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Rudolf Fischer & Peter Doherty, Language Editors

Kati Könczöl, Editorial Secretary

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e-mail: quarterly@mail.datanet.hu
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István Szabó

The Luring Image

Thank you for the honour of being invited to speak at this celebration of European cultural life. For a time I wondered whether I should accept it. Indeed, what could I tell you that a Frenchman, an American or an Austrian for that matter, a politician or a practitioner of one of the other arts might not be able to tell you? What kind of question could I put to you which you would not answer on the basis of mere routine or prejudice.

I was born in 1938, the year in which Toscanini decided that he would not come to Salzburg as long as the Nazis were in power. In Budapest, where I grew up, I witnessed eight major political transitions, each affecting the lives of everyone around me.

Each of the eras marked by these transitions had its favourite artists, since every political regime needed to legitimise its roots and its claim to power in artistic terms. Each regime needed artists who would willingly proclaim that the country had been governed by traitors in the era preceding and that the new regime would guide the people into a future of justice and happiness. Street names changed frequently in Budapest. You did not even have to move out of the same apartment on the boulevard where the Opera stands, to have, over a short lifetime, five or six different streetnames in one's address.

Perhaps you will understand, then, why I want to talk about the relationship between art and politics. Especially in its Central European variant, this curious love-hate relationship evolved through permanent historical turmoil, political reversals, pathological intrigue, conspiracy theories and actual conspiracies, in short, trials that put people's integrity to a severe test. Politics always envied the seductive power of art and its influence upon the masses, while artists envied those in power for their ability to control the masses. We have now reached the point where culture and art are, often and in many places, a mere puppet-play governed

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This is a translation of the Oscar-winning film director's opening address at the 2004 Salzburg Festival, given on 23 July.

by politics. Deception, back-stabbing, character assassination through the leaking of information, the deliberate overlooking of the achievements of others, and in general the predominance of interests over values. Based on my own past experience, I consider all these strategies so many forms of Bolshevik politics. Even after the demise of Bolshevik regimes, many of their typical mechanisms remain with us.

Since I am, I believe, the first film director to be honoured in this way by the Salzburg Festival, I take this occasion to be a recognition of cinema as an art form. Let me use this opportunity to deliver an inaugural lecture of sorts on behalf of the cinematic art. I want to draw attention to some of the dangers I experienced in recent years, all of which have to do with the responsibility of artists.

When, many years ago, I entered art school, the first thing I saw was a sign on the wall: "Of all forms of art, none is more important for us than film." The quote is from Lenin, but later I was to find out that Dr Goebbels was of the same opinion. As I also found out, what Lenin had in mind were the newsreels informing illiterate Soviet citizens of the new decrees passed by the Party. Dr Goebbels, for his part, made it abundantly clear that he praised film above all as a medium that could reach everyone, as evidenced by the hundreds of thousands of people joining the Nazi party following screenings of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will.* Just imagine what a politician with a similar mindset would say today! Of all art forms, none is more important for us than the evening news on television. The present-day successor of Dr. Goebbels would strive to bring the TV channels, not the film studios, under his control. Indeed, we are witnessing such efforts on the part of certain political powers in new democracies.

The moving picture—whether in the form of film or television—has become tremendously powerful, burdening everyone involved in its production with immense responsibility. Film-makers must never allow their camera to become weapons in the hands of politicians; and viewers must learn how to see what is behind the images, just as they had to learn how to read between the lines in the twentieth century.

Many years ago I had a film project which made it necessary to go through all the *Deutsche Wochenschau* newsreels released between 1933 and 1938. It took several weeks. Early on, maybe in the summer of 1934, the crew accompanied hundreds of railway workers on their vacation in the Baltic states. You see them waving from the windows as the carriages roll through the Baltic landscape; they were clearly having a good time. A few years later a similar newsreel was released. This time, if I remember correctly, the railway workers went on vacation to the Black Sea. The following summer saw them travelling through France to Marseilles. And all of a sudden I was thinking, what a perfect way to prepare for war in the heyday of railway travel: to travel along transportation lines with experts, to check the condition of stations, rails, switches. These were just the imaginings of a director, of course. What a good story it would make if we put together the jigsaw puzzle of this archival material about vacationers and tourists.

A film never documents truth as such; it only captures a segment of reality chosen by the observer holding the camera. It only documents what the person standing behind the camera wants to document.

When I was starting as a director it was one of my tasks to go through newsreels from the fifties. I was astonished to find that some of the well-known victims of Stalinist show trials were later removed from this film material. I came across original photographs of historical events, later reproductions of which were doctored, with the inconvenient faces being removed and replaced with others. Thus I realised that some pictures usually considered as documents were in fact false.

Of course, in every age there are political interests that require falsification, the deception and manipulation of the public. Seeking to transform art into a vehicle of ideology, politics is always a seductive and corrupting force for artists; and there are always artists who need the protection of politics to attain success. Today, art as well as politics are mostly out to influence the masses, to seduce and indeed, if need be, to rape them.

I used to wonder if film has a special power that no other art form possesses. I have seen more than once the famous footage where Stalin delivers a speech in the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow to the delegates attending the Congress of the Soviet Communist Party. It shows Stalin in one long close-up: he speaks slowly, with emphasis, and he repeatedly reaches for a glass of water. Upon repeated viewing, the footage reveals something uncanny: Stalin is struggling with that glass. Barely has he put it down and uttered another sentence, