its influence felt. Compared with Germany, the biggest member of the EU with around 80 million, or Italy, France and Britain with around 60 million, or even Spain and Poland with around 40 million, it is not in the 'big league'.

But nevertheless its representation in the Council of Ministers (in terms of votes) and in the European Parliament (in terms of seats) is proportionally greater than its population. For example, although Britain's population is 6 times larger, Hungary has 12 votes in the Council compared with Britain's 29,

and 24 seats in the Parliament compared with Britain's 78. This bias in favour of smaller countries is a key feature of the 'Community' system, and is designed to reassure the smaller countries that their interests will not be overridden by their big neighbours, as happened too often in the past.

Paradoxically the method of 'intergovernmentalism', also present in the EU's decision-making system, is less advantageous for small countries, despite the fact that it is based on the principle of equality between states. In reality, the 'big boys' tend to dominate the intergovernmental game, not only because of their size and resources, but because the European Parliament and the European Commission are largely excluded from negotiations between states acting in the intergovernmental mode. Consequently Hungary, like the majority of the new members, will normally have an interest in pursuing the Community method.

To make its voice and votes effective in Europe, Hungary will often need to make alliances of interest with other members—not always with the same countries—depending on the interests and issues at stake. To act successfully in this way requires a good knowledge of European policies, and of the ideas and interests of the other members. In some cases, the dividing lines between members follow the traditional politics of right and left, depending on the parties in government, but in many other cases they relate to factors such as the level of economic development, the structure of the economy, and so on. Sometimes Hungary will need to find compromises to allow solutions acceptable to the majority, and at other times it will want to defend its interests stubbornly.

Personally I believe that Hungary can have a considerable influence in the EU, and we in the Brussels institutions expect much from it and the other new members. Ideas are the most powerful instrument at Europe's disposal, and we can hope for new ideas from Hungarians for several reasons. Since they come new to our policies, they should have a fresh approach to European questions. For many years they have been making social and economic reforms, in some areas more rapidly and courageously than the old members. For a decade we have been urging them to fulfil criteria for membership which we did not apply to ourselves, so now it is time for us to stop preaching and start listening!

One of the questions often posed in Brussels, and among the existing members of the EU, is whether the 2004 enlargement will lead to a weakening of the EU, a slowdown of its integration, and even its dissolution into a free trade area. This fear that 'widening' may be made at the cost of 'deepening' has accompanied every enlargement of the EU, but it is greater this time because of the number of countries involved. Having expanded progressively in the last 25 years from 6 to 15 members, taking in at most 3 at a time, the EU is now taking in 10. Since many of the new countries have only recently gained or regained their independence, they will not be enthusiastic to give up part of their sovereignty in the EU.

I do not share this scepticism. Experience has shown that each successive enlargement of the EU has been followed by steps forward, and that widening

has driven deepening. For example, the development of a 'cohesion' policy in favour of poorer EU countries was the result of Spain and Portugal arriving in 1986, and joining forces with Greece and Ireland. In addition, I believe that the new countries now joining us want Europe to be more, not less, cohesive. When I listen to Hungarians and others talking of their ideas and aims, I do not sense a demand for 'less Europe' but often for more. For example, the new members plan to take over the European currency as soon as possible—unlike the British, who are still hesitating. I tell my British friends these days that if they do not make up their minds soon about the euro, they will be overtaken by the Hungarians. I observe that while new members seem to have the political will for integration, but often lack the economic means, some of the old members have the economic means, but still lack the political will...

For Hungary, like Britain, the early years of membership will be a period of learning and familiarisation. An important part of the process will be to learn the ways of European discourse: having decided what it wants in different areas of policy, Hungary will need to persuade its partners that it is in the European interest. I use the word 'persuade' because that is what is needed. It will not be sufficient to argue for a certain course of action in Brussels on the grounds that it is good for Hungary. The others do not expect you to support things that are against your national interest, and they are not really interested in your national arguments. In fact, the language of nationalism is the least effective in EU affairs. What you need to do is to convince the others that what you are advocating is good for Europe, not just for Hungary, and that requires a good understanding of the aims and mechanisms of European policies.

A historical perspective

From Brussels I sometimes go with my sons to pay our respects to my uncle Archie Lloyd, whose grave is in a military cemetery near Le Treport on the Northern coast of France. A soldier in the British army aged 22, he died on the day before the 1914–18 war ended. He was the oldest child of a family of ten, of which my mother was the youngest, and she could recall him leaving home to go to the war from which he did not return. My visits serve as a reminder to me that for earlier generations of Europeans, war was a 'normal' experience, but that in the second half of the twentieth century we succeeded in organising Europe in such a way as to avoid it. I like to think that Archie would be pleased to know that his baby sister's youngest son works for an organisation that has helped to make war in this part of Europe impossible!

My family link to the conflicts of the last century is only one of many millions of examples. For Hungarians, there are similar family stories, though the context is different. For the British, the individual experience of war was just as terrible as for others, but collectively it was perhaps less traumatic than for the conti-

nentals, since the British never suffered occupation and defeat, or deportation and mass killing. Britain's history, and its island situation, spared it many of the horrors which Hungarians and others suffered. I believe that this helps to explain why the British sometimes find it difficult to understand why other countries are willing to make such efforts for European integration.

But the political agenda in the EU has moved on. War between European states now seems so unlikely that we do not even consider it as a risk—though the conflicts in ex-Jugoslavia have reminded us that ethnic tensions can still lead to killings on European soil. Even in the wider world, the main security risks now seem to come not so much from states as from non-state actors such as terrorists. So if the EU succeeded in the last century in its mission to pacify Europe, its mission in this century must surely be to reunite the continent: after pacification, unification. It is in that perspective of reuniting Europe's divided peoples that Hungary's membership takes place.

When I was the European Commission's negotiator with Austria in its talks for membership in 1993–94, I developed an interest and sympathy for Hungary's progress towards the same goal. The Austrians have been advocates in the EU for Hungary, and I recall how their Foreign Minister Alois Mock, in an emotional speech at the end of the final negotiations in 1994, spoke of the realisation of his dream that Austria would join the EU, and would be followed by its neighbours. After all, it was the opening of Hungary's frontier with Austria that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of Communist system, and the possibility for Central and Eastern Europe to be reunited with the West.

My Hungarian friends have spoken to me of their dream, in the years when the country was separated from the West, that one day it would return to European values, rights and liberties, and that their children would enjoy the same life-chances as other Europeans of their generation.

That dream has become a reality. Making a success of the dream will now depend mainly on Hungarians. The country has suffered many reverses in Europe in past centuries: while outsiders perceive its courage and resolution in the face of adversity, for Hungarians it sometimes seems an unremitting history of misfortunes, accidental or self-inflicted. Membership of the European Union now opens a new chapter, in which Hungarians can say farewell to their troubled past and share in constructing the future.

In his book *The Russian Empire and its Rivals,* Dominic Lieven in 2000 posed the challenge for Europe in this way: 'the problem is to reconcile our tradition of national sovereignty and democratic self-government with our attempt to create a system of continental scale, so as to achieve goals which go beyond the power of the nation state. The basic dilemma for the EU is to reconcile the expansion required for its economic efficiency, its security, and its external power with a sense of solidarity and legitimacy among its multinational citizens'. We look to Hungarians to help to find the answers. ❧

Sándor Márai

American Journal

Part Two: 1984–1989

This is the third, and last, instalment of excerpts from Sándor Márai's journals. As the reader may remember, the novelist and his wife, Lola, settled in San Diego, California. In these final years covered by the journal, the writer lost a sister and two brothers, his wife, and finally his adopted son. Half blind and frail himself, past 89, in his total seclusion he prepares for the inevitable. Gradually he gives up writing, save for the journal which he continues to keep, though sporadically, to the very day when decides to shoot himself, 15 January 1989. Reading is the other activity he cannot go without, in spite of his failing eyesight.

Meanwhile, back in Hungary the socialist system is crumbling. Márai receives respectful invitations to return and splendid offers to publish his entire oeuvre in expensive editions, but he refuses to come or to give his permission while the Russians are still occupying the country. After they leave, free elections must first be held under international supervision, he insists.

The intellectual and moral integrity, the ever-inquisitive workings of a creative mind and the disciplined emotional undertone that emerge from the journal make this work a gripping document, telling of the inner world of a fine writer of our times.

1984

7 January—The eponymous year of that over-boosted Orwellian potboiler. The prediction has not come true so far, but the mundane reality of nuclear terror is already here instead. A letter-writer nostalgically refers to the 19th century and memories of tranquil Progress. I came into this world on the very threshold of this century, and if I think back to the first decade of my life, when the 19th century was still a reality, all I recall is that everyday life was inexpressibly more laborious, more primitive, and more unhealthy than the cursed 20th century in which a hundred million people may have been slaughtered in wars and revolutions but, at the same time, existence was also more humane even for the masses than it was in the 19th or any previous century. Expectation of life is double what it was 150 years ago. In the first decade of the 19th century the

Earth's population was approx. 1 billion; it will very likely be 6 billion by the end of this century. In the 19th century people were terribly proud to boast that one could go round the world in eighty days; now it takes 90 minutes. My paternal grandfather died in 1849, "of intestinal debility brought on by the unhappy conditions of our homeland;" these days only suckers die of appendicitis. So was it "better" in the last century? What does one mean by "better?" However you look at it, we live much faster and longer lives today.

9 January—The Portable Edmund Wilson. He died not long ago, and now they have brought out a selection of his critical essays. He was one of this century's most cultivated literary eye-witnesses in the commercialised flea market that characterises American and much of European literary criticism; one of the rational and independent spirits. In one of his essays he details the circumstances under which the melodrama of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* came to life. I read Harriet Beecher Stowe's notorious book as an adolescent; I have never opened it since... These days, Uncle Tom moves around in a car, goes in and out of restaurants and hotels, and can make good in any occupation, if he is qualified, which is not always the case. All the same, Harriet Beecher Stowe's naïvely sentimental book is grotesquely shocking to read today. Wilson cites from the famous book the methods of a certain Simon Legree, overseer of the slave quarters on a Southern plantation, who was in the habit of having the Negro slaves whipped. That sort of thing went on in the Nazis' flaying-houses too, where the *kapos*, some of them Polish Jews, were just as cruel as the Nazis towards their comrades in misfortune. It went on, and still goes on, in the Gulag, as Solzhenitsyn and others have described.

*

20 January—Fatigue, weakness, tottering gait. Like a torch that flickers when the battery has run down.

*

27 January—At noon, a heat wave; by the evening, gales and Arctic cold. As if everything had been stood on its head. A numbers game: I was 48 when we left Hungary; now the digits have reversed, with 48 becoming 84. We are contemporaneous with the times in which we are living.

*

29 January—A nearby church that went broke because the faithful moved away—probably a Congregationalist sect of some kind—has been purchased by a wine merchant. The splendid, imposing building has undergone several months of complete reconstruction, but an angel blowing a trumpet, and thus keeping watch on the neighbourhood, us too, has been left on the dome. Now the angel has been given a gilded robe, and the church has been rebuilt with

luxurious extravagance; they are planning to put on big banquets and will be offering French cuisine and vintage wines. On the opening gala evening 550 people paid $100 per head for dinner, with the proceeds going to the bankrupt local Philharmonic Orchestra. The prices are steep even mid-week, but the church, where the faithful are now offered bread and wine in the form of lobster and Château Lafitte, is a characteristic hybrid of religion and culinary art.

*

20 February—Reflections on bilingualism in the émigré press. The degree to which an emigrant is willing to acquire the native language of the receiving community to the detriment of his or her own native tongue is the crucial problem of every diaspora. This is not a problem for an émigré writer, because if he loses touch with his native tongue and attempts to write in a foreign language, he cuts the umbilical cord that bound him to the life-giving native tongue and sustained his literary consciousness and abilities. It is possible to express one's thoughts writing in a foreign language, but "writing"—creating, that is to say—can only be done in one's native tongue. That was no secret to me when I left Hungary 36 years ago: wherever I might end up, I would be a Hungarian writer there.

*

5 March—A film director from Budapest (I've never heard of him before) has written a letter in which, though unknown to me, he calls on me to return home because there is no sense in the "empty gesture" of emigration; everything back there is fine and dandy, etc. The letter-writer categorises the fact that I have been living abroad for 36 years as a "gesture" and calls on me to return home, where they will await me with "the national anthem or incognito," as you please. At times like this I am always amazed at how uninformed contemporaries are in their judgement of one another's stances. The assumption that I would join the "useful idiots," as Lenin called them, goes without saying for the letter-writer. At times like this it is always a relief to know that two oceans separate you from this type of person.

*

6 March—L.'s eyes are not improving; she lives by groping around, and I grope along with her. She spends a lot of time thinking about her childhood and Kassa [now Kosice, Slovakia], even has dreams about those back there. Today she talked about Róza, our elderly maid, who was our marvellous cook in Buda, but with her failing eyes one day—and it just happened to be a fussy dinner for invited guests—she short-sightedly handed over a salad in which an earthworm was lurking. When L. pointed it out to her, old Róza shamefacedly declared, "In that case, I'll leave." And leave she did—having to grope around, elderly, she took herself off to the hopelessness of a poorhouse. Memories which come back in old age and are painful. We ought to have retained Róza, done something for her... In the end, these conjurings-up of spirits are the worst.

*

18 March—A dinner in the Mikó utca apartment, 40 years ago today. Everything was, at that point, still in its place, two maids, the big apartment. The table setting as in the good old days: silver ware, china, everything just as it should be. Of the family members around the table, sharing in that supper on my name-day, my mother, Aunt Julie, brother-in-law Gyula, sister-in-law Tessie, and Alice Madách have all passed away. My brothers are still alive, so am I, and L. too, though only just. That night German Nazi troops occupied Budapest. Everything was dislocated—life, work, Hungary, the old order and disorder. A total break. I was 44 and just recovering from a severe illness. Two weeks later came the move out to Leányfalu, into exile, with the dog and a maid. The bombardment of Budapest began, with our own house being hit by 36 shells and bombs on the last day of the siege; everything was destroyed. I left half my life there. Then came the second round, the roaming across continents. It was 40 years ago today that the self I was until then perished, and that other self who I am today took shape—and now even that is in the process of disintegration.

*

11 April—Very tired. A large dose of Vitamin C. Reading matter: Hungarian poetry, Hungarian literary history. Tranquillity when I think of death; disquiet when I think about dying.

*

8 May—I totter along the street like Blondel, the tightrope walker, balancing with his pole above Niagara Falls. Not even "on sand" any longer, but on a rope, hands stretched out in front, feeling about in empty air. Sight in the left eye is nearly gone; I am unable to read or write with it. The right eye still functions, dimly, with effort, though I don't know for how long. If there is not that much, I shall no longer be able to read; that will be what I shall regret, there is no longer anything else that will be missed. With L.'s latest fall—fortunately, not dangerous: a slip in the bathroom—the two sick, near-blind old people who we are totter in support of one another. And always "it could be worse"—which is true.

*

20 June—Hungarian poetry every evening. And bits of reading on literary history. Hungarian literature was a miraculous labour in every age.

*

23 June—The first summery day. The air is heavy, with a whiff of lead in it. I limp along whether walking, writing and reading, but I still walk, write and read. Nietzsche's "What does not kill me makes me stronger" – is not certain. A person may sometimes just be weakened by something that does not kill him. But the everyday trial of strength of existence, thinking and cognition somehow endows one with a sense of consequence, if only for a second.

*

30 June—A volume of selected newspaper articles that Krúdy wrote between 1914 and 1919. I start from the back, with him describing the redistribution of land at Kápolna in February 1919. The piece is exciting for me, because it brings the drawing-room intoxication of my youth closer to hand: I was then a second-year arts student at the University of Budapest and, at 19, a "rookie" trainee journalist with the daily *Magyarország*. Barna Búza, the minister in the Károlyi government who oversaw land redistribution, had placed me there. Búza—a man of short stature with a pock-marked face, an old-style liberal and honourable advocate of reform—had been at school with my father. I was living in Pest during the October 1918 revolution and the run-up to it, green and in a hurry, a cub-reporter eye-witness to the rotten war and then the revolution. I was present in the Astoria Hotel the night the president and his wife were invited over from the Károlyi Palace, because the Budapest garrison had lain down its arms and gone over to the cause of the revolution. Károlyi, who had been hauled out of bed, was wearing a fur coat over his pyjamas, and I heard him asking: "Fine, fine, but what does the King say to this?" I was present in Parliament when István Tisza announced that the Monarchy had lost the war; I watch him as he speaks, a grey glove on one hand: he must have had some skin complaint. I write my report in the parliamentary reporters' gallery; my boss was Gyula Török, the bearded writer, then famous as the author of *The Emerald Ring*, my protector and mentor at the newspaper. Among the new men jostling ostentatiously around Károlyi is Pál Kéri, a gifted and particularly corrupt man, one of those who, a few months later, would persuade the president to release Béla Kun, Szamuely and the other Communists from gaol and hand over power to them. That happened. Krúdy evokes all these faces and figures. Also that guest-house on Rákóczi út where I was quartered then, and where I came close to dying of the Spanish flu but recovered without the help of doctors or medicine. Those were the weeks in which everything was decided: Beneš & Co. had already Balkanised the Monarchy; Horthy & Co. were getting ready to exact reprisals. The Krúdy book brings all this back. It was a wild youth, an overture, everything blaring and bellowing.

*

10 July—L.'s eye trouble and my own state of health prevent us from travelling, which would have been a matter of great sadness for me at another time of life, because travelling has been, perhaps, the only real passion in my life. Abstinence from travel is easier to bear nowadays, however, because travelling in the sense that I indulged it over the lengthy course of my life—as a sensual approach to the world—has ended. There is no more "travelling" in the Ulyssean sense; now there is only a change of scenery.

*

22 July—Reference is made in a review to Gibbon's "unreliability." Virtually every week I read a few pages from the work of this superb writer, and there are

moments when I am awe-struck at how, given the 18th century's more limited means of data-gathering, he was able to assemble and then annotate in an appendix everything that had been recorded in the Classical and subsequent sources. The wealth of information is staggering. It may well be he lacked the means to check everything that was recorded, but the work he created in this manner, in its entirety, is miraculous, not "unreliable." A great work's value is not determined by where its bricks and mortar are taken from but solely by what the writer constructs from the bricks and mortar.

*

16 August—Trope. I feel dizzy when walking. This trope, semi-swooning wandering feels good. Like life once was.

*

25 August—By the ocean, under a leaden, storm-boding sky, I gazed at an old seagull that was motionlessly scrutinising the shore, standing sentry over infinity. Matchstick legs supporting a bulky, densely-feathered bird body, the hooked beak, a weapon trained for combat, for struggles on water and dry land, poking out into the air like a sheathed dagger, and the two darkly bright eyes on either side of the head spying to left and right simultaneously. It does not look ahead, does not know the horizon any other way than in the perspective of left- and right-side hemispheres. Just like an ideologist who is only prepared to recognise the human world in a left or right-wing conceptualisation. Yet it is also possible to look straight ahead... That requires a frontal lobe and eyes imbedded in it.

On TV they are showing the Republican Party's Convention in Dallas. It's just like a hippie festival, a bellowing, leaping, flag-waving, screaming and applauding, dope-fuelled folk celebration. At the same time, the hysterical, heaving mass is making history in nominating Reagan for a second four-year term. I have been living in America for thirty-two years, going through the mass hysteria of presidential nomination eight times, but now is the first time that I am seeing on the screen the strange plot that emerges from this human passion, superstition and hysteria. I watch the plot and spectacle of history-making, on my own, in my room. This too is a symptom of the change that has ensued in this century: Caesar or Napoleon's assumption of power, and all that stemmed from it sooner or later, was not seen by contemporaries, only lived through. The contemporary has become an eye-witness; that is what I am experiencing, and there is something spine-chilling about it. I am no longer just a contemporary, but an eye-witness too.

*

8 September—Writers who wanted to relate more, and other things, about man and the human condition than entertaining, instructive and interesting gossip and stories, were always few in number, but they were close to the men about

whom and for whom they wished to speak. They still exist today, and are still few in number, but a chasm separates them from their readers, like a stylite who flees to the top of one of the undamaged columns of an undamaged peristyle of a ruined civilisation, squats atop the column, high above the mass, is fed by ravens on sandwiches and Coca-Cola, and from time to time shouts down from the top of the column on high to the sauntering, chatting, sporty hippie mass and, having no other choice, showers down his excrement from on high. The few writers who are still around today are stylites of that sort.

*

28 September—With L. this morning by the ocean, in a sea-food bistro. The journey is difficult, even by taxi; with L.'s every step unsteady, getting in and out are veritable feats of acrobatics. We feel our way along; the late-September sun is scorching. And yet, even so, everything is marvellous.

*

2 November—The dead. They are so many that there is no longer room for them all in my memory. Overpopulation exists not only in the world of the living; masses also throng in the hereafter.

*

20 November—I went to post off the page-proofs of the corrections for the Journals 1976-83 volume and was in a kind of "farewell-to-my-craft" mood as I stood in the post office whilst the clerk stamped the postmark on the package. It is unlikely that I shall bring out another such issue in what is left of my life. For me, over the last 40 years, these jottings have been a substitute for journalism, for contact with mundane reality. It is also a sort of farewell in another way, when I think about writing something else. I ought to finish the thriller, but otherwise I feel no stimulus to add yet another work to the many volumes published to date. *Keresztkérdés* (Cross-Question) and the foreword to a volume of Krúdy, who would be a hundred this year; everything else (talks broadcast on Radio Free Europe, drafts) can stay in the desk drawer. But I still have an inclination to write that thanksgiving work, a child of the century's expression of gratitude. Each time I have thought about it, though, I have grown sad because, as Balzac complained, I have been unable to conceive of an "internal form" for it. All anti-memoirs, those Malraux-style experiments, are clumsy. To write down "everything" in its flesh-and-blood reality, so to say—that is repugnant. All the same, there is an "internal form" for a farewell work of thanksgiving (it dawned on me whilst walking today), which is the heroic verse in hexameters. That would be one task still to tackle. I don't know if I shall have the strength for it, as it may be that once I am 85 "my blood has thickened, my brain run dry."

*

22 November—Thanksgiving Day. Profound peace within me and around us, and in that peace something that could be said to be a sense of gratitude. Gratitude to America that fate has brought me here, at the end, to the shore of the Pacific Ocean, to this friendly cave in this pretty town, where I don't know a living soul and everything I have disliked is appeasingly remote: "nationalism," breast-pounding patriotism, inveterate racist rancour... And the Hungarian language has endured, offering the means, at this great remove, "to give you sustenance, and so I choose as your guardian the absence that makes the heart grow fonder." Thank you.

*

31 December—After lunch, L. unexpectedly, without any warning signs, became ill with fainting symptoms. Precipitate spells like this have occurred a number of times during the past ten years. It's not a heart attack, she has no pain: a loss of consciousness with essentially no pulse. I gave her a dose of Synpathol and managed to carry her into the bedroom; I put her to bed and she fell asleep. By the evening she was better. The two of us are ripe to go. L.'s eyesight has not improved, indeed deteriorated if anything; the physician advises further eye surgery, but L. is afraid of anaesthetics, me too, so I don't dare either to favour or reject a new operation but leave the decision to her. Death as a couple, simultaneously—that would be the greatest boon for both of us. This year even the stragglers amongst our personal acquaintances have departed. I have no objection of any kind to going; I am uneasy solely about the manner of dying. One must entrust that to fate. We have lived life to the full.

Reading matter in recent weeks: Aristotle, the chapter on the soul from the complete, two-volume English edition. He did not believe the soul had a separate existence: body and soul are only conceivable as complementary, and if the body succumbs, the soul too is extinguished.

Occasionally, the Odyssey and modern Hungarian poetry.

1985

28 January—We have no future, life has run its course; all I now look forward to is to go peacefully. The symptoms of physical and intellectual attrition are day-to-day occurrences. There are times when it's as if I were remembering myself.

*

26 February—A letter from Vienna. The correspondent is watching Hungary's "liberalisation" from close at hand and has doubts about the phenomenon because "it's as if the pope were to stand up on the Vatican balcony and announce to the assembled throng that 'Salvation didn't work out; we have to make a fresh start, and this time do it all differently.'" The comparison is apposite. Like Egon Erwin Kisch, the German journalist who, when asked just before the war to dream up a sensationalist headline of some sort for the dwindling *Prager*

Tagblatt came up with: *"Franz Ferdinand lebt, der Weltkrieg war umsonst"*—"Franz Ferdinand alive—the World War was futile."

*

9 March—L. blindly clipped her fingernails and injured the nail-bed with her unsteady hand. The bleeding had still not stopped by the third day, so we went to hospital, where they made a "drain" to draw off the accumulated pus and administer antibiotics. Back home she has fainted yet again; a sudden drop in blood pressure is causing the fainting. There is no medicine, no help; on all fours, I somehow managed to lug her to bed. After a few hours' lie-down she gets better. We have talked over what is to be done if either one of us should go. There is not much scope for action (first aid, etc.). It has to be endured; that sort of thing has a way of somehow working itself out.

Reading matter: a biography of Schopenhauer. The poetry of post-1945 young Hungarian poets. Many of them are talented.

*

1 April—The flat had to be heated last night. A tropical swelter explodes at dawn.

In the evening, Aeschylus' *The Persians* (in English); the text's authentic, Greek import hovers vaguely somewhere in the distance... Seven of his plays are extant, *The Persians* just one of perhaps seventy that he wrote. He won many prizes, out-writing Sophocles and the covetous, pushy dilettantes. In the end, jealous dramatists rejoiced because an eagle dropped a tortoise on Aeschylus' bald head, thinking the bare skull was a rock on which it might crack open the tortoise's shell. It is all much simpler today: a competitor would be accused of being a Fascist or Communist.

*

6 April—L. stumbles in the bedroom, falls and breaks her left arm. In the same place as it was broken seven years ago, in Salerno: the left humerus. We go by ambulance to hospital, where they X-ray and pin the fracture together.

*

11 April—LXXXV.—L. lost consciousness in the morning. I was alone; it was hard lifting her into bed. The third such attack in the last four weeks.

Freedom is a private undertaking. There is no such thing as institutionalised freedom. Anyone can only be free every day by oneself, under one's own steam—and only ever for a short time.

Reading: the letters of Mark Twain. And Aeschylus' *The Persians*. One surprise amongst the birthday greetings: President Reagan and his wife send their best wishes on my 85th.

*

5 May—For four weeks nurses have been lining up, one behind the other, one washing and tidying her up, helping her to walk and lie down, a second cleaning up, a third instructing in physiotherapy, a fourth taking the blood pressure and checking the pulse... L. is living in a swoon. In the meantime, everything is as if paralysed, both days and nights. At night, if L. is sleeping, my reading is Sophocles and occasionally Hungarian poetry. Weariness, like someone who has been struck down out of the blue.

*

21 May—What does senility have to offer beyond existence? Nothing. I understand those who pre-empt the ending.

*

6 July—Three months have passed, and today L. went out on the street for the first time. The three months of nursing day-and-night were successful; she did not find walking difficult. Her eyesight has not improved; she is virtually blind. I myself am unsteady in my gait; sight in my glaucomatous eye is failing, the other eye is also weak. That is how we live, the blind leading the blind. The time of decrepitude is on its way, when one shucks off everything without any sense of loss.

I have finished the thriller (mostly at night, once L. was asleep). I shall write no more fiction.

*

11 July—The big come-down in life is not when a person discovers, at the end, that he was mistaken. More crushingly, he has no means of doing anything other than be mistaken.

*

17 July—Reading: *Mémoires du Duc de Sully*. The book was printed in London around 1760. A present. In the age of pocket books that are printed in runs of one million this "book" is like a prehistoric relic. Font, paper, type area, binding —everything is reverential. A book then was still a liturgical phenomenon, like a font of holy water or a tabernacle; its contents were addressed to a person, the reader, not to consumers.

*

9 September—L. has "gone downhill" since her fall; the arm has healed, but an inner slump has overlaid the fall, and she is unable to come out of it. I concern myself solely with her, day and night, striving to make her condition bearable, insofar as that is possible. It's as if there were no longer a separate personality; I have become absolutely identical with her.

*

17 October—L. was at the internists's. Blood pressure, cardiac function, vital organs—all intact. She cannot see and can only hear with the help of an electronic

hearing aid. She cannot take a step without me; I guide her by the arm, but I myself need a walking-stick and am rocky on my feet. Following the examination, the doctor sadly declares: "Senility." That may well be, but equally there are periods during the day when her mind is lively, she recalls everything, can recite long poems, talk shrewdly and perceptively about people and events. She cannot see her food and is sometimes unable to distinguish the character of dishes. By day and in the evening, her ability to orient seems to fail. And she is just as beautiful at 87 as she was when young—differently so, but still "beautiful." I don't know how long my strength will hold out, but I would like to be with her to the last moment, helping and nursing her. Everything has to be done for her; she is incapable of eating, keeping herself clean, or digesting by herself. This is how we have been living since the fall in April. The doctor says the state may remain the same for a good while; it may deteriorate, but there is no chance of any improvement. (That is not sure: if she were to regain her sight, my fear and the uncertainty would cease.)

...I am not reading or writing, but I sometimes dream I am writing something. In the dream the lines move like a projected text. The lines make sense, what's more; the word choices are correct, the composition is vivid. None of this is being written by "me," it is all happening inside me. The return journey from life to death is dark; I am stumbling along from nothingness into nothingness, and on the way a word or concept sometimes shines like a glow-worm in a dark forest.

*

10 November—After three days in hospital for a check-up L. was transferred to the nearby convalescent hospital. I asked the doctor to send her home, where, with constant nursing supervision, I can be together with her. The doctor says that is impossible; home nursing is no longer an option, she needs full, round-the-clock medical and nursing assistance. The convalescent hospital to which the ambulance transported her is a single-storey building with around seventy rooms, most of them with two beds. They put L. too in one of these.

When I took leave of her today, she said semi-consciously (she can longer see): "Take care you don't fall into bad company."

*

12 November—I tried to read tonight (Spinoza's *Ethics,* in English), but absent-mindedly, and I abandoned it. Later on, it was poems, Hungarian poets, new people. I couldn't hear the music from the verse, so abandoned that too. The great weariness, the compulsory labour of the last months, does not end even now, when she is not with me day and night. I go back and forth by taxi, yet even so tottering the few steps the trip requires me to take. I hope I shall last out as long as she needs me. She is very beautiful; the beauty of passing away is sometimes more convincing than the triumphant beauty of youth and full womanhood.

*

19 November—There was nothing else that could be done; she had to be taken to the hospital. I haggled and delayed up till the last moment, but it could not carry on, because the two of us at home, on our own, with myself half blind and unsteady on my feet, and also, after half a year of round-the-clock nursing, liable to collapse at any moment, when there would be no help at all. There was nothing else that could be done, but it is dreadful not to have her with me, not to be with her night and day; she cannot see, and I can't see for her. I don't know how long I am going to be able to stand this.

*

21 November—The patients are set outside the rooms until 4 p.m., sitting in wheelchairs in the corridor; those who still have all their senses propel the wheels up and down the corridor by hand. I found L. in the room, sitting in a chair, head slumped forward, bound to the seat's back rest. She is now barely conscious. She groans out from time to time, but on being asked says that there is no pain. Twice she said, "Mama, mama." I try somehow to explain that I am now her "mama." She does not respond; maybe she understood. When I speak to her she will give a yes or no, nothing more. It's all so dreadful and frightening that I sometimes think I shall be unable to take it. It is no consolation to be told that "she isn't suffering;" she is suffering in another way, in some unlit corner of her mind. The beauty of this ravishing woman has become ennobled in old age; physically, even now, she is marvellously unscathed. The current within has gone dead, however. I sit beside her for hours on end, holding her hand; she does not return the pressure. At 4 p.m. two nurses put her back to bed. Time—day, night, afternoon, morning—no longer exists for her. A senseless and incomprehensible prayer of some sort is present inside me for a cosmic beam to restore her balance of mind, so that the body may regain strength and she can come home and we can die together. I feel utterly wretched. Rational argument—the time has come, we have lived our lives—does not help. She was a marvellous creature, everything about her; as a human and as a woman, she embraced all the graces. She was, and still is, what has given my Life sense; if she goes, there will no longer be any sense in anything.

*

25 November—A reader sends me one of my old short stories that appeared in one of the Budapest magazines under the title *A kulcs* ['The Key']. I wrote it in 1943, which was when it was published, and had forgotten about it. On reading through it I feel a pain that is hard to bear: for 62 years she was the first person to whom I would read everything, all my works of that kind. Now there is no-one to whom I can read; expressing myself in writing no longer holds any attraction for me. Once she goes, I will follow her inconspicuously and without any fuss.

*

2 December—The customers in the department store of death organise a wheelchair race in the corridors. Some of the corpses dressed up for the occasion. Anything but this—this consumer death.

*

3 December—As if something may have happened: a baffling serenity has ensued out of the turmoil of anxiety, agitation and suffering, as if I had "understood" life's ghastly, merciless confusedness. I don't blame God, man, anyone. I expect nothing. I have accepted what has happened... accepted it in its ghastliness. At times like this, one person prays, another curses; but then there are also some who start to listen, only listen inwardly. I did not "decide" this; somehow it just happened. The greatest personal tragedy in my life, which must be accepted, not fatalistically, non-judgementally, unprotestingly—simply accepted. This is the end, it must be accepted—that is worse than any sudden demise.

*

4 December—I get to the hospital at 4 p.m., when the clearing-up, bathing and feeding are over and done with. The bed, the room—everything is clean, scrupulously tidied. L. is sleeping. I sit for an hour beside the bed, holding her hand; a feeble squeeze at one point is her sign that she is aware of me. She does not open her eyes, though. Her face is tranquil, without a trace of suffering, agitation or fear on it. This serenity is a species of beauty for which I know no parallel. Everything that works on, alters, a face in life—temper, desire, disappointment—is absent from the face. The features, that familiar, sweet, inimitable face, are now purified, ennobled in a way that is only possible in the presence of death, when there is still life behind the face, but the personality no longer lives and all that is left is the body, cleansed by fate. This is not like the marble faces of great works of sculpture; this face is still living, but all dross has vanished, leaving only a final tranquillity and pure reality.

*

8 December—Life, people, work, "literature"—all that is at an end. Disgust and shame just in thinking about "writing." Every line I wrote for her; now there is no-one for whom to write. That is a surprise.

*

9 December—I had not realised before how at one she was with me, in complete physical and intellectual proximity. We have lived together for 62 years, and there was love, anger, and all the other things that are an inevitable consequence of a shared life; but the degree to which I had become intertwined with her—that I had not realised before.

*

22 December—At the doctor from whom I requested a second opinion. An older acquaintance, he is American and, I believe, honest. He tells me that L. might live another few months: She needs to be fed by tube, inserted via the nose, but

"that is not painful." Chemotherapy will not be curative but will slow down the development and proliferation of a malignant tumour. He is friendly and would like to help, but admits that he is unable to do so.

*

24 December—Christmas Eve at the hospital. The first Christmas Eve in 62 years that we haven't spent together. When I arrived the room was already dark; the patients had been settled down for the night. Unable to see, she doesn't recognise me; I hold her hand and sit that way for an hour beside the bed. I would not have believed I would live to experience this evening. Reality is indifferent. I cannot protest; there is no rage, no accusations. Life's total meaninglessness and pitilessness. There are no "words," nor feelings or passions. As when everything that has flickered or blazed in the course of a long life burns out. Out of nothing have we come and to nothing we return; all the rest is infantile imagining. What came in between, marvellous as it was at times, is always senseless and without purpose. I always "knew" that, but this evening, in the hospital in San Diego, I finally acquiesced in it. If we were at home, I would put an end to both of us. As things are, that is not the done thing. Though maybe that, too, is just cowardice.

*

31 December—New Year's Eve. She hasn't eaten for two days, receiving only fluids. She is rattling. She jerks and tosses herself around. She is given a sedative, but the expression on her face is agonised. Her fellow patient in the semi-darkened room, a senile woman, is sleeping easily. The old codgers in wheelchairs are taking a spin out in the corridor; one or another looks in from time to time, to check if the fellow inmate is still alive. This is a hell of pain and suffering that I could not have imagined.

1986

1 January. – ... The New Year. The end of our lives; she may have a few more weeks - not of life, only of twilight, unconscious existence. For me this year is the end of life, even should I last it out. I have no inclination to die or to live either. Everything that life has brought is senseless, almost grotesque, in this twilight.

*

1 January—L. died.

*

14 January—She was cremated.

*

9 February—I am a "widower", and there is something horrendously grotesque about that. I live in reality as I did hitherto, in the first person singular. Over the past 62 years and 8 months (that is the time we lived together after "signing up:" we were the first hippies in that we didn't have a proper "wedding" but

simply "signed" a bit of paper, literally hauling in one of the witnesses from the street, a poet by the name of István Szegedi, who just happened to be passing that way and went up into the registry office to be a witness, with L.'s desperate father as the other one, having rushed up to Pest in horror on hearing that we were proposing to "sign up"). Always together throughout the last six decades, waking and sleeping, physically and otherwise, both of us floundering through escapades, but always seeking refuge again in one another, always together, through thick and thin. Now I am all alone, in a void, like the atmosphere around an astronaut in space in which the gravitation that held him in earth orbit has ceased to exist. Everything floats: himself, objects, the world too.

Tranquil days. The "liberation" that is felt by those who are widowed is evident to me too, though not like someone who feels liberated from an emotional and circumstantial constraint, but differently. In recent years my sense of responsibility was at times unbearable: had I done everything I should have done to have her eyes and hearing treated, then to recover her strength, to stop her dizziness, the fainting in the street and at home... We went to see doctors for years on end (what loathsome creatures: shop assistants selling stomachs, eyes, and hearts, it is rare to come across one of them who is humane). "Liberation" now because I am no longer responsible for her, for her health, and don't need to rack my brains about what more I can do. The doctor's farewell letter on her cremation: she had cancer, "we could do nothing for her." The moments when I am assailed by irrational fury and resentment, when I rage at God (if there is one) for being merciless, for allowing her to suffer. Then great weariness and apathy. Grief leaps abruptly like a rabid dog, out of the shadows, to sink its teeth into me and make me yell out in pain. Then that passes and it is apathy again. The emptiness that was ushered in the moment she died, that nothing can fill—total emptiness. She died like a noble plant that withers away with a sudden icy gust of wind. She has now been swallowed up by the ocean, and her place is taken by a Nothingness that "is" more than anything else that "is."

For the past three months I have not opened any books. Now I am "liberated," I am reading again: Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (in English) and Voltaire's *The Age of Louis XIV.* Business as usual.

Walking about on the street, at home too, is tottery. The old cleaning woman who tidies up the flat once a week is the only living being with whom I speak.

*

14 February—The situations of an emigrant life. Following L.'s death, a new variant of emigration has commenced for me. Others suffer from an itch to make themselves conspicuous, seeking to have their name seen and heard far and wide at any price. With me the itch to be inconspicuous to vanishing point is now pathological—to not read my name, to *not* hear about myself, just vanish.

*

18 February—János is 45. I see the three-year-old, fair-haired boy setting himself before me and introducing himself in the garden at Leányfalu. L. had arranged it. One of the tacit riddles of our life lies behind the encounter. L. has gone, leaving János and me still here.

At a firearms store on the city outskirts. I purchased a hand gun there two weeks ago, but only now has the application form come back from the police. They now hand the pistol over, carefully and politely pack it up, even throw in 50 rounds. When I point out to the salesman that the supply of ammunition may be more than I shall strictly need, he shrugs and says one never can tell. All around the walls of the store hang all sorts of weapons, hunting guns and automatics. Customers mooch about, looking the weapons over, most of them leather-jacketed young lads. In America, every citizen has the right to possess fire-arms. I return home by taxi; the driver enquires what I have bought and is pleased to hear it is a revolver. "Always a good thing to have around," he says. I feel a sense of satisfaction for the first time in months. I have no plans to take my own life, but if the processes of ageing, enfeeblement and growing incapacity should continue as they are, it is good to know that I shall be able to put an end to the humiliating decline in a trice, and I need not fear ending up in one or another of those institutionalised refuse heaps, a hospital or an old people's home. Even so, a bit of luck is needed: a stroke can put an end to any escape plans.

*

20 February—At night, Voltaire. The 17th century, the civil wars. People murdered, invoking religious slogans, merely to be able to kill and plunder. Like today. Like tomorrow, and for ever more.

Something irrational is happening inside me and to me: anger, the feeling that I cannot forgive. One cannot forgive (whom, though?) if a person one loves dies.

Did I love her? I don't know. Does a person love his legs, his thoughts? Except nothing has any meaning, if one is without legs or thoughts. Nor is anything truly meaningful without her. I don't know if I loved her. That was a different matter. I don't "love" my kidneys or my pancreas either; except those too are me, just as she was also me.

I don't want to die, not as yet. Still, I have put the revolver in my night-table drawer so it is on hand if the moment should come when I wish to die. It is possible, though, that this too will be otherwise. Everything is otherwise.

*

28 February—The novel *Válás Budán* ['A Divorce in Buda'], which I wrote half a century ago but haven't read since, appeared in several languages and now an English translation has come to light from one of the trunks. I gave it to H. to retype and I have read through several passages. The information it gives on an al-

most completely defunct class of Hungarian society, the cultivated middle class, is surprising from a retrospect of fifty years. Alongside the overbearing counts, the parasitic Jewish and Christian gentry, and the clod-hopping peasants, there was also a well-read, talented Hungarian bourgeoisie—admittedly, for the most part, only in Upper Hungary [now in Slovakia] and Transylvania [now in Romania]. It was eradicated by Beneš and the other grave-diggers—and now by the Communists, on the heals of the Nazis.

*

7 March—The closing sections of the first volume of *Egy polgár vallomásai* ['Confessions of a Middle-Class Citizen'] have been translated into English, and the manuscript has been sent to me. On reading it, the moment when my father died in hospital at Miskolc flashes back to mind from a distance of half a century. Then that other moment when little Kristóf died in the children's hospital at Pest. And also that moment two months ago when L. stopped breathing in the San Diego hospital. She did not close her gorgeous eyes, the left eye—green, the right one—a bluish-grey. She could not see through either of them, having been near-blind for two years.

By night, text down the hot-line. About how to kill oneself. It's best with a pistol, but even that is not totally reliable. Bullet in the mouth or through the temple? How to grip the pistol (it is lying in the night-table drawer). Which is more sure: to lie with the mouth agape, or what? The response to the point, a lecturing tone, expert.

*

16 March—In my dream last night, the "hot-line" again. The luminous printed letters are telegraphed into the sleeper's consciousness. It may be that the dead are as up-to-date as this in making contact with the living. "Mincsi didn't love Pincsi," says the light-script that I read in my dream. She talks about her parents. Then: "You wrote your journals for others, and I mine for you." I search in the trunk for the diaries that she kept from 1948 onwards, the notebooks in which she wrote down, every day, what had happened that day. It's as if every day I were getting a letter from her. Over a hundred of these notebooks have been left, and there are as many again somewhere in Pest, if they still exist somewhere.

*

25 March—... If my eyesight continues to deteriorate as it is, shall I be able to find the pistol in the drawer?

It is expected of writers who are coming to the end of long-spun lives that they write a summa vitae, some sort of philosophical summing-up. I don't know about any sort of summing-up of my life, and in summary all I know is that people are not so dangerous when they are "bad" as when they are stupid. And there are plenty of stupid people. Those are the dangerous ones.

*

27 March—In the evening, Boswell—oh, and Voltaire. Picking out the letters, with difficulty.

*

29 March—Easter Saturday, the Resurrection. Forty-two years ago, a dinner in Leányfalu, at the house of an actor–couple. The order requiring Jews to wear a yellow star had been brought out by then. Our hostess was Jewish, so everyone was given a present of a yellow star beside their plate during the dinner. L. was also given one. That marked the start of the rabid, foaming-at-the-mouth slaughter of the Jews. The hiding, the concealment, the disgrace, L.'s father being carried off to Auschwitz. Forty-two years ago a society showed its true face, a paroxysm of every species of hatred, rapacity and cruelty. That can never be forgotten nor pardoned.

A lengthy magazine essay on the cause of the "new anti-Semitism," signs of which are present not just in the Russian domain but elsewhere too. Anti-Zionism and anti-Judaism do not, as such, amount to anti-Semitism—an "anti" arises in response to the symptoms of nationalism wherever they may be. However, the writer of the article steers clear of the true cause of hatred of Jews.

*

11 April—LXXXVI—This morning the telephone rang repeatedly at length; calls from abroad. I did not pick up the receiver. There is something tactless about a person who lives longer than is proper. Like when hosts exchange those "when-is-he-going to-leave?" looks over a guest's head.

*

20 April—...Reading: *Don Quixote* occasionally. Magazines, skimmed through. A Beckett memoir (he is now 80) in praise of disintegration.

*

13 May—L.'s diaries, every day. The replayed time that, for me, is just as much a "reality" as the present. This moving and exciting diary is a huge gift. I can relive the everydays and dreams of our life.

At the firearms store where I bought the pistol. They explain how the shells may be loaded into the magazine so the weapon is always ready to be fired.

Staggering when I walk. It may be anaemia, perhaps a circulatory disorder. The fatigue which sometimes prevents me from getting up from the armchair, thus forcing me to sit for hours on end. After a few steps in the street, dizziness. If I were to fall and fetch up in hospital, I shall be unable to use the gun. That's a serious worry.

*

21 May—The "hot-line" starts up at 4 a.m. She speaks at length, for a long time, a voice that has a music and a scent of flowers. She just won't stop. I listen to

her in the dark room, fearful that she will come to a stop, that something will prevent her from telling "all." Tonight she told "all." The "all" was a long declaration of love—the declaration of love for which I waited for 62 years, and meanwhile we always somehow managed to talk about other things. A thing that indeed cannot be said "whilst alive," only once dead; the declaration wells up from the depths of the ocean, like some kind of steaming-hot flow of water from the sea-bottom, where deep-water volcanoes are ablaze. She says that she loved me, loved me alone, loved me passionately, for 62 years. In the diary all she ever writes is "him," or "with him," or "at his place." Now she tells all. As it gets towards dawn her voice gets stuck, reiterates two or three words, like when the needle get stuck in a groove with the record spinning, now saying the same thing over and over again. The end of the declaration of love. I have "lived" to hear that too.

*

18 June—I take a taxi to the edge of town, where, at the local police training facility, and for a fairly stiff fee, police officers instruct applicants in handling fire-arms. The trip is timely, because I am not feeling well and would not like some cack-handed piece of clumsiness to mess up the moment when the time comes to forestall a prolonged spell of incapacity and waiting for death. The site operates outside the city, and even on arrival there are dull cracks of weapons firing to greet one, because this is where young police recruits are also given training. The civilian recruits who have signed on for the course, myself included, number around thirty. Most of them are quite young, with under-age girls amongst the females. In America the right to bear arms is guaranteed under the constitution, and anyone may keep a weapon at home, but one may only carry it on the street if one has a separate permit. A leaflet informs me that some 120 million fire-arms are currently owned privately in America. Statistics show that in the past year 84 per cent of deaths due to use of fire-arms were suicides. Two police officers give a lecture, by way of initial instruction, on how to handle a handgun, what one should be careful over, what is permitted and what is forbidden. One may shoot a burglar in one's dwelling, but only if prior to that the intruder has threatened the inhabitants with a weapon, etc. The pupils in the lecture room are attentive and quiet. This officially organised instruction in the technique of killing—or murder and suicide, to put it another way—is a curious example of what life is worth where we are living. Practical instruction will commence next week. The first lesson comes to an end late in the evening, and in the taxi called out from town I slip back through dark fields towards the built-up area where the targets, people, live. Me too. This is one of the oddest undertakings in my life—in the end, preparation for a journey from which "no traveller yet has returned." It is night-time before I get back to the empty apartment; Lola's bed has been unmade for months now, and I reflect abstractedly that it will not be long before the moment comes when I can set off into the nothingness where she is

and towards which I am heading. I sleep soundly, like one who has made all the necessary arrangements at the travel agency for a long journey.

*

8 July—Earthquake at 2:30 in the morning. It finds me still awake. To begin with the room rocked a little, then the bed was shaken by a strong tremor. There is nothing to which one can compare an earthquake, accompanied as it is by a sense of total and absolute helplessness. This one may have lasted three seconds; the next day I read that it had an intensity of 6 on the Richter scale, the last quake of that magnitude in this region having been 15 years ago. The rest of the night was without incident; I slept until morning.

*

10 July—Celebration of the Lady, the Statue of Liberty, on her hundredth birthday. Like every immigrant, I too relive the moment, 34 years ago, when, on an April morning, we glimpsed the huge, torch-bearing female figure in New York harbour. I don't recollect any sort of "I-am-free" emotional reaction to it. Over these three and a half decades a lot has happened in our lives too, but the greatest satisfaction for me was being able to write without self-censorship for the length of a generation.

*

8 September—Two weeks in hospital. I was operated on to have an enlarged prostate and the surrounding tissues removed. On the basis of the hystological examination it is apparently non malignant. After the hospital, two weeks in János's sea-front house, where I get visits from therapists. Then back to my own apartment, where I am completely on my own. A cleaning woman comes round twice a week, and I have lunch brought to the door. What sense is there in any of this? One more year? Two? It's almost farcical.

It's been eight months since she died. Only now, for the first time, does it register that she is no longer here. Up till now, it seemed as if she had merely gone out of the room, or was out somewhere in town. On occasion, I would call out to her. Now I know she is no more; she is dead.

*

2 November—I.V. [István Vörösváry] would like to publish the six volumes that make up *A Garrenek műve* [The Work of the Garrens]—*A zendülők* [Rebels], *A féltékenyek* [Jealous Folk] and *A sértődöttek* [The Offended]—in one go, perhaps in two volumes. If I go, as is now timely, it needs to be tidied up. I started writing it half a century ago (*Rebels* in 1934, *Jealous Folk* in 1937, *The Offended* in 1942–43), whilst *Utóhang* [What Came After, 1948] was not even published: it was printed and ready for distribution but ended up in a cellar. I get them out

from that 50-year crypt to read them for the first time since they appeared. I am astonished, after the passage of 50 years, at how much of what I wrote then about the City, Art, Foreigners and a humanly scaled civilisation is relevant today, when the latter is being destroyed and a consumer void is taking shape in its place. When I wrote it I had not yet read any Gibbon. Spengler perhaps. It was all in the air; all I did was write it down. Sometimes I just wonder, like Eckermann on asking Goethe what his general idea had been in writing the second part of *Faust* and the poet replying: *"Liebes Kind, wenn ich das wisste"*—"As if I knew myself, dear boy."

Just as one cannot "write a poem" (only write it down, hastily, as the poem dictates itself), behind deliberate composition too there lies some kind of "archetype" that narrates itself.

*

28 November—A telephone call this morning from Europe. Géza, my younger brother, has died.

Over the last 14 months, the period immediately prior to and following Lola's death, life has become empty for me: Lola went, shortly before her my younger sister Kató and younger brother Gábor, and now Géza. I am left as the family's rearguard; not one blood relative is now alive. I am straggling after the single file of those who "have not departed, only gone ahead." This has arrived like an epidemic. Indeed, that is what it is: the epidemic of time...

Géza was a film director [under the name Géza Radványi] a gifted one. He emigrated from Hungary in 1948, but moved back there a year ago. He went home to die.

Or else he went home and died of that.

1987

1 January—New Year's Day a.m. I have not been out on the street for days. I try, but am unsteady – like someone mugged in the street. The past year has stripped me of everything. L. has gone, my siblings too, all three of them, in just a few months. I have not read a single book during the year, at best only dipped into one. Apart from the occasional entry in this journal, I have written nothing. I live completely on my own, with no visitor for months on end except for the old charwoman—and sometimes János and his kids. It is better being lonely on one's own than in society. I have no wishes. I hope that I shall manage to go quietly; there's no need for force. L. too is far away; she sends word from time to time.

*

24 January—A well-nigh vegetal existence. Very occasionally I take a few paces in front of the house. Weakness forces me to sit down after a few paces, as on a staircase. I also have to rest inside the apartment if I go from one room to an-

other. I sometimes write a letter of reply, matter of fact, otherwise nothing. Reading materials that are lined up for lights-out—Sophocles, Cervantes, Arany—have been untouched for months. A distinct feeling of nausea if "literature" comes to mind. Words only conceal; they don't reveal reality. Reality is "other." Sometimes there is a glimmer of nothingness. At the same time, homesickness; how wonderful "literature" was—the other sort, the true kind, charged by a current, like the stars or Jack and Jill.

*

28 January—A young couple are seated on the steps leading up to the main entrance of the nearby Episcopalian church and headquarters, which occupies a leading place in the local hierarchy. They are Hispanics, homeless, in tatters, filthy, wearing headbands. I totter past them and see how, before eating (they have dug out a bite to eat from their pack), the man and woman turn to one another with open arms and exchange a protracted kiss. This spontaneous street embrace, on the steps of the church, before eating is touching. A human gesture in the vastness of inhumanity—that is now very rare.

*

23 April—János has died. He was 46. He got up at 6 a.m., the same as every other day, to go to work. He set his foot out of the bed and collapsed; he was taken to hospital and lay there unconscious, in a comatose state, for 14 days. He could not see, could not hear, was fed by tube, and he died that way, never regaining consciousness. According to the autopsy that was performed, "non-bacterial endocarditis is clearly the proximate cause of death, via embolisation." He has been cremated, and the ashes were strewn into the ocean. There were just two of us on the little boat, Harriet, his widow, and me; the three children stayed at home. The helmsman on the sea trip (one has to move to at least three miles from the shore; only then is it permissible to scatter ashes) played funeral music from a portable radio and read out a prayer of some sort.

L. departed a year and a half ago. Directly before her, my brother Gábor (72) died in Budapest, then in the months directly after L.'s death, likewise in Pest, my sister Kató (82) and brother Géza (79). The magic circle has closed; now no-one from my family is alive. And now János.

A letter from Vienna in the morning's post. S. is writing a book; he is writing about General András Hadik's heroic venture in "capturing" Berlin with his raiding party of cavalry in 1757, a figure by the name of Farkas Babocsay being one of the valiant hussars. This impinges on me like some sort of occult message, as Babocsay was János's family name. Over 43 years we never made any reference to it. When I legally adopted him as a child in the Pécs public notary's office in 1945 the parents, who had been separated by the war, were present; they were so-called "simple" people from Transdanubia, the father

a carpenter. There is something eerie in the fact that the name should surface on the day of his death.

He was perennially modest, well-mannered, exceptionally intelligent. He went to the Paulist high school in New York, then studied electrical engineering at an electro-technical college. He did two years of army service in Alaska, coming out with an honourable discharge with the rank of corporal. He worked for the Digital company for 20 years, where he was a valued employee, becoming a sales manager and moving on to a new posting every three or four years, with the company each time paying the costs of removal and purchasing a new house. The manager of the California office has now written a "celebration" in his memory which has been sent out to all employees. He was liked by many; more than a hundred people signed the book of remembrance at the memorial service.

For me this is like a punch in the chest: an insult. Everything that they say about death is a lie. The truth is that it is an insult, a non-consensual swindle. I abhor priests, the myths that religions spin.

To go peacefully, without any painful deception and self-deception. I have no-one now. For me, he was the last "person." I no longer wish to write now, nor to live; just to go peacefully. It would be a great boon not to wake up.

*

7 June—I have done no "writing" for two years. Lying in the trunk are a "thriller," two radio plays, and the poem *Map*. I have not even been keeping this diary in recent weeks; a few lines at the beginning of the year, but they have been mislaid. I am writing now nonetheless—like someone who has been sentenced to life imprisonment and whilst awaiting execution scratches the occasional mark on the wall with his fingernail.

The verdict: life imprisonment in solitary detention. I see no-one for weeks at a time. Walking is ever-more difficult, rocky. As to appetite—the odd bite, with great distaste. No women, no company, nothing. Sex is a great, pure energy as long as one is physically capable; otherwise mere lechery. I don't miss it. Solitude is better than "company"—better in bed and at the table.

*

26 August—Elisabeth comes once a week, on Wednesdays. She cleans the apartment, does the washing, and sometimes cooks something. She is getting on for 70. She is quiet; the few times when she does speak, I don't understand her because she mumbles and splutters the words. She gets ten dollars for one hour's work, and she always stays two, sometimes three, hours. She is the only person with whom I have exchanged any words for months now. Oh, and every Sunday at 6 p.m. there is the call from Toronto; István Vörösváry calls and we chat for a few minutes. Iren occasionally chips in that she will send a parcel of

Linzer cookies. Otherwise, I see nobody. Harriet sometimes comes by, bringing one or another of her children; she stays half and hour, but it would be better if she didn't bother. She is starting to come to, and I have no concerns about her. Reading for an hour at getting on for midnight: Huizinga and Krúdy. No writing. Nausea just thinking about "literature."

*

28 August—L.'s diary, entry for May 1967. The packing. The liquidation of 15 years in New York. Fifteen years in a city where I was unable to connect with anything. Total failure: human and literary failure. Not one line from my pen had appeared in English. Scummy parasitic enemies all around. Departure was a sign of total failure yet, at the same time, a relief.

1988

4 February—L. died two years ago. Complete solitude during these two years. I have given up on almost all visitors. Walking and seeing are becoming increasingly difficult; I don't have the patience for reading. The apartment is a kind of Uncle Tom's Cabin. And a solitary cell, life term. No appetite; strict fasting in every sense.

*

28 March—A courier from Pest. He brings contract proposals from three publishing houses and an invitation from others back there. A complete, "unconditional" surrender on their part; they will publish everything—books, articles, the lot, the entire "life's work." It's an interesting symptom, as if the process of disintegration were getting under way. I shall not give permission for anything to be published there as long as Russian occupying forces are in the country. And, once they have gone, they should hold free, democratic elections at home under the supervision of foreign observers. Before that happens, I shall not allow publication of any of my works. In response to my question, he declares that if the present régime were to go, Hungarians would retain little from the past 40 years other than the healthcare system.

*

25 April—The Writers' Association etc. are inviting me back to Hungary; they wish to make a monument of me and my books. They will re-publish everything, leather-bound—me as well. It is the shared fate of monuments that dogs pee all along the plinth.

*

24 July—All is in God, and God is in all. Spinoza was right. But God cannot be the god of "religions."

Not only have my direct family, colleagues and contemporaries died out, so too have my enemies. If I were to go back to Budapest, I would now find nobody whom I would have any right to be angry about.

*

20 August—Social life. People come out of curiosity, observing me like they would a talking dog in the music hall. Look here, the old codger's an attraction, they say; he doesn't smear his spinach on his ears, still speaks, and can count up to three even at his age. A miracle. They look into the pit of old age. They haven't caught on yet that it is best for an old person to be alone, because at least then he does not get bored.

*

27 August—Around now marks the day when we left Budapest 40 years ago. Of those who accompanied us to the train station to say farewell, now perhaps the little nursemaid is still alive today; the rest—Tibor, Miksa, maybe half a dozen friends—have all died. My places of abode over those 40 years have been Geneva, Naples, New York, Salerno, San Diego. Lola and János have gone, then all my former personal acquaintances and colleagues. In my 89th year, I am left alone, with walking and eyesight deteriorating all the time; I can now read only for quarter of an hour at a time before my sight becomes blurred; a stroll is at most once up and down the sidewalk in front of the house, with a walking stick. Virtually no alcohol: a glass of watered wine or an occasional beer. Cigarettes: down to approx. ten a day. Sex or anything of that sort: nothing, not even in my dreams, and I don't miss it either. A bit of tenderness would go down well, but I don't trust anyone. Reading matter: at night, the newspaper, then Krúdy. I don't read any new books now. Recollection uncertain; vivid memories come back to me from the distant past, but then there are times when I don't remember what happened five minutes beforehand. No complaints about facing death, but no death wish of any kind.

Today I greatly missed the nobility and refinement of L.'s body. Her smile. Her voice.

1989

15 January—I am waiting for the summons; I am not pressing for it, but nor am I putting it off. Now's the time. ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

Victor Határ

Poems

Translated by George Szirtes

Songs from THE CHAIRLIFT

(A Libegő)

1.
once upon a time long gone
an ancient she-toad waiting
on St Lucia's hollow throne
sat faffing and pulsating

sweating in her vestibule
plying her vocation:
Lucy-Stool or simple stool
both need application

baked as hard as brick or steel
her innards like a rock bun
full of hurt and heat and heal:
how nice it'd be to drop one

her eyes pop out as if on stalks
her peepers the soul's mirror,
I grow dizzy, faint, she squawks
and glances down in terror

Victor Határ
is a poet, novelist, playwright, essayist, philosopher and broadcaster living in England since 1956.

time stands still, the mill that drives
the blood round grinds no longer
the pulse in her old ribs still strives
now weaker and now stronger

her sinews tremble, her head slumps,
all things swim and thicken
this is the day, down in the dumps,
when heartbeat fails to quicken

now copper doorknob, cranium
meet in a full frontal,
head flops between grey thighs, no room
to lie out horizontal

she jerks back on her wooden ring
her eyes roll in their sockets
she calls on angels to take wing
and shift her with holed buckets

her stuttering embittered heart
accuses Death unbidden:
you slimy sod, your filthy art
had kept this horror hidden

nor knife nor poison you bestow,
but in sole occupation
of this foul booth, you foul below:
terminal constipation

Speak, fool: hear the ancient cry
lament the last and worst thing:
when boot comes down, and echoes die
all toads are for the bursting.

2.
ROKUS for profit's sake I spread my stall
I dealt in snow, the kind that's wet,
deposit, interest, loan and all
saw profit dwindle into debt
the wagons carrying the load
were heated and the snow, worse luck,
ran out in pools along the road
fit only for a passing duck

ALL The snow
The snow
went where snow is sure to go
away with water's ebb and flow

ROKUS I took to selling fishponds then
transporting them to Araby
the hot sun there is known by men
to have a drying property
so wisely I arranged a tank
to hold it all—but sad to say
it sprung a hole and like the bank
I saw my capital leak away

ALL The pond
The pond
Dribbled away behind beyond
One ponders it but can't respond

ROKUS I blew my money on a stud
so horsedealers became my friends
a horse sans pedigree's a dud
and pays a man no dividends
then came the order: war is war
the army's starving, men must eat!
My stud was requisitioned for
not cavalry but for raw meat

ALL A horse
A horse
May fetch a fortune on the Bourse
Or make a tasty second course

ROKUS A mine perhaps. To bags of salt
I turned my trusty sacks of dough
It cannot have been all my fault
It's there they found the new Lascaux!
Pale bison, hunters, sepia brown
left me pale and took their toll
My shares went down and down and down
Payroll transfigured to bog roll.

ALL A mine
A mine
Should yield rocksalt or serpentine
Not Neanderthal cave design

ROKUS Too few the weeks to sow or reap
For drought a single month's enough
As rainman I came none too cheap
I knew my shamanistic stuff
I knew the rites, I did my dance
The rain came without let or fail
My own fields by an evil chance
Were beaten to a pulp by hail

COMPANY The rain
The rain
May speed and prosper fields of grain
Or turn to money down the drain.

ROKUS I lost the works, I lost the mill,
insolvency destroyed them all
To bulls and bears I took my till
on Wall Street I employed them all
You wheel, you deal, you rack your brains
You calculate on fine projection,
Then comes the crash, all that remains
Is your poor beggarstaff collection.

ALL The staff
The staff
Attends upon the falling graph
And writes the dealer's epitaph

ROKUS A life's not long enough to mourn
the hopes that daily flail or fail
What hope of profit's not forlorn?
What prospect in a fairy-tale?
What use in lying abjectly,
in sugaring pills of rejection?
what profit does a beggar see
in his beggarstaff collection?

ALL The staff
The staff
Pose as you will for the photograph
The staff of fate has the last laugh.

ROKUS A life of shreds and patches spent
Upon the road, along the way
To luckier men in merriment
A running target, easy prey—
A bowl of lentils for his grub
His ever-mulish wife in tow
His luck runs out and there's the rub:
His time is up and he must go.

ALL The staff
The staff
The beggar's staff's the only staff
To write the poor sod's epitaph.

3.
justice naked, made to measure
whipping by a bruiser,
gypsy life's a dubious pleasure,
birch fit for a loser

here comes the stray dog, the gypsy—filthy from his cradle—
comes the horse-thief, ancient fox, burglar bitch of Babel,
here he comes with that foul corpse-stench filling his whole body,
his old hag trailing by his side, sour magpie to his cubby
watch him hawk-like day and night, be vigilant to bust him,
sharp eyed keeper, booking clerk, know how not to trust him
grab his knap-sack, sort it through, frisk him for his booty,
ace of sneak-thieves on the sly, crafty tutti-frutti:
where's it hidden? cough it up! is it his? since when, man!
nicking everything, the slimy nimble-fingered fenman—
he has the bill of sale? so what! no reason to excuse him!
he has to know his place, the swine, the only way to use him!
what the market? which the stall? note it down for quittance!
what's his game, who has he fleeced, where did he get his pittance?
smash his foul mouth, knock him down and stab him in the goolies:
let him flash his calling card to all his fellow stoolies.

justice naked, made to measure
whipping by a bruiser,
gypsy life's a dubious pleasure,
birch fit for a loser

let him respect the force of law, let him feel the truncheon,
as soon as spotted tip him in the steaming dung for luncheon
feed him sometime if you like, but let him fear and blench, man
beware your every passing mood, your gamekeeper, your henchman,
make him feel you'd kick him out at any time, pursue him,
grab your pitchfork on a whim and drive its prongs right through him—
he'd have the skin from off your back, has plundered you already,
rip off those filthy rags of his, hold the bloodhounds steady,
his tattered cloak, his baggy pants—let the whole pack smell it—
let him caterwaul for life, pepper him with pellet,
thousands on the downwind trail, thousands on the pack side
there they are—two vagabonds—God blast them in the backside,
skin the buggers, skin the pair, just as they would skin you
no time to catalogue their pains, start as you'd continue
give it to them now and let them pray to priest or devil
here's the chain gang, here's the ball, here his burning hovel—

justice naked, made to measure
whipping by a bruiser,
gypsy life's a dubious pleasure,
birch fit for a loser

Baptism of Fire

Tűzkeresztség

we stumble through the stump-end of the planet
in monstrous regiments, a shiftless lot,
our death-wish quite unbridled, near as dammit,
with all the bravado of one who any minute
is likely to be frogmarched out and shot

fine for the pushers, coke sniffers in clinics,
fine for those whose sorrows are drowned in wine,
fine to remain in line with clever cynics
their beady eyes on cosmic frills and frolics
who know what's what and how to read a sign

it's no excuse, that this accursed contagion
provides us with a pass beyond the port,
impossible lives yield no consolation:
we're bored of crisis, bored of all creation:
steer clear of us if you're the nervous sort

whatever we possess we're loth to part with
everything's so strange and desperate
we feel the pang—this world's not ours to start with!—
with jangling nerves enough to break a heart with
racked with neuritis, sick, intemperate

we stumble through the stump-end of the planet
in monstrous regiments, a shiftless lot,
our death-wish quite unbridled, near as dammit,
with all the bravado of one who any minute
is likely to be frogmarched out and shot

Balázs Györe

Happy-Book

(Excerpts from the novel)

I.

The pipes in the loo are perspiring, droplets of water hanging down from them, in a line, I can see them when I look up as I take a pee, half-naked. I too am perspiring. The thermometer outside the window in our sitting room shows 33 degrees Centigrade (I checked just before, at two o'clock).

"Let the story be a naked lunch."

This morning I took my wife to the hospital. To be more accurate, she had to go back (she had already been there for ten days in March).

I am writing with the fountain pen that she gave me in 1986, during a critical period of a similarly very difficult year, though the problems then were of a different nature than this year.

Now I need to write a *boldog könyv—a happy book.* I promised my wife as much. That was the intention with which I sat down at the writing desk.

"The method must be purest meat
and no symbolic dressing"

It is clouding over. The air is ever more stifling. Yesterday, the fifty-year record high for Hungary was broken. I washed the bed linen and hung it up to dry on the rack in the kitchen—the bed linen on which my wife had slept.

On account of what I shall call the *happy-book,* I have left off the book that was started in March. ("It seems the world is discontinuous like that.") I could carry on with that, but right now the *happy-book* is more important. I have be-

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Balázs Györe

studied Hungarian and Russian and is now a free-lance writer. In addition to a book of poems he has published eight volumes of fiction to date. This novel appeared in 2001.

gun a new pagination in my big, *blue,* spiral-bound, lined-paper notebook, which I am about halfway through, seeing as I number pages (provide them with numbers). I have got into the habit of doing it.

I owe my wife this book. I owe her a lot (along with much else), but *this* book above all. ("I mind getting a rattling good story from you. I want your *loot.*") I would like to write it. I would like to be able to write it—for her. For her. I promised. She needs to know that whilst she is lying on her sick-bed in hospital I shall be endeavouring to *make her happy.* I'll try. *I am writing to you. It's me. I'm sitting here on the edge of the bed. Sleep soundly! I'll keep an eye on you.* ("Please follow your heart, win or lose.")

The flat is empty without you. I wander aimlessly between the kitchen and the living room. I cannot find my place. I squeeze a lemon, making lemonade for our daughter. She will be back from school before long. I'll fry two chops for her lunch. There is still a bit of poppy-seed cake from yesterday.

Puffballs of white cloud are forming in the sky. I look at them from the room.

I blunder around the flat. Read the electricity meter. Wait for the meter-reader. Sweep up in the kitchen. Clean out the coffee filter.

Before we went to the hospital, you vomited, felt dizzy and nauseous for days on end—a result of the side-effects, adverse effects, of all the medicines, we supposed. What is more, we stopped all the medication, at our own discretion. You went on a diet. You ate toast. The poppy-seed cake that you like so much (poppy seed is your favourite) I ate for you.

I have plenty of choice as to where I might begin our story. Where and how should I begin the *happy-book*? (That's the *name,* the *genre,* the *purpose,* the *goal,* indeed even the *title* of this on-going piece of writing. Work in progress. I call it that simply because one cannot give a long and laborious label to something that it will be rather hard, complex and moot to bring off or define.)

I could start the way Gyula Krúdy opens his novel *Ladies' Prize:* "Daemon, who rules the entire world, came to Pest one day and spied a bolt-hole in the funeral director's house." Yes, indeed. Whilst I was moving into Aunt Margit's apartment on 27th December 1997, devils moved into our flat on Bartók Béla út. I did not know that at the time, did not suspect a thing. I did not suspect anything until the morning of Saturday, 14th March 1998, when my daughter's despairing phone call startled me out of bed: she asked me to come at once, because something was wrong. "Mummy's so weird," she sobbed into the phone. I went. I was not yet aware then that for weeks my wife had been imagining I was a spirit; for her, I am that daemon. "You are a ghost," she said. She spoke to me in English that Saturday morning. I have to try and drive the spirits, daemons, Furies, ghosts and God knows what out of the room. Win back the flat from them.

My wife was taken into hospital that same day, and I moved back home from Pannónia utca after two and a half months.

So much stuff that I needed to write piled up during those ten days in March that it would be enough to last me 200 years. At least three lifetimes would be needed to write everything that accumulated during that brief period. Three lifetimes!

On 14th March, my 16-and-a-half-year-old daughter had to grow up from one moment to the next. She had to put at least 25 years onto her actual age - in the blink of an eye. She had to behave soberly. Yes, indeed. We needed to preserve a sound mind. Our sobriety. Or another way of saying it would be that we had to sober up promptly. I don't know how successful it was. I cried. We cried. "I've only seen you cry once," my daughter later on alluded to that Saturday in a poem she wrote for my birthday. "I was scared."

I could start the *happy-book* with a roundabout curse (I confess that I have recently taken to swearing, every now and then, to myself, or under my breath), but that is not my style. I won't start that way.

I could start with what I found in the etymological dictionary: *boldog—happy,* of uncertain origin. May derive from the root *bód-,* of unknown origin, as in the verbs *bódít* 'stupefy', *bódul* 'become dazed'. (The change in meaning from 'ecstatic' or 'stupefied' to *'happy'* may be linked to some pagan religious aspect.)

I could start the way Allen Ginsberg starts his great poem, 'Howl': "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked..."

Or I could start with a contradiction—the one that Iván Sándor wrote in response to a letter in which I mentioned what I was preparing for: "—there's no such thing as a happy-book. Happiness is at best being able to complete a book."

I spoke to my wife about the prospective book. I reported that I had made a start on the *happy-book.* I had no particular ideas about it, or at most only that, come what may, the ending has to be good, happy. *No kidding.*

We strolled out of the hospital block, slowly, hand in hand, and after a winding little detour set off down the hill in the grounds. We looked for and found a free bench. We withdrew into the half-shade and sat down on it. That is where I said I had no particular ideas about this book, only that I had started it, made a start, because I had to start. My wife was sitting beside me in her night-dress. It was hot. The world was pressing down on her like a lead weight, she said. The grass before our feet was a vivid green, the iron bench snow-white. People were coming and going on the narrow path behind us, in a hurry. "Being is intolerably difficult," she said. "Even bird song... I try to guess their names when I hear them striking up at dawn... That's a bluetit, that one a blackbird."

In those hours when the vital corona of the land and sleep serve only for me to dream, o my darling, in the stillness of my doubts I picked up this strange book, the door wings of which open into some kind of deserted house at the end of an alley of trees.

I gathered the spirit of the moment, flitting onward in every single song of each flower, each bird, in order to write, weaving eternal life and everlasting peace.

All of a sudden, my friend Rezső Keszthelyi came to mind, who once told me, "You don't conceive the past in advance. You cannot say that you are now writing down past time. You don't conceive it. The past is not reconstructed. It is the way it was. You have no construction for the past. It lives. It connects with the present. Your relation to the past is in the present tense." Well, maybe I should adopt some method along similar lines, I said to my wife on the bench, awkwardly yet self-assuredly. I stroked her hand, or she stroked mine, and meanwhile a small child rushed carefree over to a basin that had long not been in use, but a hedge that had been planted around it blocked it off, and the child was unable to get any closer. I saw the joy of discovery on the face as the child was running, then I also saw the bewildered tiptoeing behind the hedge.

I need to find the path that leads to healing. The path that leads to total recovery. That leads back to life. Bend the branches aside, gently, and glimpse the clearing. That is the task. The path leading to healing needs to be mapped out. The *happy-book* needs to be written. To be more exact, my wife has to find the path, and she also has to write the book, not me. She will dictate. She will guide my hand. She will write it for me.

Of course, I could start with Ottlik: "Tolstoy, perhaps by way of apology for his choice of subject, starts his famous novel: All happy families are alike, but an unhappy family is unhappy after its own fashion. Well, they are not all alike. On the contrary, the species of unhappiness, by and large, are much of a muchness. It is happiness that is diverse, unnamed, unmapped. Unhappiness is easily seized by the forelock, portrayed, understood, and seemingly of wider interest, because what it has to say is of more universal validity. Happiness, the lurking, deep currents or unruffled, subdued heartbeat, unpredictable flare-ups or settled bitter calm of which Kosztolányi often lays bare in unusual situations—happiness is an all but unknown territory that still awaits exploration...

That is a big risk... to accept a romantic way of looking at the world, accept that in the end, taking one thing with another, life is good nonetheless, and say yes to it."

The word *boldog* appears for the first time in written form in Hungarian in 1193, compounded in a toponym, and as an adjective around 1200, in the form *boudog,* in the 'Funeral Oration and Lament'.

I must correct myself straight away. There is no basin at the spot toward which the child rushed. I took a look. Simply a flower bed with plants set out around it. The basin is further up the hill. I was muddled. My wife and I sat down by the edge of the long-unused basin in order to talk. *Today, really and truly.* For today the world has cleared up, she said. The verdure and the grounds are different. She hears birdsong differently. When was there last water in the basin? What's in it now? Nothing? Dry. But its bottom has not cracked as yet. How long since it was last used, I wonder? Harmless decoration. Round. Deprived of its water, it sits there, deserted, before our feet. We ought to use it. But how? By being concerned with it.

Over the past weeks, back at home, we had tried to promote healing by reading aloud. I read *Robinson Crusoe* to my wife, a chapter at a time ("I seldom gave any thing over without accomplishing it, when I once had it in my head enough to begin it."). Let there always be something that offers solace. I read out Emerson's essay ("trust thyself"), a Hemingway novel ("light was all it needed and a certain cleanliness and order"), a Ken Kesey short story ("A man must have balance, like a haiku."), but above all, or rather first of all, Salinger, the short story 'For Esmé—with Love and Squalor': "You take a really sleepy man, Esmé, and he *al*ways stands a chance of becoming a man with all his fac—with all his f-a-c-u-l-t-i-e-s intact." Indeed, indeed, that's what we too are looking for and want, which was precisely why we would often say together, or separately, or with one starting and the other finishing, *that we needed a chance of becoming a man with all his faculties intact.* That sentence became our watchword. That story (one of the *nine*) was my favourite. For me it is what poppy seed is for my wife. "I used a coat tree as delicately as possible, and then sat down at a table and ordered tea and cinnamon toast. It was the first time all day that I'd spoken to anyone." I love those sentences. It is from Salinger that I know about cinnamon toast. That such a delight exists at all. One of my favourite treats. My wife often makes it for me, out of bread rolls.

Without warning, an early-evening shower pitched down on us in the hospital grounds. I did not have a raincoat with me. Leaning on the balustrade in front of the main entrance, we looked at the grounds, the paths, the flight of stairs, the trees, the flowers. We saw *everything* freshening up. The rain washing the ground. The rain washing our souls. Too exquisite? I don't wish to deceive. When we strolled over towards the so-called Memory Clinic earlier on, the sun was still shining. We discovered some mouldering benches beside the path. It was no longer possible to sit on them; it could be no-one at all had sat on them since time immemorial. My wife was worried I would catch a cold in my T-shirt. That worrying was already the *old,* the *natural* her. It was gratifying. I then ran out into the rain, cut across the park, in my sandals. My wife's nightdress was rocking in the shopping bag. I would wash it out later at home. The rain was warm. At 7 o'clock in the evening the nurses dole out the medications to the patients. Whilst I was dashing about in the rain, my wife was again overcome by fear, I found out later.

I noticed that the right-hand headlight of my car is not working. In March the left-hand bulb burned out, likewise on the homeward journey from the hospital.

Yesterday was my aunt's name-day. Margit took us out to Csobánka, to the little house there, fifteen years ago. We didn't even know the village existed. With her help we found the sloping plot that we eventually bought. A tiny shack, patched together from sheets of iron and timber; inside, a bed, cupboard, table and a few chairs. Built into the loo was a toolroom, along with lots and lots of tools, nails, a sprayer, a manual lawn-mower, recliners, plant-protectant chemi-

cals, dried-up cans of paints, a hose-pipe, and God knows what else. Our shanty was, perhaps, not unlike the cabins of Thoreau or Malcolm Lowry, seeing that we did not have even electricity for 12 years, for instance. *Rising* and *dipping. Descending* and *rising. Sinking* and *elevation. Hill and dale. Soaring and tumbling.* Folds. Scrolled-up leaves. Wires. Picket fence. Plopping damsons. Barrels. Roses.

What do I mean by all these *risings* and *dippings*? Why am I emphasising and reiterating them? Why would I like to supply ever newer synonyms? Why do I need to do that? To dress them up in ever-newer clothes. "Your writings are a sea full of wrong words and faulty sentences. Level." "This is the sadness of the sea—waves like words, all broken—a sameness of lifting and falling mood."

The body is at once rising and dipping. The chest rises and sinks as we breathe. Up, down.

My daughter, as a three-year-old, ran happily down the slope in the Csobánka garden. Thrilled to run around. There was room. Spaciousness. Lungs. The trees were still tiny, the girl still tiny, in 1984. She ran towards us in sandals, no socks, in her little shorts, her upper body bare. We were waiting for her at the bottom of the garden. Down below. She ran with arms spread wide open, hair cut like a boy's, with her big belly button, then started to brake. She was laughing. It was August. Heat wave. I was cramming a few students for re-sits in Russian (that month I earned 3,500 forints with home tutoring). The body was panting from running. The child could still be picked up. From ground into arms. And handed on.

We collected the rainwater in green barrels in those days.

I taught throughout 1984. Home tutoring, from Rákospalota to Budaörs. I coached struggling students. We did their homework. My daughter wrote block letter Bs in my diary, in red, in June, against the months of September and November.

My father came out to Csobánka just once, or rather I took him out there by car so he might see what sort of 'property' we had bought. Later on, he no longer even moved outside the apartment and soon was confined to bed.

My grandmother was also curious about Csobánka, and I once took her too out there. She clambered up the path leading to the house by hanging on to the fence. At the top she missed her footing and tumbled to her knees. Knelt before our house. Fortunately, no harm was done. It was hard to help the heavy body up from the kneeling position. I pointed out the sights: the two Kevélys, the limestone crags of the Oszoly, the village of Pomáz straight ahead, and beyond that, in the distance, Dunakeszi, and still further beyond that, the church at Fót. Over to the left was the roof of the tourist hostel at Csikóváralja, with its chimney, Cradle Hill, and on the extreme left the red lamp of the beacon on Dobogókő ("the supreme symbol"). It shines constantly. I am proud of the vista.

Over the years, Csobánka became part of our life. The water main was connected, we expanded the house (a small kitchen, two small rooms and a minus-

cule bathroom), and the big terrace, its area (24 sq. metres) equalling that of the house, was completed. We furnished it. Bit by bit, it became completely our own; we grew attached to it and would not sell it for the whole world. Our pine trees (3 of them) grew. And, all of a sudden, the ivy planted in front of the terrace began to grow and creep. It clambered up on the side wall, then ran up the timber balustrade, and on reaching the top of that it had to be trained to slither back down. Evergreen.

My mentioning Lowry just before was no accident, as one of the things I read to my wife was his short novel 'The Forest Path to the Spring': "But could you rent Paradise at twelve dollars a month?" In this short novel, "... such words as spring, water, houses, trees, vines, laurels, mountains, wolves, bay, roses, beach, islands, forest, tides and deer and snow and fire, had realised their true being, or had their source..." *The vocabulary of happiness is sparse, stuttering... Happiness, put into words, is more pallid than the reality...*

On a back page of an American book, I discovered not long ago the following sentence: "No trees were cut down to make this book." I too would prefer that not a single tree were to be cut down on account of the *happy-book*. And that I destroy nothing whilst writing it: "in order that I may become a better man, capable of more tenderness, understanding, love..."

I shall not allow the Csobánka shack to be knocked down. Our life, too, is a similar shack that my wife and I have been building for 19 years (we started it in 1979, the two of us, together).

III.

I perhaps first saw Juli Gábor in the late Sixties or maybe the early Seventies, on Margaret Island, in the queue at the box-office for the open-air cinema. There was always much shoving there, an air of expectation, a long line even before the box-office opened; the tickets were soon snapped up. In her miniskirt and thigh-length black boots, she was a rather conspicuous figure. She smiled self-confidently, since everyone was just gawping at her. I learned later that she was the daughter of the actor Miklós Gábor and his actress wife, Éva Ruttkai.

Her mum would sometimes come to visit her, dropping in at the Surplus Stock Centre. This workplace was a gathering place for superfluous, discarded people, from Alice to Zsombor. On one occasion the actress wore a cape, and she squeezed into the cramped women's changing cubicle with her daughter, waiting until she had changed. They went off together to lunch or shop. Juli was wearing glasses by then, with big round frames. She had become more serious. Her mum was not ill yet (I am not sure about that). Her dad never came, but he phoned her up lots of times. My friends called me up lots of times too; my colleagues would constantly be calling me to take the phone. That slightly nettled Juli, but she would laugh. Then one day, to my utter amazement, she offered to

loan her small house in the Hűvösvölgy district. I must have been moaning about not being able to get peace anywhere. I was living with my parents at the time; I moved to Kavics utca on separating from my wife. I was in the midst of divorce proceedings. I would complain at my workplace that there was no nook to which I could retire (a touch of exaggeration, perhaps?); I would like to write, but I had nowhere to do so. ("The Happy Prince never dreamed of crying for something." I did not know that at the time.) I moaned so much that Juli finally tired of it, and one day she placed the keys to her small house in my hand: "There you are!"

The consultant has prescribed a new medicine for my wife, because what she has been taking up to now had no effect. It is so new that it is not yet obtainable at the pharmacy. "Free medical sample. Not for sale" is printed on the box. It has an odd name (odd to us, at any rate): *Zyprexa.* Not easy to pronounce. Its "alternative" or "non-proprietary" or "generic" name is olanzapine. It means nothing to us. Will this funnily named medicine (which has since been introduced commercially) bring about an improvement? Will taking one tablet twice a day mean healing? Why should I not put the question that way? *Eli Lilly & Company Ltd, Basingstoke, England.* Is happiness to come from English climes? Is the starting-point of recovery 70 km from London? In a factory? What a distance! What paths, immeasurable remotenesses, must the soul travel in order to be well again? Is happiness concealed in pills?

Let us try to track delight, step by step! Let us try to nab it, catch it in the act! Let us try to learn the technique of delighting—from Hemingway, for instance!

I have fourteen slips of paper at present, set largely in order. Is that too many or too few? I have filled up both sides of twelve of them with my writing; only two have an empty verso.

Again I have to correct myself: those mouldering benches about which I asserted earlier that one could not sit on them ("it could be no one at all had sat on them since time immemorial"), well, one can. During our stroll today we saw them being used. We even walked by the people who were resting on them. They were sunning themselves. We strolled up as far as the night-time sanatorium. I like these strolls, but what about my wife? I wonder if she too likes these slow steps. *And this is why she learned to walk? For these belated, bitter steps?* We walk hand in hand. For me the breath of air is as though we were in our own garden. "These strolls are very good. Fallen leaves under my feet and the mellow calmness of the misty evening." I have had to switch to another book. "Trees, and our house... And our house has a magic spell, with wisps of grass, dried walnut leaves, pictures, books, Mariska, a chopped-down cherry tree. That has

something to do with happiness too." I had to switch for a short while into "the garden of our own house", "the misty evening", but I am now back here again, in the bright afternoon. "A shiver of a sort of sense of happiness passed through him." We have nothing, only our shadows. Night-dress on my wife, white shorts on me.

We spot the man who at the same time, day after day, suddenly hoves into sight amongst the trees. He runs. Cropped hair, bared chest. Our observations suggest he makes several circuits of the park. His pace is swift; he must already be behind the main building. An athletic body. Who can he be, we ask each other every time we glimpse him. An athlete? A patient? Whoever he may be, I pay the man my respects, unknown as he is. I like runners.

The bulky trunks of two trees are girdled by iron railings—to protect them. From what or whom? Who would harm the trees here? On the ground are big-bodied ants, scattered; they do not swarm, only scramble around, seemingly at random.

"'Yet yesterday I surmised that life, for me, has four planes.

A mundane or real plane. Duty, coming and going, saving...

Then the romantic, or happiness, plane. Amatory obsessions, sentiments, novels, marvellous moods...

Then the fear or danger plane... Tax office, throat cancer, people's democracy, the death of near-and-dear...

The final plane, the incomprehensible, is the plane of my death...'"

"On recovering, even after a serious illness, we restart the world. At all events, we try to start again from the beginning. We try to sniff out what has remained intact and unscathed. What is incorruptible. Where is that plane of existence into which no trouble, illness, poverty or bullet of any kind penetrates? Where things and events preserve their pristine essence, their original meaning. A patient undergoing treatment would rather adjust, in seconds, to a primordial starting-point than to society, to some kind of impoverished timetable. What might be the name of that sensibility to which we dare entrust ourselves in such a case? What kind of immovable embryo do we seek at such times? And if we find it, recognise it, it is no longer an embryo, a 'generative germ', but a poem, birth, twilight, laughter or childhood snow-fall. (I am thinking of versions of a poem, birth, twilight, laughter or childhood snow-fall to which human language has no access.) Adrienne is reading, Barbara sleeping. In any case, a year of primal significance has come to an end. 'It was night...' The rest—pre-recollection."

I am rereading what I wrote around 16 years ago. I was quoting myself, from one of my old pieces ("The child just holds my hand to teach me"). Overnice? Unintelligible? Does it still stand its ground? What ought I to write differently?

I keep examing my sentences. Hmmm. What definitely has to be amended? If the soul could get well again 16 years ago, why should it not also get well today?

In 1997 there were 400 million worldwide who suffered from anxiety disorders and 340 million from depression, the World Health Organization reports.

It was not Mariska but *Marika*—the name of my keelboat, that is to say. We bought her second-hand in 1966. It was not me who named it; it was already called that. Somebody had christened it a good while before, and that was there, in curly lettering, on the boat's prow, on both sides. I did not change that, nor did I rechristen her. The licence was issued by the Waterways Police Headquarters. *Stamp-duty affixed to the application.* Serial number 133. Keeler 'Marika' is cleared for taking to the water. Permanent moorage: Vöcsök Boathouse II. Hull material: timber (mahogany). Length: 800 cm. Beam: 75 cm. Draught: 31 cm. Capacity: four (4) persons. Double rowlocks. Displacement: 320 kg. Registration number: Bp-X-1821.

There are Marikas in my wife's family, her mum and grandma, for example.

That keelboat was most definitely a part of happiness—for 10 years at least. "And then went down to the ship, down to the beach, set keel to breakers, forth on the godly sea..." One of the nippiest boats it was at the Rómaipart. It was in good condition. I liked it a lot. I had (still have) a map: *Water Sports Map.* The Danube from Esztergom to Budapest. I still carry round in my head one or two of the river lanes and several uninhabited islands. The Kvassay Lock. I camped on Mosquito Island (opposite Nógrádverőce). Nothing survives of that water life for me now. But I always look at the Danube. When it is in flood, I go across to Szentendre from Csobánka and observe the height of the water. I keep my fingers crossed that the river won't flood the city. Shall I ever be able to explain what it meant to me to put out in a boat? Explain? No, I don't want to explain anything ever again. The oar blade glided on the surface of the water as one drew it back, whilst the sliding seat slipped forward in preparation for a new stroke. Feet fastened with straps. Possibly a thin cushion, of foam rubber, under one's behind. The singlet water-soaked to cool one down. What is the cox doing? Is he paying attention? Indulging in reveries? That is not permissible. Rowing (like literature) is no time for reveries. Happiness, not slaving at the galleys. Where is my friend Zoli Szlabej, with whom I not only rowed but also fenced in Csepel? We were rivals, as well as fellow sportsmen, at the age of 15.

"'Then another reason why it is hard to put up with people is that, much as an awful lot goes right, the displacements in the planes are constant. When I am moving in the happiness plane the other person will happen to be having a realistic moment...'"

No, at 15 years of age I was not aware that we were mates and rivals at one and the same time. I was not aware that literature is not a reverie. I dreamed. "Literature is not dreaming, embroidery, a Bohemian craft, still less a refuge for the wounded, the handicapped, or simpletons."

What name would I have given my skiff, I wonder? What would I have called it? And what name would I give it today, if I had a keelboat?

What's all this, then? Are worries surfacing over the *happy-book*? Are you scared it will flip over? That the intention will turn turtle, the devil stick an oar in, and it will turn into an unhappy book? Nothing of the sort! I'm not afraid. I have patience. ("Happiness is nothing more than prolonged patience.") Let the heart pound! ("A pure heart is all it takes.") The task is to shift from the plane of fear to the plane of happiness; from sickness to health.

I have a feeling that up till now all I have been doing is *scratching around.* My wife says that she can't write either, all she does is *chicken scratch the paper.* She tried to copy a few sentences out of a book by Kosztolányi into her notebook but couldn't manage it. Writing tires her. Her hand doesn't tremble, but she writes dodderingly, as if she were elderly, an old biddy with shaky hands, though her hand does not shake—it is just tired, very tired.

It was Malcolm Lowry, by the way, who reconciled me to the word wife. He uses it so familiarly and naturally in 'The Forest Path to the Spring' that it gave me a taste for the word.

I read out the first 15 pages of the *happy-book* to my wife. "Your sentences purl along like the waters of a brook," she said. "As if it might even be a spring?" I asked. "It might," she replied. *Gurgle, gurgle, gurgle.* We left the room meanwhile. The washing machine programme was through. We hung out the clothes to dry on the rack, and my wife prepared a little evening snack for the two of us. After that, she read me a Rilke quotation from Lowry's short novel 'Through the Panama': "—for those unapparent fatalities, once one has recognised them, can be endured only so long as one is capable of expressing them with the same force with which God allows them."

We are there in books. May I look on ahead? May I look on ahead when reading? I don't believe so. Can I bring something forward from behind?

My wife always used to tell me (since she has been my wife, since I know my own mind, or in other words since time immemorial) not to be afraid as long as I could see her. I should put my trust in her. She would nurse me when I get old, feed me when I became helpless. She would look after me, support me; she

would not allow me to starve to death. I know she meant it seriously, and I believed every word of it; it was comforting. At the moment I am nursing her, and we are not even old; I try to support her, comfort her not to fear as long as she sees me.

I shaved my beard off the night before the summer solstice. I did the same last year. Last year it helped. A sort of rite. Let there be a cleansing! May my wife be healed! "Open the gate, new moon!"

That alone is love, boredom, illness, growing ugly and dreaming of elsewhere, and the desire to flee, to escape, a thousand times over yet always staying put: sitting face to face and looking at one another's ageing features, watching the other's dying to the end—that is love.

During the Sixties, I would even drink the water of the Danube. If I didn't have a water-bottle with me, or I couldn't find a well on the shore where I had moored, and I was very thirsty, I would stand in the water up to my knees, bend over, and drink from the Danube. I slurped the water. It was very satisfying. It never gave me any trouble.

At Luppa I would swim over to Szentendre Island. As I swam further, ever further out, just when I had gone past little Luppa Island, the water became colder, cooling me nicely. I would allow myself to be carried by the current. If I swam when it was raining or cool, the water would warm me up.

Squeezing out of ourselves at least the daily quota of good cheer is hard work. Wringing out a bit of joy. The daily minimum dose of joy. The way one squeezes lemons in the kitchen, day by day, because one regularly drinks lemonade. One puts the squeezed-out lemon in the refrigerator to absorb the smell of food: it is supposedly the best odour extractor there is.

Should I attempt a trick? Sneak up on joy unnoticed? Steal up behind it on tiptoe, then cover its eyes with a sudden flourish? "So, who is it? Who am I?" should I ask, or just wait in silence until joy says something, tries to guess my name?

"In my dream I was acting opposite Éva Ruttkai in a two-hander. The actress was wearing a lovely gown. Her face was made up. I went over to her, as the role required, and caressed, comforted her. I kissed her tenderly. The actions were not accompanied by any words."

"Illness wisely shows where our soul is to be found. A blow of some kind is needed *for us to be able to see it.*"

My friend from America helps me out. A letter has just arrived from him. He has sent a questionnaire: *techniques for procuring joy in Budapest.* "Do me a favour and fill it in," he writes. And he appends his own list: "1. Stand on Margaret Island, near the bridge. Southwards is the city, Pest and Buda, before our eyes. Up above migratory birds wing away. Or: an immense jeweller's shop window, by night. 2. Observe an old building being renovated. 3. Wish a lot of luck to a recently planted tree. 4. Stroll along a street where cars are not allowed to drive (e.g. the southern end of Váci Street). 5. Look into a pair of beautiful hazel eyes swimming in the Olympic pool. 6. Visit Gyula Krúdy's *old* stamping-grounds (Margaret Island, Óbuda, Király utca, Andrássy út, the Terézváros and Józsefváros districts, etc.)." In my reply I promised my friend that I would fill in his questionnaire on techniques for procuring joy—if I live long enough.

The *Mozart* has arrived on the Danube, mooring alongside the *Dolphin Queen* (at the end of July). Where might the *Esmeralda* be? *River Symphony* is still anchoring here.

If you go down Deer Park Street and cross Valley Street, where the No. 56 tram stop is, look around, and if you carry on, still going down the hill, you cross a little bridge, that's the Devil's Ditch, and there you have *Fern Road, Cloud Road, Carpet Road, Kerouac Road, Lowry Road, Thoreau Road, Hemingway Road;* bear to the left, then turn up Snipe Road, carry on up, up, then again take a left, then left again into Vulture Street then Happiness Close, to No. 6/a. There you will find the little house the keys to which Juli placed in my hand: "There you are!" ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

György Kocsis

Letter from Brussels

"My dear Madam, I have not the faintest idea what measures will be in force after May 1st. I'll be happy to be told three days in advance...," the polite young official said with an embarrassed face at the desk handling residence permits for foreigners in Belgium at the Auderghem municipal office in Brussels. This was after he had already sent the Hungarian correspondent back, with similar politeness, to obtain documents which had not been required previously. It is quite possible that the friendly young municipal official was actually being over-optimistic. Belgian bureaucracy, never particularly smooth in its operations, will probably "sweat out" the new measures three days (if not three months) after the deadline measures intended to free journalists from the new member states from at least some of the annual torture involved in renewing residence permits.

The occasional battle with Belgian bureaucracy is good for a journalist's health in that it maintains a sound level of adreneline, it is also useful in developing a sense of reality. For the Belgium that a Brussels correspondent spends most time in is not the Belgium whose citizens are jarred by the Flemish–Walloon conflict or the rise of the extreme right or mass murderers of children. Nor is it the country where fingers are not enough to count the parliamentary parties and in which, at election time, a Liberal Walloon minister urges Flemish voters to support candidates of the Flemish Christian Democratic Party and thus block the Walloon Socialists.

No, the Brussels correspondent lives in "EU Land", the centre of which, as everybody knows, is not the capital of Belgium that boasts one of the world's most charming main squares, but "Brussels", residing at the Place Schumann, encircled by the gigantic office buildings of the Union and at a safe distance from the Grand Palace featured so prominently in the guidebooks. A correspondent only meets Belgian citizens at the hairdresser's, at the check-outs of the *supermarché* or in the person of the attendant of the *trateure,* a Belgian "inven-

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tion" worthy of the Nobel Prize, which offers meat and charcuterie, cold buffet products and ready made foods that do taste as if they were home-made. Maybe also in the lift of the apartment house—only the friendly neighbour turns out to be German, living there for thirty years, thus one of the foreigners making up a full third of the one-million residents. The Brussels correspondent also tries to make the best of the fact that, by train, London is a mere three hours away, and Paris an hour and a half, and Amsterdam is a two and half hour drive, all full of tempting cultural delights. Consequently she may easily complete her four or five years without ever properly admiring the carved stone lattice of the town hall of Louvain or actually learning what *ommengang* (a Flemish carnival of medieval origin) is. By the end of her term, her address book is filled with Scandinavian, Baltic, Mediterranean Arab, American and Southeast Asian names, and when she is asked what Belgium was like, she has to rack her brain in embarrassment.

This is due to no lack of interest but to life and the job. The some twenty-five thousand officials and thousands of diplomats in the permanent missions of the member states, the members of the European Parliament and its staff, the lobbyists, the consultants, the specialist institutions, settled around the institutions both literally and figuratively speaking, and of course the journalists, three thousand or so at any time, constitute a continuously expanding universe in the heart of the continent. It is both inward-turning, for what else could be the most frequent topic of professional and social life than the EU itself, whose much-mocked jargon and all its acronyms, are understood by few people outside "Brussels", whereas here it is used with a sense of intimateness, as the language of the initiated. This mini-universe, however, is also outward-looking, since its fundamental feature is a mixing and permanent exchange of ideas between multitudes of European citizens, the like of which is to be seen nowhere else. In Brussels, a British Eurocrat sits in conference together with Spaniards and Finns, a Greek journalist has lunch with an Estonian member of the European Parliament, the Hungarian diplomat has a working dinner with his Cypriot colleague, and a French interpreter is courting a Bulgarian radio journalist.

In Brussels, the only permanent thing is change. The first question asked of a newcomer at a social gathering as soon as his or her country of origin has been clarified is "when did you come?" followed immediately by "how long are you going to stay?" And in Brussels something is always happening. The fixed point in the life of the "horde of journalists" is the daily midday news conference. The media is being bombed by the political statements of the party factions and committees of the European Parliament. But the real juicy bits for journalists are of course the periodical skirmishes between ministers of the member states in the Council, or those between heads of government during the quarterly summit meetings. Those with any energy left may also visit any of the conferences, seminars, workshops and press breakfasts staged by the innumerable international unions, re-

search institutions and civil organisations all centred in Brussels and dealing with problems of a European significance. In Brussels, the shoots of a common European media, much desired by many believers in integration, have already taken root. Accredited journalists from twenty-five nations report home on basically the same events, and on the basis of information coming from the same sources, even if somewhat differently, tailored for German, Portuguese, Slovenian or Hungarian audiences. The "exchange of news" is also continuous; the correspondents mutually question each other about the reception of a proposal or a community decision in each other's country. Such information is also incorporated in the reports, broadening their readers' horizons, connecting the public opinions of various nations with one another. This communication perceptibly intensified with the approaching of the enlargement. The correspondents of the new member states no longer merely receive but have also become sources of information on the informal news exchanges of Brussels, magnifying and adding shading to the image of East Europe held by the West European media. The correspondents in Brussels also share, to a greater or lesser extent, their frustration with editors at home, because in most countries "Brussels" is far away, and Europe is all too easily pushed into the background by domestic issues.

Still, the metaphorical distance between Budapest and Brussels is getting shorter by the day with the approach of May 1st. Ultimately—even though long years of preparation for accession were expressly intended to help the new member states move into the Union more smoothly—on the day of accession Hungarians and the Hungarian media will awaken to something new: a number of things that were "foreign politics" before will suddenly turn into "domestic politics". According to some estimates, half of the time spent in session by the parliaments of EU member states today is being taken up by simply transplanting Community rules into the national legal system. Hungary up to now received Union laws and the strategic decision on which they were based "ready-made", as an external observer of the debates the member states were conducting, as rules which they simply had to adopt; from May 1 on, however, the greatest change will be that Hungary will have its say in the common decisions and play a part in the common thinking. All this will demand a high degree of awareness and responsibility from the political actors, a social discussion of issues relegated into the background earlier, and a more open mind.

Representatives of the Hungarian government have been sitting in on the sessions of the Council of Ministers, the main decision-making body of the Union, since signing the accession agreement on April 16, 2003. However, there is a world of difference between making a speech without consequences and speaking and voting in a responsible European manner, and being held accountable at home for that vote. (Ministers of the new member states will have the right to vote only after May 1.) Similarly, delegates of the parliaments of the new mem-

ber states, including Hungary, have been present in the European Parliament in an observer status for nearly a year now, but their rights are limited; they are not entitled to speak at the plenary sessions and may not submit proposals on their own, only if a fellow representative from a "full-right" member state acts as a go-between. This will also change radically after May 1, and even more after the European parliamentary elections in June, when the 24 directly elected Hungarian Euro MPs will be able to speak and vote in Strasbourg in full equality, and before the entire public of the continent and their own constituents.

The right and requirement of having a voice in the European decisions will demand a greater intellectual effort from the new member states than they made so far. "Tell us what to do, and we'll do it!" one of the Commission's officials quoted the request, betraying complete helplessness, of an official from a candidate member state during the negotiations over accession. A diplomat from another candidate member country laments the amount of effort it takes for him to find out his government's position, if any, on certain issues. It will probably not take long for the Hungarian MEP leaving for Strasbourg with the "protection of the interests of the Hungarian nation" in mind, to find out that the bodies of the Union are not battlefields where national interests are asserted as opposed to the interests of other nations; quite to the contrary, they are forums for the identification and development of common interests. As a consequence, a national "team spirit" is rare in the European Parliament. Voting lines run between parties professing different ideologies, cutting across the team of delegates from the same county.

The entry of "the ten" is naturally anticipated with a great amount of expectation and guessing in Brussels. The main subject of interest is first and foremost the person and character of the ten new candidate Commissioners: what their professionalism and language skills will be like, will they be cooperative and constructive members of the legislative and executive body, will they be able to resist, perhaps better than some current Commissioners, political pressure coming from home, once they have taken the oath to serve European interests only in their new capacity. Most, of course, will not be strangers emerging and coming to Brussels from total obscurity. As holders of some kind of government position, they have already had ample opportunity to make the acquaintance, "from the other side of the counter", with the present Eurocrats now accepting them as colleagues. The new role, however, will require new qualities as well.

The enlargement will bring about a gradual influx of officials from the new member states. At the moment, some five hundred people from "the ten" are working under temporary contracts in the European Commission, the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament, which employ some twenty-five thousand Eurocrats altogether. The majority of the new employees are university graduates or young officials with a few years of experience in public administration, all multi-lingual. This year the European Commission intends to recruit another 800 new employees from a "labour stock" sifted through a severe compet-

itive testing process, and the number of future employees from the new member states will reach four thousand by the end of the decade.

Those plans can be accomplished of course only if "the European government" is at long last able to return to its huge, renovated headquarters. The Commission had to vacate its almost symbolic, star-shaped centre, the Berlaymont Palace in 1991, after the walls turned out to contain carcinogenic asbestos. Since then, the officials of the Commission, dispersed in a number of offices rented temporarily, are patiently waiting for the Belgian government to comply with its obligation, and make the building habitable again by the accepted deadline: the end of April, 2004. For the moment the fulfilment of that promise is very much in doubt. Failing to fulfil it, the Belgian government will have to pay over-run costs of € 220 000 per day out of the pockets of the Belgian taxpayers. Time is also running out for the Belgian authorities as regards the new "European School", which has to be built because of the enlargement. Currently there are three such schools in Brussels, funded from the budget of the Union, in which the children of the employees of the European institutions are taught partly in their native language but mainly in French, English and German. According to estimates, in the next five years, room will have to be made for some three thousand Polish, Czech, Hungarian and other East European children, but it looks as if the fourth school will not be completed before 2008, so the "Eurokids", will be among the first to experience directly all the favourable and less than favourable consequences of the unification of Europe.

Another subject of universal speculation is which of the existing characteristics of the EU—good and bad "traditions"—will be strengthened by the newcomers. The practice of unprincipled bargaining, for example, can be learned fast. "I did not agree with a word of what you said but I supported you because your support may come in handy some day....," a broadly grinning Austrian diplomat explained his "position" during a discussion with an astonished Hungarian colleague. Many are wary that some of the new member states, despite having entered the EU era, will not be able to break away from their "victim" mentality, their constant referring to the historical debts owed to them by the Great Powers, constantly making demands on that basis in an unproductive way. It may well be that, as a consequence of the enlargement, Eurosceptical political movements may gain new strength in some EU countries. Indications of this can already be felt as the European parliamentary election campaign is gathering momentum; economic difficulties are blamed by many on the Union not only in the West but also in the East. A certain loss of illusions may, however, be regarded as healthy in both halves of Europe, now on the threshold of unification. "The European Union is not like a parental home where we found ourselves by the will of nature as children," one of the experienced 'gurus' of integration, who has lived in Brussels for the past ten years, explained recently. "The EU is rather like a long-term relationship into which one enters as a grown-up with a mature mind: it must provide proof day after day to justify its existence". ❧

Schools and Gypsies: Who Fails Who?

The Hungarian Gypsy community is differentiated in many respects—in language, culture and living conditions. It divides into three main language groups and its size is estimated at 500,000–600,000. Gypsies live all over the country, although the distribution is not even. There are far more in the north and east and in the extreme south-west. These are the regions where per capita GDP is lowest and unemployment highest. They tend to live in smaller villages in run-down industrial areas and traditional agricultural districts, rather than in better-off, more developed industrial areas with better infrastructures or in the developing towns or places frequented by tourists. Traditionally migratory, rural Gypsies after 1945 took advantage of the opportunities offered by the artificially stimulated labour shortage that went with an economy of shortages. This implied commuting long distances, changing their lifestyle and linguistic assimilation. Albeit the costs were considerable, particularly in health terms, this resulted in a certain social improvement and financial security. This process stalled after 1990, as market forces asserted themselves and Gypsy unemployment skyrocketed mainly for the lack of the skills now needed.

Gypsy advancement has been buried by the change of system, along with many of the achievements and illusions of the state-socialist period. Only now, more than a decade later, is a narrow stratum emerging of those who have responded successfully to the challenges of a market economy. Some have started small businesses, others have obtained clerical or professional jobs or entered

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public life. However, most are back where they were decades ago, still unskilled, still desperately poor, and quite unable to help themselves.

Gypsies have the highest proportion of young people, the highest fertility rate and the lowest life expectancy in Hungary. Their proportion of the nation's children is twice that of their population. Gypsy children usually complete the eight grades of compulsory education, so that illiteracy is largely confined to the elderly. (This is not the case in many other countries.) But the gap is huge. Seventy per cent of the non-Gypsy young obtain a secondary school-leaving certificate and 30 per cent a diploma or degree. The proportions for Gypsies are 5 per cent and 1 per cent respectively. Gypsies encounter discrimination in all areas of life. Hungary's schools still maintain 700 segregated classes for Gypsies.

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Eszter Rádai: *Are you hoping that Hungarian accession to the EU will begin a new era for the country's half-million Gypsies? Can accession really change the disadvantages and prejudices they suffer, or will it just affect the tiny number involved in Gypsy politics?*

Tibor Derdák: I'm not just hoping. The changes for which we shall have the Union to thank were not postponed to the date of accession. We're already profiting from them and the process has been underway for some time.

The EU has long been a benchmark to which we can refer. People wanting to attain something in this field have long argued that "this is what the EU expects." Everyone believed us, although we knew that it did not matter that much. Slovakia, for instance, has not shown any improvement in the way it manages the problems of the Gypsies, but Slovakia has been accepted as a Union member in the same round as Hungary. The Gypsies in Slovakia are outcasts, their state is worse than it is here. Although their proportion of the population is even higher, I know of no serious initiative. In Hungary, on the other hand, not only leaders of the Roma community but also other political forces and politicians sympathetic towards the Gypsies and feeling a responsibility for them, have been able to apply pressure by saying, 'Wait a minute, Europe won't let you leave things in that state.'

Are you saying you've been bluffing in a good cause?

Certainly, we've been bluffing, which means that now, inside the Union, where there are real prospects at last, we aren't facing a completely new situation. We just have to continue what we've been experimenting with and practising for some time. For instance, we succeeded in using EU entry to stop the classifying of a mounting proportion of Gypsy children (20 per cent in recent years) as disadvantaged, sending them to special schools. This school year many of the schools have not started special classes—it's not Euro-compatible to do so.

Referring to models in EU countries was how we managed to introduce a system of after-school tuition involving NGOs to make a secondary or university education a realistic goal for the Gypsy young. For this, we introduced a French system known as *accompagnement à la scolarité.* There have been some splendid individual initiatives in the city of Pécs, in a run-down mining area, where there is an excellent Gypsy play-school operating alongside one of the day nurseries. Also an art club for handicapped children run by an art teacher at a special school. Thus, they published an edition of Petőfi's epic poem John the Valiant in Beashi, a Gypsy language, English and Hungarian, with excellent illustrations. Generally speaking, a single well-trained and committed teacher can work miracles. As well as that, there's some real solidarity been engendered: within the Gypsy community among people in different situations, and in a section of the majority society that feels and accepts some responsibility—and this works in both directions. This too is based on European patterns.

When you were a young man at university in the mid-1980s, what led you towards the Gypsy community? How did you come into contact with them? As a teacher or as a sociologist?

As both. To start with, I was majoring in Hungarian and French, but I switched to sociology because I recognised that they were dealing with things in the department that were difficult to approach otherwise.

Poverty, for example. It was something I hadn't encountered before in a comfortable, so-called "Communist family", but I knew it existed. My father and grandfather were 'worker-cadres', who rose to high positions with low qualifications. Poverty for us seemed to be something you could overcome. I was born in a district where there weren't any really poor people. The teachers at the sociology department took us students in groups to poor areas, to show us what it was like. To me it seemed very odd, but the existence of poverty was denied in 'socialist' Hungary. One of the regime's most important declared aims was to better the lot of the poor and eliminate poverty. So it was not done, indeed forbidden to talk about existing poverty and the poor. And my interest, of course, was aroused by the Gypsies, because there was obviously something wrong about their condition. I was also interested at that time in the semi-legal or illegal world of the free churches and sects. I wrote my dissertation on the work of a Protestant movement, the Calvinist Mission for Saving Drunkards. I was beginning to deal with things you couldn't officially hear about at the time, whose existence was being ignored or even denied.

Your student research work took you among your subjects, sharing their lives.

Yes, but when you live among people, sympathy is replaced by participation. You feel sympathy for people who are not like you.

When you graduated, you took a job as a social worker in Kőbánya, one of Budapest's working-class districts, but they soon got rid of you. Why?

The official view at that time was that social problems were diseases and people had to be cured of them, and so the head of our institution was a district nurse. That led to all kinds of conflicts, because the young sociologists working there thought that social problems could not and should not be treated with medicine. So they soon bid us goodbye. We didn't want to hold surgeries, like white-coated doctors, telling other people what to do with their lives. Instead we were always out in the field, trying to resolve the problems where they appeared. Later I was thrown out of the Institute of Alcohol Studies for similar reasons. I was showing too much interest in Alcoholics Anonymous, which was successful in the West, but unauthorised in Hungary at that time, although alcoholism was one of the country's gravest social problems both in scale and consequences. This was when Gorbachev was pursuing his campaign against alcoholism in the Soviet Union. Not with much success, but alcohol was one area where social problems were at least being addressed in the Communist countries. My bosses may have been right to fear that real methods of treatment would upset the established order. Alcoholics are not revolutionaries, but drinking is a kind of revolt against hopelessness. The way to overcome it is to restore the individual's social relations, to restore civil society. That was strongest taboo under the regime, so my professional efforts were 'banned'...

But you didn't lose your enthusiasm.

No, I was more amazed than anything. I hadn't heard of anything like that before. I'd been taught at home that this world of ours was working well and to "speak your mind boldly and things will advance."

So off you went among the Gypsies to find out what life was really about?

I didn't go among them intending to learn. In fact I thought I already had a good idea what life was like. I was thinking how I'd show these sociologists in Budapest it was possible to go among the people.

Like the Narodniki?

I've always been put off by them. My model were the Anglo-Saxon social-anthropologists, such as Bronislaw Malinowski. They were paid by colonial powers to find out how all the many different peoples who found themselves in the British Empire lived. At the time, I imagined that my own research interests were leading me to the Gypsies, but I know now I was trying to discover what kind of life I really wanted.

The first stage was Southern Hungary, the Magyarmecske Primary School.

Yes, then I moved to Besence. The village between the two is Gilvánfa, a Gypsy village—even the mayor is a Gypsy. That's where I spent most of my time later on. Then I moved as the families moved, I lived in Pécs for a while, then in Hidas, in the Gypsy colony, and now in Mánfa. Apart from that, I've spent various lengths of time in several other villages in Baranya County.

At first I taught in a small general school in Magyarmecske, where I had to do everything, if one of the teachers fell ill, I had to fill in for two or three extra subjects. When the PE teacher was called up for his national service, I became the PE teacher. I also taught math, which I really don't understand. My pupils were extremely poor, most of them Gypsies. This, incidentally, is the district of Hungary with the highest unemployment—across the River Dráva from Croatia.

You wanted to get as far as possible from Budapest?

No, I wanted to teach Gypsy children and build on the knowledge of the language of Gypsies I'd gained at university. I'd teach them French and they'd teach me Gypsy.

A straight swop?

A fair deal, yes. I give and I get something in return. Although the idea of exchanging things of value is largely unknown there. They live in a very depressed world with nothing to exchange, because they own nothing. There's a kind of property community among them. It's not polite, for instance, to say thank you for anything—that was very odd for me—because it would mean you were keeping track of what was being given and it would need reciprocating. Reciprocation would break up the property community.

Do you live in this property community? Do you identify with the community that much?

I do actually. More and more. For instance, I bought a house jointly with a family that had lived in a Gypsy colony up to then, but you couldn't build there, while the money I had wasn't enough to buy a place.

I've been to that house. You have a room of your own and your things in it, but the door's not locked, everyone can come and go as they please.

Well, I'm a poor teacher, and this is a poor family from the Gypsy colony, about twenty of them. But the room where my bed is, where I keep my computer, where I charge my telephone and have my books is just mine. Well, not entirely, because the children use the computer as well. Their grandmother can't read or write, but they send e-mails to their mums in Copenhagen... They are very receptive to the world that is opening before them. They find that Europe offers more opportunities than the Gypsy colony in the village. So you might say it is a

fortunate encounter. I have learnt that the socialisation these children bring from home allows them to hold their own in a globalising world. A large number of people growing up together within a few square metres means more experience of communication. It gives an ability and knowledge we need above all to hold our own in Europe. And just imagine, it is provided by the culture of Gypsy homes, in families living in the deepest destitution. Seen from Europe, the Gypsy question doesn't look as recalcitrant as it does from the Hungarian Parliament. Growing up in a crowd of people is a cultural asset that Europe values.

Not many in Hungary will agree with you. Most teachers, for instance, take a different view.

Yes, a great many teachers talk disparagingly of Gypsy families—"what we've built up at school by the evening collapses again at home by the morning." Then they talk of the family holding children back and an environment short of stimulus that Gypsy families are supposed to surround their children with. The reverse is true. These families provide real emotional support and there is an incredibly eventful and lively life in them. Anyone who has worked with Gypsy children knows it's a treat to be among them, they make for such lively company. There certainly are a number of things they bring from home that the school finds hard to cope with, but that's not the home's fault, it's the school's failure, or more precisely that of the education system.

You see, Gypsies grow up in large communities, not the bourgeois nuclear families typical of the towns. And naturally there's no such thing as the children's room. When we take them to camp and there's a separate bed for everyone, they are unhappy and start moving in with each other, saying they would 'die' if they had to spend a night all alone in a separate bed. There is no cradle. They don't cage babes in little pens. They keep them on their laps all the time. Not the same lap, of course. The mother wouldn't be able to stand that all day, but they'll be in the grandmother's lap, the brother-in-law's, the godfather's or the cousin's lap. Meanwhile the baby is learning that it is different being in one lap from being in another, and how to make sure it's grandmother's lap, which is the best place, and they have usually found out how to achieve that by the time they're a year old. They learn to talk the same way: they are exposed to constant banter, and when they start to walk, they find that one person they totter to has this kind of humour and another that, and they have to be ready for the unexpected from everyone. You can't expect one answer to a single question. There'll be a thousand, depending on the mood, the position in the family or the character of the person you ask. But this extremely varied culture is no advantage in school. Thus Gypsy children have learnt that if they want to say something, they have to compete for the right to be heard amongst the crowd of brothers and sisters and cousins. This behaviour goes against the style of the Prussian-type school system, with a teacher up front explaining things on the

board and the children only allowed to speak if they are spoken to; it counts as naughtiness, indiscipline or 'not being ready for school.' So another cultural positive from home turns out to be a negative, a shortcoming, a minus point. This, I cannot insist too much, is the fault of Prussian-style teaching, not the child's or the family's.

You're an adviser to the ministry commissioner for the education of disadvantaged and Gypsy children. What should teachers do?

It has been largely realised in many parts of the world that you have to let children do things, you have to make them 'work', not force them to sit still in a hard school desk, but let them move as they want. Meanwhile you encourage them to cooperate with each other, because that is the best way of evening out the differences in standards and culture within the group. We should be forgetting 'frontal classwork', which knows only one form of cooperation, whispering the answer, and that is forbidden. Let the children sit down at a table and be given joint tasks, tasks that can only be done by cooperating—that's the only way to succeed together and individually. This method is used in Hungary in a few schools—and everywhere with good results, so the situation is not hopeless. If the children are taught like that, there will be no problem in the classroom about one child from a doctor's family and others not being able to read and write properly yet. At the Education Ministry we advise schools to educate children from different backgrounds together. The new watchword in education policy is integration.

Laws and regulations are being shaped to make it worthwhile for schools to teach Gypsy children along with the others, because that will earn them more funding and more respect, and institutions not prepared to do so will find themselves at a grave disadvantage. I am spending most of my time on this at present.

You were a member of the first freely elected Parliament in 1990–94. What took you into politics?

The chance to try my hand with my friends at founding institutions. For example, something we founded at that time was the Gandhi Gimnázium, the one and only academic secondary school in the region for the Gypsy community, and it has since become famous. What prompted us was the conclusion that if Gypsy children were not attempting the secondary school-leaving certificate, that is they were excluded from secondary education, we had to found a Gypsy minority school. It is based on an alternative approach to teaching, which it was possible to 'sell' in the early 1990s as a service for an ethnic minority. It is a typically Eastern European concept that people in Western Europe cannot understand. The school has allowed us to prove to teachers in neighbouring schools in Pécs that Gypsy children can get their certificate as well and can go on to complete

university. Of course it is hard to imagine a secondary school-leaving certificate and a degree for children who could not read a newspaper at the age of 12–13, cannot understand a map, and cannot find a word in a dictionary. They haven't a desk at home and they haven't a relative who attended secondary school. Your average teacher will see these as dim children "without good capabilities", as the euphemism goes in Hungary. Since then, the school has achieved outstanding results in some fields with these pupils. It has become the city's best gymnasium in some respects. The Gandhi children are best when it comes to communication, for instance in student drama or oral skills in foreign languages. Hardly surprising in the light of what I said about the upbringing in poor families. So it's not true that 95 per cent of the Gypsy community cannot continue their education. It is the schools that cannot do their job.

What prompted the idea of the Collegium Martineum at Mánfa founded in the mid-1990s?

That is another track, another chance for Gypsies. We decided to start a students' hostel rather than another secondary school so that the pupils themselves could choose their next school. The funds were collected for Eastern Europeans by German Catholics. They saw it as important to give young Gypsies living like outcasts in Eastern Europe a real chance of continuing their studies. That also calls for some form of special teaching programme and the Germans liked ours. The choice is wide in Pécs. There is a bilingual secondary school with Italian as the other language of instruction, another specialising in English, and a third for those who specialise in art or mathematics. The hostel helps pupils to succeed in these schools. It would be hard or impossible for them otherwise, if they had to rely on their home background, a *gimnázium* is based on the values, experiences, vocabulary and tastes of the middle class. Our children lacked all that for a start. They do not listen to serious music or for that matter to rock, only to disco or folk music as played on a synthesizer. They cannot swim or skate. They have never been abroad and they do not possess passports. On the other hand, they can chop wood, they know what to bring home from the woods, and they know all the types of mushrooms, but none of that is much use at a *gimnázium.*

In other words, you provide an environment in the hostel that simulates the life of a middle-class family and its ideas, habits and general knowledge?

You could say that. The requisites of a middle-class culture are available in Mánfa, but it's also important they should feel all of one piece not having to break the ties that bind them to their childhood and family. There's no need for them to change their characters or deny their earlier selves. They can always switch back to their own background, whatever it may be. Some of our pupils come from slightly more prosperous homes and some from poorer ones, where

there isn't even a table. Hungarian society needs them. Let there be a section of the middle class that happens to be Gypsy as well. But that means forgetting a concept still regrettably current in education. That's the idea that a family holding a child back has to be removed from his life, that the child has to be lifted out and taken off as far as possible; that it's better if the family abandons him altogether. That still happens with a great many children. All I want to say is that the Gypsy family is sacred, just as sacred as any other family. So when you establish a hostel, you have to think all the time how to make what goes on here attractive to the families.

Now there's a second students' hostel at Ózd. How does it differ from the first?

In just that. Again it was a Western European initiative; the EU spent 170 million forints on it. Gypsies make up a quarter of the population of Ózd, a northern town that suffered worst after the change of system, when its 'socialist' heavy industry collapsed. So the decision-makers pricked the map and set the task: a talent-developing college for Gypsies. But there was no application process and no team of teachers able to cope with the challenge came together. There wasn't a democratic organization on the Gypsy side to act as a partner, either. Very poor use will be made of an endowment under undemocratic conditions like that, and the bigger the endowment the poorer it will be.

Is that when you became involved?

Once I had expressed my opinion, I was asked to act by the organization that had provided the money, Phare, which is the Western European programme concerned. The EU delegation was astounded by the practice of plucking children out of their family background. But ever since the Empress Maria Theresa issued a decree on the subject in the eighteenth century, it has been considered self-evident that a Gypsy family is no partner in this, it pulls the child back, so that the county administration and the heads of the college could not understand what the donors' problem was. Then we formed a society of young Gypsies who had managed to continue their education, so that they could share their experiences with those at the college. This kind of 'youth-leader' work develops commitment and solidarity among and provides a model for the younger ones, so it works both ways. Social psychology speaks of a self-help group. I came across the concept at the beginning of my career, in the form of Alcoholics Anonymous, and my recommending its adoption cost me my job, as I said earlier. I later lost my job twice for the same reason when trying to introduce the method with some colleagues in teaching. The Hungarian teaching profession finds it very difficult to work with such an organization, but with the wind of Europe behind us, we managed to incorporate the model into the 2003 Act on Public Education.

Ózd and the rest of the impoverished northern industrial belt of high unemployment proved a hard nut to crack. There was long, hard resistance in the

gimnáziums, the college and the county to treating the Gypsies as equal partners. As one would expect, the results were poor. After all, the secondary-school-leaving examination was meant for citizens, not serfs. Drop-out rates in Ózd are unimaginable. Meanwhile the failure rate provides arguments for people out to show that Gypsy children are not meant for schools. That's one reason why the EU would do better not to waste money on ill-founded undertakings. It should always insist on professional expertise and a democratic mode of organization on the part of those spending the money.

What sort of results did Mánfa achieve?

There were no drop-outs there initially, while the German money lasted, but there was a sharp drop in standards when it began to run out. (The government took the view that it had no responsibility for the matter and so did the Hungarian Catholic Church, which is the owner of the college in a manner of speaking.) But the tried and experienced teaching staff knew roughly what to do and had a thousand solutions up its sleeve. At Ózd, on the other hand, there's no ready solution, mainly because the eastern half of the country lacks a sufficient number of teachers who believe that a large number of Gypsies can pass the secondary school-leaving exams. They can't imagine how young people living in absolute poverty, with weak reading and writing skills, can be brought to university standards. Teaching work needs truly committed people who believe in their mission, but there aren't any to be found in Ózd. Those available tend to be people who get on with their work and will perhaps realise that it is worth it a few years later. Teachers with faith had to be imported from Pécs and Budapest. Meanwhile the institutional background is emerging. A county self-help network has been set up by educated young Gypsies, mainly from Szendrőlád. It has been named after Bhim Rao Ambedkar, who played a prominent part in suppressing the Indian caste system.

When do you think Gypsy children will approach the Hungarian average levels of educational attainment?

At long last this process is on the way all over the country. Not just because of government intervention, but because of the diminishing number of children. There's talk of closing schools, and after years of a teacher shortage, teachers are now afraid their jobs may go. So they and the secondary schools feel a great need to attract Gypsy children. The trouble is that Hungarian secondary schools are incapable of holding onto them. But if we can make modern teaching methods available and produce structures to assist them, success will certainly follow. The children will play their part, you can be sure of that. ❧

Golden Retrievers

Few people even in Hungary knew of Kürt Computer when Business Week *wrote in 1995 that they had put Hungarian high tech on the map. By then, it was the fourth largest data-recovery firm in the world, with a fund of experience in retrieving data from soaked or fragmented hard drives, for governments, radio stations, banks, carmakers and Interpol, and also in information security technology. The business started in a laundry in 1989, during the turbulent months of the change of system, by the brothers János and Sándor Kürti, with assets of just 1 million forints. From repairing hard drives (in a country desperately short of them), the company went on to be one of the world's first to develop data-recovery technology in 1993, then remote data recovery in 1999 and information security tools in 2000. By then, Hungary's flagship data-processing outfit had multiplied its turnover several hundred times over. As IT went into recession, some foreign rivals collapsed, but not Kürt Computer, which is now preparing to set up its second foreign subsidiary. It has kept its enthusiasm, pioneering spirit and relaxed culture of innovation. CEO Sándor Kürti (56), a former chemical engineer (with a doctorate in mathematics) is among the country's most respected executives, chosen Informatics Manager of the Year in 1997 and 1998.*

Eszter Rádai: *Will the EU gain when Hungary and your firm join in May? Or are you in already?*

Sándor Kürti: The question is whether Hungarians will gain, and I think the answer is probably yes. Our firm has been selling within the EU for some time, but accession will probably make things a lot easier. When it comes to a confidential

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Eszter Rádai
is on the staff of the weekly Élet és Irodalom. *She has published several volumes of interviews.*
Sándor Kürti
has been CEO of Kürt Computer European Data Recovery Service since 1998.

product like ours, if you have to choose between a British or a Bangladeshi supplier then you'll probably choose the British one. It has definitely been a drawback, not being in the EU. It is very hard indeed to sell to the world from here.

I would have thought a data recovery firm named by Business Week *in 1995 as one of the world's top four, would be over that by now.*

We have had plenty of good reviews, and it pleased my brother and me no end when one of the world's principal business journals had us on its cover, but these things are quickly forgotten. A good introduction, but not enough for salvation. Hungary is not that well known for good products. The EU is a developed region, and when we're in it, we won't have to be struggling all the time to have our products recognised as equal.

Who are the other big three?

The top place is held by a US firm, Ontrack, dealing exclusively with data recovery. They are owned by the FBI. There is an excellently run Norwegian firm, Ibas, that is like us in having two strings to its bow, the other being data protection. Then there is an Anglo-French business, Vogon. Apart from us, these three firms possess 'omnivorous' technology: whatever has caused the data loss—virus, fire, water or steam roller, these four independently developed technologies can achieve more or less the same thing.

In simple terms you are capable of recovering the contents of data carriers that have been burnt, soaked, squashed, trampled on or smashed to smithereens.

The Guardian of London is no great enthusiast for the post-Communist world, but it recognised our achievement, when the High Court in London called on us for assistance in a serious criminal trial. It was a fraud involving several million pounds sterling, in which data stores serving as evidence had been deliberately destroyed. We managed to retrieve clear evidence of fraud from the broken discs.

How can a firm as small as Kürt Computer gain a competitive advantage?

One factor is that Hungary has always been in possession of technological expertise. Data stores of this kind used to be produced by Hungarian Optical Works (MOM) before 1989. MOM was the flagship of Hungary's industry and the firm with the biggest exports. Those data stores were however of poor quality, and anyone who worked with them would have come up against defective data stores day after day. Well, the technicians from MOM are working at EDRS-Kürt these days. Restoring a fragmented data store is not much trouble to us, since we often had to do it in those days. As the old joke goes, it showed how ingenious socialist society was at overcoming the obstacles it had placed in its own path.

You spent 15 years at the oil refinery in Százhalombatta as a chemical engineer. Now you are running a company that is called on by the London High Court or helps to catch security forgers for Interpol. Were you at all interested in informatics?

Yes, I was, although computer technology in those days was known as automation. After I graduated, I dealt with the automating of processes in the chemical industry, so I was in close proximity to computers. The university had a computer, as big as a room, and I used it quite often, but as for half our present business, the security side, I had never even heard of it. On the other hand, my brother János, with whom I founded the firm in 1989, was involved with the new Hungarian computer manufacturing industry when it started in the 1970s. He had a chance to study magnetic data storage technology in several places and how data stores were being operated, because the idea of making them in Hungary was in the air at the time. A gigantic state project was launched with huge amounts of money, but those firms all failed around the time of the change of system. Then Mikroelektronika, the firm making chips, burnt down, so the plan failed. But the expertise that a few people had acquired was still there and didn't go to waste, because we founded Kürt, and I joined the team as an outsider in 1989, although I had been working in the field under my brother János Kürti since 1985.

Back in those days, you were running a dry cleaner's alongside the IT business. That sounds absurd.

It was just that we didn't have any money or any premises and we had to live. We rented a shop from the state-owned laundry service Patyolat, which was on the way to bankruptcy, but in 1989 you could only do that if you kept up the laundry end. That was one of the things we did to pay the rent, and one of us would take in the clothes along with the broken hard drives. When Patyolat went completely broke, we bought the premises from the receiver. But that's all ancient history now that we are working with the most up-to-date technology in the world.

So how did the Kürti brothers progress from running a laundry and repairing clunky hard drives to peak data-restoration and data-security technology for customers large and small in the United States, Japan, Britain, South Africa and Switzerland?

You could not just walk into a shop in socialist Hungary and buy a high-tech product. This was a poor country, and the Cold War Cocom bans did not help. Few people remember that it was years after the change of system before all the Cocom bans on technology sales were lifted from the socialist or post-Communist countries. So anyone who knew anything about these machines had business opportunities to exploit, repairing the old, overused, broken data stores. We found

that niche in the market and repaired them. That wasn't our dream, of course, but we were glad to have something to keep the wolf from the door. Later, thank goodness, that little market disappeared—we thought it was a tragedy at the time. The forint became convertible in the 1990s and the bans gradually disappeared, along with the penurious conditions. It then became possible to get everything, and from then on, nobody bothered with repairing computers any more. But fortunately, it also turned out at the time that the data stored on the old machines had far, far more value than the machines themselves. Yet if the magnetic disc, hard disc, floppy, magnetic tape or up-to-date vehicle—CD, DVD, flash memory—breaks down, the data becomes practically inaccessible unless there's someone who can retrieve it. There was hardly anyone in the world apart from us who had learnt how—we had a two or three years' start. We still try to maintain that lead and our efforts in the past fifteen years have been directed mainly at staying on top of the peak-technology products as well, because that's how we make our living.

So it wasn't so much big ideas and innovation that got you where you are, but responding to various constraints, struggling to make a living and striving to stay in the business. And if you took a risk, it was not so much in the hope of big winnings, but because you had no other option.

Anyone who wants to remain in any business and puts his head on the line to create his life's work will necessarily end up in the top echelon. He has got more time than anyone else. He is dealing with the matter continually, so he will be better than the rest, who don't deal with it so much. All that happened to us was that we became better than a hundred thousand or a million others who started out in the same business, and we still are. Anyone starting up now is going to have a fifteen-year handicap.

Is your success then due to factors that others use to explain their failures by? Tight money, primitive equipment, poor quality, a lack of imagination or of a readiness to take risks. All you did was adapt to changing circumstances and get on with your work. You did not want to succeed so much as to avoid failure and this was the result. Isn't this mock modesty?

I am just talking of one side—continuing to compete. Everyone knows how it's done. There's nothing new in saying that if you practise and train a lot more, you'll do better even with average talents than a genius who forgets to practise and train.

Still, there were great turning points and decisions, crucial periods and watersheds in our lives as well. January 1, 1989 produced a miracle in Hungary, when the new company act was gazetted, making it legal to set up a private firm. But strange as it may sound, not one of the team of 20–30 that my brother headed in the state-owned enterprise wanted to follow us. They could not believe what I

tried to make them understand: that the kind of world had come to an end in which it was enough to work two days a week in a state-owned enterprise and the stupid regulations did not make it worthwhile to work more than that.

I told them, we'd work ten hours a day five days a week and we would spend the rest of the time studying, but from then on, we will be more knowledgeable by the second and we won't have any rivals. Not that I knew how things would turn out either. But I was sure it would never again be the way it had been. When I broke up my brother's team, he didn't know what his younger brother was doing, but in the end he came too. We went across from the big state ship to a little private skiff of our own. First we assembled our team, taking experienced professionals from MOM and elsewhere. And it's been the same ever since: we get on with our work, do our job, know a little bit more every day, and get a little bit wiser. You can't start the hop, step and jump with the jump. Anyone who wants to get into this market will have to follow the whole course. There may be someone who does it a bit more cleverly and imaginatively than we have but we have invested far more time than anyone and our team is united. By now we have learnt so much, and we have got used to living, thinking and performing to a world standard, and we have received attestations and marks of appreciation from the whole world that can't be won, obtained or created in a day. Thanks we have received include letters from Rudolf Giuliani and George Pataki after 9/11, and they would never have been written if all these things had not been there backing us.

You took part in retrieving data from the twin towers in New York?

Yes, we offered our help in maintaining the damage resulting from the terrorist attack and our offer was accepted.

You scraped up pieces of computers from the wreckage of the towers, fragmented data stores, and read the data from them?

Precisely. Huge amounts were lost, of course, but even more was saved as they processed every grain of dust from there. They took the wreckage to an island, and then sorted and examined it all, because there were things of great value, even precious metals, and above all data.

But there is another side to our business, apart from minimizing the damage from problems, which is protection. I'd never have thought that we could go onto the world market in security, the multinationals have their own providers and there would not be much for us to brag about at home either. But thank God, we managed to win orders from the multis in Hungary. Then they asked us to enter international tenders as well, and we have now reached the point of providing the security for financial institutions based in the EU, such as Volksbank and Generali. We have colleagues in ten countries, like assault craft, checking and examining our clients' information security and performing hacker-like tasks, to

test the security of each system. But a great many tests can only be done on site. For instance, how the bank can defend itself if some kind of trouble or catastrophe occurs, while still running the institution and ensuring continuity of service. Our task in these cases is to seek the optimum, set limits, in other words, handle risk and set rules for managing them. So these banks with a European network of branches and the information systems in them have a functional backup strategy. They are protected by a Hungarian firm.

You already have a subsidiary in Germany and you've just decided to start one in Austria too. I hear there was some kind of constraint involved in this case as well.

Yes, we have been working with so-called partners, on a contractual basis. We lacked the time or the money to start founding firms abroad, and this system worked well in 16 countries. But after 2001, the Americans bought up all our partners, and so we 'lost' Italy, Switzerland, Poland, I won't list them all, it brings tears to my eyes. Another era in our lives came to an end. On January 1, 2003, we started our own subsidiary in Germany, and on the last day of the year we decided on the second, and we hope to continue founding our own subsidiaries at about that rate, out of our own resources. It has the advantage that no one can buy them up, because they're ours. But they are starting from scratch, so they are going to soak up huge amounts of money.

So all that has happened again—for the nth time in your history—is that a period is over and you have to adapt to a new situation. You have fled forward, making yourselves bigger and more successful still.

That is the essence of competition. I haven't mentioned the times when we lost out, but there were plenty of them. But the firm is a closed system in the sense that we are not working on credit and we have been able to cover our losses out of our own resources. This kind of business competition bears a logical resemblance to a sports event. It's all simple to start with, success (known in business as money) is everything, but then come the other requirements: we have to develop at vast expense to be state of the art. We have to see clearly where we stand and work out our strategy. For instance, what effort and resources we have to invest in seeing, or trying to see into the future. And we have to be very careful that the unsuccessful ventures don't predominate, or we've had it. There is no free choice. It's a chase in which every step is forced upon you, but it's an enjoyable chase and they are enjoyable steps to take. And these things give us some kind of confidence that we're moving in the right direction. But God save us from lack of confidence, because the firm is small in size, so small that it finds it hard to protect itself from the dangers of the world. Let me tell you a favourite little story of mine about two men who find themselves in some exotic place and hear the roaring of a lion. Whereupon one of them starts to do warming-up exercises. 'Have you gone mad?' says the other. 'You think you can run

faster than a lion?' 'I don't have to run faster than the lion,' says the first man, 'I have to run faster than you.' That philosophy may sound a bit crude, but it's what drives every minute of our activity. We're competing to make sure we aren't the one the lion gets.

You stress that you are just an 'ordinary' man, that you are never going to excel as an egghead?

That's my opinion. The big systems are never run by eggheads and geniuses, they are just used as window dressing, if at all. The systems that really work call for collective thinking.

The Japanese model.

Precisely. It is one of the firm's biggest assets, its operational system, and it is very close to the Japanese model. It is built up from the bottom. The ideas come from below, not the top. We have a seven-member board, in which everyone is equal and everyone has one vote, me as the owner and the other six, the key people, as well. And this collective brain operates the company very well, because those taking part in the decision-making know that their results and those of their team depend solely on the firm's performance. The firm has learnt how to operate in an evolutionary, lifelike way, how to distinguish important tasks from inessential ones. In that respect we operate in a copybook fashion, based on a Harvard model that we adapted for ourselves, but not adding much to it, in fact. So you'll find with us a kind of blend of modern management techniques.

How is this modus operandi of yours compatible with the general conditions in Hungary, which don't follow this logic at all?

That is our biggest problem, the greatest barrier we have to overcome. Not a shortage of funds, but the 'product-making culture' of Hungary. The forty years of socialism meant that the ability to produce high-quality products was damaged. The cooperation this requires is absent at every level, within companies, between companies, within industry, between industries and between countries too. Restoring that is one of the big tasks ahead for Hungary in the years to come.

That doesn't mean we just shrug and stand around. On the contrary. We try to raise ourselves by our own bootstraps. One way has been the work we have done before, study abroad, another employing German, Austrian and Canadian staff, for instance. Their culture allows them to solve certain problems quite simply, while we can't solve them standing on our heads. We want world-standard products in the long term, because that is what we want to live on, so we do everything we can. That is why we think the Japanese model is worth following. What Japan made up to 1960 was trash, but forty years later, they have reached a stage where 'Japanese' is synonymous with quality.

You have twice appeared on the list of the hundred wealthiest Hungarians. What obligations if any does wealth entail? I know your firm spends large amounts of money on education. Is that an obligation, or simply charity?

Let me say to start with that the wealth they ascribe to me is tied up in a company. More precisely, it is working, it cannot be mobilised, it is not accessible to me. Then the team appears, and they may not be as socially sensitive as Sándor Kürti. In other words, decisions about money are taken jointly. The next question is where to spend this money that has been accumulated by hard work. We have all chosen education for several years now, because we believe that it will make the world a better place. Right at the start in 1990, we put our entire annual profits into founding a school, a general *gimnázium* known as the Kürt (Horn). It's a lovely school and we're very proud of it. It has got an excellent teaching staff, and in some subjects it is among the top ten schools in the country. In 1997, we were able to let it go its own way, and since then, it's been self-supporting. We decided that from then on, we would put our money towards education for Gypsy children, since it would do more good there than in a school for the children of the intellectual elite. Up to now, we have been able to contribute to the schooling of 52 Gypsy children.

I hear you're an excellent dancer, appearing in competitions too.

The latter is not true. But it is true that I have gone in for dancing instead of skiing in the last five years.

You can do a proper tango, an English waltz, a samba or rock and roll? Do you do displays?

Yes, although my wife and I are only amateurs. But we do enjoy it a lot and it does relax you. There are twenty-year-olds and younger coming to the club and they have accepted us, but there is no question of competing.

Is your wife your own age?

Yes, we have been together for 32 years and we have two sons, Tom who is 27 and Jerry who is 13. ❧

György Spiró

Commission for European Standards: Literary

(Draft 1)

The Hungarian Writers' Union has been informed by a source in Brussels that, after a series of confidential conferences, an agreement is imminent on obligatory literary standards for all EU member states. Nations due to join the EU in the 2004 round of accession were also present at the conferences in an observer status, without the right to vote (Slovak, Slovenian and Hungarian writers' organisations are said to have protested because they were not invited). Our correspondent has been able to obtain this draft copy of the chapter relating to the novel only.

Chapter CVIII. Prose Fiction (The Novel and Related Genres)

The formal criteria for narrative forms called *Prose* shall be understood henceforward as follows:

1) A volume of text not less than 116 pages and not more than 367 pages should be called a *Novel.* Any such text shorter than that is a *Short Story,* and as such, will not be supported by the European Union. Anything longer than such a text will cease to exist.
2) For Font Size, see also Paragraphs A and B of Chapter LXIII. Use of fonts over or under 12 points will result in the exclusion of the Novel from European Union support. Formatting more than 25 lines on a page and more than 60 characters in a line is prohibited.
3) For *insetting, paragraph spacing* and *margins* see Sub-Sections 234 and 235 of Chapter XVII. Any work failing to meet the requirements as laid down in Items 2 and 3 will not qualify as a Novel even if it should fulfil all other criteria.
4) The Novel must be arranged through an *Action,* namely into a beginning, middle and an end, and this arrangement is obligatory. This trinity is

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

defined as Action-Bow. In the absence of an *Action-Bow,* a Novel is not allowed to be published, distributed or written in the territory of any Member State of the European Union.

5) The Novel must contain *Dialogue* and *Author's Text.* A work lacking either of these will not qualify as a Novel and will not be supported.
6) The ideal ratio between Dialogue and Author's Text is 2 : 1. A maximum divergence of + or – 12 per cent is tolerable. Any divergence of a larger order will result in the disqualification of the work from European Union support.
7) The words used in a Novel must conform 99 per cent to the *Common Word Stock* of the language concerned. (For the definition of *Common Word,* see *Family Standards* of the European Union, Chapter on Mother, Sub-Section on Mother Tongue.) Every European Union Member State is permitted a maximum of 5000 Common Words. The determination of these falls within the competence of the Academy of Sciences of every Member State of the European Union. By 31 December 2004 these Common Words will be published by the Member States at their own cost in a minimum of half a million copies, and are to be made available also on CD-ROM. If the total of words other than those contained in the *Common Word Stock* thus determined does not exceed 1 per cent, the Novel is to be tolerated; an excess of 2 per cent will disqualify the Novel from support. A divergence of 1.5 per cent will be judged by an International Literary Committee of Arbitration whether it is tolerable or not; the decision of this Committee is subject to the approval of the Supreme Language Court (SLC) of the European Union (the SLC is to be composed as follows: two members from each of the States whose membership of the European Union dates from before the 2004 current enlargement and one member each from the states acquiring membership in 2004, with the exception of Poland which, in recognition of the importance of its agriculture, may have three members). Rulings of the SLC are final.
8) In content, a Novel is required to describe an Action begun, developed and completed in any of the languages of the Members States of the European Union, subject to the restrictions detailed above.
9) A Novel may be *Historical, Social* or *Extreme.*
10) A *Historical Novel* is one that deals with the past-time circumstances of individuals (as defined under common European Law), and its morals are Humanist in the sense that this term is determined by the relevant Standards of the European Union (see Paragraph 7, Chapter CVL). In an Historical Novel, a so-called "post-modern" or "interventional" procedure is inapplicable.
11) A *Social Novel* is one the Author of which describes contemporary society (societies). Positively presenting the work of the official bodies of the Union is preferred.

12) An *Extreme Novel* is one that falls outside the fields defined under Sub-Sections 10 and 11, but meets all other criteria. The support provided to an Extreme Novel must not be higher than 20 per cent of the support provided for Historical and Social Novels.

13) Content criteria of the Novel:

A) The Novel must have *Characters* partaking in its Action. A maximum of 33.33 per cent of the Characters may be Negative ones; the remaining 66.66 per cent must be Positive. The percentage must be calculated on the basis of each Character's occurrence per page and per length of mention. External or internal monologues of whatever length must be included in the percentage calculated for the given Character. The following are accepted as Negative Characters: Islamic Fundamentalists, Suicide Bombers, Extraterrestrials, Nazis, Fascists, Bolsheviks, Murderous Armed Robbers, Mass Murderers, Desecrators of Dead Bodies, Paedophiles and Anti-EU Demonstrators. Characters not included in the above list are Positive Characters.

B) *Main Characters* (or Protagonists) are Characters occurring in more than 50 per cent of the Action. Characters occurring with a lesser frequency are Secondary Characters. The ratio of Negative Characters among the Main Characters must not be higher than 25 per cent. The ratio of Negative Characters among the Secondary Characters may be higher that that; however, it must not exceed 40 per cent.

C) The Novel, whether Historical, Social or Extreme, is obliged to include the motif of (1) reconciliation (2) agreement (3) peace between the peoples of a minimum of two (2) European Union Member States. In the absence of any one of these motifs or of the combination of all three, the Novel must not be supported even if it meets all other criteria.

D) *Positive Main Characters* recommended exceptionally strongly:

a) A grandmother who underwent many terrible tribulations before the advent of the EU with her spiritual and moral integrity remaining intact, and who now educates her grandchildren single-handedly in such a manner that they become upright, law-abiding citizens of the European Union who meet the challenges of business life.

b) A scholar of Jewish origin who suffered Nazi and/or Bolshevik imprisonment, but was redeemed by the ideas of Free Market and Christianity, who adopts at least two African or Asian orphans and educates them to become law-abiding citizens of the EU successful in business.

c) A young man or woman originating from an ethnic minority of an EU Member State who succeeds in having his/her minority accepted by the dominant ethnic group of the given Member State,

thus contributing to the relief of latent ethnic conflicts. Especially recommended to the states joining the European Union after 2004 is the portrayal of young, upwardly-mobile, optimistic members of the Roma minority. In this type of novel the rappers and folk singers of Roma descent 2004 accession countries should have dazzling careers and should be subjects of admiration, especially on the part of the youth of the majority group in the countries concerned.

d) *Erotic* or *Sexual Novels* must have as their Positive Main Character prostitutes who as children were forced by violence, beatings and torture to provide sexual services, their passport was taken from them, but who succeed in escaping their tormentors and in helping the police imprison them, while liberating their fellow-sufferers from captivity. An additional 20 per cent support is due to the Sexual Novel whose Main Character is an Asian, African, Latin-American, Russian, Ukrainian, Kazakh or Turkmenian immigrant. It is mandatory that such Novels have detailed instructions on protection against AIDS. A failure to meet this condition means that the Novel must not be supported. In Novels with an Erotic or Sexual content, the description of any sexual position other than those described in the Kama Sutra is strictly prohibited.

E) An *EU-Supported Novel* may deal with non-EU topics without limitations as to its contents but only as long as it does not offend the sensibilities of any nation outside the European Union. As an example: the Novel must not provoke anti-Russian or anti-American sentiments. In such Novels, a total of 5.6 per cent of the non-EU Characters may be Negative Characters. Recommended Positive non-EU Characters are, for example, Presidents Kennedy and Lincoln, Leatherstocking, Louis Armstrong, President Gorbachev, General Suvorov, Tsar Peter the Great, etc. Examples for Negative non-EU Characters: Lee Harvey Oswald, Ivan the Terrible, Stalin.

14) EU support of *Novels for the Young* may cover as much as 75 per cent of their total cost if they take a stand against a) child labour; b) drug abuse; c) juvenile crime and d) childlessness (see Anti-Single Law, Chapter CVI). Support for a Novel for the Young may reach 100 per cent if it portrays the process in which the child characters of the Novel simultaneously learn at least three EU languages foreign to them, two of which must be the language of an earlier Member State, and one the language of a new Member State of the EU. The electronic publication on CD-ROM of such Novels, if suitable for language teaching, is supported by the EU in full even it the Novel itself receives only partial support.

15) The adaptation or revision of popular earlier novels will, in recognition of the fact that the history of the EU nations itself is being re-written by the European Union, receive a support of 90 per cent. For example: in the revised version of Tolstoy's *War and Peace,* Napoleon will be sympathetic to the Russian people; Moscow will not be set on fire, nor will it burn down. The French defeat will be attributed exclusively to the extreme temperatures of the Russian winter. The work of revision of earlier Novels should be entrusted to writers who have won the Noble Prize in Literature. An EU Member State which has not produced a Nobel Prize author may substitute a winner of the Herder Prize.

16) *Picture Novels* of a Humanist content combined with music will be financed 100 per cent by the European Union, in so far as they may not only be read but also viewed on a screen while listening to music. Fifty-eight per cent of the revenue coming from the sales of such Novels must be paid to the European Novel Support Court (ENSC). In the case of Erotic Musical Picture Novels with a Humanist content, 85 per cent of the revenue is due to the ENSC, which must be financially self-supporting. (For the distinction between Eroticism and the Sex Industry, see Chapter VI.)

17) Member States will delegate one Commissioner per 5 million inhabitants each to the ENSC. Member States with a population less than 5 million will be represented by one Commissioner. The base salary of a Commissioner cannot be less than the salary of a Cultural State Secretary of the delegating Member State, plus expenses allowance and an extra payment for foreign language skills if, beside his or her mother tongue, the Commissioner speaks the language of at least one pre-2004 Member State to a standard level (only the Official Language Test of the European Union may be accepted; tests will be organized by the ENSC). Extra payments may be received up to a maximum of four languages; a fifth language entails no further payment. In the case of related languages (examples: Estonian and Hungarian; Slovenian, Czech and Polish, or Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, German and Dutch), only 50 per cent of the extra payment is due. The total amount of the full extra-language-skill payment will be 7.9 per cent of the Commissioner's current base salary. The expense allowance will be determined relative to the distance of the Commissioner's home country from the spiritual centre of the European Union, calculated at a rate of C160 per kilometre.

18) Applications for support submitted must include a synopsis of the Novel (to a maximum of 2 pages), description of the Characters (to a maximum of 4 pages) and a summary of its Positive Message (to a maximum of 3 pages) written in any of the official languages of the EU. The costs of translation to all other languages of the EU must be covered by the applicant. In 2004 the total translation costs cannot exceed

€35,000. A copy of the document certifying payment must be attached. Granting of the first 15 per cent of the support will be decided on the basis of the Synopsis, the Character Description and the Message. The full amount will be paid to the Publisher upon approval of the complete manuscript. The Author's share of the full payment must not be less than 5 per cent. Unsuccessful Applicants will not be reimbursed for the translation costs. If, for any reason, the complete manuscript is rejected, the Applicant will be obliged to return 9 per cent of the 15 per cent received. Failing to do so, the Applicant will be sued and excluded from any future possibility of applying for EU support.

19) Applications must include the following Appendices: (1) birth certificate of the Author(s) and the Publisher; (2) document certifying their citizenship; (3) their highest education diploma; (4) certificate of good character; (5) a max. one-page summary of the Author's previous work; (6), the twenty most important reviews on his/her previous activity in three official languages of the European Union (two of them in the pre-2004 languages); (7) a document certifying the Author's marital status, working place and sexual preferences; (8) a certificate of the citizenship of the Author's spouse or the person, if any, living in a common household with him/her; (9) his/her authentic fingerprints, and (10) a handwritten declaration that he/she has never been a member of a Nazi Party, Bolshevik Party, Assassins' Group, Fundamentalist Church or Religious Group, or appears on any proscribed list of football hooligans. Lack of any of the above Appendices will result in the automatic disqualification of the Applicant. ❧

Gábor Miklósi

In Search of Lost Fat Content

A few months before the referendum of April 2003 on Hungary's membership in the European Union, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs set up a toll-free hotline to answer queries and concerns relating to the EU. The most frequently raised questions and the answers given have been broken down into various topics and continue to be posted at the website *www.eu2004.hu*. Unsurprisingly, the gravest concerns have been triggered by the news that the popular practice of "pigsticking", a key element of Hungarian national identity, which played an indirect role in the fall of Communism, would be prohibited. Thanks to the meticulous bureaucrats working in the Ministry, the list also contains a few items clearly aimed at diverting public attention, such as queries relating to customs administration, industrial policy and taxation. Despite all their efforts (e.g.: "Will legal provisions relating to corporate taxation by off-shore and affiliated companies be modified?"), the questions that truly concern the Hungarian population keep recurring on the website.

During the campaigns preceding last year's referendum, it was inevitable for a jovial official, usually from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Ministry of Agriculture and Regional Development, to reassure the audience that pigsticking would remain legal after EU accession. This practice, one of the *sine qua nons* of Hungarian rural life, has lost much of its original sacral, ritual meaning. Long since, its main purpose has been to provide the family and its relatives with cheap meat. Naturally, it is also the perfect occassion for a family gathering and, naturally, some heavy drinking. Squeamish city-dwellers tend to be horrified at the idea of such a bloody ritual. In rural areas, however, pigsticking not only has its practical reasons, it is also an important social event that strengthens the local community. It is understandable that the rural population does not want to forfeit one of its rare occassions of merriment.

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But what are we talking about here? Pigsticking begins after the early morning round of drinking, when the strongest men in the family drive the 2-300 kg porker from the pigsty out into the courtyard. Of course, the animal suspects right away that it is not about to be taken for a guided tour of the surroundings. Therefore, the pig's high-pitched squealing as it is dragged into the courtyard by its tail and ears, its braced feet and the calamity caused when the animal breaks loose and is chased around the courtyard by the men with knives in their hands are all part of the fun. Naturally, the pig cannot escape its fate, and (ideally after the animal is stunned) a slaughterman eventually stabs the porker in the heart. This is always followed by a few seconds of complete silence. Whilst the blood squirting from the pig is being collected into various pots and vessels, you can almost hear the horror-stricken thumping of the other animals' hearts in the pigsty. The killing of the animal and the singeing of its bristles are typically tasks for the men, the women being usually responsible for preparing the various meat products. In many parts of the country, the freshly let blood is used to make a thick soup that is eaten on the spot. The fat and the bacon are stripped off. The small intestines are rinsed through with boiling water and filled with minced meat and offal to make sausages. Of late, the more valuable meaty parts are placed in a freezer.

The only time when this noble tradition was in real danger was during the worst wave of collectivisations in the early 1950s, when meat products made during pigsticking had to be handed over to the authorities. If someone tried to hush up the killing of a pig, and did it "illegally" in the house or in the cellars, they were labelled as profiteers and imprisoned—usually for several years. It was logical, therefore, to conceal any pig from the inquisitive gaze of neighbours, not only when it was killed, but during its entire lifetime. This, however, often led to an unusually close bond developing between the family and the animal. One of the most memorable scenes from Béla Bacsó's film *The Witness,* which catches that era excellently, is one in which the children sing pioneer songs in the living room to muffle the squealing of Dezső the porker, fighting for his life in the cellars.

Few are aware that the Hungarian passion for killing pigs was one of the indirect causes of the economic and political change of system in Hungary. Up to the mid-1980s, the pigsticking season was limited to January for reasons of hygiene. The danger of unprocessed meat going bad was much smaller in the cold weather than at other times of the year. In 1988, the Kádár regime, being aware of the worsening economic conditions and sensing its downfall, tried to curry favour with the people and, in an unexpected turn of events, suddenly permitted pigsticking all through the year. Not long before that, tight restrictions on purchasing foreign currencies had been relaxed and consolidated customs preferences were provided to families. On a long spring weekend, hundreds of thousands of Hungarians decided to utilise this new opportunity and imported freez-

ers to the value of several hundred million dollars, strapped to the top of their Trabants and other exotic vehicles, from neighbouring Austria. Westerners, watching reports of the bizarre consumer exodus on television, were laughing their heads off; in actual fact, Hungarians were driving the final nail into the coffin of socialism. Ill-considered as these concessions were, the country's foreign currency reserves were effectively depleted and the trade balance was thoroughly upset. The fresh pork landed in the new freezers; less than a year later the Kádár regime disappeared down the drain of history.

Since pigsticking survived the Rákosi era and laid waste to socialism, we can hardly expect the resourceful Hungarians to forfeit it now. They would rather find some way of outwitting the EU's strict pig-killing executives. Thankfully, no tricks will be necessary, since EU integration does not threaten this fine tradition. Regulations only prohibit the commercial sale of household meat products, and, as of January 2003, require that animals be stunned before being slaughtered.

Although nothing can rival the strategic importance of pigsticking, there are other dangers looming over the favourite customs of Hungarians. The regulations applicable to pigsticking also apply to the slaughter of chickens, hens, ducks and rabbits kept on household farms, which is a much more mundane affair than pigsticking. Once again, the problem is not the prohibition of the commercial sale of meat products, but rather the requirement to stun the animals. It is not entirely clear just how the law-abiding housewife is expected to sedate the hapless winged creature selected as the centrepiece of the Sunday soup, before cutting its throat. An anaesthetist cannot possibly be assigned to every chicken; at the moment, knowing what is at hand in a typical rural household, the most obvious solution seems to be intoxicating the unsuspecting animal by mixing a hefty dose of home-made *pálinka* into its morning meal.

There was also controversy concerning the EU's efforts to reform the feeding of the most important "ingredient" of pigsticking ceremonies: pigs. In line with the principle of economy that is characteristic of rural households, kitchen leftovers (pig-swill) is widely used to feed the curvaceous inhabitants of the pigsties. As of the 1 May 2004, however, this will theoretically become illegal, since this could spread the germ that causes swine fever. A single outbreak of this disease could seriously damage European meat exports. Although no cases of swine fever have been reported in Hungary for quite a while now, farmers resigned themselves to the ban on swill without a grumble. They probably doubt that any authority is going to carry out dawn raids on hundreds of thousands of farms to check whether the regulations are being adhered to.

Generally speaking, what the European Union takes away with one hand, it gives back with the other. The same is true as far as pigs go. Hungarian swine who become members of the EU will have to do without their favourite

delicacy. On the other hand, the news spread that farmers would have to buy them toys for the pigsties. This development soon got country folks' playful imaginations going. The letters to the editor sections of farmers' papers and rural dailies were flooded with amusing suggestions on Pig Lego, swine skipping-ropes and rubber cubes for boars. The news, however, proved to be a hoax. The truth of the matter is that pigsties will always have to contain material for the hogs to grub at, in order to provide them with a more stimulating environment. Of course, it is likely that their sense of comfort would increase more significantly if pigsticking were banned, but Hungarian swine advocacy organisations have so far been unable to manage this in their negotiations with the EU.

Another lovable custom in agriculture is the force-feeding of geese. Although geese are voracious animals, there comes a point even for them when they do not want to eat any more. Farmers, however, who would take every care in the world to feed their geese, are often dissatisfied with the result, perhaps because of the exorbitant prices they receive for large goose livers. So they grab hold of the poor anorexic creature, stuff a ball-shaped helping of feed into its throat and gently massage it down its neck. There were rumours that this not exactly humane practice is considered to be a form of cruelty to animals in Brussels, and would be banned. Thankfully, nothing of the sort is planned. The EU only prohibits the mechanical force-feeding of geese; in other words, the barbaric custom of a machine grabbing geese by the neck, prying open their beaks and force-feeding them through a tube into their stomach in order to elicit a beneficial effect on the mass of their livers.

Hungarian geese lead miserable lives. Chances are that whenever they are not being force-fed, their finest down is systematically being plucked from under their wings. The answer provided by the administrator in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the question "Will the plucking of goose down be prohibited?" was characteristic: "The practice of plucking down may be in jeopardy in the long run after accession, since current EU regulations do not permit it." Fortunately, the quote does not end there: "This danger does not exist in the short run. Although the European Convention on the Protection of Agricultural Farmed Animals, signed in 1998, prohibits this activity, an estoppage declaration will be drawn up upon its ratification in Hungary, expected in the near future, which will designate the plucking of down a national feature peculiar to Hungary." So let us rejoice! It's official: the plucking of goose down is a unique national characteristic to be protected, along with the Chain Bridge, Hungarian salami and the Mohács folk masques!

One of the most peculiar issues, which the ministry's website fails to deal with, is regulations concerning the curving of cucumbers for human consumption. This issue was raised not so much because of actual fears, but rather with the intention of ridiculing the increasingly oppressive Brussels bureaucracy. In all

likelihood, the unbridled onslaught of the standardising Eurocrats will provide an excellent breeding ground for popular banter. The cucumber curving issue allows us to gain some insight into the bouquet of amusing absurdities lying in store for us. The EU did indeed determine standards for the curving of cucumbers, although only with the purpose of classifying them. The answer given to one of the questions might also come as something of a shock to mushroom growers, when they are confronted with the fact that champignon mushrooms of less than 15 to 30 mm in size cannot be marketed in the EU.

Another popular myth is that the consumption of poppy seeds will be prohibited. The poppy seeds that embed themselves between one's teeth after a hearty portion of delicious poppy seed noodles, poppy seed milk cake, poppy seed strudel or the Christmas poppy seed roll are national traits that are just as characteristic of Hungary as the plucking of goose down. Anyone worried about the disappearance of poppy seeds after accession may set their minds at rest. There are no restrictions whatsoever in force in the EU concerning the growing of poppy seeds for human consumption. What is more, neither does the EU prohibit the growing of the industrial poppy, the basic ingredient of pharmaceutical products containing opiates, it merely requires a licence to grow the plant.

Therefore, no changes are expected with regard to poppy seeds. But many people are asking about opiates. This also appears on the ministry website. The real concern behind its wording is that if the free movement of goods is implemented, then drugs will also flow freely from Western European countries with a pragmatic drug policy into Hungary, a strictly prohibitionist country. The concern is understandable, but unjustified. The trafficking of hard drugs, including opiates, is prohibited worldwide, including the Netherlands. Also, Hungary will only become part of the Schengen zone in a few years' time, so border controls will remain in place for the present. And anyhow, EU accession is not the primary factor that fuels drug-related fears. Rather, it is the lack of information, ignorance and prejudice. So the question here is whether these too are also considered as Hungarian national characteristics that have to be protected.

Euro-sceptic Hungarian milk consumers have every reason to believe that their worst nightmares are about to come true. The marketing of milk with 2.8 percent fat content will be prohibited after accession. This may not seem to be a major issue. Yet in Hungary milk of this fat content has always been the most popular. It will be available for another five years following accession, but after that, milk producers will only be allowed to market the accepted EU standards: unskimmed milk (minimum 3.5 percent fat content), half skimmed (1.5 to 1.8) and low-fat milk (maximum 0.5). If anyone is having trouble coming to terms with the loss of their favourite level of fat content, we can recommend mixing half a litre of unskimmed milk with half a litre of the skimmed variety to obtain the desired fat content. For the moment, this reassuring, though

admittedly toilsome, suggestion does not feature amongst the answers and solutions offered by the Ministry.

There are two more types of interesting questions relating to the European Union. The first is to do with utterly irrational fears. "Will Brussels have the power to deploy Hungarian troops abroad?" Since the EU does not have an army, it does not have the power to deploy troops anywhere. "Will the Hungarian labour market be flooded by workers from other member states?" Given the difference between the EU average wage level and Hungary's, it is hardly likely that workers from other member states will find it impossible to resist jobs in Hungary. Nevertheless, it is perhaps worth taking these fears seriously, regardless of their reality, since they are an indication of the lack of informedness on the part of the general public, and also that the changes accession is expected to bring immediately awaken philistine reactions.

The loss of certain aspects of national sovereignty is an inevitable factor of accession. There are some self-conscious Hungarians who hope that this will be offset by striking changes in the life of the continent, caused by Hungary's membership of the EU. According to one such individual, the word "euro" should be written with the accentuated Hungarian spelling (euró) on the notes and coins to be issued in Hungary. The accent would thus serve as a metaphor. It would symbolise Hungarians' European roots and unique cultural traits at the same time. No doubt, hundreds of millions of Europeans would be pondering the uniqueness of Hungarians for days on end. It would probably also bring direct economic benefits by increasing tourism. Who could resist visiting a country that had stood up so admirably for its accents?

Many people would have liked to see more stars appearing on the EU flag after the accession of the ten new member states. The twelve stars on the flag do not even correspond to the number of current members, but everyone must have their due. However, not even a new star would solve the identity crisis of Hungarians, since we still would not know which star is ours. Maybe someone is already drafting a proposal to have the stars in the national colours of the member states, or for the stars to be replaced by the national symbols of the individual countries. If this happens, then Hungarians will be able to rest at ease. Amongst the symbols, we will find our favourite pig, with a knacker's knife plunged into its heart. ❧

Nicolas Éber

The Self-Portraits of Lajos Vajda

"Who are the five most important modern Hungarian painters of the years between 1892 and 1964?" was the question put to one hundred leading Hungarian artists and intellectuals in 2003.

Surprisingly Lajos Vajda ranked second in terms of votes cast: 50 per cent of the answers included his name. He came ahead of international celebrities such as József Rippl-Rónai and László Moholy-Nagy. Since the middle of the 20th century, the painting considered to be Vajda's emblematic work (it has become known as *Icon-Style Self-Portrait Pointing Upwards*) is in all likelihood the work most frequently reproduced in Hungarian art books and magazines. This is all the more noteworthy since Lajos Vajda is not, or at least not yet, well known as far as the general public goes, and his works are far from fetching the highest prices in the auction rooms.

Lajos Vajda (1908–1941) is an outstanding figure in 20th century Hungarian art. He died in 1941, at the age of 33, a consequence of the bone-tuberculosis he had suffered in his youth which was aggravated by being called up for labour service as a Jew. Before his early death his life was overshadowed by his illness, which caused him to be subjected to invasive treatments no less than ten times.

His impressive life-work can be divided into two main periods. After studying at the Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest he spent nearly four years in Paris. The Louvre and other museums, and the exhibitions he tirelessly visited, were his real education. Surrealism and Russian cinema were the main influences on a great number of collages from that period during which he earned his living by colouring lead soldiers and glueing raincoats. The early years were followed by the second period, the productive years between 1934 and 1940, which he spent

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in Szentendre, a quiet little town with Orthodox churches, on the Danube north of Budapest, once inhabited by Serbs who had fled from the Turks. The works of his first period reveal his exceptional talent for draughtsmanship at the early age of 15, but it was during the Szentendre years that he became an artist of great individuality and major importance.

He worked and lived in extreme poverty. His studio was an unheated and unlit loft and his usual working materials were wrapping paper, pencil and charcoal. With just one exception he never sold, was never able to sell, any of his works. Nor did he intend to create paintings which corresponded to public taste. He had a clear artistic vision which he followed with monkish humility and self-discipline. He considered his work as a mission. Like many of the truly great artists in history, whether poets, composers, painters or sculptors, he was something of a prophet. The totality of his work created during his period in Szentendre between 1934 and 1940 is a clear indication of the step by step, though rapid and steady, mental and spiritual progress he made in his art. This includes (in chronological sequence) collages, drawings of the traditional houses, architectural details, churches and still-lifes of Szentendre, masks, icon-style paintings and eventually Indian ink and charcoal drawings of phantastic organic structures.

His self-portraits play a crucial role in his oeuvre and can certainly be considered as unique with respect to their message. Although there exists a considerable amount of literature about Vajda's work and its different aspects, his self-portraits (the main subject here) have not yet been discussed as such, let alone in detail. In the following I propose to argue that his self-portraits are probably better suited than any of his other work for showing and understanding the personality and the art of Lajos Vajda.

According to the *catalogue raisonnée,* which is part of the most detailed and best illustrated book on Lajos Vajda[1] to date, out of over one thousand items, a total of 54 self-portraits are known. Of these 19 originate from his early years (between 1923 and 1927) and the remaining 35 from his mature period (between 1934 and 1937). In the second period, just like the anonymous medieval monks who illuminated codices and painted icons, Vajda did not sign or date his works. Nor did he give them a title. The titles and the chronology in the catalogue are the fruits of several years of work on the part of his widow Julia Vajda and of Stefánia Mándy in the 1970s, some 30 years after the artist's death. One has to be aware that the chronology of the works is not accurate and that the titles of individual works are often arbitrary and not always pertinent.

Only two of the early self-portraits are reproduced here, to document Vajda's (at that time still conventional) style and early talent. *Self-Portrait with Hat* dated March 23, 1924 shows the still rather childish looks of the 15-year-old artist,

1 ■ Stefánia Mándy: *Vajda Lajos,* Budapest, Corvina, 1983.

whereas *Self-Portrait with Raised Fist* dated 1925 July depicts a 17-year-old man in a defiant, rebellious pose. In a certain sense this drawing is a key for the understanding of his character and prophetic attitude of mind.

Árpád Mezei offered a psychoanalytical interpretation for the large number of self-portraits and saw a narcissistic personality, a fascination with mirror-like images and reflection as inspiration behind them.[2] As I see it, the self-portraits of the early period have rather to be considered as part of a normal "know thyself" process in accordance with the inscription at the entrance of Pythia's, the oracle's, cave in Delphi. Superficially, the strongest argument against the narcissism hypothesis is the fact that from the seven year period between 1927 and 1934, during which Vajda was pursuing his studies at the Academy of Fine Arts and spending nearly four years in Paris, no self-portraits are known. The same goes for the last four years of his life between 1938 and 1941.

On his return to Hungary in 1934, he settled in Szentendre and began to realize the artistic vision to which he devoted all his energy and attention. His attitude is best characterized in lines from a letter written to his wife-to-be Julia Vajda in 1936: "I am one of those who are thinking about what they are doing. In art I am much more rational than in my everyday life, where I allow myself to be influenced by my feelings." These words are essential for an understanding and appreciation of his self-portraits within a conceptual framework.

In what follows I intend to discuss the self-portraits of Vajda as parts of a larger entity, as constituents of something which could be best described by the analogy of a symphony. We may look at them as parts of a building or as musical statements, which have their development and build up to movements in a composition. The different categories and sub-categories within this complex can be advantageously compared with the movements of a symphony.

The basis or initial step, the corner stone of the building or the opening theme of Vajda's "self-portrait symphony", are line-drawings. Vajda succeeded in simplifying and substantiating the features of his head to the extent that it had almost more in common with a signature than with a self-portrait. A typical and presumably the earliest example of this style appears on the drawing entitled simply *Self-Portrait.* Like a signature it does not express or reveal any emotions, feelings or mood. Its sole purpose is to identify the artist—like a signature identifies the writer at the end of a message—and to indicate the artist's presence as an emblematic image which always appears in combination with something or somebody else. It is a reminder that we have to do with a message, a declaration by the artist. In its utmost simplicity it functions in a similar way as the famous four-note opening of Beethoven's 5th Symphony. Thereafter it is, in both Beethoven's and Vajda's case, modulated and combined with other themes.

2 ■ Árpád Mezei: "Vajda Lajos" in *Vajda emlékkönyv.* Budapest, Magvető, 1972, pp. 112–120.

Vajda was a brilliant draughtsman. His line is of almost unprecedented clarity, safety and vibratingly alive. In this respect the comparison between him and Paul Klee, which several scholars have made appears to be well justified.

In the first movement of the self-portrait symphony (which one might compare with the first movement *Allegro con brio* of Beethoven's 5th Symphony) the line-drawing self-portrait appears in different variations and combinations. Typical examples are *Self-Portrait with Barred Window, Self-Portrait with Church* and *Life-Tree Self-Portrait,* all intended and to be understood as declarations of his empathy and solidarity and an expression of affection for his environment, for Szentendre, where he discovered and wanted to explore his roots.

A second theme or variation on "empathy and affection" is demonstrated in the two drawings *Double-Portrait with a House and Double-Portrait with a Nude.* In the first Vajda's own and his best friend's (the painter Endre Bálint's) features appear superimposed, mounted one on each other in combination with architectural and still-life elements; in the second the same two features are combined with a nude (symbolising the loved wife of the then newly-wed artist) and various geometric elements. His friend and his wife were the two closest and most important people in his life. These two drawings furnish convincing evidence about Vajda's unrivalled draughtsmanship and compositional ability. Their harmony, transparency and multi-layeredness are demonstrations of the very highest virtuosity.

Besides, and sometimes in combination with, the line-drawings demonstrating his clear and obvious intention to express empathy for his environment and/or his beloved, Vajda repeatedly depicted himself with a skull on his forehead, as in *Self-Portrait with Church.* The most impressive work in this connection is *Self-Portrait with Skull.* These are clear indications that, due to his chronic bad health, the idea of death, *memento mori,* was constantly on his mind and that he knew full well that he could not expect to live long and had no time to waste if he wanted to complete his artistic mission. The more grateful, therefore, we should be to him for having created his life-work with so much self-discipline and self-sacrifice.

As the second movement of Vajda's "self-portrait symphony", by analogy with the *Allegro con moto* of Beethoven's *Fifth,* self-portrait paintings make their appearance. Within this wider family of works we can find, just at the beginning of the 1935–37 period, several self-portraits on which the artist's features, that is, his complexion, are dark or even black. The most impressive of these is *Black Self-Portrait,* whose present whereabouts is unfortunately unknown after it was recently stolen from the home of its owner. What does this painting mean, how are we to understand and interprete its message? What did Vajda wish to express by the blackness of his face? No doubt, this enigmatic work has a message, a declaration of solidarity with those who are the oppressed and discriminated against. Equally revealing and elusive is the pupil-less eye, which features in four self-portraits.

Another remarkable painting of this period, fully embedded by message and meaning into its time of creation is *Self-Portrait with Mask.* Someone who wears a mask is for some reason afraid to show his real face. He is hiding himself against the threat, the danger behind the mask: he is afraid. Vajda could have had many reasons for fear, not only of death due to his illness. He had also good grounds for fear: the steadily increasing threat because of his Jewishness and of the pressing misery in which he lived, financial anxieties which were apparently insoluble.

The next theme of the second movement of Vajda's self-portrait symphony is the icon-style self-portrait. Of the two basically similar paintings *Self-Portrait with Lily* (1936) presents a conceptualised, even imaginary portrait; it could even be called a glorified portrait of the artist, radiating dignity. We see no trace of the artist's real features that his line-drawing self-portraits have made us familiar with.

The differences spring from the sum of the details. In this icon-style painting, the shape of the head is rounded and has the form of an ellipsis. As to other features, it is the dissimilarity of the eyes and of the nose in comparison to the real line-drawing self-portrait that is striking. Here the nose is substantially shorter. The eyes are round, instead of the usual empty almond-shape with the iris in their upper side to give them a dreaming, far looking character. The impression these round eyes creates is significantly intensified by eyebrows of a regular semicircular shape. In this picture the head, including the hair, is rounded in every respect and this lends to it a glorified expression. Vajda only used the icon style in paintings, we know of no icon-style drawings. We may assume some sort of homage or devotion at the origin of a "sacred image" (which also profanes the icon, an image normally only produced to represent saints) combined with blasphemy and hubris, suggesting in a way no more and no less than a quasi self-canonisation of Lajos Vajda. I venture to say, if art also had its saints Lajos Vajda would deserve a front row place.[3] These icon-style self-portraits show that he saw himself in a similar way and, surprisingly, he had the courage and boldness to express it.

Despite all the striking dissimilarities when compared to the more faithful self-portraits, I unreservedly accept the general concensus that this is also a portrait of Lajos Vajda. This is somehow like imagining a meeting with your deceased loved ones in the Other World and recognizing them in their bodiless guises.

This stunning and beautiful painting, now part of the permanent exhibition of the Hungarian National Gallery, seems to me to have an all too obviously erroneous title. What the painting shows is not a lily but an olive branch, the symbol of peace and goodwill since Antiquity. It should obviously be retitled as *Self-Portrait with an Olive Branch.*

3 ■ Miklós Éber: "Conditio Humana—Vajda Lajos: 'Felmutató ikonos önarckép'" (Conditio Humana: Lajos Vajda: Icon-Style Self-Portrait Pointing Upwards), *Balkon,* 2003, No. 6, pp. 11–18.

This is indeed an extremely rare creative achievement, which must be properly appreciated. Vajda was able to materialise brilliantly his true artistic vision. The golden, icon-style background also obviously contributes to the overall impression.

The rebellious *Self-Portrait with Raised Fist* is an early work from 1925 and can be linked to the later self-portraits. This provokes the question of what motivated Vajda, of Jewish descent, to allude to and represent so frequently someone he saw as his fellow Jewish, fellow rebellious prophet, the crucified Jesus of Nazareth.

The small (21.5 x 20 cm) pencil-drawing known as *Plastic Head* and believed to have been executed in 1937 (later than *Self-Portrait with an Olive Branch*) belongs to this group, too. The sphere is considered as the perfect geometrical body and thus especially suited to represent the deity, or as in the case of this picture, a being considered as glorified and unearthly. During the period when *Plastic Head* was executed, Vajda apparently had a preference for the spherical head form and made use of it several times. This particular work, again not titled by the artist, is one of his most significant and finest. Inside the sphere, one can recognize Vajda's features (not the realistic, terrestrial ones, but those which I have called glorified above). The artist here gives, eyes entirely closed and turned in towards himself and in a state of meditation, the impression of a spirituality which has turned away from the World.

The spherical head rests on a comparatively long cylindrical neck, the composition employing the two most perfect geometrical bodies. The deep spirituality of the head and the face is decisively intensified. Vajda succeeds, through the apparently simplest means, in lending it an ethereal, completely weightless, character. The head levitates in the sphere just as an embryo in the womb: the spectator is unwillingly reminded of astronauts in space or of yogis who seem to be able to walk across water or levitate themselves. Small in size but monumental in impression, this piece exerted an important influence on Vajda's fellow artists and on the generation of artists that followed them.

The current title of the picture, which it should be said again is not Vajda's, cannot be regarded as satisfactory since it refers to a rather unimportant formality, to shape rather than essence, which is its exceptional message. These last would seem to me be better expressed through title *Meditative Self-Portrait.*

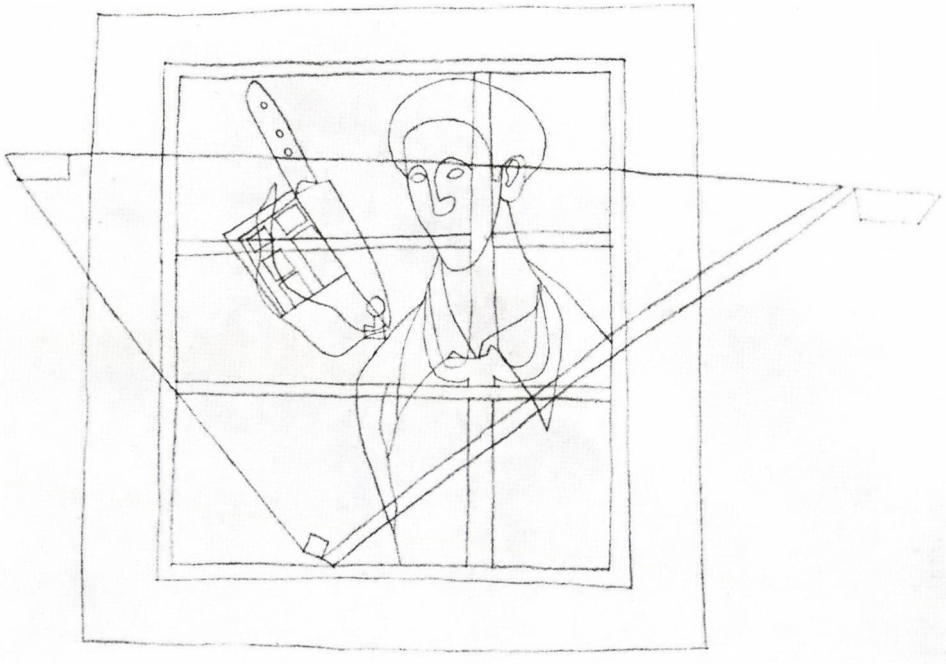
Finally let us turn to and make an attempt to reinterpret the most important work among Vajda's self-portraits and in his entire oeuvre, the pastel painting hitherto known as *Icon-Style Self-Portrait Pointing Upwards*.

This work is a synthesis of the self-portraits, in spite of the fact that, to our present knowledge, it was executed not at the end but in the middle of his 1934–37 period, in 1936. In this piece can be found the development of the line-drawings and of the icon-style paintings coalescing, almost culminating, sum-

Self-Portrait with Hat,
1924, pencil on paper, 21 x 17 cm.
Private collection.

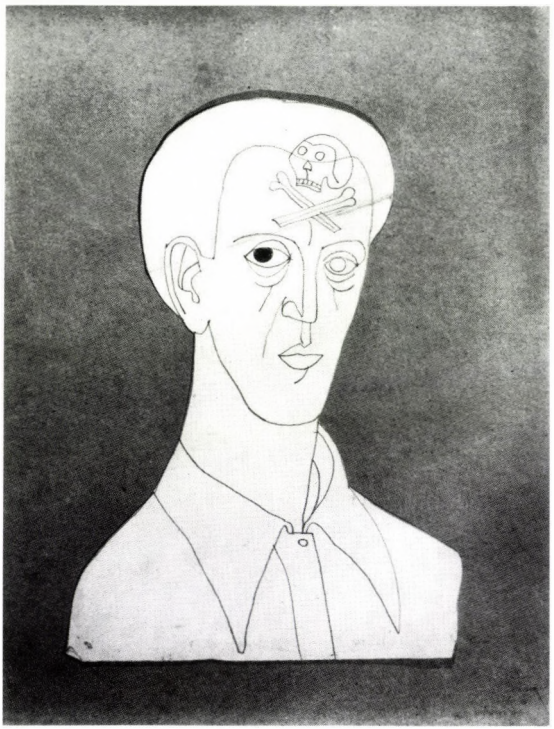
Self-Portrait with Raised Fist
(Earlier: Self-Portrait
with Raised Arm),
1925, charcoal on paper,
31.5 x 24.7 cm.
Private collection.

Self-Portrait, 1935,
charcoal on paper, 55 x 41.7 cm.
Vajda Lajos Museum, Szentendre.

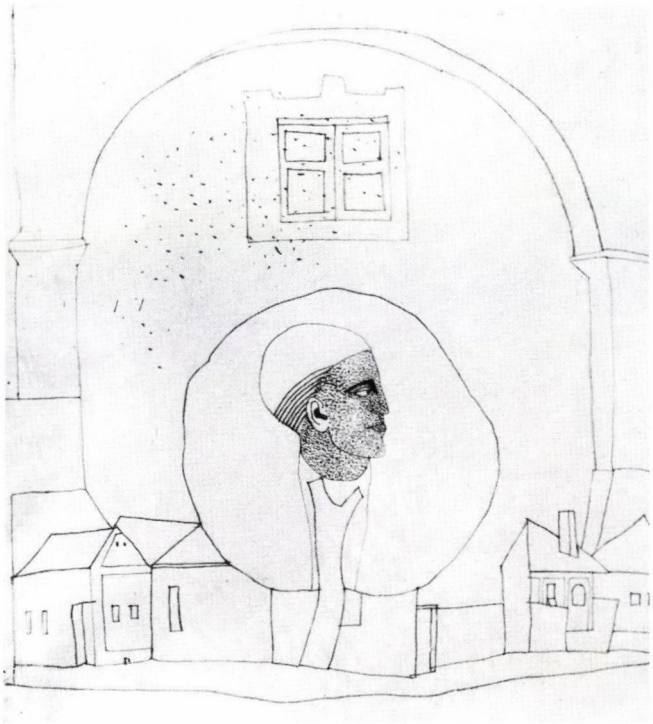


Self-Portrait with Barred Window, 1936, pencil on paper, 31 x 38 cm. Private collection.

Self-Portrait with Church, 1935, pencil on paper, 32 x 24 cm.
Vajda Lajos Museum, Szentendre.

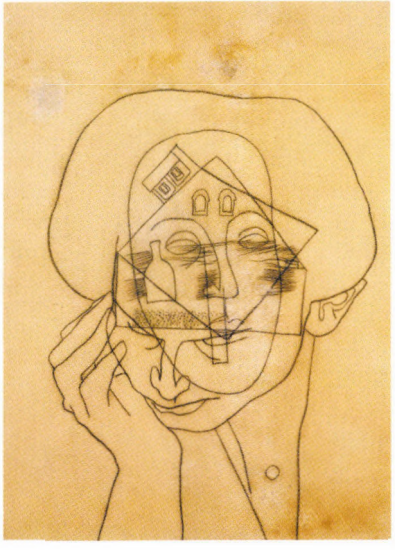


Self-Portrait with Skull, 1936,
pencil on paper, collage,
32 x 25.5 cm.
Vajda Lajos Museum, Szentendre.

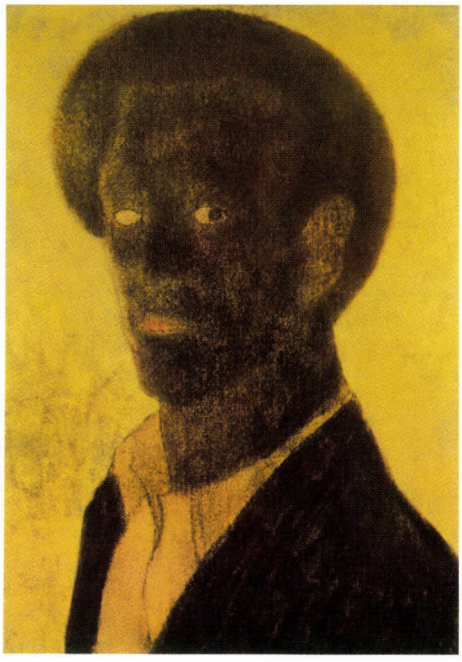


Life-Tree Self-Portrait, 1937,
pencil on paper, 25.5 x 22 cm.
Private collection.

Double Portrait with Nude, 1937, charcoal on paper, 63 x 45 cm. (whereabouts unknown).

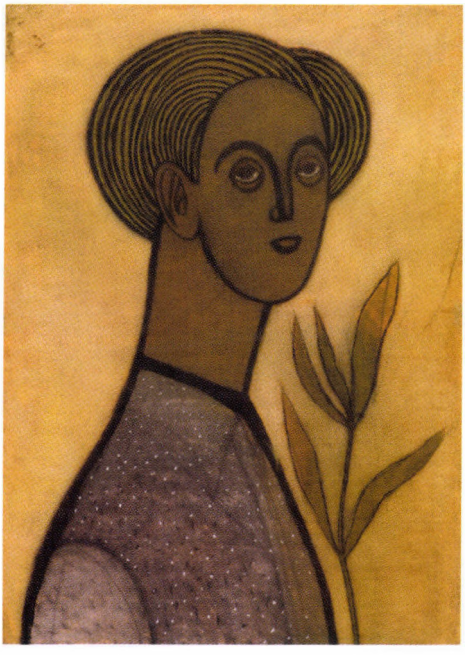


Double Portrait with House, 1937, charcoal on paper, 60 x 44 cm. Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs.



Black Self-Portrait,
1935, pastel on cardboard, 63 x 45 cm.
(whereabouts unknown).

Masked Self-Portrait,
1935, tempera on paper, 63 x 45 cm.
Hermann Ottó Museum, Miskolc.



Self-Portrait with Olive Branch
(Earlier: Self-Portrait with Lily),
1936, pastel on paper, 89 x 62 cm.
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.

Plastic Head, 1937, pencil on paper, 21.5 x 20 cm. Private collection.

Self-Portrait with Icon-Style Head and Hand (Earlier: Self-Portrait Pointing Upwards), 1936, pastel on paper, 83.5 x 68 cm. Private collection.

ming up the motifs previously employed. In a way, it is comparable to the third and fourth movements, the *Allegro* and the *Allegro Presto,* of Beethoven's 5th Symphony which also invoke and develop the theme of the first movement.

Modest in size (83.5 x 68 cm), its effect is monumental. It is an outstanding example of a development from the simple to the complex. The mode of representation of the line-drawings reappears here in a painting for the first time, enriched by traits from the icon-style paintings.

Icon-Style Self-Portrait Pointing Upwards has three principal elements that immediately catch the eye, namely two heads and a hand. In the upper middle of the painting, directly opposite the spectator, there is a light green-based-tone head looking to the right and its trunk covered by a shawl. The features of the head are easily identifiable as those we are familiar with on the line-drawings. We may call it the self-portrait head. In front of it another darker, golden-brown toned, though transparent, icon-like spherical head (or simply *icon-head*) with its trunk in similar colour. The icon-head is opposed to the self-portrait-head and is therefore faceless, only seen from the back. The icon-head figure was always considered as the incarnated representant of deity, Jesus Christ.

On careful inspection, a third face can be discerned or rather imagined: it originates in the interface of the self-portrait-head and the icon-head. Its contour is that of the icon-head, whereas the line of its chin and its eyes (looking to the left) are those of the self-portrait head. It would be difficult to decide whether this third face has been intended at all by the artist or if it is only there in the observer's imagination.

Until recently the understanding of the role, the affiliation and iconographic function of the hand represented in the picture had met difficulties. The largely oversized, disproportionate, black hand with its threatening impression does not belong to any of the figures present in the painting. It is, however, merely a hand. Furthermore, as against the suggestion implied in its given title, it does not point anywhere.

As I see it, the self-portrait head represents the spiritual side of mankind rooted in an immaterial world, the hand represents the material side of mankind. It is this simultaneous double relationship of man which makes him essentially different from deity and other living creatures. This also explains the unique role man fulfils in the world, indeed in all Creation, which has enabled him to create civilization and culture.

The hand is the more sinful side of man since it is closer to the material world. In man's deeds the hand—in contrast to his brain which can be considered as the intellectual author—is the executor both in his benefaction and his crimes. Without hands, the opportunities for man, for the human brain, to sin would be considerably reduced. This is the reason why the hand in the picture is so oversized, black and threatening; there must have been similar considerations which induced Vajda to represent a left hand. According to the strict rules

of the Orthodox Christian canon—which were well known to Vajda—it was only the right hand which was entitled to indicate gestures of the canon.

As to the gesture of the hand and its meaning here, I am in agreement with earlier critics that it reveals hesitation and expresses perplexity and uncertainty. This hand is unable to show the way. Bearing in mind that in 1936 world war was already looming, this was an understandable and logical assessment by Vajda of the state of mankind, the *Conditio Humana;* I have suggested elsewhere, it would be more appropriate to have it as the title of the work.[4]

Symbolic and contemporary allusions abound in this painting. It is not difficult to see the bundle of fibre cutting through the hand between the thumb and the palm from the right above to the left as a symbol for the physical threat of mankind and in a similar way in the illuminated nail of the thumb some little ray of hope. Observing somewhat more carefully the dark shade of the same colour as the hand which is covering the middle part of the self-portrait-head, we are reminded of the painting *Self-Portrait with Mask,* which we have already interpreted above, and to the fear and anxieties of its bearer.

If the painting is indeed the expression of the human condition, the condition of mankind, the questions may be legitimately raised as to what Vajda's diagnosis is and what treatment he suggests.

The faces, the lips in the painting remain mute. It is only the gesturing hand which is speaking: about uncertainty, raggedness and threat. The head, the face of the painter is hiding behind a mask, it is afraid. The hand, representant of the material real world is embarassed, cannot, is not able to show the way out, to indicate a direction. The way out consists in the turning of man towards God, to Christ, to observation of His principal teaching, love for one's fellow-men. That is what man has to do. Presumably this is what Vajda intended to indicate by the self-portrait figure's covering, attracting the icon-figure with its shawl. This can be considered the humanistic message of this work by Lajos Vajda. ❧

4 ■ Miklós Éber: "Vajda Lajos önarcképei" (The Self-Portraits of Lajos Vajda). *Balkon,* 2004, Nos. 1–2, pp. 9–20.

Kálmán Makláry

Alfréd Réth, Cubiste Extraordinaire

"After Eighty-One Years, Hungary's First Cubist Artist Has Come Home" was typical of the media's response to the two retrospectives on Alfréd Réth (1884–1966) organised simultaneously at the Budapest Gallery and the French Institute in Budapest in the Autumn of 2003. Earlier, in February 2003, the Hungarian Institute in Paris presented the Cubist and the "metaphysical-Cubist" works he produced between 1911 and 1928. Réth's works are in the Musée National d'Art Moderne, at the Pompidou Centre in Paris, in the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; the Musée d'Art Moderne, Grenoble; the Musée Géo-Charles, Echirolles; the Petit Palais in Geneva, Switzerland; the New York Metropolitan Museum; and several other public and private collections in Western Europe.

Starting out – Nagybánya

Alfréd Réth (originally Roth) was born into a middle-class family on February 29, 1884 in Budapest. His father, who had eight children to support, worked as a family practitioner. (His patients included the painter Baron László Mednyánszky.) He wanted his son to become a bank official, but Réth, who had his heart set on a different career, rebelled. Mednyánszky and the publisher József Wolfner took him under their wings: on discovering the young man's talents, they encouraged him to paint and also introduced him to Oriental and Buddhist philosophy. The summer of 1903 found the nineteen-year-old Réth working at the Nagybánya artists colony ("Hungary's Barbizon"), where modern Hungarian painting was in

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He is co-author of Alfred Reth: From Cubism to Abstraction *(Maklary Artworks 2003)*

the making. Here Réth joined a movement which was determined to "resurrect" Hungarian painting. Encouraged by the news of what was happening in Paris, members of the group were all set for a confrontation with the spirit of Academicism. Sensing that he ought not to rely on second and third-hand information, Réth was resolved to see the Parisian developments for himself. Upon his return, and with his family's support (although his father still opposed his plans), he set off, first to Paris and then to Italy to study the art of the Renaissance masters "at the cradle of painting." During the eight months he was away, he took the opportunity to attend the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence. In the autumn of 1904, on his way home, Réth stopped over in Paris to see the second Salon d'Automne. It was on this occasion that he saw thirty-two of Cézanne's paintings all in one room, an experience that left a deep mark on him.

Réth was back at the Nagybánya artists' colony again for the summer of 1905, but his instincts told him that if he wanted to live freely and fulfill his potentials as a painter, he had no alternative but to take up residence in Paris: "With a few exceptions, the entire generation of artists gravitates to Paris."[1] With the support of the prominent art critic Károly Lyka and the painter Mednyánszky, he set out for the city of his dreams in the winter of 1905. The painter József Egry mentions this journey in his memoirs: "I left for Paris at the end of 1905. In Vienna I met Roth, who was also on his way to Paris. We spent one day in Vienna. We went to see the museums. On the way to Paris we had a very pleasant journey, enjoying the winter magic of Switzerland. (...) We arrived in Paris at night. (...) The following day we moved into a furnished flat in the attic of a building by the Seine; we took it over from a Hungarian, some kind of a fur-dresser, whose address we had been given. The next day we enrolled in the Julian.[2]

Montparnasse

As Egry said, they enrolled in the Julian Academy on their first day in Paris. Nevertheless, the name Réth/Roth is not mentioned anywhere in a book[3] on the academy, which comes complete with a list of all the students who attended it, featuring more than a hundred Hungarian names, including Egry's.

In 1906 Réth switched to the Delécluse Academy, as attested by Jean Buhot (1885–1952), with whom Réth established a life-long friendship. This is what Buhot has to say in the memoirs he addressed to his daughter Hélène:

> In 1905/1906 I left the Julian Academy and attended the Delécluse Academy at the corner of rue Nôtre Dame des Champs and rue René Pailine. Several Hungarians were among the students; this was where I met Réth, along with Joachim, Mikola and Deutsch, as well as Brummer who was even poorer than the rest of them. The latter was eventually to become an influential cosmopolitan antique dealer in New York. I cannot understand how they survived and how they actually made ends meet. Réth was rather well-off by their standards and he only had 70 francs a month. Living in an

unsightly little hotel on rue Guénégaud, he invited his undernourished compatriots for a hot chocolate once a week... All the Hungarians (not all of whom were Jews) were very nice and everybody liked them. They responded neither to the advice of the masters nor to the art movements that the French students were keen to follow: in fact, it was they who gave us ideas... Each of the Hungarians worked very hard, although their method seemed rather odd to Ernest Laurnet. Their easel was set up in one corner of the studio, and their viewing position in the opposite corner at about 8 further metres away. For a good half an hour they carefully examined the sitter, then walked all the way to the easel and left a tiny charcoal or pencil mark on the blank sheet of paper. The sheet of paper was enormous, quite often a piece of wrapping paper. They did probably the best work in the studio and in the long term I, too, learned a great deal from them.[4] (...) On entering the room, the first person I noticed was Réth, who was delighted to see me. He produced some very fine drawings at the time. ...Later on Bató and two other Hungarians joined us...

Hinduism and Khmer art

In the stylistic ferment that was then Paris, several young Hungarian artists (Béla Czóbel, Róbert Berény, Ödön Márffy and Sándor Ziffer, to name but a few of the best-known) showed a marked partiality for the Fauvists, who looked up to Matisse as their leader. Csaba Vilmos Perlrott, Valéria Dénes, Sándor Galimberti and Géza Bornemissza studied directly under Matisse. Réth himself was not inspired by this style, regardless of his close friendship with the Galimbertis. His inspiration came from Cézanne: his works at the time reveal a striking analogy with Cézanne's Arcadian compositions. Furthermore, along with Picasso, Modigliani and Brancusi, he felt a strong affinity for primitive art. These last all fell under the spell of African sculpture, Réth succumbed to the magnetism of Khmer and Hindu art. The plasticity and the system of proportion that characterised his nudes, along with the compact and full forms, all clearly point to the influence of the Angkor masters. It was Jean Buhot[5] who probably called Réth's attention to the Musée Guimet, where he first encountered Japanese prints and Indian and Khmer art. A good many drawings in the sketch books found in Réth's bequest were studies or copies of Indian and Khmer exhibits in the museum. Buhot introduced Réth to his friends, who were all Buddhists, which was very unusual in France at that time. Under their influence, Réth became and remained a vegetarian for the rest of his life. Members of Buhot's circle included the Cubist painter Maurice Esmein, who died at a tragically young age, and his girlfriend Suzanne Karpeles, a Buddhist scholar who hailed from the East.

Réth first showed his works in Paris in 1910, when he took part in the Salon d'Automne with three compositions produced under the "influence of Hindu art."[6] By that time Réth's interests and experiments had already branched out in several directions. Between 1908 and 1910 he created several compositions, in which natural objects were presented in abstract form. Following these experi-

ments, he based the composition of his pictures exclusively on the relationship between lines and planes, without reference to any objects, real or imaginary. These compositions made Réth one of the pioneers of abstract art.

The Cubist period and rise to fame

The year 1911 is an important date in the history of Cubism, the year the Cubists held their first collective show under the aegis of the Salon des Independants. That was also when Zsófia Dénes, an important figure of the period's literary and art scene, first arrived in Paris. Since her aunt and uncle, Valéria Dénes and Sándor Galimberti, were staying in Marocco, at the time along with Matisse, they asked their friend Réth to look after their niece. This is how Zsófia Dénes recollects the exhibition:

> We crossed a few rooms, he was dragging me by my arms and I was whining, because I wanted to stop. The walls were plastered with the works of Rouault, Matisse, Marquet, Derain, Othon Friesz, Camoin, Dufy and the like—all familiar names to me. "Of course, later you will have to come back here and see all these, too: Gustave Moreau's school and the beginnings with Cézanne. And the Nabis, who are a kind of prophet, and the Fauves, the Beasts. They had already started to shake the foundations. But I want to make your head swim." And he dragged me. He dragged me straight to room 41. That room had already gained some notoriety during that spring for being the one where all the Cubists gathered. That was the first time they were presented to the public as a group, as a school and as a movement. Painted on large canvasses and plywood boards, there were the compositions of Braque, Gleizes, Metzinger, Lhote, Léger, Le Fauconnier, Delaunay and the only woman, Marie Laurencin—and many others. Thirteen artists altogether. Chagall was allocated to this room also, obviously by mistake. And Réth, too. He was the friend who gave me this guided tour. He was fully entitled to be here, since he was a through-and-through Cubist. Alfréd Réth, or Frédi, who dragged me through all those rooms so as to confront me with the most revolutionary development of the Spring of 1911, Cubist painting. I had already known the word Cubism. That Frédi was a Cubist, I had also ascertained. But to see Cubism, to see the school of painting physically manifested through the pictures hanging on the walls, that was something I had not seen and had not even imagined. That room 41 inside the pavilion on the bank of the river Seine—in 1911—was simply beyond belief, something out of fantasy land for someone from Pest.[7]

Thus it was that in 1911 the Cubists and Réth literally burst upon the scene. At the Salon d'Automne the Cubist group grew more numerous still with the newcomers, including the Hungarian József Csáky. At the Salon, Réth's picture was hung between the paintings of Matisse and Rouault. Next he exhibited at the Jubilee Exhibition of Nagybánya and then he was invited to take part in an exhibition in Berlin. It was probably there that Herwarth Walden first had the opportunity to look at Réth's paintings, although the possibility cannot be excluded that a

common friend, the poet Ludwig Rubiner, had originally called Walden's attention to the Hungarian painter; whichever was the case, the fact remains that in February 1913 Walden asked Réth to represent the new French movement, Cubism, in Der Sturm, his own gallery. Réth exhibited eighty of his compositions; the journal *Der Sturm* published Réth's article on Cubism, along with his artistic credo. By this time, Réth was considered a major artist; this was underlined by the fact that the gallery had featured the Delaunays previous to his exhibition, and Franz Marc, one of the founders of Der Blaue Reiter, after it. That was when Miklós Rózsa, the director of the Művészház of Budapest, discovered Réth.

> It was partly due to Alfréd Réth that in this very tense and intensive period in the art world extensive contacts were established between Der Sturm and Művészház, in other words, between Berlin and Budapest. And so have we now come back, through Paris and Berlin, to Budapest, the Művészház. This exhibition took place in April and May, 1913 as the International Post-Impressionist Exhibition, although the title is misleading, as the content pointed far beyond Post-Impressionism. Not only did the Expressionists and Fauvists hang their works next to the compositions of Hungary's Eights and Cubists, but—according to the evidence of the catalogue—Kandinsky and Robert Delaunay also showed some of their abstract paintings. As far as Alfréd Réth was concerned, he had a separate section within the exhibition, featuring thirty-six of his works. In this way, Hungarian Cubism, which had been born in Paris, found its way back to Budapest—in illustrious international company.[8]

Thus Réth was set on the way which made him an important twentieth-century painter. The Berthe Weill Gallery mounted an exhibition of his paintings in 1913, the gallery which had been amongst the first to show Braque, Picasso, Léger and Juan Gris. The future looked promising to Réth but unfortunately only for a few months. The Great War broke out and, as a Hungarian citizen, he spent the next four and a half years in an internment camp in the Bretagne.

A new start and return to Paris

"... a disillusioned, spoiled Hungarian romantic, with memories of prison and the loss of people dear to me fresh in my mind, I was desperate to find new values and a new life."[9] This is how Tibor de Nagy, a major New York art dealer, described his feelings after the war. Réth must have felt something similar: although he returned to Paris after the war, he was not able to stay there long. The short time he spent in Paris produced one new and important acquaintance, Géo-Charles; but the loss of the Galimbertis and Maurice Esmein, as well as ill health, compelled him to return to Hungary. For a while he was on the road, roaming Europe and spending some time in Salzburg, among other places. Once back in Hungary, he tried to make a fresh start in the art life here: Béla Fónagy, the director of the exhibition venue Belvedere, organized a retrospective for him

in October 1922 and then invited him to take part in a group exhibition the following year. But Réth found the atmosphere in Budapest too stifling: in his own words, he was suffocating. Also, he felt that the attraction of Paris grew stronger and stronger. In 1923 he returned.

Of this return an interview published in the Budapest daily *Esti Kurír* has this to say:

> When I arrived, for some reason that I cannot explain, I gave my old address to the cab driver. You can imagine my surprise, when I got out of the car in front of the house on Boulevard Montparnasse, the location of my dear home that I had given up eight years before: with a delighted face and evident joy, the old concierge rushed out to greet me with the following words: – Enfin vous voilá, monsieur Réth! At last I was here, these were her words, which I found rather puzzling. But my astonishment grew even further, when the old lady led me to the studio and opened the door. Please, go in, she said. And she was the one who was amazed that I found this amazing. As it turned out, everything remained there exactly as I had left it eight years ago; they did not touch anything, believing that my absence was only temporary. I was not even charged rent for the period I was away.[10]

In 1924 the art life in Paris had started to liven up again. André Breton published his *First Surrealist Manifesto* and a new wave of Hungarians was arriving. This was when Brassai, Lancelot Ney, André Kertész, Béla Vörös, Géza Blattner, Árpád Szenes, Etienne Beöthy, Béla Czóbel, Vince Korda, Lajos Tihanyi, Emil Lahner, Csaba Perlrott and his wife came to Paris, along with Réth's childhood friend, the enormously talented painter István Farkas and his wife, Ida Kohner. By then Farkas was no longer just a friend, but also a relative: Farkas's father, József Wolfner, had re-married, taking Réth's sister Jolán as his wife. After 1925, the works of Réth and his compatriots were once again to be seen in the Paris salons. In 1926 the Salon des Independants mounted a jubilee exhibition entitled *Thirty Years of Independent Art 1884–1914,* in which Réth showed six of his paintings. The works he produced in that period assumed a "metaphysical character," somewhat similar to the painting of the young de Chirico and Carlo Carrà.

In addition to the faceless figures à la Malevich, he also added to his pictures motifs, icons and signs, which he would develop into a separate subject in its own right years later, in his *"découpages."* Most of the paintings he made in the mid-1920s came under the heading of "metaphysical Cubism," although some abstract compositions also emerged.

Beginning of the non-figurative period

In 1927 Réth was finally naturalised in France, which probably relieved him from some uncertainty, at the same time giving him additional confidence in his work: he rediscovered himself, as evidenced by the invitations he received from those important galleries which would eventually help him resume the suc-

Nudes and Horses, 1908, watercolour on paper, 72.5 x 91.5 cm. Private collection.

Lounging Nude,
1913,
watercolour on paper,
96 x 126 cm.
Private collection.

Nudes and Horses, 1909, oil on canvas, 54 x 81 cm. Private collection.

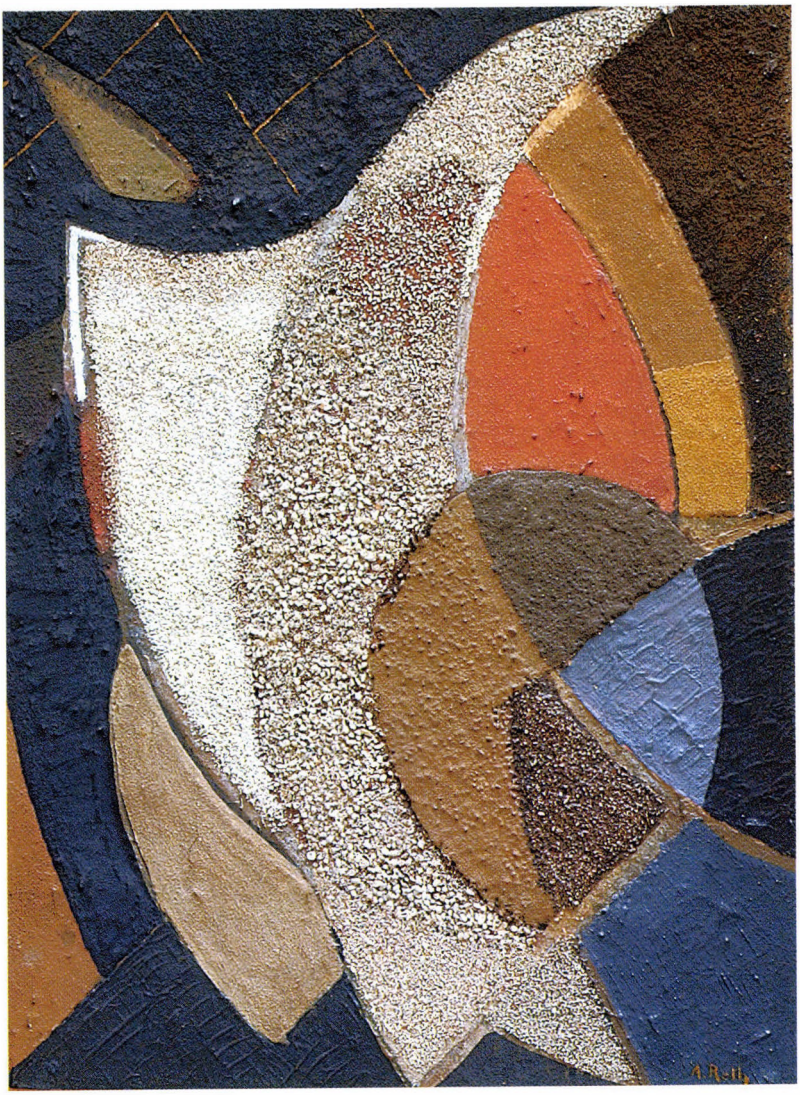
Bathers, 1911, oil on canvas.

Cubist Nude, 1912, oil on canvas, 105 x 75 cm. Private collection.

Southern Landscape, 1925, oil on canvas, 80 x 65 cm. Private collection.

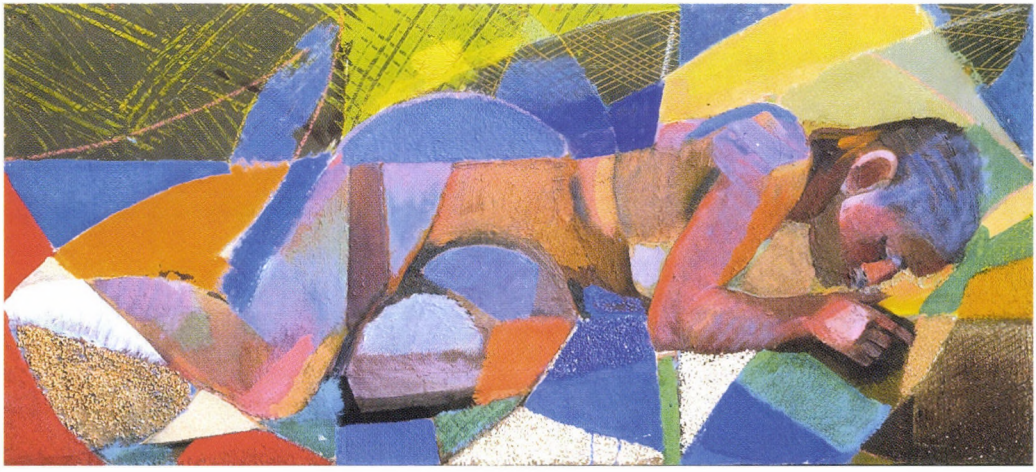
Woman with Necklace, 1927, oil on canvas, 58 x 46 cm. Private collection.

Composition, 1935, oil on canvas, 146 x 97 cm. Private collection.



Harmony of Materials, 1951, oil on wood, 82 x 61 cm. Private collection.

Persons, 1964, oil on wood, 66 x 102 cm.



Composition, 1950, oil on wood, 59 x 130 cm. Private collection.

cessful career that was disrupted by the war. The other factor that probably had a bearing on Réth's art concerned Berlin's losing its position as the centre of the international avant-garde to Paris for a few years after 1928, when the first abstract art groups, such as Cercle et Carré or Van Doesburg's creation, *Art Concret,* were established in Paris. Réth sent three of his works to the exhibition *Art d'aujord'hui,* which was arranged in 1925 by the Polish painter Victor Yanaga Poznański.[11] This exhibition prepared the ground for the breakthrough, in consequence of which abstract art became the dominant trend by the middle of the 1930s. In 1928 the Galerie Henri organized an exhibition for Réth, who was next invited to show his works in the Galerie Le Canard Sauvage of Brussels.

Réth received another invitation in 1931, this time to the Galerie de la Renaissance, where a group exhibition was held under the title *1er Salon de 1940.* The list of the invited artists included, Arp, Beöthy, Czóbel, Albert Gleizes, Mondrian and Lajos Tihanyi. Réth, whose last previous association with a group, apart from the École de Paris, dated from his Cubist period, now chose to identify himself with the school known as Abstraction-Création.

Abstraction-Création

In February 1931 a new art movement was born out of the débris of the short-lived group Cercle et Carré. Calling itself Abstraction-Création: Art non-figuratif,[12] the group held exhibitions with the aim of popularising abstract art. Alfréd Réth joined the movement in 1933; he took part in the group's exhibitions in 1933 and 1934. The series *Rhythms and Découpage* were produced during this period.

For a few years during the 1930s, Réth was producing works which were characterised by curving lines and the interplay of concentric circles and contrasting tones. Enjoying a freedom he had never before experienced, the artist added fresh colours to his palette, colours that were hitherto unseen.

> After the monochrome of Cubism, the colorful world of the Impressionists, the Fauves and the Orphists opened up for him, and Réth was happy to bow to the power of light and colour. Following in Delaunay's footsteps, he, too, looked upon colour not just as one particular property of matter, but as a pure element, a pure form and a perfection that needs no complement.[13]

The distinctly isolated colours were not meant to express sensuality or a newfound vivacity. Quite the contrary: the colours of the paintings referred to the theories of light and colour. They elevated the physical laws above the problems of taste, beauty and aesthetics—in line with the painting of Delaunay and the Orphists. In 1934 and 1935, in conjunction with the *Rhythms,* Réth embarked on a series of new experiments, which resulted in brightly coloured three-dimensional pictures, or *Découpages* (Clippings). These painted wood constructions, which the artist liked to refer to as *"formes dans l'espace"* (forms in

space), while Roditi called them super-collages, are full of bright colours, featuring shifted half discs and full discs and forms analogous with Leger's machine aesthetics. He incorporated all these into his wood panels, the edges of which coincided with the contours of the painted forms. The same signs and motifs of industrialised urban folklore, which had originally appeared in the pictures he had made during his metaphysical period, reappeared in the compositions constituting the series of "forms in space."

In April 1935 Réth had a one-man show in the Galerie Pierre, where his latest works were shown next to a selection of his compositions from 1912 and 1913. The fact that immediately before Réth's exhibition the gallery showed Pablo Picasso's works clearly says something about Réth's own status. Futhermore, the Galerie Berthe Weill invited Réth to hold a second exhibition there, which took place in 1939.

The war years and Réalités Nouvelles

History once again interrupted Réth's career just when it began to take off anew; this was so regardless of the fact that, in spite of his Jewish ancestry, he was able to occupy himself with creative work during most of the war in Chantilly—although in reduced circumstances. Lacking the basic materials necessary for painting, he started to experiment with materials which had rarely or not at all been used previously in the fine arts. He mixed powdered coal, cement, slag and chalk powder with glue, then used a painter's spoon to apply the mixture to slabs of concrete—since canvas was also in short supply.

> I think that non-figurative art should find its own materials, to be able to express our ideas in a spontaneous fashion, we should abstain from using traditional materials. (...) I wanted to avoid the separation of colour and material. These two elements are closely bound up in everything that nature offers to our vision. And we all know that paint only allows the imitation of various materials.[14]

Moving from the découpage of the 1930s, through the three-dimensional pictures made in 1944 of concrete, he arrived at the series Harmony of Materials, which reached their high point the 1950s.

Apart from his Cubist days, the "most visible" period in Réth's oeuvre—and therefore also the one that was the most accessible to critics—was the time when he was associated with the group Réalités Nouvelles, when he created the series *Harmony of Materials*.

The first Salon des Réalités Nouvelles was held in 1939, and then relaunched in 1946, in Paris. Réth took part in it in the following year. In 1947 the young Denise René invited her to her gallery, where Réth was represented by nine of his compositions. This was followed the next year by a one-man show covering Réth's entire oeuvre, where forty-five works produced between 1912 and 1948 were exhibited. His work received extensive media coverage. Jacques Lassaigne described

the exhibition in the following words: "Réth is one of the most serious and most authentic vanguards of the actual movement working towards abstraction."[15]

Following this, but still in 1948, Réth was invited to participate in the exhibition *Tendances de l'art abstrait.* The following year he had his retrospective in the Galerie Folklore of Lyon. This was followed by the exhibition *Le Cubisme (1907–1914)* in 1953 in the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, where Réth was among the participants. In 1955 the Galerie de l'Institut organized a retrospective for him, where he showed forty-six of his paintings and George Waldemar contributed an essay to the catalogue. In 1957 he contributed five paintings to the exhibition *Art Abstrait. Les premières generations (1910–1939)*[16] held in the Musée de Saint Etienne; dated 1910, one of his paintings, *The Relationship between Straight and Curved Lines,* was among the earliest works shown.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s Réth used a wide variety of materials for his compositions, which included brick powder, cement, sawdust, pebbles, crushed seashells and eggshell, matchsticks, slag, charcoal, wood fibre, shale and fabric. In a way, the series *Harmony of Materials* was already anticipated by a composition he produced in 1914, *Robinsonian Landscape.* From as far back as 1914, Réth enriched the surface of his works with sand; later he added other materials to his armoury, the colour and the texture of which came to form an organic part of his compositions. Réth was among the first to apply sand to his paintings (two years after Braque's and one year after Picasso's similar experiments). Through his experiments with clay, he participated in the preliminary history of such movements as *art brut* or the "matièrists," whose members included Alberto Burri and Piero Manzoni. He evidently exerted an influence on some Hungarian artists also, most notably his good friend István Farkas, who experimented with the same process, as seen in his painting *Still Life with Pipe* (1928), and Ferenc Martyn, whose composition *Structure* (1970) relied on the same technique.

Return to figurative art

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, when he had to come to terms with the fact that he was coming close to the end of his life, Réth decided to combine the motifs and characteristic features of his various periods in the bubbling melting pot of his expressive power: "through his painting, he cut through the dilemma between figurative and non-figurative art, between cold abstraction and tachism," George Waldemar wrote,[17] adding that "There are landscapes and faces overlapping. Réth created a world in which sign and meaning are mixed together." Throughout this period he liked to use various textiles, which he appliquéd to the canvas as a substitute for paint. In the last period of his life he was honoured with several retrospective exhibitions, such as one held in 1959 in the Gimpel Fils Gallery in London, and another one arranged in 1963 in Michel Boutin's gallery in Paris.

In conjunction with his return to figurative art, Réth returned to themes that were associated with the old masters *(The Adoration of the Magi,* 1957; *The Feast of the Sardines,* 1958). The latter was a paraphrase of Goya's *Carnival Scene.* Meanwhile, Réth continued to search for the most timely form of expression. The achievements of Neo-Expressionism or Art Informel seem to answer the questions he posed in his last period, when he addressed the contemporary public by using a "sign language" to aid comprehension.

Alfréd Réth died on September 17, 1966 in his studio. He was laid to rest in Montparnasse cemetery, in the company of Atlan, Baudelaire, Brancuşi, Man Ray, Maupassant, Soutine, Tristan Tzara and Zadkin. ❧

NOTES

1 ■ Nagybánya–Budapest, August 18—October 14, 1906. Válogatás a nagybányai művészek leveleiből 1893–1944 (A Selection from the Letters of the Nagybánya Artists 1893–1944). MissionArt Galéria, Miskolc, 1997. p. 141.

2 ■ *Születtem... Magyar képzőművészek életrajzai* (I Was Born... The Autobiographies of Hungarian Artists). Palatinus, 2002, Budapest. p. 208.

3 ■ The Julian Academy, Paris 1868–1939. New York, Shepherd Gallery, 1989.

4 ■ In 1907 Buhot started to visit the Academy La Palette.

5 ■ Later on Buhot became the managing director of the Orientalist Society of the Musée Guimet.

6 ■ Réth's letter dated June 10, 1952. Réth Bequest—Aline Boutin.

7 ■ Dénes Zsófia: *Tegnapi Újművészek* (Yesterday's New Artists), Budapest, Kozmosz, 1974. pp. 9–10.

8 ■ Krisztina Passuth: *Avantgarde kapcsolatok Prágától Budapestig 1907–1930* (Avant-garde Connections from Prague to Budapest 1907–1930). Balassi Kiadó, Budapest, 1998. p. 58.

9 ■ Laura de Coppet and Alan Jones: *The Art Dealers.* Clarkson N. Potterm Inc. New York, 1984. p. 43.

10■ Unsigned article: *Esti Kurír,* August 6, 1924. p. 5.

11■ Cercle et Carré group: an art movement founded by Michel Seuphor and the Uruguayan Joaquim Torres Garcia in 1929, although it effectively began to function only a year later, in 1930. By holding exhibitions and issuing manifestos, the group made an attempt to bring together the abstract art schools of Europe—e.g. Constructivism, Futurism, Purism, Neo-Plasticism, Dadaism and the Bauhaus—and to unite the artists involved in the fight against the predominance of Surrealism.

12■ The following artists were among those shown: Arp, Baumeister, Brancuşi, Bruce, Marcell Cahn, Csáky, Robert Delaunay, Sonia Delaunay, Van Doesburg, Domela, Goncharova, Gris, Huszár, Janco, Klee, Larionov, Léger, Marcoussis, Miró, Moholy-Nagy, Mondrian, Nicholson, Ozenfant, Picasso, Prampolini, Sevranok, Sima, Tihanyi, Valmier, Vantongerloo, Villon and Vordemberg-Gildewarth.

13■ Csaba Sík: *Rend és kaland.* Budapest, Magvető, 1972, p. 26.

14■ Extracts from Alfréd Réth's interview for the publication *Témoignages pour l'art abstrait.* Op.cit. p. 248.

15■ Jacques Lassaigne's criticism was published in the journal *La Bataille,* in the column Les expositions, on March 3, 1948.

16■ The artists invited to the exhibition included Arp, Tauber-Arp, Balla, Beöthy, Brancuşi, Calder, Csáky, Robert and Sonia Delaunay, Van Doesburg, Freundlich, Geizes, Goncharova, Herbin, Huszár, Jawlenskij, Kandinsky, Klee, Kupka, Léger, Man Ray, Miro, Moholy-Nagy, Mondrian, Nouveau, Ozenfant, Picabia, Schwitters, Seuphor, Severini and Survage.

17■ Waldemar George: *Les silences d'Alfred Réth,* Paris, Galerie Armand Zerzib, 1968.

László Kontler

Historians from the Periphery

William Robertson and Mihály Horváth

The story I am going to tell will perhaps look familiar to readers on the threshold of the enlargement of the European Union. For the accession countries, this is an entry into a composite entity, and the abandoning of a part of national sovereignty in the old sense of the term, for the sake of reaping distinct benefits—especially in terms of prosperity and security. Intellectually and emotionally it is an expression of the aspiration of the accession countries to be "measured by European standards," and their expectation that their integrity and identity will be unharmed, even enriched by the fulfillment of this aspiration. For obvious reasons, the process is not without dilemmas and tensions.

Nor is this situation without historical precedents. In a somewhat imaginative fashion, the terms of union, accession and enlargement could be translated into those in which the relationship between metropolitan and provincial regions of the early-modern and modern empires (composite monarchies) of Europe was conceptualised. This was especially the case among the "minor partners" involved in such relationships; and especially after the Enlightenment, when questions of modernity, progress and tradition, development and backwardness started to receive more and more attention, and were frequently examined through the lens of the dialectics of territorial integration in large and powerful units versus retaining or (re)gaining a separate polity as a bulwark of a separate identity. In this article I shall attempt to illustrate this through an admittedly unusual experiment in comparative history. Broadly speaking, I shall bring together the contexts of two cultural revivals marked, indeed greatly inspired, by the above-mentioned complexities: the Scottish Enlightenment and the Hungarian "national awakening" or "Reform Era".

Admittedly, there is no obvious warrant for the two chosen units of comparison. They are separated not only by a substan-

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tial geographic distance, but also asynchronicity. The time-span in which the Scottish Enlightenment is usually studied is the 1740s to the 1790s, that of the Reform Era the 1820s to the 1840s. Albeit its prelude in the Josephian and Leopoldine period, under the first Hungarian "reform generation" of the 1780s and 1790s, presents some overlap in time, whatever intercourse with or influence by the Scottish Enligtenment one might detect was mostly indirect and not of real importance. It did occur, but reference to it here would exaggerate significance.

A phenomenological similarity between the Scottish Enlightenment and the Hungarian Reform Era can be certainly established if our yardstick is a notion of the Enlightenment that gained acceptance simultaneously with, and not independently from, the unfolding of a new interest in eighteenth-century Scottish studies since the late 1960s.[1] This shift was marked by a de-emphasising of the metaphysical and radical, anti-clerical, anti-Christian and generally anti-establishment content often associated with the Enlightenment as a result of identifying it with a few, predominantly French *philosophes.* Instead, it came to be approached as a comprehensive and collaborative effort to contemplate the unity of man with his physical and social environment, to accumulate and systematise knowledge available about this environment, with a view to improving it. This was indeed more congenial to the spirit of the literati of Edinburgh, and was obviously shared with them by the Hungarian reformers—but also by many others right across the continent. In addition, the outstanding achievement of the Scottish Enlightenment (that is often exclusively identified with it), the "science of man", a pursuit integrating moral philosophy, psychology, aesthetics, political economy and history, evoked less of a response in Hungary than elsewhere. At the time of its blossoming, political economy made its appearance in the shape of *Kameralwissenschaft* and *Statistik,* and when social science in general was found relevant to the Hungarian predicament, Comte and Hegel were imposed on the Enlightenment heritage.

There were strikingly similar motivations, arising from a similarity of situational elements, at work in both the Scottish and the Hungarian case when the "moment of Enlightenment" came—when, having arrived at the maturity required to take full responsibility for one's past, present and future doings, one could assess these with a sense of realism and self-criticism. Here, of course, I am paraphrasing yet another definition of the Enlightenment, one that is contemporaneous with the phenomenon itself, and probably the best known of all: Immanuel Kant's famous answer to the question *"Was ist Aufklärung?"* in the 1784 inquiry of the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*—"mankind's exit from its self-incurred immaturity."[2] Enlightenment in this sense, in both Scotland and in Hungary, was a sociocultural response to one's being a minor partner in a composite monarchy in which the other side had proved itself more powerful politically and socio-economically more advanced. In the case of both Hungary and Scotland this predicament was relatively recent, following centuries of asserting independence, in conjunction with "ancient liberties" enshrined in Whig traditions defying the pretensions of absolute monarchy (hallmarked by the names of two sixteenth-century figures, the historian-statesman George Buchanan in the Scottish and the lawyer István Werbőczy in Hungary). "Enlightenment" was the recognition that the staunch insistence on such traditions was not only hollow but also potentially harmful because it tended to conceal the real causes for the country's sorry state and precluded effective remedies.

A critical assessment and re-evaluation of one's own past (feudalism) within a broader European context was a central element, but the inspiration from that particular structure was particular to Scotland and Hungary.

Indeed the shaping of the political framework in the two countries did show some parallels. After long-standing personal union and strife of political and religious nature, the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was a crucial period in the history of both. At the cost of not inconsiderable violence William III carried the "Glorious Revolution" to Scotland, a move which—together with Scotland's ailing economy, and after acrimonious domestic debate—prepared the way for the incorporating Union of 1707. The Scots were thereby deprived of their parliament (though kept their Church and legal system intact), while they were promised a share of the benefits of empire. At almost the same time, Leopold I's attempt to incorporate Hungary as a province in the Habsburg Empire after the expulsion of the Turks provoked the Rákóczi uprising (1703–1711). This failed to achieve the restoration of national monarchy but, through the ensuing settlement that culminated with the Pragmatic Sanction of 1723, in effect secured the constitutional integrity of Hungary (though in religious and legal affairs Vienna was largely to have its way). A tension-ridden, metropolitan-provincial type of relationship was created in both cases, although the legal relationship and many other circumstances were markedly different.

One difference arose from the fact that whereas by the mid-eighteenth century the improvement of the Scottish economy under the impact of the Union was rather impressive, Hungary's recovery from the calamities of the previous two centuries was sluggish, and the frequently lamented "colonial situation"[3]—the 1754 tariffs which hampered the progress of Hungarian manufactures—also made it equivocal. But later, in the Josephian era, a sizeable vanguard for a Hungarian Enlightenment had been raised, it became possible to ask whether the causes of Hungary's backwardness were truly the "colonial system" and other factors encapsulated under the slogan of "subjection to Vienna", or they lay elswehere, closer home. In other words, an inquiry into the past and present condition of Hungarian society and the resulting imperatives, not unlike the Scottish Union debates, became advisable through challenges of a similar nature.

Traditions of learning in Scotland prior to 1707 were far from insignificant. Noteworthy was the reception of, and high level engagement with seventeenth-century traditions of continental natural law and medicine; Newtonian ideas appeared in the curricula of the Scottish universities considerably earlier than anywhere else. Yet, though the Scottish Enlightenment relied on all these traditions,[4] the primary challenge was posed and occasioned by the Union and it was in the Scottish Enlightenment that the problems of evolutionary sociology and the moral dilemmas of modernity were discussed within the same discursive framework. Peripheral Scotland emerged during the eighteenth century as an intellectual great power as a result of her struggle with issues raised by the late seventeenth-century crisis of the "European mind,"[5] with which the Union confronted her, and from which the very genesis of the Enlightenment was inseparable. These included the sociology and moral psychology of a modern commercial society; its place in stadial progress and its relationship with its predecessors, as well as its future chances.

To an underdeveloped but proud and independent nation the Union held out the prospect—initially a highly doubtful one—of enjoying, in return for the relinquishing

of formal independence and becoming a province of a global empire, a share in its profits and in the advantages of the largest free market area in Europe. Scotland had been the minor partner in the personal union created back in 1603, but during the tempestuous seventeenth century it was possible for her to retaliate for policies curtailing her integrity by steps which threatened the stability of the whole of the state extended over the British archipelago, and to exert a decisive influence on the chances of restoring order: the Bishops' Wars of 1639 are examples for the first, and the attitude of the Scottish parliament at the time of the Glorious Revolution for the second. In England in the 1690s the financial foundations of an unprecedented powerful state machinery were laid,[6] but Scotland's economic weakness was shown up by events such as the ignominious failure of an independent colonial policy in the collapse of the Darien scheme.[7] The Union was only postponed, but not thwarted either by the separatism of the Highland clans or the patriotic movement hallmarked by the name of Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun, which drew its inspiration from a republicanism adapted to British circumstances by James Harrington at the time of the Protectorate and promoted by Fletcher's Anglo-Irish contemporaries Robert Molesworth and John Toland.[8]

The dilemmas of republicanism were indeed crucial to the genesis of the Scottish Enlightenment, and they continued to cast a shadow on the ideas of all of its central figures.[9] What chances were there left for patriotism and national consciousness, if the independent legislative assembly had been abandoned and the country relegated to the status of a province in an empire whose purpose and vital element, was commerce? No chance whatever, according to the "straight" version of republicanism, whose spokesmen stressed that commerce and luxury undermined civic and patriotic virtues. As soon as the citizen's interests were divided between the common good and other pursuits—the market being distinguished from the agora in this regard—his patriotic devotion grew feeble, and became vulnerable in the face of corruption; and once individual morals were corrupted, the liberty of the republic was doomed. For Fletcher and his like the issue appeared in simple terms. Since virtue, liberty and participation were closely linked to each other and the integrity of the human self, they dismissed Union and empire, which were proving themselves to be incompatible with these values; and even though they acknowledged that the Scottish economy ought to be modernised through commerce, they believed that the latter's tendency to corrupt should be checked by the utopian correctives of Harrington, rather than let loose by incorporating the country in England's trans-Atlantic empire—which, however, seemed for their more numerous opponents the sole guarantee of successful trade on a large scale.

Fletcher's spirit never ceased to haunt the Scottish Enlightenment: even such a quintessential "modern" as Adam Smith owed a debt to the civic tradition.[10] But the Scottish Enlightenment became what it was because its key theorists—whatever differences separated some of them from others—asked Fletcher's question the other way round. Since commerce, empire and what they amount to—that is, modernity—could no longer be ignored, were there foundations other than that hitherto known upon which virtue could be based? The limitation of the nation's sovereignty and the influences and challenges to which archaic Scottish society was exposed—and, even more, was expected to be exposed to quite soon—in the early eighteenth century required a revision of the traditional teaching on public virtue. Under the given cir-

cumstances it was imprudent and insufficient to insist on the republican ethos based on the historical ideals of the ancient citizen and the Gothic freeholder, while the differentiated world of commercial society opened alternative paths of asserting one's virtue, no longer confined to the strictly political sphere. The accents of the discourse in the new system of values facilitated an interference between expressions whose roots were actually or supposedly common: they create the impression that "polite" or "polished" conduct might at the same time be "political"—i.e., related to the art of the *polis*—, or that "civilised" has much in common with "civil". For these potentials to be fulfilled, societies only need to rise to a level of development where opportunities for "commerce"—the exchange of commodities as well as ideas and sentiments, trade as well as conversation—are plentiful. By giving a spur to men's instinctive sociability, frequent intercourse will stimulate the growth of moderation, mutual respect and tolerance, criticism and self-criticism. These virtues, even if not asserting themselves on a directly political level, might do so in a circuitous way. While negotiating a business deal, or discussing subjects of the most diverse nature in coffee houses, inns, clubs, assembly rooms or private company, parties to the conversation are necessarily compelled to observe each other's viewpoints and assess their own from the position of the "impartial spectator". The "invisible hand" (to employ two compounds so obviously associated with Smith's name) would thus ensure that private gain —a better bargain, greater renown, or simply the satisfaction of one's self-complacency—is not antithetical to the common good, thereby also promoted just as through casting votes in a popular assembly of the citizens of a city state. When enlightened self-interest has in the process taught people to restrain their self-love, laws can be implemented and institutions can be created which would formalise such restraints. In due course after the growth of commerce, the rise of cities and the polishing of urban manners had become obvious,

> statutes and regulations multiplied of course, and all became sensible that their common safety depended on observing them with precision [...] [o]rder and good government, and along with them the liberty and security of the individuals, were, in this manner, established in cities

as William Robertson tells us in *A View of the Progress of Society in Europe,* the voluminous preface to his *History of Charles V* (1769).[11]

Besides *Charles V,* Robertson's major histories include the *History of Scotland* (1759), the *History of America* (1777) and *An Historical Disquisition of the Knowledge which the Ancients had of India* (1791). These are works by an establishment man: the Principal of the University of Edinburgh, a dominant figure in the General Assembly of the Kirk and a "historiographer royal", a national historian who has also been described as the quintessential eighteenth-century cosmopolitan historian; the works of a master of historical narrative employing stadial history to provide an interpretative framework.[12] He turned this framework to completing the erosion of a mode of patriotism that rested on the legend of the ancient Scottish constitution, whose special virtues were rooted in a unique Gaelic legacy heroically preserved against tyrants within the country and foreign invaders by a valiant and public-spirited nobility.

This interpretation of the Scottish past, most notably present in the humanist George Buchanan's *Rerum Scoticarum historia* (1582), had already been challenged from at least two corners for over half a century before Robertson.[13] Fletcher ridiculed the idea that the nobility had been disinterested guardians of Scottish liberty,

although he retained the notion of liberty as freedom to take an active part in national affairs, and the view that "no monarchy in Europe was more limited, nor any people more jealous of liberty than the Scots."[14] There was also another trend, of royalist inspiration, which suggested that as freedom is incompatible with the lawlessness that generally prevailed in the country,

> actual liberty was a stranger here ... our Scottish heroes of old savour a little of the Poles at present: they fought for liberty and independency, not to their country, but to the crown and the grandees.

The historical basis of the alleged two-thousand-year-old *ius regni* was also undermined.[15] Such trends were all helpful in working out the historical foundations of an anti-aristocratic and civic patriotism in an atmosphere generally critical of the Scottish past, as encapsulated in Alexander Wedderburn's Preface to the *Edinburgh Review* of 1755–6 (an initiative whose aim was to improve Scottish letters, and in which Robertson was also active):

> The memory of our ancient state is not so much obliterated, but that, by comparing the past with the present, we may clearly see the superior advantages we now enjoy, and readily discern from what sources they flow

—meaning the Union and its consequences.[16]

In most of his output as a historian Robertson focused on the period which he considered crucial from the point of view of his vision of the history of the western world as the unfolding of the great plan of Providence, a gradually increasing accessibility of divine revelation, made possible by the improvement of the means of subsistence and the consequent refinement of manners and enlightenment of the human mind. This period was the sixteenth century, which saw a crisis in that process (in the sense in which the term had been used in the modern historiography of the early-modern period, i.e., both as a halt and as a catalyst). In his *History of Scotland*, Robertson sought to show how and why Scotland, although already making its appearance on the horizon of European history by the sixteenth century, did not share in developments that were taking place elsewhere, such as the curtailing of feudalism, which in Scotland was in effect postponed until the constitutional Union of 1707 with England. By doing so, he attempted to refocus Scottish historiography: he endeavoured to place Scotland on the map of Europe by providing a pattern for the study of national history in the context of the continent-wide development of economies, societies and polities.

True, Robertson did pay tribute to the robust traditions of independence and martial vigour that so heavily imprinted themselves on the history of Scotland. He was also as willing as Fletcher to explore these themes by using the classical vocabulary of virtue, and in a "mood of carefully contained nostalgia".[17] But he left no doubt that these aspects of the Scottish past were inseparable from the "aristocratical genius of the feudal government"[18] which, because of a few peculiar properties of the country and its inhabitants, was accentuated in the case of Scotland: the lairds acknowledged no master, foreign or domestic, nor did they recognise legal constraints, exercising an oppressive tyranny over their inferiors.

> In rude ages, when the science of government was extremely imperfect, among a martial people, unacquainted with the arts of peace, strangers to the talents which make a figure in debate, and despising them, Parliaments were not held in the same estimation as at present; nor did haughty Barons love those courts, in which they appeared with such evident marks of inferiority.[19]

And Scotland, alas, seemed to have been marked by the longevity of these structures:

> Many years after the declension of the feudal system in the other kingdoms of Europe, ... the foundations of the ancient fabric remained, in a great measure, firm and untouched in Scotland.[20]

Not in the least because of these considerations, for Robertson the economic benefits of the Union and the resulting social progress more than made up for the loss of political standing; indeed the Union seemed to him as the beginning of an authentic history of freedom in Scotland.

> As the nobles were deprived of power, the people acquired liberty. Exempted from the burdens to which they were formerly subject, screened from oppression, to which they had been long exposed, and adopted into a constitution, whose genius and laws were more liberal than their own, they have extended their commerce, refined their manners, made improvements in the elegancies of life, and cultivated the arts and sciences.[21]

By broadening the horizon of writing Scottish history to include the progress of manners and social structures besides political events, Robertson proposed to supersede its shallow ancient constitutionalism and its insularity. Thoroughly depending on a criticism of feudalism, he offered a new, enlightened patriotism—one that has been described as Anglo-British rather than Scottish, but whose chief pursuit was the improvement of the condition of Scotland, rather than vainglory and partisanship.

At the time of writing this was not overoptimistic, nor merely a programme to be realised but rather a rationalisation and defence of a new state of affairs. Within a matter of decades, a significant minority within a landed oligarchy whose fractiousness had in the past been notorious and had so often led to a state of near anarchy in Scotland, became imbued with such impulses and became rational improvers motivated by patriotic desires for the regeneration of their country.[22] A similar process of enlightened patriotism replacing one merely consisting of "antiquated prejudice" (as Robertson would have said), was also taking place in Hungary between the Josephian period and the Reform Era, closely wedded, as in the case of Scotland, to a critical reassessment of the nature and consequences of the country's involvement in an imperial partnership, from which a new interpretation of responsibilities and imperatives resulted.

After the post-1711 settlement, the Hungarian nobility's insistence on their privileges was still conceived as ardour for the liberties of the nation. By contemporary standards this was not entirely bogus: the *natio Hungarica* was supposed to consist only of the *nati,* those born to houses with a pedigree, that is, the nobility whose interest was therefore, from the etymological point of view, plausibly conflated with the national interest. By defending the corporate (estates-based) "constitution" (to be more precise, the traditional customs and statutes of the realm)[23] and thus ensuring the continuous survival of deliberative assemblies and organs of self-government on the municipal as well as the national level, they maintained an important political tradition that goes back to the thirteenth century. The corporate paradigm, i.e., the idea that the *res publica* is established upon the dualism of the monarch and an autonomous *corpus politicum,* first obtained some institutional reality in the *generalis congregatio* (or, *parlamentum publicum*) of 1277, and took an epic shape in the *Gesta Hungarorum* of Simon Kézai (ca. 1282/5).

Kézai's *Gesta* is a projection of the desirable model of the polity into the distant past, in which kinship and continuity is alleged between the ancient Huns and the Hungarians. It defined membership in the

corpus politicum through a theory of inequality, in which the dissolution of the ancient self-governing community and the boundary between the free and the unfree was explained by reference to the contempt of some for the call to arms issued "in the name of God and the people" (c.7).[24] The military nobility was thus identified as the *communitas Hungarorum* (c.42),[25] a corporate legal entity authorised not only to govern itself but also to take decisions on behalf of the *populus.* Laws are represented as deriving their binding force from the *assensus* of the *tota communitas* or its *sanior pars,* and a vocabulary of consent and pact is used in explaining the origin of the power of rulers among both the Huns and later the Hungarians (c.19, c.46).[26] Already in ancient times, endowed with prescriptive authority, Kézai refers to "the dominion of the Huns and Attila" (c.15) in a sort of *politia commixta*.[27]

During the subsequent two centuries the theoretical premisses of the corporate paradigm became integrated in the political thought and attitudes of the Hungarian elite, and ultimately received reinforcement from legal humanism in the *Tripartitum* of István Werbőczy, a culmination of the centuries-old process of collecting "the customary law of noble Hungary".[28] Though its enactment was prevented by a party of magnates at the diet of 1514, it was published in Vienna three years later, and became included in the Hungarian *Corpus Juris* in 1628. The most successful Hungarian book of all times went through over fifty editions in three centuries, during which period it was regarded as an authentic source of law—as the only readily available and accessible compilation on the subject, and as a faithful representation of the views of the nobility. Werbőczy confirmed the principle fundamental to their self-understanding: that the prelates, barons, magnates and nobles of the Kingdom of Hungary may differ in regard of their dignity and their role in promoting the public good, but they all enjoy *una eademque libertas,* one and the same liberty. He clearly distinguished the privileges of burghers from the "golden liberty" of the nobles, the same across the *universitas,* as being merely particular to the localities where they constituted randomly assembled multitudes.[29] As in Kézai, nobility is derived from armsbearing. Echoing Kézai's *communitas* theory, in Werbőczy's account the monarchy came into being from the nobility's voluntary consent to elect a king and transfer to him the power to govern and rule. "There is no prince but elected by the nobility, and there is no nobleman but ennobled by the king;" and the mutual bond expressed in this formula makes all nobles true "members of the Holy Crown".[30] While most of this has to do with social exclusiveness rather than the political right of the nobility to be involved in legislation, the thrust of Werbőczy's argument and the few passages that specifically relate to the structure of the polity support the corporate model.

The availability of this corporate tradition of the constitution was an advantage in the sense that when raising the hitherto unprivileged "among its bulwarks" became timely, it provided an existing practical framework within which emancipation could be envisaged. However, this was at a serious cost. Elsewhere in the Habsburg lands, the nobility grudgingly abandoned their tax privileges under Maria Theresa, but in Hungary they resisted attempts to force them to contribute to state revenues. By their insistence on the maintenance of the whole network of rural relations connected with these privileges, the nobility had a share in perpetuating the country's backwardness, which they did perceive, but threw at the door of Vienna which, supposedly, pursued colonial policies to-

wards Hungary. For most of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth century, Hungarian diets attributed the dismal conditions of the country to political oppression and economic exploitation by Austria. The significance and the intellectual powers of a small cohort of committed reformers propelled to prominent positions under Joseph II far exceeded their numbers, and they were perhaps the first in Hungary to develop the awareness that there was no obvious match between the two concepts, "fatherland and progress", that became the slogan for the generation of their grandsons.[31] The moment when they had a chance to change, from disaffected Josephinists to leaders of opinion, was cut short by the French Revolution and the measures taken to avert its influence, culminating in the shock of the Jacobin trials of 1795.

Among the given circumstances, Werbőczianism and Scythianism continued to provide the ultimate framework for interpretations of a Hungarian history that had a claim to be called patriotic. Learned polemic against this Hungarian *thèse nobiliaire* was confined to such advocates of court policies as the court librarian Adam Kolar, or Adam Baltazar Krčelić, rector of the Croat College in Vienna, who both offered critiques of the *Tripartitum* and all it stood for during the crisis culminating in the Diet of 1764 and its dissolution. Significantly, the figure consensually regarded as having started the Enlightenment in Hungary, György Bessenyei, still regarded the gulf that separated the nobilty from the peasantry as "natural". He supported this from Werbőczy in his *Of the Course of the Law* (1777), and interpreted *The Customs, Manners, Modes of Government, Laws and Important Deeds of the Hungarian Nation* (1778) in the same spirit.[32] When, on the basis of linguistic evidence, János Sajnovics first pointed out that the Hun–Hungarian kinship theory was mistaken and that Hungarians were most closely related to the Finns, Bessenyei was one of several influential figures of the Hungarian intellectual scene who re-emphasised the "Scythian" theory. Remarkably, he did so on the basis that "instead of words, one should look at manners", and that in contrast to the people of Attila, marked by "victory, valiance, the ambition of glory and the sagacity required for domination", the "Lappon" was deformed in his outward appearance as well as his manners. Bessenyei's text bears the title *The Legal Status of Hungary:* evidently, he still conceived constitutional integrity as inseparable from social exclusiveness, which in turn is represented as resting on the special virtues of the privileged—even though Bessenyei and several like-minded authors thought that the character of the age required nobles to become "learned patriots", asserting their virtues through superior learning, not just armsbearing.[33]

The point of such adjustments would be the preservation of the ancient constitution. As in manifestations of the same political language elsewhere, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose:* the more (successfully) the practice of the ancient constitution is adjusted to the changing requirements of the times, the more infallibly its original principles will be asserted[34]—in this case, the liberty of the nobles to participate in government and their particular rights enshrined in customary law. Correctives of a republican inspiration were as capable of revising this language quite significantly as those offered by Fletcher in the Scottish case, although they were less conspicuous. In his Patriotic Address of 1808, the poet Sándor Kisfaludy warned that

> the usual pernicious ills of nations, such as indolence, effeminacy, pride, inadvertance, prodigality ... discord and strife ... have again overwhelmed the Hungarian nobility,

and threaten to undermine a vigour indispensable to a politically active elite.[35] Others, as late as in 1842, stressed the excellence of the Hungarian ancient constitution (in particular, the county system) by drawing a parallel between it and the republics of classical antiquity: just as these, to Ferenc Pulszky, seemed to enshrine the liberty of direct influence over public affairs, in contrast to "the liberty of the moderns", which was merely the security the law offered to one's person and property.[36]

As in the Scottish case, therefore, the shift from an aristocratic to a civil language of patriotism depended on a critique of the discourses of both ancient constitutionalism and classical republicanism. This was done in a very succinct manner by József Eötvös in his reply to Pulszky: there was indeed a similarity between the Hungarian constitution and those of ancient Rome and Greece, for truly

> nineteen in twenty inhabitants of this country do not possess any rights whatsoever, which also ... belongs to the special character of the ancient states.[37]

As to Robertson, to an increasing range of Hungarian reformers opposed to Vienna the paradigm of the ancient constitution seemed to offer a false history of liberty, and a false patriotism. But to develop a true idea of the same, one also needed to have a concern for improvement and social justice, one absent from the corporate paradigm and one that started its career in the Hungarian context as the almost exclusive province of enlightened absolutism. As a result, the paradigm shift also involved some sort of, mostly tacit, engagement with the issue of the Habsburg–Hungarian relationship.

The somewhat paradoxical borrowal of the idea of social contract from the discourse of enlightened absolutism and its grafting on the vocabulary of the ancient constitution by some of the critics of Josephism during the Diet of 1790/91 is only superficially related to this process.[38] More significant was the perpetuation of the inspiration drawn from enlightened absolutism into the 1790s and beyond by some of the erstwhile Josephinists. For them, disillusionment with their impatient master did not entail the abandonment of the social and intellectual ideals they had pursued during the 1780s. They continued to champion these ideals in the committees set up by the diet and charged with the enormous task of working out proposals for the comprehensive reform of the country under the more congenial Leopold II; then, under the unenlightened absolutism of Francis I, first as sympathisers of the Hungarian "Jacobin movement", and later, after its suppression, more or less as internal exiles, waiting for more auspicious times.

Figures like the emblematic writer on economics Gergely Berzeviczy maintained the tradition of social criticism and social responsibility in a period marked by patriotism confined to a stand against the fashion of "French principles"; the ancient virtues and glories of 'the nation' were extolled in poems, songs, orations and pamphlets; the wearing of national costume and the playing of *verbunkos* music (recruitment songs based on Hungarian folk motifs). The availability of pieces of analysis like Berzeviczy's was of enormous importance when the Age of Enlightenment, in the sense outlined here, came to a culmination in Hungary with the appearance, in the later 1820s, of Count István Széchenyi and his projects of piecemeal improvement that focused on the economic and socio-cultural spheres and avoided the constitutional issue in a studied manner.[39] Reformers like Berzeviczy and Széchenyi brought about a shift in the discourse on Hungary's past and current predicament. As they saw it, the chief

cause of Hungary's problems was not her subordination to Vienna, but the feudal system, and the way to emerge from it was not by the quest for past glory. Rather, the goal was progress and refinement through the polishing of the human mind and the human environment, and the forging of a sense of community, a *societas civilis* where formerly there had been only an assemblage of groups of subjects possessing very diverse rights and privileges. Those involved in this change were not insensitive towards the cause of national independence, but they considered the rhetoric of constitutional grievances employed by the country's elite against Vienna to be futile and wanted to direct their fellow nobles' attention to spheres in which they could more usefully and meaningfully exert their patriotic enthusiasm. They championed an attitude that had its parallels amongst other "minor" partners in extended polities across Europe, such as in eighteenth-century Scotland. They argued that neither modernisation, nor even a powerful civic consciousness inevitably depended on full political sovereignty, and that the latter was only desirable when accompanied by the former.[40]

It must be added that there was also a growing recognition, especially in the 1840s, that the limitations on Hungary's political sovereignty also impaired the prospects of the civilizing process as envisaged by the early lights of the two reform generations. But a realistic assessment of the implications of the imperial bond and of the interplay of indigeneous and external factors in the growth of Hungary's backwardness and the resulting imperatives, had to precede, and prepare the way for, this recognition even in the case of individuals who most clearly acted upon it when armed conflict broke out between Hungary and Austria in 1848. One such individual was the historian Mihály Horváth, Minister for Religion and Education in the Szemere government appointed after the Hungarian Declaration of Independence in April 1849.

In his introduction to a book on the times of George Rákóczi II published in 1829, Imre Bethlen expressed the hope that "at last a Hungarian Gibbon, Hume, Robertson or John Millar might be born as an ornament of this nation."[41] Perhaps no-one would be more suitable for the role of a Hungarian Robertson than Horváth. Born into the petty nobility, he had a clerical education and later became a bishop; as a historian he published books that achieved quite remarkable sales, given the relatively narrow contemporary market. His interests and approach as a historian display interesting similarities with those of Robertson. Impartiality, which the Scottish historian insisted on,[42] in the sense of an immunity from the prejudices of the feudal past (in effect, a strongly partial antagonism to those prejudices) was a governing principle for Horváth, too. His first historical work, a prize-winning essay, was "A Comparison between the Civil and Moral Culture of the Hungarian Nation Moving into Europe, and of Europe at That Time" (1834)—the history of the manners of a barbarous nation when confronted with those of more civilised neigbours. This was a topic central to Robertson's *View of the Progress of Society in Europe,* similarly to the subject of commerce which Horváth took up in his next book, *The History of Industry and Commerce in Hungary during the Past Three Centuries* (1840). Robertson and his fellow Scottishmen of letters were pre-eminent in formulating a novel historical approach which shifted attention from chronology to manners, from kings and heroes to the path taken by peoples towards civilisation. Horváth argued that

> It is a mark of inferiority in a nation to be so short of other sources of praise and fame as to hold the antiquity and glory of its ancestors to be its chief merit,[43]

and sought to discover other, more essential features in the national past. He wholeheartedly embraced the approach championed by Robertson in his attempt to focus on "the quiet circle of popular life,"[44] and while he acknowledged that commerce had not played a paramount role in Hungarian history, he stressed the importance of the subject in an age that displayed a special interest in the "material parts of life", in "popular industry and popular happiness."[45] In the "Comparison" Horváth's desire to criticise feudalism still led him to a favourable portraiture of the rustic simplicity of the ancient Hungarians, ostensibly only tempted to burst out into violence and lapse into indolence by the riches of the West, and though professing to be in favour of the virtuous middle, he still preferred the unlimited freedom of the Hungarians to feudal servitude—appropriate as a counterpart of Robertson's "carefully contained nostalgia", as described above. In his later work, however, he was more inclined to associate the striving for, and the establishment of civil freedom with improved morals and the growth of civilisation, occasioned by the progress of commerce and industry (besides Christianity).

It would be tempting to suggest that in these pursuits Horváth must have drawn some inspiration from Robertson. In the lack of consistent evidence to this effect, it is safer to suggest that if there was any influence of this kind, it was exercised indirectly through the great Göttingen historians of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (August Ludwig Schlözer, Ludwig Timotheus Spittler and Arnold Ludwig Heeren) who were certainly aware of the relevance of the Scottish Enlightenment in general and Roberston in particular to their own work, and who, especially Heeren, had a demonstrable influence on Horváth.[46] But, as argued above, the kind or parallel I intend to draw does not depend on reception, demonstrated *clare & distincte*. It rather depends on the similarity of certain situational elements, such as, in this case, learned inquiry into the European history of social and economic structures in order to throw light on the national past and present, an inquiry which also implied taking stock anew of the relationships within a composite state, the very act of stocktaking in such terms requiring a tone and attitude of impartiality, self-criticism and responsibility.

It is apposite to mention here that when commenting on Lajos Kossuth's protests against the Austro-Hungarian compromise, the *Ausgleich* of 1867, Horváth quoted the example of Scotland in support of his own view that when the fundamental aims of a state are more likely to be realised in association with another state, this is the path to be followed.[47] In spite of his eventual role during the Revolution and War of Independence of 1848–1849, this measured tone also characterised Horváth's evaluations of Austro-Hungarian relations, always discussed in the light of the development of commerce and industry in the pre-revolutionary years; a disposition whose counterpart was a realistic asessment of the indigeneous causes of backwardness during the key centuries of the making of European modernity.

A history of Hungary that starts with the year 1526 cannot but begin in a tone of gloom. "Unhappy", "lamentable", "miserable" are the adjectives that determine the tone of the introductory passages of Horváth's *History of Industry and Commerce,* but the author hastens to add that the disastrous battle at Mohács in 1526, where the Turks wiped out the royal

Hungarian army, rather than being the root cause of misery, only sealed the fate of the country and that the seeds of the trouble had been sown much earlier, at times when Hungary still possessed complete mastery over her fortunes, and was apparently at the height of her glory. The "oligarchy" that first came into being under Sigismund of Luxemburg receives the criticism due to it;[48] considerably later we also learn that the problems were of a structural nature:

> In Hungary commerce was favoured neither by the existing constitution, nor by the legislation, which has always shown a certain apathy and prejudice in regard to this subject.[49]

As a result, commerce in Hungary never rose above the level of mediocrity, and even that level was never attained

> except in the age of Louis the Great, Sigismund, and Matthias, when [Hungary] was supported by some extraordinary circumstances, and started to assume greatness and to forge links with the commerce of the world.

The problem with the constitution was its feudal character that not only enshrined the nobility's privileges but also fueled its prejudices against commerce:

> The merchant and his trade was not held in any respect by public opinion, at least by the noble class; because they did not appreciate its benefits for civil life and the happiness of the country... merchant or usurer fraud was all the same to their minds.[50]

Such prejudices, together with economic policies ("reasons from economy *[státusgazdasági okok]*") that maintained monopolies, staple rights and were conducive to customs abuses etc., would have prevented a flourishing of commerce and manufactures even in the absence of the Ottoman wars. Despite such moves as the confirmation of urban charters or the extension of the liberties of some communities, Horváth does not fail to call attention to the responsibility of Hungary's sixteenth and seventeenth-century Habsburg kings in neglecting the cause of commerce and industry (which for Horváth also included agriculture), especially in contrast to other European monarchs of the time. Nevertheless, the whole import of his evaluation of even the centuries of the greatest adversity is encapsulated in the closing remarks of his introductory chapter:

> It will be highly edifying to observe that it was not only political misfortune: the bitter tyranny of the barbarous Turk, and the rage of faction; not only physical impediments: distance from the sea, the dismal condition of trade routes by land and water etc. that were the causes of these unhappy circumstances; but there were a great many domestic factors to account for such conditions, partly voted in the nation itself and within its parts of different character and interest, and partly in the constitution and the government.[51]

By contrast, Horváth's account of the next period (1711–1780) is introduced by a highly optimistic presentation of the conditions marked not only by the expulsion of the Ottomans but also by the failure of Rákóczi's independence war. This is peculiar, but indicative of the author's novel conception of patriotism. In this period the

> industrious class of the people was freed of manifold harassments, and it was no longer vain for it to seek the protection of the law in the face of its oppressors.[52]

Moreover, besides peace and the alleviation of lordly tyranny—i.e., the removal of previous impediments—positive incentives to the progress of commerce and industry were also introduced by Charles III, (the Emperor Charles VI) whom Horváth considers a pioneer in Hungary from this point of view. Even though technology remained underdeveloped, improvement became possible through a resettlement policy ac-

companied by generous tax exemptions, through securing the free movement of serfs and rendering them some legal protection, initiatives that were carried forward in subsequent reigns.

One of the most conspicuous features of Horváth's book is the dispassionate treatment of the most frequently lamented product of eighteenth-century Habsburg economic policies, the 1754 tariffs and their consequences for Hungary under Maria Theresa and Joseph II. He does not fail to recognise, and analyse in detail, their adverse effects on the progress of Hungarian manufactures. At the same time he does not harbour any doubt as to the good intentions of either ruler, both as far as improvement in general and within Hungary in particular is concerned (though his judgement of the government bodies in charge of the implementation of the system is somewhat different); nor does he pretend that the regulations stifled viable industrial initiatives. On the contrary, Hungarian products are described by Horváth as primitive, and it is implied that any effort at a significant advance in that field at that time might well have turned out to be Quixotic.[53] In turn, he is willing to concede that, as rulers of a composite state, Maria Theresa and her son were obliged to think in appropriate terms and consider the interests of the *Gesamtmonarchie,* instead of any of the constituent parts—and such considerations prompted them to strengthen existing branches of the economy in each of them.[54]

Almost astonishingly—one might say, carrying impartiality to the extreme—the accommodating tone remains unchanged even in regard of the reign of Francis I, who was far from being a favourite on either side of the Leitha.

> Our government... has done more in this century than ever; nay, it has done everything it might do in view of the relations of the whole of the monarchy for the sake of the happiness of the same. That it has not allowed full liberty to our commerce can less justly be ascribed to its disposition and will than anything else. This system of relations [of the Monarchy], conditioned by a great variety of circumstances and events through several centuries, is much too ancient, much too deeply rooted in the most delicate elements of the state organism, for it to be possible, with the greatest goodwill, to change suddenly and at once without a dangerous convulsion of the other provinces which also seek paternal care.[55]

This, perhaps too indulgent, evaluation of the performance of a government that tolerated, rather than encouraged, economic progress in order to preemt too much political discontent, may also have been prompted by the desire to emphasise domestic responsibility for bringing about a decisive change in the country's fortunes. In Horváth's interpretation, part of the problem lay precisely in the prevailing disposition to "expect manna to fall from heaven".

> Sufficient energy was lacking; amidst the noise of requests, desires and demands, very little was done worthy of a nation whose bosom was swelling with vigour![56]

There were merely two periods that were an exception to this dominant attitude of the Hungarian elite. The first were the post-Josephian years, when the commissions of the 1790/91 diet, inspired by the "spirit of the century", busied themselves with a systematic survey of the condition of Hungary and put together recommendations on this basis. These prepared the ground for the second generation of responsible reformers which appeared on the stage in 1825 and which, Horváth hoped, would "erase the ignominious stigma of centuries-old languish from its forehead."[57]

In the introduction to this paper I argued that, for the sake of meaningful and interesting comparisons, differences are no less significant than similarities. The similarities have perhaps dominated my presentation so far, so in my conclusion differences ought to be highlighted. The concept of liberty was certainly central to the pursuits of both the Scottish Enlightenment and the Hungarian Reform Era. We have been told that

> the history of liberty had been rewritten by Scotland's own intellectual elite in such a way as to subvert the intense pride which earlier generations of Scots had taken in their independence as a sovereign kingdom, in their freedom within that state from absolute monarchy, and in their Protestant autonomy from Rome. ... For Scots, unlike other nations, liberty did not inhere in self-determination. The Scottish conception of liberty had from the mid-eighteenth century become associated with the benefits of Union with England, including liberation from anachronistic feudal institutions.[58]

Modern (though perhaps not contemporary) Scottish consciousness is indeed a "nationalist failure" in the sense that at its inception the idea of freedom became associated with Anglicisation, to a large extent because of the peculiar view of the civilising process developed by the Scottish Enlightenment, a view which was inconvenient for the creation of myths of national golden ages. Such a conception of freedom had a limited potential in the multi-ethnic empires of Central and Eastern Europe, where the economic and civilising benefits held out by the imperial bond were less obvious than in Scotland, and where, unlike in the Scottish case, the inferior status of vernacular languages were a barrier in terms of career paths. But although enlightened patriotism, based as it was on a particular view of the civilising process that was committed to theories of progress inducing scepticism and criticism towards ancient glory, came to early maturity in Scotland, significant counterparts were inspired by the confrontation with a similar set of issues in early-nineteenth century Hungary. There the liberalism which was imbued with such counterparts became inseparable from a nationalism that ultimately challenged the imperial bond because it was found antithetical to the interests of progress. But for this to occur it was first imperative to examine critically Hungary's Habsburg connection in the light of criteria other than its relevance to the liberties of the estates. This went hand in hand with a critical assessment of those liberties along with the whole of Hungary's social fabric. There is still an agenda for Hungarian historians to revisit the entire sweep of our history during the sixteenth to the early twentieth centuries from the angle of the comparative history of European composite states. A comparison of the Scottish Enlightenment and the Hungarian Reform Era, far more detailed, consistent and comprehensive than attempted in this paper, might form a modest chapter in such an undertaking. ❧

NOTES

1 ■ The publications that inaugurated the watershed of eigteenth-century Scottish studies were H. R. Trevor-Roper, "The Scottish Enlightenment", *Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century,* LXVIII (1967) and Nicholas Phillipson, Rosalind Mitchison (eds.), *Scotland in the Age of Improvement* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970, 2nd ed. 1996). It was about the same time that the value of Enlightenment studies centred on the salons and the philosophes of Paris and their continent-wide "influence", still visible in Peter Gay's magisterial *The Enlightenment. An Interpretation,* 2 vols. (New York: Norton, 1969) started to be questioned—a trend marked, among many others, by Roy Porter, Mikulás Teich (eds.), *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

2 ■ James Schmidt's translation, in James Schmidt (ed.), *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 58.

3 ■ A contemporary term that gained currency in the post-Josephian period when, during the Diet of 1790–1791 and afterwards, arguments were sought by the Hungarian nobility for redefining Austro-Hungarian political and economic relationships. See János Poór, *Kényszerpályák nemzedéke 1795–1815* (A Generation that Had No Choice. Budapest: Gondolat, 1988), 77–96. For obvious reasons the term also lent itself readily to historians of both patriotic and Marxist inspiration. The classic statement is Ferenc Eckhart, *A bécsi udvar gazdaságpolitikája Mária Terézia korában* (The Economic Policy of the Vienna Court under Maria Theresa. Budapest, 1922).

4 ■ Roger Emerson, "Natural Philosophy and the Problem of the Scottish Enlightenment", in *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century,* 242 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1986), 243–291.; idem., "Science and the Origins and Concerns of the Scottish Enlightenment", *History of Science* 26 (1988), 333–66; idem., "Science and Moral Philosophy in the Scottish Enlightenment", in M. A. Stewart (ed.): *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 11–36; Paul Wood, "The Scientific Revolution in Scotland", in Roy Porter, Mikuláš Teich (eds.), *The Scientific Revolution in National Context* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 263–87.

5 ■ A term borrowed from the English title of a remarkable book by Paul Hazard, *The European Mind 1680–1715* (French original 1935; London: Hollis and Carter, 1953).

6 ■ For an authoritative analysis of the emergence of the "fiscal-military state" in England, see John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power. War, Money and the English State 1688–1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

7 ■ In the last years of the seventeenth century many Scots subscribed to the formation of a Company of Scotland whose purpose was to set up a colony at Darien, near Panama to ensure Scottish participation in the New World trade.

8 ■ See J. G. A. Pocock: *The Machiavellian Moment. Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,1975).

9 ■ John Robertson, "The Scottish Enlightenment and the Limits of the Civic Tradition", in István Hont, Michael Ignatieff (eds.), *Wealth and Virtue. The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scotish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); idem, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Militia Issue* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985).

10 ■ Nicholas Phillipson, "Adam Smith as a Civic Moralist", in Hont and Ignatieff, *Wealth and Virtue;* John Dwyer, "Virtue and improvement: the civic world of Adam Smith", in Peter Jones and Andrew S. Skinner (eds.), *Adam Smith Reviewed* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 190–216.

11 ■ William Robertson, *A View of the Progress of Society in Europe from the Subversion of the Roman Empire to the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century* (Preface to *The History of the Reign of Emperor Charles V*), in *The Works of William Robertson* (London, 1835), 319.

12 ■ Robertson is in fact the protagonist, and his most comprehensive intellectual biography is offered, in Richard B.. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment. The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985). Diverse aspects of his life and work are explored in Stuart J. Brown (ed.), *William Robertson and the expansion of empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). For surveys of his historiographical achievement, see Karen O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment. Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), ch. 4–5; J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion. Vol. II: Narratives of Civil Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), section iv.

13 ■ See Hugh Trevor-Roper, "George Buchanan and the Ancient Scottish Constitution", *English Historical Review,* supplement 3 (1966); Roger A. Mason, "Scotching the Brut: Politics, History and National Myth in Sixteenth-Century Britain", in Roger A Mason (ed.), *Scotland and England 1286–1815* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1987), 60–84.

14 ■ Andrew Fletcher, "Speeches by a Member of the Parliament which Began at Edinburgh on the 6th of May, 1703", in Andrew Fletcher, *Political Works,* ed. John Robertson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 135.

15 ■ By the Jacobite antiquary Thomas Innes. The previous quotation is from an 1735 article by the lawyer James Erskine of Grange. For both, see Colin Kidd, "The ideological significance of *Robertson's History of Scotland",* in Brown (ed.), Robertson and the expansion of empire, 126–7.

16 ■ *Edinburgh Review* (1755–6), ii. For the general context, see Nicholas Phillipson, "Scottish Public Opinion and the Union in the Age of Association", in Phillipson, Mitchison (eds.), *Scotland in the Age of Improvement,* 125–147.

17 ■ The expression of O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment,* 108. The argument of this paragraph and the next one is indebted to O'Brien's study, as well as to Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity, 1689–c. 1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

18 ■ William Robertson, *The History of Scotland during the Reigns of Queen Mary and of King James VI till His Accession to the Crown of England,* 2 vols. (4th ed., London, 1761), vol. I. 25.

19 ■ Ibid., 80.

20 ■ Ibid., 38.

21 ■ Ibid., vol. II. 298.

22 ■ See several studies in Phillipson, Mitchison (eds.), *Scotland in the Age of Improvement.*

23 ■ The shift in usage from *leges et consuetudines* to *constitutio* took place in the aftermath of the reign of Joseph II, when the emperor seemed to have levelled an assault not merely on individual laws and customs but their entire edifice, from now on increasingly referred to as "the ancient constitution". See Henrik Marczali, *Az 1790/91-iki országgyűlés* (The 1790–1791 National Assembly. Budapest, 1917), 110; cf. László Péter, "Ország és királya a hatvanhetes kiegyezésben" (The Country and its King in the 1867 Compromise), in *Az Elbától keletre. Tanulmányok a magyar és kelet-európai történelemből* (East of the Elbe. Essays in the History of Hungary and Eastern Europe. Budapest: Osiris, 1998), 225.

24 ■ Anonymus, *A magyarok cselekedetei* (The Deeds of the Hungarians) – Kézai Simon, *A magyarok cselekedetei* (The Deeds of the Hungarians. Budapest: Osiris, 1999), 93.

25 ■ Ibid., 107.

26 ■ Ibid., 101, 109.

27 ■ Ibid., 99. For a detailed discussion of Kézai's theory, see Jenő Szűcs, "Társadalomelmélet, politikai teória és történetszemlélet Kézai *Gesta Hungarorumában* (A nacionalizmus középkori genezisének elméleti alapjai)", (Social Theory. Political Theory and Historiography in Kézai's *Gesta Hungarorum* [The Theoretical Foundations of the Medieval Genesis of Nationalism]) in *Nemzet és történelem* (Nation and History. Budapest: Gondolat, 1984), 413–556.

28 ■ For a relatively recent discussion of the Tripartitum in this sense, see Gábor Hamza, "A Tripartitum mint jogforrás" (The *Tripartitum* as a Source of Law), in *Degré Alajos emlékkönyv* (Alajos Degré Memorial Volume. Budapest: Unio, 1995), 77–85.

29 ■ István Werbőczy, *Hármaskönyve* (Tripartitum. Budapest, 1897), 391, 401.

30 ■ Ibid., 55-69.

31 ■ In his studies on the Scottish and the Neapolitan Enlightenment, John Robertson reminded that whereas both countries started the eighteenth century as dependent and underdeveloped provinces of a greater monarchy, and produced much enlightened thought, in terms of socio-economic development Scotland was a success when compared to Naples—while it was Naples that acquired independence in 1734. See his "The Scottish Enlightenment", *Rivista Storica Italiana* 108 (1996), 792–829; "The Enlightenment Above National Context", *The Historical Journal,* 40 (1997), 667–697; "The Scottish Contribution to the Enlightenment", in Paul Wood (ed.), *The Scottish Enlightenment. Essays in Reinterpretation* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2000), 37–62, in particular 54–5.

32 ■ György Bessenyei, "A törvénynek útja", "A magyar nemzetnek szokásairul, erköltseirül, uralkodásának módjairul, törvényeirül, és nevezetesebb viselt dolgairul" ("The Way of the Law". On the Customs, Morals, Manner of Rule and Notable Deeds of the Hungarian Nation), in *Bessenyei György Összes Művei. Társadalombölcseleti írások* (György Bessenyei's Collected Works. Writings on Social Theory), *1771–1778,* ed. Péter Kulcsár (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1992). See also Domokos Kosáry, *Művelődés a XVIII. századi Magyarországon* (Culture in 18th-Century Hungary. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1980), 571–584; Ferenc Bíró, *A felvilágosodás korának magyar irodalma* (Hungarian Literature in the Age of the Enlightenment. Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 1994), 161–186; and Olga Penke, *Filozofikus világtörténetek és történetfilozófiák. A francia és a magyar felvilágosodás* (Philosophical Histories of the World and Philosophies of History. The Enlightenment in France and Hungary. Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2000), 161–182.

33 ■ György Bessenyei, "Magyarországnak törvényes állása", (Hungary's Legal Position) in *Bessenyei György Összes Művei. Prózai munkák* (György Bessenyei's Collected Works. Prose), *1802–1804,* ed. György Kókay (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986), 231–5. On "learned patriotism", see Attila Debreczeni, "Tudós hazafiság" (Learned Patriotism), *Irodalomtörténet* 32 (2001), 487–504; idem., "Nemzet és identitás a 18. század második felében" (Nation and Identity in the Second Half of the Eighteen Century), *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 105/5-6 (2001), 531–3.

34 ■ "Ancient Constitutionalism" as a Dominant Language in Early-Modern Political Discourse Was

Discovered by J. G. A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law. A Study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957; reissued with a retrospect, 1987); see also Glenn Burgess, *The Politics of the Ancient Constitution. An Introduction to English Political Thought 1602–1642* (London, MacMillan, 1992).

35 ■ Sándor Kisfaludy, "Hazafiúi szózat a magyar nemességhez" (A Patriotic Appeal to the Hungarian Nobility), in *Kisfaludy Sándor minden munkái* (Sándor Kisfaludy's Complete Works), ed. Dávid Angyal (Budapest: Franklin, 1893), vol. VIII, 44. Cf. József Takáts, "Politikai beszédmódok a magyar 19. század elején. A keret" (Political Modes of Speech in early Nineteenth Century Hungary. The Framework), *Irodalomtudományi Közlemények* 102/5–6 (1998), 673.

36 ■ Ferenc Pulszky, "Centralisatio" (four articles in *Pesti Hírlap*, 1842, nos. 116–119), in *Pulszky Ferenc kisebb dolgozatai* (Ferenc Pulszky's Minor Works), ed. Antal Lában (Budapest, Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1914), 109–139.

37 ■ See József Eötvös, *Reform és hazafiság* (Reform and Patriotism), ed. István Fenyő (Budapest: Gondolat, 1978), vol. II. 119.

38 ■ On the relevant pamphlet literature, see Henrik Marczali, *Az 1790/91-iki országgyűlés* (The 1790/91 National Assembly. Budapest, 1917), 89–98.

39 ■ See "The Need for Pride: Foundation Myths and the Reflection of History in Modern Hungary", *The Hungarian Quarterly* 41 (2000) Winter, pp. 54–74. On Berzeviczy's early career, see Éva H. Balázs, *Berzeviczy Gergely, a reformpolitikus (1763–1795)* (Gergely Berzeviczky, the Reform Politician. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1967); as representing continuity between the Josephian period and the Reform Era, idem., *Hungary and the Habsburgs 1765–1800. An Experiment in Enlightened Absolutism* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1997), 298–303; also Poór, *op. cit.* 83–91. From the vast literature on Széchenyi, see especially George Barany, *Stephen Széchenyi and the Awakening of Hungarian Nationalism, 1791–1841* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968); András Gergely, Széchenyi eszmerendszerének kialakulása (The Shaping of Széchenyi's Theoretical System. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1972); and, concisely, András Gerő, "Count Széchenyi and the Conflicts of Modernity", in András Gerõ, *Modern Hungarian Society in the Making. The Unfinished Experience* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1995), 60–70.

40 ■ Cf. László Péter, "Volt-e magyar társadalom a XIX. században? A jogrend és a civil társadalom képződése" (Was There a Hungarian Society in the Nineteenth Century? The Legal System and Civil Society), in *Az Elbától keletre* (East of the Elbe. Budapest: Osiris, 1998), p. 148–187.

41 ■ Imre Bethlen, *II. Rákóczi György ideje* (The Times of George II Rákóczi. Nagyenyed, 1829). Cited in Ágnes R. Várkonyi, *A pozitivista történetszemlélet a magyar történetírásban* (Positivism in Hungarian Historiography. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1973), vol. II, 44.

42 ■ See Jeffrey Smitten, "Impartiality in Robertson's *History of America*", *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 19 (1985), 69–85.

43 ■ Mihály Horváth, "Párhuzam az Európába költözködő magyar nemzet s az akkori Európa polgári és erkölcsi műveltsége között" (Parallels between the Hungarian Nation Moving to Europe and Civil and Moral Culture in the Europe of the Time), in *Horváth Mihály kisebb történelmi munkái* (Mihály Horváth's Minor Historical Works. Budapest, 1968), I. 102. Cf. R. Várkonyi, A pozitivita történetszemlélet, II. 98.

44 ■ Mihály Horváth, *Az ipar és a kereskedés története Magyarországban, a három utolsó század alatt* (Industry and Commerce in Hungary in the Last Three Centuries. Buda, 1840), iv.

45 ■ Ibid., vi.

46 ■ The importance of Heeren and the entire Göttingen school for Horváth, both in their own right and as intermediaries for the Scottish Enlightenment, has been stressed in Mónika Baár, "Historians and the nation in the 19th century: the case of East-Central Europe", PhD. Diss. (Oxford, 2001). See also her "The Intellectual Horizon of Liberal Nationalism in Hungary: The Case of Mihály Horváth (1809-1878)", in Balázs Trencsényi, Dragos Petrescu, Cristina Petrescu, Constantin Iordachi, Zoltán Kántor (eds.), *Nation-Building and Contested Identities: Romanian and Hungarian Case Studies* (Budapest: Regio Books, Iaşi: Polirom, 2001), 21–41.

47 ■ Baár, "Historians and the Nation", 233.

48 ■ Horváth, *loc cit.* 2-3.

49 ■ Ibid., 152.

50 ■ Ibid., 45–6.

51 ■ Ibid., 10.

52 ■ Ibid, 111.

53 ■ Ibid., 213.

54 ■ Ibid., 222.

55 ■ Ibid., 367. Censorship, or the threat of it, is of course a factor to reckon with.

56 ■ Ibid., 368.

57 ■ Ibid. 390.

58 ■ Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past*, 268.

Anna Fábri

Manners Maketh Magyars

Polite Society in the 1880s

Budapesti társaság (Budapest Society) in 1886 was published and met with considerable interest. The relatively long work by an anonymous author was brought out by a distinguished publishing house that usually specialised in scholarly works, but that also thought it its duty to publish manuals on etiquette. These were not only profitable, but also fulfilled a mission, one that the key players in nineteenth-century Hungarian culture (and in Hungarian political life) also considered as their own. At the time manners often appeared as issues of primary political importance in Hungary, given a climate of societal change and the breakdown of the feudal system: these processes, however, were strongly linked to upholding the aim of national sovereignty within the Habsburg Empire. All this obviously demanded a modernisation of manners. Politicians and writers in the first half of the century treated manners as of equal importance with land reform and overcoming long established prejudices.[1] In the depressed atmosphere that followed the crushing of the 1848–49 Revolution and struggle for national independence, the suspension—or complete cessation—of feudal differences in the conventions of social contact was seen as the pledge of social unity.[2]

The author of *Budapest Society* was one of the many writers who reacted sensitively to Hungary's image abroad and for whom "our reputation in the world" was of special importance. The book, according to its preface, was intended as an amendment and critique of two books published abroad on social and political conditions in Hungary. In both of these, the writer Madame Adam (Juliette Lamber, who also maintained a famous political salon in Paris) and Angelo de Gubernatis, the Italian scholar, tried to draw a comprehensive picture of the political and societal conditions of "the country of the Hungarians".[3] The author of *Budapest Society* read both as summing up experiences during their travels in Hungary with an openly acknowledged sympathy. However, as they relied on the opinions of others, including books published on the subject, there is no doubt that their image of Hungary was influenced by the likes and

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dislikes of their Hungarian informers. Given this, it is surprising that the author of *Budapest Society* not only agreed with the comments of these two foreign visitors on the "caste-like", "isolationist" character of Hungarian (especially Budapest) society, but made this the principal thesis of the book. The author reiterated that social integration (and the development of a bourgeois civilization) so enthusiastically espoused by Hungarian politicians and writers at the beginning of the century had not materialised. Nor had this happened as regards manners following the Compromise and within the framework of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. He bitterly acknowledged that, from the 1870s, a major part of social life (and especially that of High Society) was characterised by behaviour and thinking that was inconsistent with both Hungarian social traditions and the liberalism of the 1848 Revolution taking no account of the moral achievements (and material sacrifices) of those who attempted to implement these ideals in practice.[4]

Stefánia Wohl, who maintained one of the few genuinely noteworthy Budapest salons of the time, looked at the failings of Hungarian social life from another angle.

> The keen exchange of views and the real interest in the arts that occupies educated society in other European cities where at homes, parties, concerts and recitals lively discussions integrate them again and again, are missing from our society where it is only feet dancing that seem to understand one another.[5]

The complaint, which obviously refers to a minimum interest in matters of the mind, is emphasised by the reference to Europe. According to Stefánia Wohl, who is so proud of her Europe-mindedness, Budapest has a "Europe deficiency".

De Gubernatis said very much the same when he established how much the Hungarian social scene differed from "modern societies",[6] but he described certain charming little circles *("charmants petits cercles")* as providing the stage for the mixing of the classes and (or intellectual enjoyment so well in the social life of Budapest. He mentioned the soireés given by Ferenc Pulszky, the director of the National Museum, and his daughter Polyxéna, as well as the circle around the "Abbé Liszt". He also described salons maintained by aristocratic ladies where members of parliament, government officials, members of the Academy of Sciences, university professors, famous writers, painters, sculptors, well-known actors and a few foreign diplomats engaged in relaxed conversation. (His book contains a chapter, *La femme,* about the Wohl sisters where competent women writers and their roles in society are described.)

> When, a couple of years earlier, Stefanie Wohl wrote a spirited article on the absence of Hungarian salon life, the article itself was refuted by the existence of the salon maintained by the Wohl sisters where people gathered not to eat, drink champagne or dance, but rather to exchange ideas. You could never find a "crowd" at the Wohl salon as it was "quality" and not "quantity" that mattered to them. In spite of this, there was a continuous coming and going at their place, "just as at an embassy", noted a consul general, one of the guests. Perhaps that was the reason why they didn't see salon life in the same way as they do here. They didn't organise glittering feasts. They didn't place emphasis on cuisine or pomp. But for many years they were "at home" through long winter afternoons and evenings. Those who were in need of an hour's *causérie* or longed for some good music could be sure to find a pleasant atmosphere and a cup of tea even if they knocked on the door unexpected and uninvited.[7]

wrote Zsigmond Justh, some years later. Justh was a writer, who was a welcome guest in the salons of Paris. He had many

plans to modernise society and one of those was to bring together those of high birth and artists of distinction.[8]

The Wohl sisters were working women: writers, translators, journalists and (for more than a quarter of a century) editors.[9] They were devoted to their writing, and industrious in their social life. They invited company to their inner city home and themselves frequented several other Budapest salons. While their health permitted, they travelled to numerous European cities where letters of introduction gave them entrance to the homes of many famous figures. They belonged to a middle-class Jewish family that had converted to Lutheranism. Following the early death of their father (who was an army surgeon) they had supported themselves from a very young age. Though they considered themselves to be self-made women, they were proud (and rightly so) of what they had achieved: a secure livelihood, undoubted success, social respect. The Emperor Francis Joseph awarded Janka a high decoration in 1897. Presumably family connections helped them considerably. Their mother, of whom an encyclopaedia considered it important to say that she was an educated woman, was well, indeed closely, acquainted with a number of aristocratic ladies. She passed on these connections to her daughters and this made the salon possible. Through their cousin, Lajos Hevesi (who became a well known art critic in Vienna under the name of Ludwig von Hevesi), they created a good relationship with the German-language press in the Habsburg dominions, which provided them with information and work. Their salon, like several others in Budapest, was multilingual. Foreign diplomats were regular guests as was Franz Liszt.[10] Music was very much part of everyday life in the home of the Wohl sisters. The elder, Janka (Johanna), had published a significant collection of poetry when she was barely fifteen years old. She had originally studied the piano, but she suffered from such terrible stage fright that it stopped her from ever becoming a concert pianist. Their home regularly hosted rehearsals for musical pieces, and the company was often entertained by the wonderful musical and literary improvisations of the talented one-armed pianist Count Géza Zichy, a close friend of Franz Liszt. Alongside several well-known society women (mainly aristocrats) the regular guests included prelates, among them the cultured Cardinal Haynald, another close friend of Liszt's; scholars, including Ármin Vámbéry, a renowned and adventurous Orientalist; the young literary dandy, Zsigmond Justh; the dedicated believer in the equality of women, Antonina de Gerando and her mother Countess Emma Teleki, as well as young and eager writers, journalists and politicians. The gathering at the Wohls was truly mixed in terms of gender, religion, political persuasion and social position. They tried to avoid confrontations in conversation[11], and it is quite clear that the salon worked as an information exchange, though the sisters always kept the more intimate information for those they corresponded with.[12]

> Janka Wohl is a highly competent observer of the involved tapestry of society and she very clearly interprets the different views of the world in various types of salons [...] The Wohls' home has long been acknowledged as a popular centre for people with western European tastes interested in literature where prelates, magnates, comtesses from Transylvania, gentlemen from the Up Country as well as from the Great Plain as scholars, writers and artists make their appearance.

Their salon, as well as their works, was characterised by superior taste, and in the eyes of many, snobbery. There is no doubt that their essays, novels, poems and espe-

cially the older sister, Janka's, guides to manners—which she published under the name *Egy nagyvilági hölgy* (A Lady of the World)—not only urged high standards as regards home decoration, dress and etiquette, but also helped to introduce the latest fashions. These books were especially written for women, although they naturally also affected the lives of men. For example, in 1898 Janka Wohl devoted a whole booklet to bicycle riding that was "an approved leisure activity for ladies in all countries of high culture." The favourable outcome of the arguments surrounding "the right to ride a bicycle" was considered to be a victory for women's rights. It was another step on the long road that allowed women to rise from being "adored idols, pretty trinkets and toys or useful domestic furniture to becoming equal, self-assured, respected and valued independent citizens."[13] She popularised "afternoon teas" in her articles and books and, with her sister, frequently had guests for tea.

Janka Wohl's most successful guides: *Az illem. Útmutató a művelt társaséletben* (Etiquette. A Guide to Cultured Social Life, first published in 1880), and *Az otthon. Útmutató a ház célszerű és ízléses berendezéséhez* (The Home. A Guide to the Practical and Tasteful Furnishing of the House, first published in 1885) were turning points in the history of the genre in Hungary. In the nature of things she could not help being didactic but her style was, as a whole, closer to that light and conversational manner that Hungarian writers and journalists of ther *fin de siècle* turned to a high virtuosity. Readers were not made to feel inferior either emotionally or intellectually, they were looked on as partners and their receptive cooperation was reckoned with. These books suggested that good manners did not suppress identity but helped readers to discover their individuality. All in all it depended on the person how they classified themselves and what rules they decided to follow. This provided an opportunity for all of those who were searching for their true identity, and ways to express it, in a period of social change that was far from over. The author offered the opportunity of membership in a new society, in an "educated society". A society that encourages aristocratic features (it not only accepted snobs but actually counted on them) but did not accept the validity of the foundations on which an aristocratic society rested. Privileges due to birth or great wealth were not recognised. Nevertheless, according to Janka Wohl, educated society respected rank and demanded that all those who belonged, with the exception of such as were outstanding in the arts or sciences, be people of property.

However, her attempts to "Europeanise" Hungarian manners with the help of foreign examples were nothing new. Such attempts (more or less deliberate) have been present in Hungary for hundreds of years in books on etiquette. In Hungary, as all over Europe (and more or less on the other side of the Atlantic as well), most guides to manners were in fact translations or simple compilations. The original works on etiquette, both foreign and Hungarian, were produced under the influence of the classics and the most popular works of the genre. Even when the sources were not stated, they strongly relied on foreign books on etiquette as well as on works of philosophy, theology and education that had inspired them. Writing on etiquette that claimed to be original (though still based on foreign material) was often less original than books which declared themselves to be mere translations or adaptations. *Az illem könyve*[14] (The Etiquette Book) 1884 by Róza Kalocsa, the respected headmistress of a girls' school was a good example of this false originality. She translated *Der gute Ton in allen Lebenslagen* by

Franz Ebhardt virtually word for word and had this behavioural guide published as her very own. The public ought to have been aware of this plagiarism as the first translation of the German original had been published four years previously with the name of the author clearly shown.[15] Kalocsa's Etiquette Book was nevertheless accepted as her own work. (Even decades later, the book was still referred to as an original on good manners, providing information for the middle classes in both private and public situations by excerpts from works of fiction that offered a picture of the times. It was recommended as a text for girls' finishing schools and was claimed to be as important as other text books.) Frequent references to the Greats of Hungarian literature and passages describing the manifestations in social life of the Hungarian national character, including appeals to readers to preserve and revive this character[16] backed the claim to originality. The unsuspecting reader had no idea that all this came straight from Ebhard: she had only changed the word "German" to "Hungarian" in the text. This guide to good manners, emphasising the fact that national characteristics are of great value, is the strangest and best example of servile adaptation in Hungarian etiquette books.

Before considering the nature of this powerful German influence, one must state that even *Der gute Ton* was not really authentic German. Kalocsa's work was based on the fourth edition of Ebhardt (Berlin, 1880); naturally it did not contain those lines in the original that stated that *Der gute Ton* had been produced with the authorised use of Madame D'Alq's work. It didn't contain the original preface either in which, in 1879 (a few years after the Franco-Prussian war), his acquaintance and cooperation on questions of etiquette with Madame D'Alq (a pseudonym), a French lady, was mentioned.[17]

Using the pen name of Porzó, Adolf Ágai, a well-known satirical journalist and editor, wrote a pleasant meditation as the introduction to the 1886 translation of the American *Don't.* This contains an interesting example of a point of view that openly admits qualities and habits and at least in part aims to preserve them; however, it also puts emphasis on harmonising Hungarian etiquette with the European.

The preface for English readers to the guide to etiquette: *Don't: A manual of Mistakes & Improprieties more or less prevalent in Conduct and Speech* (that was "written by an American author for the American middle class") said that this little book would teach the well-bred English nothing but it would definitely entertain them. Censor, the author of *Don't,* "is a gentleman, and writes with a gentleman's instinct", and he lights the stage of American life with reality: the do's and don'ts allow the English reader to see what Americans are and how they behave.

The attention of the Hungarian public was not drawn to the possibility of such a "text". In the Budapest edition, Porzó's speculations and anecdotes replaced the laconic Censor's introduction (and further twenty pages). A short note following the chat that takes up a quarter of the book makes it obvious that, according to Porzó, the middle-class Hungarian reader (even if he has been properly brought up) cannot possibly possess the self-confidence that would permit the entertaining comparison presented to the English.

> Even a well brought up person, who feels at home with the rules of good manners and more refined company, can find pleasure in this book. They may find that it offers them something new which will help them reach perfection. Those who are only European on the outside will reject the book perkily, saying that what is listed under "don'ts" is all old hat.[18]

Thus, according to Porzó, Hungarians who are Europeans on the inside, have different standards of comparison than English men. They do not judge others by their own standards but they judge themselves by the standards of others. Porzó would have liked to see the ease of the French and the sober practicality of the English in Hungarian manners. What he did not take into account was that manners are precisely the reflection of a certain attitude towards rules, and, in the last resort, of feeling secure in one's identity. The introduction to the London edition of *Don't,* at the same time as emphasising that the author was not always the best authority on questions of etiquette, and that he was prone to individual interpretation and often even pig-headed, actually entreats readers to form their own opinion of the book.

Censor (the pen name of an American, Oliver Bell Bunce [1828–1890]) listed clear prohibitions without any reservations. He thought it important to point out that rules of behaviour could be changed, though he emphasised that obeying norms raised the tone of a company. In comparison with this, Porzó, in his own introduction, plunges into the need to change the rules. This was also true of Janka Wohl and Róza Kalocsa in their earlier published guides to manners and etiquette, of de Gubernatis's work on Hungarian society and of the anonymous author in his work on Budapest society. Sometimes firm, sometimes light, occasionally humorous criticism of customs and manners or suggestions on their change (with reference to being up-to-date or more European) were aimed at the relaxation or cessation of rules that emphasised the closed nature or isolation of Hungarian society. Instead of the complicated and artificial system of forms of address referring to real or imaginary differences in status, it was recommended to use the Hungarian equivalent of Madame or Monsieur to indicate equality. They stressed the importance of the informal "thou" in Hungarian. They only considered this acceptable as an expression of intimacy and not a demonstrative expression of belonging to some narrow social group.

> There is a side to this habit that does not really match the rules of cultivation. Let us say that the company is comprised of persons of equal status and they are all addressing each other with the informal "thou" and an acceptable individual enters. However, this individual is, for reasons of birth or profession, not of equal status. This unfortunate individual will play the role of a pariah. No matter how friendly the other members of the group are to her, she is the only one who addresses the others "you" and is herself so addressed. One should never make such an obvious exception... An educated salon is like a republic where we owe everyone, at least on the surface, equal respect. The higher the rung on the civilisational ladder, the less obvious subtle differences of rank will become.[19]

There are varying points of view behind such comments urging tact and fairness. Janka Wohl says that behaviour that is appropriate, deliberate and disciplined fits the individual for society. In this way one enters the virtual company of ladies and gentlemen, of the well bred, educated and courteous. This will grant you admission to every (existing) "good society" in Europe. In this sense, an individual's social success depends on oneself. By comparison, Róza Kalocsa considered that polite behaviour manifested belonging to a social set-up (i.e. the ever-developing national middle class), in her opinion "educated taste and tactful manners" in the private and public sphere were in the national and class interest. Ultimately, Porzó, too, was guided by some sort of patriotism in desiring to eliminate certain patriarchal

and provincial habits from social life, replacing them with "European" ones, while preserving some out of respect for the past and the national traditions. However, his brand of patriotism was tolerant and realistic, and even a little self-ironical—and not insistent or pathetic (like Róza Kalocsa's).

Hungarian etiquette books of the 1880s, as in earlier years, nevertheless undoubtedly adapted the best international standards. They followed the European trends. Stressing the internationality of good manners, they envisaged the emergence of an European middle class integrated in many respects in mentality and manners. ❧

NOTES

1 ■ We come across this in the works of the great reform politicians, such as Count István Széchenyi and Baron Miklós Wesselényi.

2 ■ This conviction, among others, affects works such as Lajos Mocsáry: *Magyar társasélet* (Hungarian Social Life) 1857, Count Imre Mikó: *Irányeszmék* (Guiding Principles) 1860 and János Vajda: *Polgárosodás* (Acquiring Urban Customs) 1862.

3 ■ Madame Adam: *La Patrie Hongroise* (1884; published the following year in Hungarian in Budapest), Angelo de Gubernatis: *La Hongrie politique et sociale.* Florence, Joseph Pellas, 1885.

4 ■ He puts all this down to the effect of certain European political events. "We can make bold to say," he wrote, "that all this is the result of the reaction that has revived in Europe after Sedan. In fact, the latest *'comme il faut'* tone stems from this." ibid., p. 425.

5 ■ S. Wohl: *Szalonélet Budapesten* (Salon Life In Budapest). In Wohl, *Hátrahagyott iratai* (The Papers that She Left Behind) 1894, Budapest, Athenaeum p. 196.

6 ■ ibid., p. 256.

7 ■ Zsigmond Justh: "A Wohl-szalon" (The Wohl Salon), *Magyar Szalon* 1892. pp. 405–407.

8 ■ In 1889 he initiated the Circle of the Friends of the Arts with the support of Countess Anna Bolza, the wife of Count Albin Csáky, the Minister of Education, and of Mór Jókai, recognised at the nation's greatest living writer at the time. The responses to a survey in the quality weekly of the period, *A Hét,* showed that it was not really succesful in the art world.

9 ■ They edited women's interest publications that (especially the 1870s and 80s) played an important role in the women's movement.

10 ■ Liszt didn't speak Hungarian but the Wohl sisters were able to converse in German, French and English and switching between languages posed no great problem for the majority of their guests.

11 ■ "Even if there was a time when our salon was referred to as a 'Pechovich nest', it was only because it reflected the political persuasion of the visitors and definitely not the quality of conversation...we never involved ourselves in any political intrigues" said Stefánia in her writings: *Nápolyi töredékek* (Naples Fragments), published in *Hátrahagyott iratai,* p. 66.) Servile supporters of the government were nicknamed "Pechovich."

12 ■ Janka was a passionate correspondent, but only a fraction of her letters (a couple of hundred) survived and found their way into public collections.

13 ■ Janka Wohl: *A kerékpárról* (On Bicycles). Budapest, Athenaeum, 1898. p. 3.

14 ■ Full title: *The Etiquette Book: Cultured taste and polite manners in different stages of life. A handbook on the rules of etiquette in the family and social environment.* Budapest, Révai Brothers, 1884. pp. 690.

15 ■ This translation, that was less literal than Kalocsa's, was by Irma Beniczky: *Etiquette: Illemtan. A társadalmi illemszabályok kézikönyve.* (Etiquette: A handbook on social etiquette). Budapest, Athenaeum, 1880.

16 ■ It is generally true that the need for constant renewal is what keeps etiquette books alive. Constant change helps maintain continuity of controlled behaviour and the applicability of rules.

17 ■ Louise D'Alq's book was a three volume guide: *Le Savoir-Vivre.* First published in Les Mans, 1874.

18 ■ ibid., p. XXVI.

19 ■ J. Wohl: *Az illem* (Etiquette). p. 38.

Miklós Györffy

Family Fortunes

Júlia Lángh: *Egy budai úrilány* (A Young Lady of Buda), Magvető, Budapest, 2003, 256 pp. • Balázs Györe: *Halottak apja* (Father of the Dead), Kalligramm, Bratislava, 2003, pp.149 • Vilmos Csaplár: *Vadregény* (A Wildly Romantic Story), Magyar Könyvklub, Budapest 2003

Everyone's life is a novel, we say. Another commonplace is that everyone has a novel in them, be it only the story of their own life. For such an autobiography the question is where does reminiscence end and where does the autobiographical novel, namely literature, begin? The question is prompted here by Júlia Lángh's *A Young Lady of Buda,* one of last year's literary hits.

If I tried to classify autobiographic writings meant for public consumption three categories promptly come to mind. The first is by any author whose life—in literature, politics, art or science—is enough to arouse our curiosity regarding their personal lives. Anything they reveal about themselves and the age they lived in interests us. And if it is also well written, all the better. If, on the other hand, the author is a writer (or proves to be one in this particular book), then reminiscence turns into literature, an autobiographical novel, a self-contained example of the genre with laws of its own. This is the second type. The third type is written by an unknown or anonymous writer whose memories are read mainly for their value as a document of an era.

Júlia Lángh, now in her sixties, has not so far been a writer, nor is she particularly well-known as an individual. She has published two books earlier, both about her sojourns in Africa, where she had first spent a year as a kindergarten teacher, then taught journalism in Chad. Neither of those books had pretentions to literature, they were but journalism and reportage of a high standard. Before her visits to Africa, Júlia Lángh lived in Paris and was a correspondent of the Munich-based Radio Free Europe. *A Young Lady of Buda* deals with her years as a child and a young girl in Buda, from the mid-1940s to the early 1960s.

So which type of autobiography is the book? The question is not irrelevant, since it tells us what not to expect. Obviously only the second and third type fits here. The very title of the book, along with one of its marked tendencies, shows a strong inclination towards the documentary. Júlia Lángh's family were gentlefolk who lost their social standing and property due to the Communist takeover, a family of the "Christian middle class", a term used frequently with fairly negative connotations today. A major part of her autobiography is devoted to

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reviews new fiction for this journal.

how such a family got by in the fifties, the darkest years of Communism, to the enormous efforts it made to maintain its own traditions, customs and norms despite the dire straits into which it had fallen.

The story, divided into eight chapters, moves ahead largely in chronological order, though this is frequently cut across by the thematic treatment. Thus for example the chapters "The Austrian Branch" and the "Polish Heritage" (Chapters 2 and 4) provide an overview of her ancestry, discussing relatives on the maternal and paternal sides. She takes a look one by one at the assorted aunts and uncles who appeared on the girl's horizon either as living persons or as parts of family lore. That overview recalls Sándor Márai's classic *Egy polgár vallomásai* (Confessions of a Man of the Middle Class) where a colourful multitude of aunts and uncles are evoked in a similar way.

The two central characters in Lángh's reminiscences are, of course, her mother and the father, both of whom died young, when she was 13 and 21 years old. One can say that it was Communism, its physical and spiritual trials, that killed them. They escaped prison or deportation, which was the lot of many of their kind, but they were destroyed by fear and poverty; albeit they retained their integrity, they nevertheless suffered the indignity of being déclassé, and suffered the collapse of the old world with which they were familiar. They worked determinedly for sheer survival, though they had to sell precious family heirlooms one by one. And even though they hung on to the last vestiges and appearances of their "gentlemanly" style, they gradually lost the strength to force it upon their daughter too.

Beside the heavy and painful, there are cheerful and fond memories as well. The entire tone is, on the whole, cheerful rather than sad, and ironical at times. Indeed, the style is perhaps a little too painless and easy-flowing, with nicely rounded sentences following one another. The second line of the book evolves in the same way: the story of development, of growing up amid the extremes of the family environment and the "dictatorship of the proletariat". She feels hemmed in between pressures and unacceptable limits that are set by both sides; these she considers senseless and they awaken a yearning for freedom in her. Her inevitable revolt is ultimately successful: a "young lady", intended as a bride for one of the boring "young gentlemen" around her, chooses her husband freely—and a career and an independent life.

One notices a certain amount of obvious effort to create "literature" out of the portrayal of the ruins of the old Buda upper-middle-class life as well as of the ordinary days of the 1950s, in other words, in the rendering of the material meant to be documentary. The effort, however, is rarely successful. It does produce some results in the portrayal of the heroine's relationship to her mother, which is achieved, characteristically, at the cost of the social environment and the description of the times they lived in. Otherwise, the literary ambition is carried mostly by the clever and tasteful shaping of the sentences themselves.

Lángh seems to have been somewhat unclear about her own intentions as to what she actually wanted to write. Or perhaps she simply wanted to record everything she remembered. As a consequence, "confessions" alternate with inventory-like recitals of all-too-well-known events and things, and with memories and episodes that seem to be of private interest only. Of course what may be regarded as common knowledge of the times depends on the age of the reader, so somewhat ironic sentences like: "in that summer dangerous criminal gangs, traitors and saboteurs or-

ganising the overthrow of the people's democracy were already exposed by the police, and following the mines, factories and banks, schools also were nationalised, so there seemed to be nothing good lying ahead...", etc. may be necessary after all. At any rate, beside supposedly useful but inorganic "background information" of this type, other details appear to be similarly inorganic since they have no significance beyond the fact that they actually happened. In the previous issue of this journal, an autobiographically inspired novel by Endre Kukorelly was discussed, the "stuff" of which, as far as the social milieu and the historical period were concerned, was similar to that of Júlia Lángh's. That book, however, shows precisely how random, sometimes banal details may ultimately create a self-contained world.

If, however, *A Young Lady of Buda* is read, despite its confessional features, as a documentary of the times rather than an autobiographical novel, it is highly questionable whether the role played by the author's personal history is not too great. It may have been better to give more emphasis to some of the more interesting secondary characters, aunts and uncles, and to events and scenes which are treated too sketchily and which occasionally overflow with details that are hard or not worth to follow.

Balázs Györe's (1951) *Father of the Dead* is also pure remembrance. It is in fact a single, tormented solilogui in which the author evokes or rather wrestles with the memory of his father. Györe's father was a highly educated man, embittered, introverted, who had lived a joyless life. He had suffered devastating disappointments in his youth. Disappointed in the one great love of his life, he lost his job in 1948, the Year of Change when the Communists took over. His manhood years during the Kádár Era were monotonous, uneventful, spent with his wife in toiling for survival in much the same way as that of the parents of Júlia Lángh. The last decades of his life were spent in permanent ill-health, reduced to being almost a living corpse in the end, first confined to his apartment, and finally to his sickbed. He was an epileptic, underwent brain surgery several times and died of prostate cancer at the age of 80. Before his retirement he had been a librarian and had written a host of studies on librarianship, documentation and information theory. Books were the meaning of his life; he created a fine private library of his own and appeared to read all the time. He was also a passionate music lover, an admirer first and foremost of Bartók. He felt as if Bartók had been something like an alter ego to him. And he wanted to be a creative artist, a writer himself. "He was brilliantly gifted," his son wrote after his death. "He could have been a terrific essayist (...) He was well versed in world literature. All styles. Could this have been one of the obstacles? Did he have too much to say? It seemed as if the overabundance of things he had to say had stopped him from speaking; as if because of all those things he had to say he never had a message of his own, and his own alone. (...) He did not dare or did not want to read himself, only books. (...) He was afraid of his own subjects."

Whether for this or some other reason, Györe's father (referred to as "my father" throughout the book) became a bitter, disillusioned man—or at least so he seemed to his son. His marriage was a failure, and he had no relationship worth mentioning with his only son. They had nothing to say to each other. They were incapable of being a family. They were unable to love each other. The atmosphere between them was chilly. And none of them revolted against it. All three were living dead. And mother and

son stayed that even after the father's death. The father had been "the father of the dead". (The title also refers to the father's death, symbolcally, on All Saints' Day, the "Day of the Dead". "Day of the Dead" and "father of the dead" sound almost the same in Hungarian; the difference is a single character.) The pun does not exactly befit the grave ascetic tone of the text.

Endre Kukorelly's novel *Fairy Valley* (reviewed in *HQ* 172) comes to mind. That book also struggles with the memory of an inward turning father with a ruined life, incapable of relating to his son. The "father problem" is one of the major themes of contemporary Hungarian fiction. Györe's is one of the saddest and most disquieting variations on that theme. It is somewhat like Péter Esterházy's *Revised Edition.* After his death, something important comes to light about the father: he had secretly kept a diary in his old age, after he had turned sixty. The diary was found after his death.

It is hard to say if Györe, who has eight volumes of fiction behind him, would have written a book about his father if that secret had not come to light. In any case, he constructs his novel as if he would have done so anyway, or more exactly, he is doing so, as a task that sorrow and remembrance has laid upon him. It is precisely in the middle of the slim volume that the diaries are being "discovered". "I might have written a nice little book about my father. A fine, moving book. I might have written a sad book if the diaries had not been found. But they were found. (...) Do the diaries change everything? (...) Has reading the diaries changed the image of my father in me and my mother? Did he become a different man? A different father and husband? Or has he changed our lives? Have we become different? (...) What is one to make of the past fifty years? It is impossible to start everything all over again!"

Györe's soliloqui is full of questions. It consists of short, simple sentences, often two or three in a single line, all ending in question marks. "Man in fact is nothing but a question," the son quotes from the diary of his father. Does he put his questions to himself or the dead father? It is almost irrelevant since there are no answers anyway. What is in the diaries? What is it that overwrites the far from peaceful father-image of the son? First and foremost it is the very fact that he had kept a secret. True, he may have had other secrets as well, for sometimes he simply disappeared from home, though probably only because he wanted to be alone.

Keeping a diary is an obvious manifestation of the desire to write, a yearning suppressed for years, breaking to the surface. There is something embarrassing and sad about it: a man in his old age yields to the passion that has dominated him all his life. And of course that matter of the diaries is also disquieting. It is full of things he never spoke about either to his son or his wife: memories, thoughts, desires, pornography even. The son quotes a few details but not too many. It is not his purpose to let the diaries speak instead of himself. He is preoccupied not only with the father-image but with his own self too; he wants to know if, by finally confronting the father and having an imaginary dialogue with him, there is anything he can find out about himself.

It is at this juncture that the weaknesses of the otherwise heartbreakingly "fine" and "sad" book are found. There is a kind of remorse and self-punishing present in all this. The very title already bears reference to this: it is as if the author regarded himself as "one of the dead of his father", but the fact that he is "dead" is to be simply taken for granted. His minimalist manner of speech is colourless, dispassionate, and almost apathetic even before the di-

aries are introduced. The reminiscences radiate hopelessness. Then in the light of the diaries, the picture becomes even darker. "My father had desires: I have none. (...) I never wanted to be the world's greatest writer as he did. (...) As a matter of fact, I never wanted to be anything at all. In my father, tremendous powers were raging. (...) In me there is no power at all. My father confessed to failure by his diary. I confess to failure by writing about him." Almost all we learn of the narrator are negatives of this kind. His soliloqui, amassing questions, is full of doubt and uncertainty. It is not that this resignation, bordering on apathy, cannot be genuine and well motivated, especially under the burden of oppressive memories; the problem is that it is expressed here mostly on the level of declarations. The drama of the father image touches someone in whose place there is only his absence. The drama of the father is better written than that of the loss of the self.

Books by Vilmos Csaplár, now 57, and on the literary scene since the 1970s, have been reviewed several times in this journal. Csaplár is an interesting figure in current Hungarian writing. There is hardly a single characteristic work or a unique world or kind of portrayal associated with him, yet he is permanently and consistently present with his books. He has written texts which, for want of a better term, may be described as experimental, stretching the frames of the traditional narrative; short stories of autobiographical inspiration, documentary prose, and film scripts. His last book was a string of stories about János Kádár, combining the tone of folk tales and legends with historical facts and a satirical manner. Now with *A Wildly Romantic Novel,* he has produced a pseudo-historical novel set in the 1830s, at the time in Hungarian history known as the Reform Era.

The untranslatable pun in the title derives from two meanings whose connotations are not very far from each other. *Vadregény* literally is "Wild Novel", but the adjective vad refers to something (a scene, for instance) that is highly romantic, picturesque or moves the imagination through its awesome beauty. The adjectival suffix is cut off here in a grotesque, funny way. Thus the title promises a story which is "romantic" yet must not be taken altogether seriously, and may hide perhaps something that is anything but romantic in the traditional sense, and is rather the playful external form lent to a very modern content.

The protagonist of the novel is Adam Whitewell, an English engineer, who has quit England because of some psychological trauma. He spends some time working for the Vienna-Trieste Railway Construction Company, then is carried to Pozsony (today Bratislava) by his infatuation for a beautiful woman, where he has been living for a considerable time now without having succeeded in conquering her. She is married to Count Tarnai, a member of the Upper House of the Hungarian parliament, then in session in Pozsony, a highly influential aristocrat completely loyal to the Habsburgs. His beautiful young wife, daughter of a Polish aristocratic family, expects him to use his influence at the court for the return of her family's estates, seized by the Russians who had occupied eastern Poland.

Whitewell, in the meantime, tries in vain to get closer to the countess, née Anna Woleska. He becomes familiar with life in Pozsony, learns Hungarian tolerably well, becomes friends with a Hungarian chemist, the inventor of safety matches, called here Kálmán Idrányi, and describes his experiences in letters written to his uncle in England. One layer of the novel consists of these letters. They are distin-

guished from the author's narrative by being printed in bold, but their character is ambiguous: it is quite possible that they are being written only in Whitewell's imagination. In any case, they include imaginary, monologue-type paragraphs which, however, cannot be fully separated from the genuinely written and sent parts of the text. Whitewell, however, must be careful about what he writes, and whom he refers to by real or disguised name, because he is fully aware that his letters are being intercepted, open and read by the Vienna secret police. During a shoot lasting two or three days which makes up a large part of the novel, the text of the letters turns into sheer fiction anyway, since they could have been neither written nor posted within the time of the action of the novel.

This excursion involves the château and estate near Vienna of Count Falussy, one of the rebel Hungarian members of parliament. The shoot as such is in fact a pretext for the party convened, a group of Hungarian noblemen of the opposition, to win over the influential Count Tarnai to the cause of Hungarian independence. This effort of theirs is at the same time also a pretext for Csaplár to bring his characters, turned into caricatures with a kind of grotesque irony, together into the same château. Beside Whitewell, there is another English character on the scene, a Miss Pardoe, who writes travel books. She makes the characters and the entire situation appear as viewing themselves in the perspective of a completed and published travel book.

A good part of the novel is devoted to delaying any discernible outcome: for a long time the reader is unable to decide what lies in the background of the conversations and hunting scenes, and what the stakes in the writer's game are, whether it is a love story, a political conspiracy or a crime novel that is being read. The answer, when it comes, is literally explosive: a wing of the château is destroyed by the explosives stored in the cellar. These were hidden there by Whitewell and Idrányi, the engineer and chemist, with the approval of Count Falussy, for the purpose of testing them in a nearby quarry in the hope of selling them later. Chief Counsellor Stomm of the Austrian Secret Police appears on the scene instantly to clarify the circumstances of the explosion. This turns out to have been arranged by the secret police; its informers and spies knew everything all along, and made use of an unexpected accident, the storing of the explosives, which played into their hands, to expose the conspirators, including the letter-writing Englishman, who they believe to be an agent of Lord Palmerston's. That the person who falls victim to the explosion—or at least everyone thinks so for a while—is the same Count Tarnai against whom, the police think, the conspiracy was directed, in other words, they themselves killed the man whom they were meant to save, is accepted by Stomm as the unfortunate price to be paid for such an intervention by the secret police at any time.

Count Tarnai of course has not died, though this is not of Stomm's doing but a part of the novel's "Wild Romanticism". So is the final victory of the "righteous cause", the cause of Hungary. It is also part of this wild romanticism that all the main characters are damned beings pursued by the demons in their souls. They are tormented by terrible nightmares. Birds, muh like those of Hitchcock, among which the two-headed Austrian eagle plays a distinguished role, pursue the pathologically jealous Tarnai. Count Falussy has, since his childhood, longed to be trodden on, to literarily lick other people's boots. Whitewell is the victim of a mysterious, romantic trauma: his wife lost her mind and killed herself and their four months old

baby, leaving behind a fragment of a letter which creates the impression the she had been hopelessly in love with a female friend. The Countess devotes her entire life to her obsession of getting back her family fortune with the help of Tarnai, and, senselessly self-disciplined, she refuses even to notice Whitewall's admiration for her. All these romantic eccentricities are weird and grotesque and the action is as ridiculous as it is automatic.

There is one motif, that of the wild boar, which seems to keep these diverging tendencies together. The chief purpose of the gentlemen gathering in the castle is to shoot a boar which—when in a fantastic nightmare Whiteville moves into its mind —turns out to be a descendant of the famous legendary boar which, in 1664, killed Miklós Zrinyi, the great poet and anti-Habsburg political thinker. A long-standing patriotic legend in Hungary has it that Zrinyi had been killed by an assassin hired by the Austrian camarilla, who killed him "in the image of a wild boar". The hunted boar appears here as an eternal, satirical symbol of "secret police plots against Hungarian patriots", a recurring stereotype surviving for many years. "He [Miklós Zrinyi] was mourned by all of Europe whereas my...was mentioned with a deep revulsion," Whitevell muses, turned into a boar in his unconsciousness-, "even though it was the boar that had been attacked and who fought for his life, and with two bullets in his flank to boot! No one sighed upon hearing that it died too! And that's how things still are, just as in 1664! The dead boar is not missed by anyone. Does his loss mean nothing? And if he defends himself, it is said to be a bloodthirsty beast, an assassin disguised as a boar at worst?"

A Wildly Romantic Novel is not a great book but, aside from a few overdone parts, it is an enjoyable read. ❧

Mária Eckhardt

An Unpublished Letter by Berlioz

A Recent Acquisition of the Franz Liszt Memorial Museum

In November 2000, the Franz Liszt Memorial Museum purchased from the Viennese dealer Ingo Nebehay a hitherto unpublished letter by Berlioz.[1] The three-page octavo autograph letter is dated Vienna February 25. (The year—1846—is not explicitly given, but can be determined from the content.) On page four we find the address and the postmarks. Although Berlioz addressed the letter to the Prague music publisher Johann Hoffmann, the actual addressee, to whose hand the letter was asked to be delivered, was the Prague music critic August Wilhelm Ambros (1816–1876), who was later to gain a reputation as a versatile musical and cultural historian, but who at the time was a lawyer in the Emperor's fiscal administration. Ambros, in addition to being a young man well versed in music and the fine arts (devoted first and foremost to music) was intimately familiar with the music scene in Prague and had been sending regular reports to Schumann's *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* since 1845. He was on friendly terms with the Prague-born, extremely impressionable Eduard Hanslick (1825–1904), then still young, who would later establish considerable authority as a conservative music critic and aesthetician in Austria.

Berlioz had probably just come back from Pest to Vienna shortly before writing the letter. In all likelihood he was still overwhelmed by the experience of the concerts on February 15 and 20, when the Pest audience gave the orchestral arrangement of the *Rákóczi March* an almost frenzied reception. He might have

1 ■ The supplementary volume of the recently concluded complete edition of Berlioz's correspondence mentions the letter (merely on the basis of the auction catalogue) with brief quotes: Pierre Citron ed.: *Hector Berlioz, Correspondance générale,* vols. i-viii, Paris, Flammarion 1972–2003 [in the following: *BCG*] vol. viii Supplément, ed. Hugh Macdonald, Nr. 1025bis, p. 255.

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been expected to mention his successes in Pest in the letter, a success which he would later recall in great detail in his *Mémoires.* He also gives a vivid description of Hungarian dance and Gypsy music he observed when socialising in his freetime:

> My musical affairs did not prevent me from attending two balls while I was in Pesth, as well as a large political banquet given by the Hungarian nobility. I have not seen anything to compare with these balls: on the one hand the incredible luxury of them, on the other the brilliantly exotic native costumes and the proud beauty of the Magyar race. The dances are quite unlike anything seen in the rest of Europe. Our chilly French quadrilles are almost unknown; the *mazurka,* the *tarsalgo*, the *keringo* and the *csardas* reign joyously supreme. The *csardas* in particular, a polished version of the rustic dance which Hungarian peasants perform with such wonderful abandon and energy, seemed in high aristocratic favour [...] During dinner a small band of dark-skinned gipsies discoursed national airs in their own fashion, which is to say with a frantic, naive energy; the effect of which, alternating with speeches and toasts and liberally seconded by the fiery wines of Hungary, was to rouse the company to a still higher pitch of revolutionary fervour.
>
> Next day I had to say goodbye to my Hungarian hosts. I left still tingling with all the intense emotions I had experienced and full of sympathy for this warm-hearted, chivalrous and impetuous nation...[2]

What we know is that after the first Pest concert, on February 15, he had written to Ambros, suggesting that the enormously successful piece be performed in Prague too.[3] In his letter of February 25, however, he resisted the temptation to reminisce about the event; instead, he gave all his attention to the preparation of further successes. Thus his letter to Ambros was almost completely devoted to the practical problems related to the scheduled Prague performance of his dramatic symphony *Roméo et Juliette.*

Berlioz frequently travelled abroad to promote his own works, personally rehearsing and directing his compositions, which was met with somewhat controversial receptions back at home. One of his longest trips ever, during which he was using Vienna as his base to visit other cities, began in late October 1845. After stopping in Regensburg, he arrived in Vienna on November 2; during November he gave three concerts of his own works; then he conducted the orchestra for a concert given by the Czech virtuoso pianist/composer Alexander Dreyschock (1818–1869); in January 1846 he gave two more concerts of his own works, one of which (on the 2nd of January) was the Viennese première of *Roméo et Juliette.*[4] Shortly after the January 11 concert in Vienna,

2 ■ *The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz.* Translated and edited by David Cairns. New York–Toronto, Afred A. Knopf, 2002. *Travels in Germany II. Pesth.* pp. 418–419.

3 ■ *BCG* iii, Nr. 1021. pp. 316–317.

4 ■ See the chronological tables of *BCG* iii, pp. [217] and [303]. However, the chronology contains some inaccuracies; for example, it gives the date of Berlioz's return from Pest to Vienna as February 27, which is clearly proven false by the date given on our letter: "Vienne 25 Février".

Berlioz travelled to Prague to conduct some of his compositions there. He was persuaded to do this by Ambros, whom he came to know after the latter had published a comprehensive, three-part article on the *Roi Lear* overture in a Prague musical journal; Berlioz had it translated and then wrote Ambros a letter of thanks. On his arrival in Prague, it was again Ambros who welcomed him at the railway station, introduced him to the local luminaries and showed him around the city. In his *Mémoires*,[5] Berlioz painted a vivid picture of all this, as well as of the impressions he formed of the musical institutions of Prague. His three concerts (January 19, 25 and 28) enjoyed a phenomenal success, a success which exceeded all his expectations. As he wrote to Joseph d'Ortigue, a friend in Paris, instead of the "antiquarians", who had ears only for Mozart, he "found dedicated, attentive and exceptionally intelligent artists, who worked through the four-hour rehearsals without a word, and who grew more enthusiastic for my music by the end of the second rehearsal than I had hoped. As to the audience, they exploded like a barrel of gunpowder; at the moment, I am treated as a Fetish, a Lama or a Manitou."[6] In the same letter, he related that the audience had cried out for encores of five pieces of the programme at the January 26 concert, including the recently re-arranged *Queen Mab Scherzo* and the love scene from *Roméo et Juliette,* the latter scoring the greatest success of the night.

Berlioz's works were received much more warmly in Prague than in Vienna; there, in addition to some enthusiasts (they presented him with a silver-gilt baton on December 10, 1845, and also celebrated his birthday on the 11th at a banquet), there were a large number of critics who were far from being enthusiastic. The reviews were not unequivocally favourable in Prague, either, but the overall verdict was clearly in Berlioz's favour. A somewhat irritated report written by the Viennese correspondent of a German-language newspaper published in Pest, *Der Ungar,* was typical in this regard:

> Berlioz aroused fanaticism in Prague. One journal quite simply described him as the greatest composer since Beethoven. Here [in Vienna] people did not go that far, but it appears that the Prague public has its own view on that, too. What will the *Journal des Debats* write about these successes, one wonders, after it has already published a report sent from Vienna about the enthusiastic reception of *Roméo et Juliette,* while the failure of this Baroque symphony was an [established] fact, and not even Berlioz's

5 ■ Hector Berlioz: *Mémoires,* Paris, Michel Lévy Frères 1870 [henceforth: BM], vol. ii, *Deuxième voyage en Allemande. Autriche, Tcheque, Hongrie. A Monsieur Humbert Ferrand. Troisième lettre.* Vol. ii, pp. 371–395.

6 ■ *"[...] j'ai trouvé des artistes dévoués, attentifs, d'une intelligence rare, faisant sans se plaindre des répétitions de quatre heures, et au bout de la seconde répétition se passionnant pour ma musique plus que je n'eusse jamais osé l'espérer. Quant au public il s'est enflammé comme un baril de poudre; on me traite maintenant ici en Fétiche, en Lama, en Manitou." BCG* iii, Nr. 1017, Prague, January 27, 1846.

friends had the courage to defend this unpalatable music against such wholesale condemnation. But then, this is how fame is achieved...[7]

Therefore, it seemed only natural that Berlioz, who still had to return to the imperial city to give a concert on February 1, wanted to visit Prague again after the previously arranged concerts in Vienna and Pest. On February 3, 1846 he wrote to the director of the Prague Conservatoire, Johann Friedrich Kittl (1808–1892), offering him, besides a concert of various pieces, a full performance of the recently revised *Roméo et Juliette.* In his letter,[8] he covered numerous practical issues, such as the requirements concerning the choir and the soloists, the problems of organization and finance and even the score sheets, copies of which he promised to mail shortly to Jan Nepomuk Škroup (1811–1892), conductor of the Academic Choir, who offered to conduct at the concert free of charge. He suggested the names of the soloists, whom he selected from Prague singers he had known earlier. In connection with one of the soloists, the bass baritone Karel Štrakatý (1804–1868), Berlioz promised to make adjustments for his voice. He also suggested a date for the concert, noting that he would discuss this subject with Dr. Ambros.[9] This particular letter to Ambros, which he mailed together with the score sheets, has not surfaced yet;[10] in another letter to Ambros, which he posted from Pest on February 15, 1846,[11] he inquired about the receipt of his previous letter and also about the box of score sheets (the choir parts and the soloists' parts for *Roméo et Juliette*), which he had sent off to the Prague music publisher Hoffmann ten days earlier. He only got to know indirectly, through Dreyschock, that he was, indeed, expected to be back in Prague by March 1. In his letter to Ambros he wrote about the programme he planned for the first concert and suggested dates for the rehearsals; he also suggested to Ambros that, instead of Pest, he send his reply to Vienna, as he planned to return there before travelling to Prague. Soon after he mailed this letter, Kittl's letter arrived, to which he replied promptly.[12] His reply shows that he already asked Ambros to

7 ■ *Der Ungar,* Nr. 30. 4 February, p. 235. *Korrespondenz, Wiener Sonntagsbriefe, CLXIV. (Schluß) "... B e r l i o z hat in Prag Fanatismus erregt. Eine Zeitung nennt ihn ohne viele Umstände den größten Componisten seit B e e t h o v e n. So weit ist man denn doch hier nicht gegangen, allein die Prager scheinen auch hier eigenes Urtheil haben zu wollen. Was wird nun das Journal "des Debats" über diese Erfolge berichten, nachdem es sich schon aus Wien schreiben ließ, mit welchem Enthusiasmus man "Romeo und Julie" aufnahm, während der ungünstige Erfolg dieser barocken Sinfonie eine T h a t s a c h e war und selbst die Freunde von B e r l i o z, dem allgemeinen Verdammungsurtheile gegenüber, sich nicht getrauten, solche ganz ungenießbare Musik zu verteidigen. Doch so wird der Ruf gemacht..."*

8 ■ *BCG* iii, Nr. 1019. pp. 312–315.

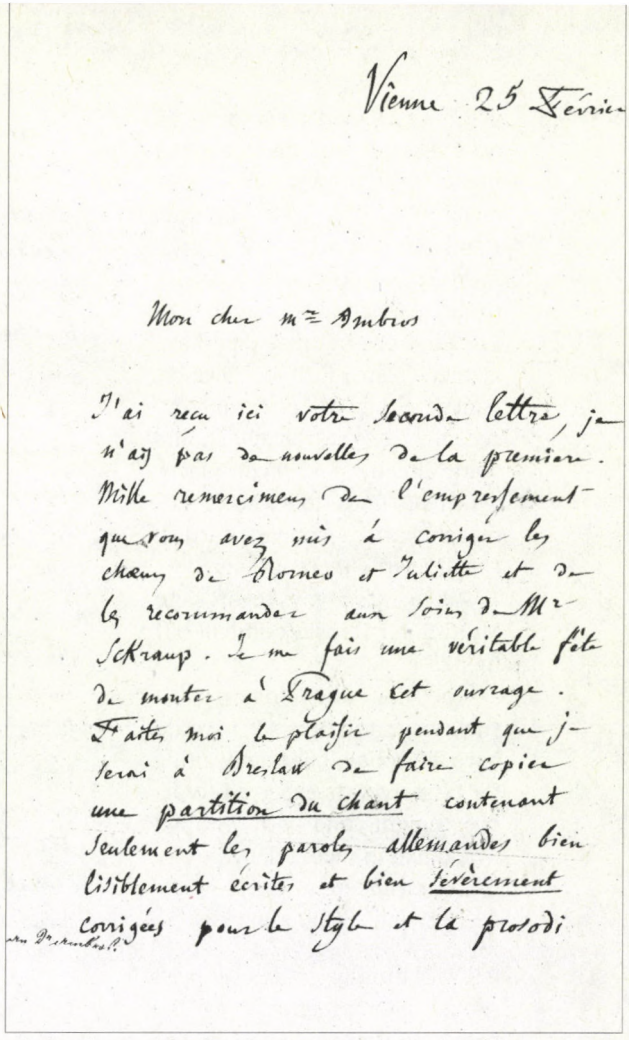
9 ■ *"Je pourrai me trouver à Prague le 7 ou le 8 mars et peut-être plus tôt. Au reste, j'écrirai au docteur Ambros de Pesth à ce sujet." BCG* iii, Nr. 1019, p. 314.

10■ The missing letter is referred to as *BCG* iii, Nr. 1020 D, dated February 5, 1846. p. 315.

11■ *BCG* iii, Nr. 1021. pp. 316–317.

12■ *BCG* iii, Nr. 1022. p. 318. Date: Pest, February 16, 1846.

have certain passages from the choir's part in *Roméo et Juliette* translated into German, passages of which no German translation had existed, as well as to correct the prosody of the passages that had been previously translated. Ambros's answer must have been lost somewhere on the way; it never reached Berlioz. Upon his return to Vienna from Pest, Berlioz finally heard from his friend in Prague, as his next letter indicates:


Vienne 25 Février

Mon cher Mr Ambros

J'ai reçu ici votre seconde lettre, je n'ai pas de nouvelles de la première. Mille remercimens de l'empressement que vous avez mis à corriger les chœurs de Roméo et Juliette et de les recommander aux soins de Mr Sckraup. Je me fais une véritable fête de monter à Prague cet ouvrage. Faites moi le plaisir pendant que je serai à Breslau de faire copier une partition du chant contenant seulement les paroles allemandes bien lisiblement écrites et bien scrupuleusement corrigées pour le style et la prosodi

Vienna, February 25

My dear Mr. Ambros,

I have received here your second letter, no news of the first one. I am deeply obliged to you for the efforts you showed in correcting the choirs of "Roméo et Juliette" and also in entrusting them to the care of Mr Sckraup.[13] The presentation of this work to the Prague audience will be a true feast for me. Can I ask you to do me a favour, while I shall be in Breslau,[14] and have a vocal score copied, where only the German text is inserted in a legible handwriting, which you have corrected thoroughly with regard to both style and prosody—if you could find the time and would be good enough to see to this problem. I would need this copy for getting the work printed in a bilingual version for distribution in Germany. The copyist could also write the piano accompaniment, which can be found at the bottom of the French score, underneath the vocal part; in places where the accompaniment is missing, he should leave the two lines blank. Also, would you be so kind as to go to the post office and arrange for those letters, which may arrive at my Prague address no later than March 15, to be sent after me to Breslau poste restante.

I am not sure if the political disturbances that presently keep Bohemia in a state of agitation will not be injurious to our plans.[15] In any case, I sincerely hope that things

13 ■ Berlioz spells Škroup's name as Scraup, Sckraup or Scrob.

14 ■ The town of Breslau (today: Wrocław) was a cultural centre in Silesia; it had a busy concert life, where some virtuoso performers (including Liszt) appeared more than once. Berlioz planned to visit the town in the middle of March.

15 ■ Hungary was not the only country which went through a phase of national revival and great social reforms.

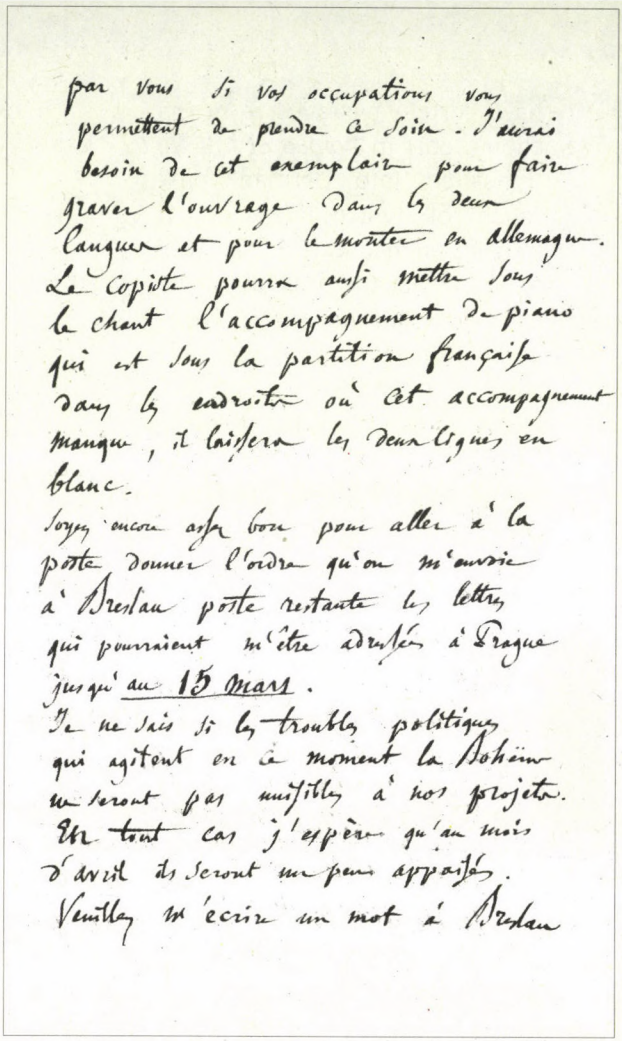
will have calmed down a bit by April. Please send me a note to Breslau, informing me how much of all this is actually true. I am very grateful to Mr Scraup for the hard work he has put into rehearsing the choirs of Roméo, but now that they have learned it so much in advance, I am sure they will perform it excellently. Mr Strakaty should mark already now those places which he finds too low in Lorenzo's part; as soon as I arrive, I shall rewrite these for him.

Adieu; give my regards to Mr Kittl, Mr Hanslick and all our friends.

The day after tomorrow I shall leave for Breslau; I would have left today, but I am waiting for Liszt, who is expected to arrive tonight, and with whom I would like to meet briefly.

Yours sincerely,

H. Berlioz



par vous si vos occupations vous permettent de prendre ce soin. J'aurais besoin de cet exemplaire pour faire graver l'ouvrage dans les deux Langues et pour le monter en allemagne. Le Copiste pourra aussi mettre sous le chant l'accompagnement de piano qui est sous la partition française dans les endroits où cet accompagnement manque, il laissera les deux lignes en blanc.

Soyez encore assez bon pour aller à la poste donner l'ordre qu'on m'envoie à Breslau poste restante les lettres qui pourraient m'être adressées à Prague jusqu'au 15 Mars.

Je ne sais si les troubles politiques qui agitent en ce moment la Bohême ne seront pas nuisibles à nos projets. En tout cas j'espère qu'au mois d'avril ils seront un peu apaisés.

Veuillez m'écrire un mot à Breslau

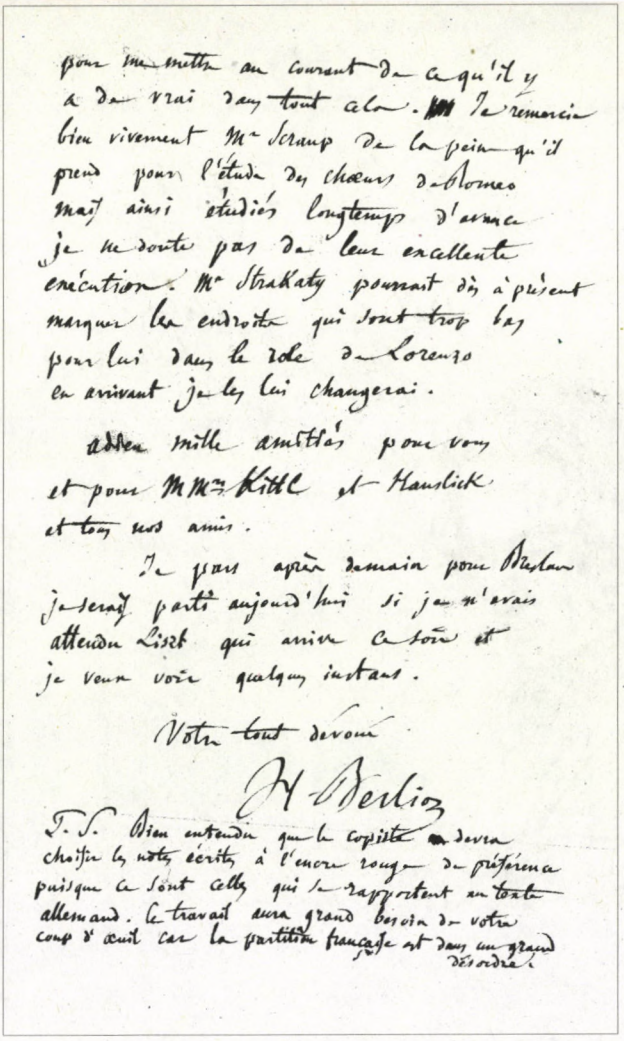
P.S. Naturally, the copyist should give preference to the notes written in red ink, as these are the ones that refer to the German text. In this work I badly need your watchful eyes, as the French score sheet is a great mess.

[Address:]
Mr. Hoffmann
Music Publisher, Jesuits' Street,
Prague
For forwarding to M[m] Ambros

[Postmarks:]
WIEN / 25. FEB.
E.B. Prag. / 26. FEB.
ABENDS

Although there is no concrete evidence to support it, it seems likely that Berlioz did, indeed, meet Liszt in the last days of February in Vienna, where Liszt's arrival from Weimar was expected on or about 25–26 February, according to a Viennese newspaper.[16] We know that Berlioz had to leave for Breslau

16 ■ *Allgemeine Theaterzeitung*, February 21, 1846. It is quoted by Dezső Legány ed. in: *Franz Liszt. Unbekannte Presse und Briefe aus Wien 1822–1886*. Wien–Köln–Graz, Böhlau 1884, p. 122.



pour me mettre au courant de ce qu'il y a de vrai dans tout cela. Je remercie bien vivement Mr Scramp de la peine qu'il prend pour l'étude des chœurs de Romeo mais ainsi étudiés longtemps d'avance je ne doute pas de leur excellente exécution. Mr Strakaty pourrait dès à présent marquer les endroits qui sont trop bas pour lui dans le rôle de Lorenzo en arrivant je les lui changerai.

Adieu mille amitiés pour vous et pour Mmes Kittl et Hauslick et tous nos amis.

Je pars après demain pour Breslau je serais parti aujourd'hui si je n'avais attendu Liszt qui arrive ce soir et je veux voir quelques instants.

Votre tout dévoué

H. Berlioz

P. S. Bien entendu que le copiste devra choisir les notes écrites à l'encre rouge de préférence puisque ce sont celles qui se rapportent au texte allemand. Le travail aura grand besoin de votre coup d'œil car la partition française est dans un grand désordre.

around March 1, in order to prepare the concert he was to give there, while Liszt gave his first Viennese concert of that year on that very day. On March 10, Berlioz wrote to Ambros again, this time from Breslau, complaining that no mail whatsoever had been forwarded to him from Prague; in the rest of the letter he discussed the problems of the two concerts planned for Prague.[17] After prolonged, tedious and boring preparations, Berlioz's only concert in Breslau took place on March 20; from there, he left for Prague on March 24, arriving on March 25. "While I was in Silesia, preparations for *Roméo et Juliette* were carried out here, and I will shortly begin the final rehearsals," he wrote to his sister, Nanci Pal.[18] On March 26, on the news that Liszt also planned to come to Prague, Berlioz wrote to him. In a somewhat roundabout manner, he urged Liszt to schedule his arrival so that they could meet.[19] The meeting did indeed take place; it was the glorious moment, when the city of Prague could simultaneously host two musicians of the caliber of Berlioz and Liszt. Since Liszt arrived in Prague on April 9, 1846,[20] he was able to attend Berlioz's last concert there, a performance of *Roméo et Juliette* on April 17 (the two previous concerts had been on March 31 and April 7); at the last rehearsal on April 15, he even acted as a translator for his friend, who spoke very

17 ■ *BCG* iii, Nr. 1026, pp. 322-323.

18 ■ *"Pendant que j'étais en Silésie on préparait ici Roméo et Juliette et je vais commencer bientôt les grandes répétitions." BCG* iii, Nr. 1029, pp. 326–329. The letter is dated: Breslau March 24, 1846—Prague March 25, 1846.

19 ■ *BCG* iii, Nr. 1030, p. 330.

20 ■ For a more detailed account of Liszt's stay in Prague, see: Alexander Buchner: *Franz Liszt in Bohemia,* transl. Roberta Finlayson Samsour, London, Peter Nevill 1962. Chronological survey of Liszt's visits to the Czech lands: p. 173.

Joseph Kriehuber and Franz Liszt: Franz Liszt composing the Rákóczi March *"at 11 o'clock in the evening", 15 December 1839, in the hotel Zur Stadt Frankfurt in Vienna, Ink drawing, a recent acquisition of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, Vienna. 24.5 x 19 cm. The signature (Half me, and half you) implies that both Liszt and Kriehuber are responsible, and that Liszt was obviously also involved in the drawing (right hand).*

COURTESY SAMMLUNGEN DER GESELLSCHAFT DER MUSIKFREUNDE IN WIEN.

little German.[21] After the extremely successful final rehearsal, Liszt was the main speaker at the banquet that the people of Prague gave in Berlioz's honour. "Glowing with the warmth of the soul and abounding in fine ideas and eloquent turns that even a professional speaker could envy," his speech deeply moved Berlioz.[22]

On the subjects of his Prague concerts and the performance of *Roméo et Juliette*, Berlioz wrote in his *Mémoires*:

> I gave six concerts in Prague, either in the theatre or in the Sophia Hall. At the last of them, I remember, I had the great delight of introducing Liszt to my *Romeo and Juliet* symphony. Several pieces from it had already been heard in Prague, and the whole work was performed without arousing any violent controversy, perhaps because it had done so in Vienna; for the two cities are notoriously opposed to each other in matters of musical taste. The vocal side of the performance was exemplary and imposing.
>
> [...] The role of Friar Laurence was superbly performed by Strakaty, with real fervour and nobility. [...] At the end of the concert, as I was asking Liszt to interpret for me so that I could thank the admirable singers, who for the last three weeks had rehearsed my choruses so punctiliously and had performed them with such prowess, a few of them came up to us and on behalf of all their comrades put the contrary proposal to him. There was a rapid exchange of German, then Liszt turned to me: "My brief has changed," he said. "These gentlemen desire me to thank you for the pleasure you have given them in allowing them to sing your work, and to tell you how delighted they are to see you so happy."[23]

Berlioz, who left Prague with a full heart and the finest of memories, stayed in close contact with Ambros, the addressee of our letter. He sent Ambros further letters mostly on the subject of the correction of *Roméo et Juliette*'s German text,[24] as Ambros had accepted to undertake this. Finally, sometime in early January 1847, the score sheet with the corrected German text was delivered to Berlioz.[25] It is not known whether any further correspondence took place between Berlioz and Ambros. The latter's career in music and cultural history was ascending, soon expanding beyond the borders of his homeland: on the strength of such works as *Die Grenzen der Musik und Poesie* (Prague,1856), *Culturhistorische Bilder aus dem Musikleben der Gegenwart* (Leipzig 1860) and *Geschichte der Musik i-iii* (Leipzig, 1862, 1864, 1868) he had earned a place among the greatest German music historians of the nineteenth century in his own lifetime, a verdict subsequently confirmed by posterity. In his capacity as a lecturer at the Conservatoires of Prague and Vienna and a professor of the University of Vienna, and also as a sought-after musical correspondent of various papers, he argued for a unified view of the arts. His open-mindedness,

21 ■ *BCG* iii, Nr. 1034, p. 334.
22 ■ *BM* ii, 395. p., BCG iii, Nr. 1034, p. 335.
23 ■ *Memoirs, Travels in Germany II. Prague.* pp. 445–446.
24 ■ *BCG* iii, Nr. 1044, 1057.
25 ■ We learn this from his letter to Kittl, dated January 22, 1847. *BCG* iii, Nr. 1093, p. 403.

which had been manifest in his reception of Berlioz's music, never gave way to the conservatism that came to characterise his younger friend, Hanslick; the fact that he remained on very good terms with Liszt is a telling demonstration of this, and so is his assessment of Berlioz, which abounded in poetic vision: "a fiery meteor in flames, crossing the night sky with irregular momentum, while we stand awestruck watching its trajectory."[26] ❧

APPENDIX

The Original Text of Berlioz's Letter

Vienne 25 Février

Mon cher M^m^ Ambros

J'ai reçu ici votre seconde lettre, je n'ais [sic] pas de nouvelles de la premiere [sic]. Mille remercimens de l'empressement que vous avez mis à corriger les choeurs de Romeo et Juliette et de les recommander aux soins de Mr Sckraup. Je me fais une véritable fête de monter à Prague cet ouvrage. Faites moi le plaisir pendant que je serai à Breslaw de faire copier une partition du chant contenant seulement les paroles allemandes bien lisiblement écrites et bien sévèrement corrigées pour le style et la prosodie // par vous si vos occupations vous permettent de prendre ce soin. J'aurais besoin de cet exemplaire pour faire graver l'ouvrage dans les deux langues et pour le monter en Allemagne. Le copiste pourra aussi mettre sous le chant l'accompagnement de piano qui est sous la partition française dans les endroits où cet accompagnement manque, il laissera les deux lignes en blanc.

Soyez encore assez bon pour aller à la poste donner l'ordre qu'on m'envoie à Breslau poste restante les lettres qui pourraient m'être adressées à Prague jusqu'au 15 Mars.

Je ne sais si les troubles politiques qui agitent en ce moment la Bohème ne seront pas nuisibles à nos projets. En tout cas j'espère qu'au mois d'avril ils seront un peu appaisés. Veuillez m'ecrire un mot à Breslau // pour me mettre au courant de ce qu'il y a de vrai dans tout cela. Je remercie bien vivement Mr Scraup de la peine qu'il prend pour l'étude des choeurs de Romeo mais ainsi étudiés longtemps d'avance je ne doute pas de leur excellente exécution. Mr Strakaty pourrait dès à présent marquer les endroits qui sont trop bas pour lui dans le role de Lorenzo en arrivant je les lui changerai.

Adieu mille amitiés pour vous et pour MM^m^ Kittl et Hanslick et tous nos amis.

Je pars après demain pour Breslau je serais parti aujourd'hui si je n'avais attendu Liszt qui arrive ce soir et je veux voir quelques instans.

Votre tout dévoué

H. Berlioz

P.S. Bien entendu que le copiste devra choisir les notes écrites à l'encre rouge de préférence puisque ce sont celles qui se rapportent au texte allemand. Ce travail aura grand besoin de votre coup d'oeuil car la partition française est dans un grand désordre./

[Adress:]
Monsieur Hoffmann
Editeur de Musique Rue des Jésuites
à Prague
Pour remettre à M^m^ Ambros

[Timbres de la poste:]
WIEN
25. FEB.
E.B. PRAG
26. FEB.
ABENDS

26 ■ *"ein Feuermeteor, das flammend in regellosem Schwunge am Nachthimmel dahinzieht und dem wir staunend nachschauen"* Quoted by Friedrich Blume in his article about Berlioz, in: *Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Kassel–Basel, Bärenreiter 1949–1951), Bd. i, pp. 408–413.

Péter Bozó

A Liszt–Berlioz Exhibition in the Franz Liszt Memorial Museum

Hector Berlioz's 2003 bicentenary was celebrated with concerts, studies and scholarly conferences worldwide. Budapest contributed its share of commemorative events. The Franz Liszt Memorial Museum and Research Centre showcased the complex relationship between Berlioz and Liszt in an exhibition (Mária Eckhardt and Adrienne Kaczmarczyk were the curators).

The opening-night performance of Liszt's transcription of *Harold in Italy* for viola and piano offered a fine example of the affinity and the reciprocal influence between the two composers. Liszt performed the piece in Weimar, and it was this work that provided him with an occasion for expounding his views on programme music. The most eloquent illustration for the similarities between the two composers' goals and their development is, however, another major orchestral composition, the *Fantastic* Symphony.

As Berlioz recalls in his *Mémoires,* it was this work that led to the two meeting for the first time on December 4, 1830, the day preceding the premiere. That year had a symbolic significance in the life of both composers: it was the year in which their career as composers took off, in both cases with an opus 1 composed for orchestra. In the spring of 1830 Berlioz set down the first ideas that would eventually become the *Fantastic* Symphony, in that same year Liszt was inspired by the July Revolution to outline effusive and cluttered sketches. The planned *Revolutionary* Symphony was never written, even though Liszt was preoccupied with the idea until the mid-1850s.

Liszt was present when the *Fantastic* Symphony was first performed. Later, he composed a piano score of the piece, as well as a piano phantasy titled *L'idée fixe – Andante amoroso* based on the stubbornly recurrent theme of the symphony. The other piece by Berlioz performed at the concert, the *Sardanapale* cantata, composed to Byron's text, also had a powerful effect on Liszt. As Adrienne Kaczmarczyk has shown, in the 1840s Liszt seriously entertained the idea of composing an opera based on *Sardanapale.* The extent to which, like Berlioz, or perhaps even encouraged by his example, Liszt drew on Byron as a source should be clear from an-

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Péter Bozó
is on the staff of the Franz Liszt Memorial Museum and Research Centre, Budapest. His Ph.D. research is on Liszt's songs.

other of his plans. According to a note in Liszt's "Lichnowsky" sketch book (also displayed at the exhibition) Liszt intended to compose three overtures inspired by Byron in the 1840s. One of them was to bear the title "Sardanapale", while the second, *Mazeppa,* was eventually realised in the form first of an étude and then as a symphonic composition. The third, the *Le corsaire,* was realised not by Liszt but by Berlioz as an orchestral overture.

The *Scene in the Fields,* the third movement of the *Fantastic* Symphony, demonstrates a musical interest shared by the two composers. In this movement Berlioz adopts a Swiss cowherd's tune called *ranz des vaches,* examples of which are found in works by Liszt as well. (For instance in *Improvisata* in the third part of *Album d'un voyageur.*) In fact the first and the fourth movements of the symphony suggest similarities between the two composers' methods as well. Liszt repeatedly revised his works and he often adopted themes, indeed occasionally entire movements, from earlier compositions. For example, the four-voice psalm theme of the piano concerto *De profundis–Psaume instrumental* was integrated into two versions of the *Totentanz,* and the piece *Il penseroso* from *Les années de pelèrinage* became one of the *Trois odes funèbres.* Likewise, Berlioz borrowed from himself in composing the symphony: in the first movement *Dreams, Passions,* he quotes from an early song and from the *Herminie* cantata, and the movement *Marche au supplice* is taken from his opera *Les Francs-Juges,* where it is featured as *March to the Scaffold.* The overture to the opera was transcribed by Liszt for the piano.

The last movement of the *Fantastic* Symphony establishes a connection between the two composers that is both concrete and abstract. In portraying the Witches' Sabbath, Berlioz famously used the same Gregorian tune as Liszt employed in the *Totentanz:* the *Dies irae* sequence. This analogy reveals a deeper affinity, a shared fascination with death. In 1839 Liszt projected two works of this character. The title of the first was supposed to imitate Théophile Gautier's volume of poems *(Comédie de la mort).* Berlioz, of course, was also fond of Gautier, as is evident from his orchestral song cycle *Nuits d'été* based on Gautier's texts. The other macabre piece planned by Liszt, conceived under the title *Le triomphe de la mort,* was inspired by the frescoes of the Camposanto in Pisa, and possibly, by a Petrarca poem of the same title. The *Totentanz* was a successor to these two plans. In his later years, as Liszt became increasingly preoccupied with the subject of death, it was with great interest that he read the book *Les danses des morts* by an Alsatian musician named Georges Kastner—as shown by his handwritten marginal notes in his copy of the book in the Liszt Bequest in Budapest. As chance would have it, Kastner was also a close acquaintance of Berlioz: Berlioz gave him the autographed score of *Romeo and Juliet.*

The last movement of the *Fantastic* Symphony is also relevant to another theme that played an important role in the oeuvres of Liszt and Berlioz alike. One of the literary precursors for the Witches' Sabbath in the *Fantastic* Symphony was the corresponding episode in Goethe's *Faust.* Already in 1828–29, Gérard de Nerval's French prose translation of Goethe's work inspired Berlioz to compose *Eight Scenes from Faust.* In fact, according to his *Mémoires,* it was Bérlioz who called Liszt's attention to *Faust.* Both of them were to write several compositions based on the Faust theme later on. The dedications attached to the *Faust* Symphony and to *La damnation de Faust* bear witness to this shared interest, as do a number of mi-

nor works, such as songs and choral works composed to poems by Goethe. Both Liszt and Berlioz set to music Margarete's *ballade* about the king of Thule (*Le Roi de Thulé* by Berlioz, *Es war ein König in Thule* by Liszt). Berlioz's *The Damnation* of *Faust* featured the *Rákóczi March,* which Liszt too adopted in a number of his works.

The exhibition highlights a number of fascinating documents pertaining to the connections. Visitors are offered a commanding panorama of the musical and poetic ideals shared by Liszt and Berlioz: Beethoven, Gluck, Weber, Shakespeare, Hugo, and Lamartine. It turns out, moreover, that Berlioz had close connections not only to Liszt himself but also to Liszt's circle of friends in Weimar. Thus, for instance, *The Trojans* was to a great extent the result of the encouragement of Princess Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein, Liszt's second companion. The organizers compiled a catalogue-like survey of the two composers' journalistic pieces about each other's works, as well as a list of the Weimar performances of Berlioz conducted by Liszt.

This friendship of artists was not without its negative side. The exhibition does not seek to underplay this aspect. It seems that the main reason why the relationship between the two composers turned sour had to do with differences in their aesthetics. While Liszt repeatedly conducted pieces by Berlioz, the artistic recognition was never mutual. Berlioz did not like the works of Wagner, another friend of Liszt's, and clearly resented the fact that he was not the only composer championed by Liszt. Indeed he even voiced doubts as to whether Liszt's efforts to popularise his works achieved their desired effect. What brought on the final chill was the debacle of the first performance of the second part of Berlioz' *The Childhood of Christ,* which was conducted by Liszt as the director of Festival of the Lower Rhine in Aachen in the summer of 1857. Blaming the fiasco on Liszt, Berlioz asked him not to conduct works by him ever again. Following the scandalous Paris premiere of Liszt's *Gran* Mass in 1866, Berlioz did not feel compelled to defend his former friend's work, even though he could have done so as a music critic.

The bulk of the exhibited material derives from the collection of the Franz Liszt Memorial Museum, but a number of documents have been contributed by other Hungarian collections, such as the Theatre History and Music Collection of the National Széchényi Library, the Hungarian National Museum, and the Institute of Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Although the friendship between the two composers has received considerable scholarly attention, especially from the Liszt scholar Alan Walker and the Berlioz scholar David Cairns, the exhibition throws new light on the subject by displaying a recent acquisition of the Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the original of a hitherto unpublished letter from Berlioz to Liszt.* ❧

* See Maria Eckhardt: "Berlioz's Unpublished Letter" on pp.141–149 in this issue.

Bálint Sárosi

The Golden Age of Gypsy Bands in Hungary

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the word 'Gypsy' as used in Hungary and abroad most probably referred to Hungarian Gypsy musicians rather than to the Gypsy ethnic group in general. But why specifically Hungarian Gypsy musicians, since Gypsy musicians lived and worked over the centuries amongst many peoples and do so to this day? Elsewhere, especially in the Balkans, their role in traditional music has been much the same as it has been in Hungary. They played a local repertory of music to meet the tastes of the local population everywhere. Yet, the Romanian, Bulgarian or Serbian traditional instrumental music the Gypsies have played is never called Gypsy music.

"In many places, Gypsies serve but the peasants and the lower ranks with their music," and it is "of little worth," comments the 10 January 1776 issue of the Viennese weekly *Anzeigen aus sämtlichen kaiserl. königl. Erbländern.* Naturally, such 'worthless' music is not called Gypsy music, even if played by Hungarian Gypsy musicians for Hungarian peasants. Just like the vast majority of documents written on them later, this article is not about Gypsy musicians who play for peasants, but about those musicians who made music for a smaller and more sophisticated audience: the gentry and for the middle classes emerging in ever greater numbers in the century to come. It was these musicians who played 'Gypsy music' and who were for a long time the epitome of 'the Gypsy' in public parlance.

While there were Gypsies playing music in ensembles in earlier centuries too, Gypsy ensembles in the sense we use the phrase today first appeared from the last decades of the eighteenth century onwards. Such ensembles were not a spontaneous initiative on the part of the Gypsy musicians. They were rather part of the reform movements which were aimed at renewing the Hungarian lan-

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guage and endorsing the spread and use of Hungarian dances, music and costumes. For that section of Hungarian society, consciously embracing a modern national culture, the Vienna composers of the classical style, then at its zenith, could have been a musical model to follow. But given the inauspicious historical antecedents, there was no chance of that happening in Hungary within the foreseeable future. Traditional Hungarian instrumental music existed only as 'folk music' and as was mostly performed with any degree of professionalism by Gypsy musicians. They were therefore urged, through education and financial and moral support, to form ensembles (in conformity with the then dominant European taste) and to modify their traditional style and repertory accordingly. Accomplishing this transformation required distancing their music from the unwritten tradition of improvisation and, by this token, drawing nearer to the musical styles then dominant in Europe. It was in this fashion that the music played by Gypsies came to be a modern music of entertainment in Hungary—and an exotic music easily understood and enjoyed abroad.

Playing without scores (a tradition which the musicians have maintained to this day) did much to make audiences identify the music played as their own. In the last analysis, the reformed music that from the mid-nineteenth century came to be tagged as 'Gypsy music' was the least original Gypsy, or even 'east European' music. What follows here highlights the triumphant period of half a century, when Gypsy ensembles enjoyed exceptional popularity in Hungary and were received with interest and acclaim everywhere abroad.

An article in the daily *Budapesti Hírlap* in the summer of 1900 claimed there was hardly a village in Hungary without a Gypsy band of its own; there were at least two in the smaller towns, many more in the cities and over a hundred in Budapest. (Around fifty years earlier, three or four Gypsy ensembles sufficed to satisfy the demand in the Hungarian capital.) Even so, no more than a dozen of these were really good. Initially, the average ensemble consisted of five or six members; by the end of the 1850s, fifteen to eighteen-member ensembles were also to be found. Later still, the average number for the best Gypsy ensembles was eight to twelve: four to six violins, the odd viola, one cellist, one double-bass, one or two clarinetts and one or two cymbalists. At this particular period there was at least one, if not more, Gypsy ensembles of nationwide fame in almost all major Hungarian cities, including those that are now in neighbouring countries, such as Pozsony (Bratislava), Kassa (Košice), Nagyvárad (Oradea), Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca), Arad and Szabadka (Subotica). The better trained of the musicians performed by and large the same repertory of music and could thus hold their own in any ensemble of similar quality anywhere in the country. Accordingly, it was usual for ensembles to dissolve and reassemble again; members were easily replaced and the number of musicians increased or decreased in keeping with the demand or opportunities.

The leader (the *primás*) was the best violinist in the group and held in great respect by the other musicians. This was also reflected financially: in general he had to be paid double the amount the others did. Of the *primás* active in the 1850s, most praise was accorded to Ferenc Patikárius; on account of his mainly traditional style he was considered a worthy successor to the famous *primás* and composer of so called *verbunkos* (recruiting) music, János Bihari, who was active in the early nineteenth century. Little mention is made in the contemporary press of other instrumentalists as band leaders. An exception was a renowned cellist from Nyíregyháza, Károly Fátyol, whose reputation started to grow at the end of that decade and whose devotees took him on a tour of the country where he played mostly as a soloist or was accompanied by a violinist and a violist. No mention was made at all of the accompanying musicians—second violinists, viola player[1] and bass player. Special attention was paid to the cymbalist, since good cymbalum-playing was considered "the heart and soul of national music." Foreigners, too, acknowledged mostly the cymbalum-player after the *primás*.

By the end of the century, family dynasties of musicians had emerged, such as the Berkes's, Berkis, Kóczés, Kozáks, Munczis, Rácz's, Radics's, and Magyaris. Most of them led a life worthy of their standing and did well for themselves, but the majority of average players found it difficult to make ends meet for they were in greater number than needed. In 1892, the town of Balassagyarmat could not support a second first class Gypsy ensemble. In Szeged in the 1890s, two famous and world-touring ensembles were doing well but the others lived from hand to mouth. Those few of them who could read music did some teaching for a living.

It was mainly the hard living, added to the fact that no Gypsy musician likes to undertake work other than making music, that caused altercations amongst them. In the autumn of 1892, local Gypsy musicians in Arad beat up a Gypsy ensemble that had moved there from Gyula and ran them out of town. But those with talent and luck could strike it rich abroad. According to the local paper, Jancsi Kiss and his ensemble from Kaposvár "pocketed loads of dollars" in America in the 1880s. Náci Erdélyi and his band, from Szeged, took home so much money from America in the winter of 1890–91 that the double-bassist planned to buy a house and an estate to go with it. Ferdi Lakatos from Komárom reaped a "plentiful gold harvest" in London. For others, sizeable or even fabulous wealth and social ascent came with their marriage abroad. In 1896–98 the newspapers wrote extensively about the marriage of the *primás* Jancsi Rigó to a Belgian countess. Another, Elek Vörös, promised to marry a woman in Paris, who in turn was prepared to divorce her millionaire husband. However, the fairytale came true for none of them. The countess abandoned her Jancsi and the Parisienne who had come to visit Vörös in Hungary, learnt that the man she thought was unattached had a wife and children in the city of Győr.

Rivalry between musicians of equal rank was not rare. In 1850, all three famous Gypsy ensembles, those of Kecskeméti, Patikárius and Sárközi, advertised

1 ■ The 'contra' violinist and the viola player play rhythm and chord accompaniment with double-stop.

themselves as "the leading Gypsy band in Pest." Sárközi and his men pasted over the words "leading" on Patikárius's posters. Often the leaders of two ensembles active in the same town challenged one another to 'a duel of bows,' thus to decide which of them was better. The duel was normally fought in a large restaurant in the town, at the head of their respective bands; for the audience the event excited as much interest as a football match would today. The outcome was decided on the basis of the musical programme by the audience. Instead of the gauntlet, the challenger flung words at his rival, mostly in the local paper, describing him as a coward who lacked any sense of music, knew nothing of opera or could not play flageolets. Much to the chagrin of the audience, the advertised duel was often cancelled, because the party challenged backed out; he was either afraid or had no time to prepare and preferred to undertake playing at a wedding for a fee rather than fighting a duel with no remuneration.

The musicians worked mostly without a contract, and collected their fees by passing round the plate. This had the advantage of compelling the guests to be generous enough, since they were ashamed to be seen mean-fisted in public, nor did they want to appear miserly in the eyes of the musicians. Abroad the musicians usually made more money. When, however, the gentlemen of England turned out to have empty pockets, the musicians passed the word on their parsimony from London back to their homeland. The plate that was being sent around was naturally watched by the musicians with lively interest. According to one anecdote, the musician carrying the plate round had to keep a live fly in his palm, which he was to release only after the rest of the band had counted the money on the plate. Even if they travelled abroad under a contract which fixed their fees, the musicians tried to adhere to their right to collect perks freely. On their way to Mexico, the Debrecen musicians received six silver coins each on board every day, and they were also allowed to collect tips.

Traditionally, entertainers such as Gypsy musicians have to cater and adjust themselves directly to the audiences that maintain them. One way for a merry-maker to induce the ensemble to hit upon his favourite tune was to tear in two a thousand pengő note and hand one half to the *primás,* who would only get the other half when he played the favourite song. At other times, a musician has to comply with the customer's whim by playing on one leg, stopping or starting on request; he is also to bear with the guest setting the tempo or expressing his mirth shouting; he is also expected to show understanding for those revelling 'mournfully,' crying, and throwing their glasses against the wall. Of all entertainers, Gypsy musicians proved to be the best accomplices to such carousing in past centuries. The best of them were able to play for select groups of revellers and also excelled in adjusting themselves to foreigners' demands. In press reviews, especially abroad, comments were made not only on their music-making but on their looks too. When Jancsi Vörös's band played in Zurich in the summer of 1865, "their strong, manly build and elegant Hungarian costumes" proved no

small advantage. The costumes Gypsy musicians wore in the course of their tours abroad were usually a version of the colourful uniform of Hungarian hussars.

The phrase 'Gypsy orchestra' was rarely used even at the end of the nineteenth century. The ensembles were variously described as a musical company, folk music society, music band, or national music company. Instead of *primás,* we find designations like leader of the orchestra, conductor, director, even director of the national orchestra, or violin artist. Miska Farkas from Győr, who received frequent mentions in the press and composed *csárdás* dances, called himself a "Hungarian music composer."

No evidence is found in the contemporary press that the musicians readily identified themselves with the Gypsies as an ethnic group.[2] Practising their profession set them necessarily apart from the broad mass of Gypsies. Unless in the phrase 'Gypsy musician,' they felt the word 'Gypsy' offensive. This is understandable too, if we consider that they lived amongst a bourgeoisie into which in the nineteenth century large numbers of other ethnic groups were being assimilated. At the same time, that section of the Gypsies to which they belonged had lived in Hungary for centuries. So they had ample reasons for considering themselves Hungarian and had a right to be considered so by others. "We were born in Hungary and do not wish to be other than Hungarian," one famous Gypsy *primás* wrote, "in the name of all ensembles," in reply to an article he found insulting[3]. If need be and given the chance, they were ready to display their patriotism too. In the spring of 1903, the Crown Prince Francis Ferdinand and his wife dined in a luxury restaurant in Cairo, where Jóska Babári and his band were playing. Called to their table, Babári had to play a Johann Strauss waltz, and no Hungarian song was requested from him. On returning to his ensemble, Babári first played the Hungarian national anthem, then the *Rákóczi March*—which was met with acclaim by the other fashionable foreign guests present.

Expressions of dissatisfaction with the performance of Gypsy ensembles were few and far between. The overwhelming majority were pleased with the musicians and were proud of the successes they reaped in and outside the country. The contemporary press carried ample coverage not only of the famous orchestras but also of the average ensembles active in the countryside. They reported on the musicians' marriages, ran obituaries on them and made frequent references to their participation in the 1848–49 freedom fight against Habsburg rule. Lovers of Gypsy music wrote poems on the famous *primás*'s and made financial contributions towards their treatment if they had fallen ill. The proud gentle-

2 ■ They did not undertake to play genuine Gypsy music or Gypsy folk music. Gypsies are known to be traditionally self-catering in music. They use no instruments and accompany their dances with vocal music. They sing mostly without words, "rolling" (dividing the notes of the melody into quavers and semiquavers by a play of the tongue) and "mouth-bassing" (improvising vocal rhythm accompaniment). What and how the Gypsy musicians play has in fact nothing to do with the style of Gypsy folk music.

3 ■ *Budapesti Hírlap,* 25 July 1890.

manly conduct of some of the more famous, their thee-and-thouing with the nobles and their success with women also merited frequent mentions in the press.

In the early 1850s, when there were only a few good ensembles, the best-known of them—of Kecskeméti, Sárközi, Patikárius, Bunkó, the Farkas brothers of Győr, Boka of Debrecen—took advantage of the rapidly growing nationwide interest and went on 'concert' tours in the country, which may have lasted for months. In such concerts, they did not serve the audience in the sense that individual wishes on the part of those attending were not complied with, even though the musical programme was mostly improvised. This in part explains why the bands widened their repertory, traditionally folk music in nature, with new songs, newly composed pieces, foreign light music and selections from operas in vogue. While this was meant to satisfy the audiences, the same audiences were soon to voice their objection to foreign influences alien to the Hungarian traditions.

From the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries on, Gypsy orchestras played an active role in the shaping of modern Hungarian entertainment music. Accordingly, Gypsy musicians who played the *verbunkos* music (the Hungarian instrumental dance music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) and, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, *csárdás* dance music and Hungarian popular songs, came to be appreciated also as carrying out a patriotic activity. Enthusiasm for their role grew to an extent that some patrons attempted to adjust the Gypsy musicians' past to a 'glorified' past history of Hungary. Since there were Gypsy musicians among the freedom fighters in the 1848–49 revolution, their participation was also projected onto an earlier freedom fight, the one led by Prince Francis Rákóczi in 1703–11, and they were shown in various roles, such as elevating the spirits of soldiers, consoling and even counselling them. Accordingly, Prince Rákóczi was described as having been surrounded by Gypsy musicians both in Hungary and during his exile in Turkey, though there were in fact none to be found in his escort. Another of the many examples is the imaginary grandfather invented for the first famous Gypsy woman violinist, Panna Czinka (d. 1772), who was said to have been the composer of the Rákóczi Song.[4] Panna Czinka herself came to be described as the "most beautiful Gypsy woman," even though the only authentic account of her, the article in the *Anzeigen* quoted above, lists her conspicuous physical defects. Even a racist explanation was found why of all the Gypsy musicians, the Hungarians did so well—both Hungarians and Gypsies have Oriental blood in them, no wonder then that their national idiosyncracies are so close.[5]

4 ■ There is no known composer to the so-called Rákóczi song: it is a traditional Hungarian tune that has come down in several text and instrumental versions over the centuries.

5 ■ The idealised figure of the Gypsy, with the Hungarian Gypsy musician in focus, gained currency especially abroad, where some extra features were even added to it. In 1867, a French newspaper attributed a Sanscrit derivation to the word *csárdás,* which designates a particular form of folk dance and comes from the word *csárda* (village pub). A rich collection of misinterpretations and myths about Gypsies have lately been found again in French publications. See *The Hungarian Quarterly,* Vol. 38, Autumn 1997, pp. 133–139.

There were some as early as the 1860s who expressed their doubts concerning the generally held opinion that the achievements of Gypsy musicians could lead to the emergence of a Hungarian musical culture on a par with the European musical tradition. Some bore a grudge against Gypsy musicians, whom they felt were spoilt by the audiences. According to an acrimonious article in the 11 May 1862 issue of *Sürgöny,* "Owing to the circumstance that fantasy calls them national musicians, Gypsies proudly and consciously blackmail the merry-makers, as though all Gypsy brats were a Paganini, a Lavotta[6] or a Bihari." When it came to appreciating them for what they really did with mastery, most famous representatives of classical music took their side. The famous violinist Ede Reményi expressed his sincere admiration in 1860 for the Patikárius band. On the other hand, he who was frequently listed amongst the Gypsy musicians by the romantic dreamers of a Gypsy past, had to say this about the cause of national music:

> If we want our national music to be spoken of with respect in educated circles abroad, we must strive, above all, in our homeland to take our fine music out of the hands of the many frothy, chaffy, tastelessly gaudy, dilettantish wild and virtuoso Gypsies, whose style is an affront to a deep sense of beauty, and to elevate it from the stinking morasses of the centuries in which they had sunken and still keep on sinking it through their distorted procedures. Let us stop boasting of it. In other countries music is played in gardens, pubs and in the streets (especially what they call "Garten Musik"), yet no one would think of saying that such catchpenny musical literature was real art.[7]

With the development of Gypsy bands and under the influence of music from the scores, the freedom of earlier improvisational music came to be perceivably limited; yet whenever there was scope for improvisation, musicians achieved great successes with it. This might mostly account for the centuries long popularity of the *Rákóczi March* in Hungary and abroad. Instead of a final version in which the music would have been fixed from note to note, the musicians played their individual virtuoso versions with improvisations.[8] The Gypsy musicians took care, and do so to this day, not to use scores before the audience. Playing from the score would put an end to the magic of their genre—the belief on the part of the audience that the music is played directly for them.

On one hand, the audiences expected an accession to modern European music from the Gypsy bands. On the other hand, however, they required that their music retain its originality. As early as the 1850s, some sensed in their playing "an artful quality brought about under the influence of German masters." In or-

6 ■ Hungarian violinist and *verbunkos* composer at the beginning of the 19th century.

7 ■ Ede Reményi: "Hazánk művészeti viszonyairól" [On the Condition of the Arts in Our Country]. *Zenészeti Lapok,* 17 November 1864.

8 ■ The *Rákóczi March* takes its origin from the already mentioned Rákóczi Song which itself existed in several versions. Of the many versions of the march that were played from the early 19th century onwards, the best—if indeed it is the appropriate word—is the one known as Liszt's *Rhapsody No. 15.* Even more impressive is the arreangement of the tune for symphonic orchestra by Berlioz, which he composed during his visit in Hungary in 1846 and incorporated in his work *La damnation de Faust.*

der to learn new pieces from the score for their concerts in Hungary and their tours abroad, they needed musicians who could read the scores. Since they had few members who could do so, often they relied on outside help, either by Hungarian musicians, such as Károly Dobozy, Béni Egressy, Márk Rózsavölgyi and others, or German and Czech theatrical and army musicians. Real 'Gypsy conductors'—musicians who led the rehearsals—came onto the scene as late as the end of the century. The teaching was done from piano scores in general. The 'Gypsy conductor' did not write the parts, he rather divided them up amongst the members, allotting the melody, the bass and the chords, and he taught the musicians how to play these by the ear usually with a violin in his hand. A well-trained band would then know well how the piece should sound.

Portraits of the Budapest band leaders Lajos Berkes, Ferenc Bunkó, Ferenc Patikárius, Ferenc Sárközi and Pál Rácz. Magyarország és a Nagyvilág, *1875, No.5, p.51.*

Musical illiteracy was a characteristic feature not only of the majority of Gypsy musicians but also of the non-Gypsy dilettanti who composed *csárdás* pieces, a typical nineteenth-century form of Hungarian dance music. The 'whistling' *csárdás* composer whistled, or the Gypsy musician played on his violin, the tune he had composed, to the score-reading musician who in his turn made a piano version of it with conventional harmonisation. If the composer of the *csárdás* was also the band-leader, and did not want to get his piece published, which was a rare case, he did not have to recourse to literate help, for his band would shape a finished piece from the simple tune almost at the first hearing, complete with conventional harmonic and rhythmic accompaniment. It is accidental that, of the composers of the original *csárdás* tunes Brahms had used for his *Hungarian Dances,* only one was a Gypsy, because there were a lot more Gypsies amongst those composers who turned out the large quantities of *csárdás* tunes. No self-respecting band-leader could afford not to compose csárdás pieces. It is no wonder then that *csárdás* pieces were made to pattern by the hundred, one more

worthless than the other. On the one entitled "The Hungarian Goodwife's Csárdás," a critic had the following to say in the 30 April 1862 issue of *Zenészeti Lapok:* "If things go on like this, there will be no object, notable person, idea, sentiment, whatever, which would not merit a tune composed by the *csárdás* zealots who apparently set it as their aim in life to 'csárdásify' anything they can"—even though in this case the composer, Gusztáv Nyizsnyai, a town clerk, was of the more musically cultured, for he could read and write scores.

It is typical that in the last third of the nineteenth century, the Gypsy musicians and their audiences no longer considered the 'folk songs'—which in this case meant popular songs, the real basic material of 'Gypsy music'—representative items of the musical repertories. In 1890, the Gypsy band of Pécs who were contracted to play in Balatonfüred in the summer season, attracted audiences by saying that their repertory consisted of "some 120 pieces outside the folk songs, of which twenty were [details of] operas." Such selections of operas, mainly overtures, on the repertory of Gypsy bands were from Bellini's *Norma*, Donizetti's *Lucia de Lammermoor* and *Lucrezia Borgia,* Erkel's *László Hunyadi,* Flotow's *Martha,* Gluck's *Orfeo,* Gounod's *Faust,* Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana,* Meyerbeer's *L'étoile du Nord, Le prophète, Robert le diable,* Nicolai's *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor,* Rossini's *Guillaume Tell,* Verdi's *Ernani, I due Foscari;* Wagner's *Tannhäuser,* and Weber's *Der Freischütz.* Foreign critics could best assess and appreciate the discipline of the Gypsy bands through their performance of these, while the musicians themselves were proud in the first place of their impeccable rendering of the pieces they had learnt from the scores. These also included new Hungarian compositions and foreign dances—polkas, waltzes, French quadrilles and so on. As regards fashionable and foreign music pieces, Sárközi's band received warning as early as 1855 that they should not strive to carry the day by playing Strauss in Vienna of all places.

From the mid-century onwards, the audiences were increasingly interested in songs. It is in part for this reason why they thought little of the excessive instrumental 'flourishing' of simple tunes. The Gypsy musician and song composer Pista Dankó, whose career reached its peak in the 1890s (he composed his first song in 1883), played a great role in bringing about this change. The popular writer Géza Gárdonyi, who was his friend, called Dankó "a Gypsy Petőfi". The audiences idolised him; they refused to believe, for instance, against an unequivocal court decision, that he had plagiarised one of his songs, even though the chairman of the committee of copyright experts acting in the case was the very prince of Hungarian writers, Mór Jókai. Dankó also composed instrumental dance music and *csárdás* dances. A fine achievement of nineteenth-century *csárdás* and song literature, of the approximately 400 tunes he composed, some 15 to 20 have also survived in the living oral tradition. His compositions were Hungarian songs, and such was his intention too, just as his Gypsy predecessors played and composed Hungarian music which they had felt to be their own. ❧

Tamás Koltai

Cultivating Myths

Sándor Weöres: *Theomachia* • Pintér-Darvas Works: *Gyévuska* (Devushka) • *Csak egy szög* (Just a Nail) • György Spiró: *Koccanás* (Bump)

From time to time the theatre feels it has to go back to its cultic origins. There are two ways for it to do so: either by reviving old and well-tried myths, or seeking out mythological elements in history or even in everyday events.

The review in the previous issue dealt with the National Theatre production of the puppet tale *Holdbéli csónakos* (Waterman on the Moon) by Sándor Weöres (1913–1989), one of the great poets of the last century. *Theomachia,* now at the Bárka Theatre is his first work for the stage. It is an oratorical dramatic poem which Weöres wrote at the age of twenty-five; it has had one or two productions by amateur companies but no major professional production. This is mainly due to the fact that Weöres in general did not keep to theatrical conventions, nor did he seek to satisfy the expectations of audiences—least of all in his younger days. *Theomachia,* composed in the Hungarian metre, 12-syllable alexandrines, is more lyrical than dramatic and its construction follows linguistic and musical patterns, rather than the conventions of the theatre. According to Zoltán Balázs, a director in his 20s, the performance calls for a musical structure; it is closer to the oratorio, the mass and opera than to theatre: the soliloquies and dialogue function like a libretto of some sort.

Theomachia, the Battle of the Gods, is based on one of the ancient Greek myths. Chronos, the youngest of the Titans, devours his own children since it is written in his fate that he will be deposed by his own offspring. And so it happens. Chronos is fed stones wrapped in swaddling-clothes instead of the infant Zeus, the future supreme divinity and agent of Chronos's fate. In the play, just as in the Greek tragedies, fear of his fate brings the protagonist all the closer to the fulfilment of that fate. The power of Chronos, unmoving time, is taken away by Zeus, who was hidden amongst people and who thereby introduces a new world. In this Zeus is helped by Gaea, the Earth goddess, and the gods Okeanos and Rhea, brother and sister. Rhea is also Chronos's wife and the Mother of the Gods. This is a family tragedy and a drama of the struggle for power, a show-down with the cult of Chronos which includes the sacrifice of

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humans, even of children. The stone-rolling Kyreses also take part as the armed attendants of Zeus (they themselves are endowed with everyday human qualities). For Weöres, therefore, the universe is made up of the trio of the unfathomable ancient Cosmos, the incestuous gods and the human race, ready for change. The director of the play, when commenting on his production, goes as far as drawing a profane allegory, in the overthrow of the dictators' cults, with Hitler, Stalin, Mao and Castro, and amongst the 'saviours' following Zeus, with Jesus, Buddha and Muhammad.

Fortunately enough, the production does not offer a verbatim interpretation of the parallels. The audience is received in a mystical mood in semi-darkness, with the sound of prayer floating through what appears an unusual depth, while they are occupying their seats in what resembles a stadium grandstand and a temple, a profane pairing of what appears to be mutually exclusive. One is a venue for cheering, the other for devotion. Both are cultic in nature, and based on mass psychosis. With the Greeks of old, the two got on well. It is only in later ages that they had to suffer the projection of a disproportionate repression of instincts in one and the very gratification of them in the other. The director now expects us to join the rite as one of the initiates, to become participants. Chronos stands still in the centre of a space lined in black, like a dark monster. He is the symbol of endless time and power. He is played by a woman (Ilona Béres), bodiless in a rough way, neither male nor female, an allegorical figure, which recites its speeches in a piercing guttural voice. Hers is a fascinating achievement, if only because of the two-hour physical and mental concentration it takes. The symbol of a world order, postulated as eternal, is being ruined in front of our eyes as Chronos discards his dark cloak, tears out his shaggy hair bunch by bunch, and the formless deity absorbed in the universe turns into a deformed mortal human being in a white night-shirt, barefoot and bald. The ageless gods and armed attendants of Zeus fill the flat stage, the pit, a stretched net, and a flight of iron steps built into the wall. Verse and movement compete, action is transmitted by verbal and physical displays of birth, struggle, and change. The eclectic costumes and gestures of various cults—Egyptian, Indian, Oriental—clash in endless variations. Music, noises and singing voices merge. Red draperies tumble down and are lifted. Stylisation and naturalism, a plastic doll and bread eaten as a symbol of the body, are mixed. Finally, the giant circle which symbolises the universe is cleft in two, and the figures climb the flat, stand and recite as a chorus a melodious poem by Weöres, thus dissolving the end of the primeval chaos into harmony. One may fancy historical allegories in what is a tragedy of fate, though it is just as fascinating without them.

One of the tragedies of Hungarian history was the annihilation in 1943 of the 2nd Hungarian army, fighting on the side of Hitler's Germany. The alliance with Hitler led to the death of some two hundred thousand Hungarian soldiers at the bend of the river Don in the aftermath of the Battle of Stalingrad. This has been the theme of several works in various genres. Now Pintér–Darvas Works, a remarkable fringe theatre company, turned it into a musical *Gyévuska* (Devushka). Several productions of the Pintér–Darvas Works have made a stir, the last one being *Paraszt-opera* (Peasant Opera), an ironic treatment of a ballad-like story. Irony is not absent from *Devushka* either but, given the nature of the subject, there are more tragic elements. Again, just as in *Peasant Opera,* the

piece is composed of closed 'operatic' numbers and recitatives. The music performed live by an orchestra is based on instrumental adaptations of contemporary Hungarian and Russian songs, sentimental chansons and patriotic songs, arranged by Benedek Darvas, a young composer who was also responsible for *Peasant Opera.*

The story, if indeed it is a story at all, is like a mosaic, limited to a few symbolical figures, members of a bicycle rifle regiment. The main characters are German and Hungarian officers of various ranks, their wives, and a Jew on labour service. At the beginning of the play, the troops are behind the line and are preparing to attend a ball, the atmosphere is that of the nationalist–irredentist mood of the time. One of the officers discovers that a fellow officer is a Jew, but before he can report him as such, the other decides to choose his own way to die. He makes up a story that it was he who had supplied morphine to the commander's daughter, an addict who had died of an overdose. The commander's wife, a dilettante singer and a devotee of the proletarian poet Attila József, gives a recital of poems set to music. The regiment is in the meantime ordered to the line; before they set out, their interpreter (who is on forced labour service) is shot dead. The anti-Semitic officer falls in love with a captured Soviet partisan girl, whom he identifies with his Jewish fellow officer whom he has sent to his death. Both these roles are played by the same actress. The number of casualties grows, fiancées and pregnant spouses wait in vain. At the end of the play the Russian army breaks through the Hungarian front.

The story is made up of mosaics of real and fictitious elements, in part grotesque, in part tragic. There is humour as well, dry, painful and darkly morbid. One soldier's wife finds the labour serviceman's appearance objectionable, because he shows up for the ball with his leg wrapped in newspapers. "Why doesn't the man have more self-respect?" she asks. The story is bent towards the surreal, the absurd, though the standard of the text is not always up to par. The relationship between the immediate subject and the indirect content is more sophisticated and complex here than in earlier plays by the Pintér–Darvas Works, in which profane and linguistically primitive depiction was consciously aimed at depreciating the chosen theme. This time the production is expected to set the balance right. Director Béla Pintér, who also acts in the production, has introduced a ritualistic element into the play in order to accentuate the mythology inherent in the events. With its wide, white steps, the studio of the National Theatre appears to symbolise endless snowfields. The majority of the characters wear cothurnus that are thicker soled than usual and move in their simple, stylised uniforms with difficulty, with puppet-like rigidity—and mainly sidewise, as the space demands. With his rigid cloak, his face painted white, and slow ritualistic movements, the highest-ranking German officer, played by Béla Pintér, calls to mind the stylised world of Far-Eastern theatre. The Soviet army is made up of monumental and masked red figures placed across the stage. The stylised representation is set in sharp contrast to the figure of the Jewish labour serviceman, who wears neither boots nor a costume, and is shot naked into a grave.

The exchange, in two cases, of male and female roles serves the purpose of some sort of Brechtian alienation. Mention has already been made of the actress who plays both the Jewish officer and the Soviet partisan girl. The dilettante female singer is, on the other hand, played by an actor, who manages to avoid turning a well-known proletarian poem into a drag number. Not all the singing is to the same

standard. This new play by the Pintér-Darvas Works is again a pleasing and talented production; as far as its content and direction is concerned; it is more ambitious than the previous one, though here and there it is a degree more unresolved.

The new production at the Csiky Gergely Theatre in Kaposvár, *Csak egy szög* (Just a Nail), is also musical and mythological. To say that it is about the Gypsy question as an ethnical issue, a neuralgic point in Hungary, and indeed in central and eastern Europe, might give the impression that it is a documentary or at best a realist social drama. This is not the case. Gypsies as an ethnic group on the fringe of society and subjected to discrimination and hate speeches, are indeed part of everyday political life. However, the writer István Mohácsi, the writer–director János Mohácsi and the composer Márton Kovács have created no traditional 'investigative' piece; they have made, for want of a better word, a transhistorical musical pamphlet, a work of just as exceptional genre and quality as they have produced before, more than once.

Just a Nail deals with the history of the Gypsies in five absurd and ahistorical episodes. Only two of them take place 'in their own time'—the last, which is contemporary, and the one set in Auschwitz, since it is unique. Yet in these two, the production works on the plane of an elevated, theatrical reality, rather than on a direct life-like one. The present is like a grotesque farce, and the Auschwitz episode is like a dystopia of a monstrous death factory, slightly resembling the film version of Orwell's *1984*. The first three episodes are markedly different from these two; they are full of textual and contextual anachronisms. The historically fictitious elements, myth models, the trumped up trials, are interwoven with asides, out-of-context and contemporary references, as a result of which the original meanings are turned banal, profane and satirical. The aim is not to mock myths, as some might think (after the episode on Golgotha, some spectators got up to leave), but mocking the prejudices they contain. This is what the self-ironic subtitle of the play, *Prejudice in Two Noisy Parts*, refers to.

Some examples from the range of motifs in the production will help understand what it is all about. The first episode, set apparently in the ancient 'homeland' of India, is a Gypsy wedding, which is bombed by bereted activists of the Domestic Section of the India Belongs to the Swiss People's Army (they are in fact a friendly family living next door), the reason being that India had "once belonged to Switzerland". In the parody of the nationalist terror attack one may identify several European (and ex-European) examples of irrational movements focussing on ethnicism and territorial claims, which go with massacres, re-settlements and the expulsion of peoples.

In the second episode, which takes place in 1772, Gypsies are tried before a court, charged with cannibalism. This is the Gypsy version of the notorious Tiszaeszlár case of ritual murder, in which Jews were charged with the killing of a young girl to use her blood in the Paschal bread. The episode includes a number of absurdities, such as one of the 'consumed' victims appearing as a prosecution witness.

In the Golgotha episode, the Gypsies, freshly expelled from Jerusalem, come upon the Jews and with the Roman soldiers escorting them as they are about to crucify Jesus. The encounter leads to an 'ethnic clash'. The Gypsies are hired to drive nails into the cross, but when it turns out that there is a pair of hands between the nails and the boards, they turn the job down. Eventually two of them are crucified on either side of Christ as thieves—and in-

stead of the normal four nails, only three are used, because the fourth has been stolen.

The Auschwitz episode is a horrendous, nightmarish scene of gassing, an apocalyptic vision accompanied by Mozart music. At the end, water is sprinkled on the naked victims from the showers—truth cannot be displayed in the theatre, the illustration can only be corrected verbally.

The last episode is a tragicomic summary of a recent television news item—the inhabitants of a village prevent a Gypsy family from occupying the house they had bought. In the process all the pros and cons for humane behaviour or arguments for and against prejudices arguments for and against the EU accession are listed.

This plot-outline reveals little of the absurd verbal humour, the brilliant ideas, the originality of the music and the choreography of the four-hour production, and least of all of the enthusiasm, co-ordination and professionalism of the famous Kaposvár company. The narrator in the framing scene, a wise old Gypsy, talks to God about his chosen people just as Tevje the milkman does in the *Fiddler on the Roof.* At the end of the play he announces that today—and the actual date of the performance is given—all Gypsies left Hungary. He then announces that all Hungarians have done so too. Even later he says that not a word of this is true, both are still here, we can meet them if we leave the theatre, and we ought to try and live normal lives together. In view of centuries-old prejudices and everyday conflicts, a performance like this, with a releasing power and devoid of didacticism and obligatory optimism, does attain a degree of creditworthiness—at least in the theatre.

The play *Koccanás* (Bump), by the novelist and playwright, György Spiró, staged at the Katona József Theatre in Budapest, similarly offers a special cross-section of Hungarian life, or, to use a word taken from the play, a "hungaricum". Several cars bump into one another at a major crossroads, and traffic comes to a standstill for hours because of the pile-up. In the traffic jam, Hungarian life blooms. People first start fighting, then bring the situation under control. A representative sample of the population—an entrepreneur, a businessman, a homeless person, a policeman, a guest worker, a gangster, etc.,—all live out their roles. A canteen is opened, with hiked-up prices and exploitation. A stock exchange is also operated. The small business the homeless person runs with the déclassé old couple who are lodged above his bench starts picking up. The crossroads turns to a scene for a line-up of social samples—skinheads, missionaries, demonstrators, tourists who were originally Hungarian, members of the international mafia, opportunist criminals, Afghan refugees suffocated in a van. They bring with them the flotsam of ideas with which such groups can colour public speech. And in the centre are two intellectuals, of course—the Man and the Woman; one has given up himself in order to be successful, the other has remained true to herself and has done badly. They meet up, like the others do, in this highlighted moment, on the surface. Then, nothing changes; life and traffic go on as before. The upset caused by the accident is a condensation. "Here, there's Easter all the year round," a surprised tourist is told, when a foul-mouthed, shrieking pregnant woman gets her dress doused with coke. We are like this all year, this is not a special state of affairs. This is our normal life.

Spiró, as usual, has written a bitter and angry comedy. He mentioned Goldoni as his model, and there is also a good deal of Gogolian disgust in the play—against the object depicted, the medium, rather than

against the figures. Behind the facile, witty dialogues, the gags, the well-oiled comedy machinery, one can sense the hardly disguised nausea with which the author views low-quality life, low standards, profiteering and shabby slogans. He made an important decision to refrain from using daily (monthly, yearly) topicalities, direct political references and from identifying persons or groups. *Bump* is not a journalistic play, it is a comedy of characters and situations, even though both the characters and the situations are more typical than individual, like in Goldoni's plays. This is the mythology of everyday life in a condensed, pamphlet-like form.

Director Gábor Zsámbéki conveys Spiró's intellectual overview and underview in a witty manner. Up on the balcony we see the two grudging déclassé pensioners contemplating the events, and below them, on the stage, the cheerful young homeless man—it is by no means accidental that they are in a mutually exposed relationship. The scene is not that of an accident, it is a garage sale of our objects. The props are not those of an accident scene, they display the reality of indispensable junk, of which the mobile phone is the least dispensable. The cast are the entrepreneur as a key figure of our age, the millionaire looking like a beggar, the silly teenager, the hysterical lady, the frightened nurse, the ignorant tourist guide, the corrupt policeman, the foul-mouthed pregnant woman who had been socialised on soap operas, and the two protagonists—the Man, emotionally scorched temporarily, and the Woman who had given up her private life. None have names, they are all victims of de-personification. ❧

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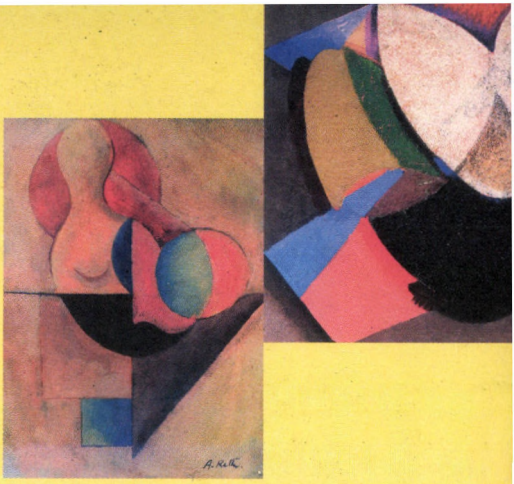

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The Novel must have Characters partaking in its Action. A maximum of 33.33 per cent of the Characters may be Negative ones; the remaining 66.66 per cent must be Positive. The percentage must be calculated on the basis of each character's occurrence per page and per length of mention. External or internal monologues of whatever length must be included in the percentage calculated for the given character. The following are accepted as Negative Characters: Islamic Fundamentalists, Suicide Bombers, Extraterrestrials, Nazis, Fascists, Bolsheviks, Murderous Armed Robbers, Mass Murderers, Desecrators of Dead Bodies, Paedophiles and Anti-EU Demonstrators. Characters not included in the above list are Positive Characters.

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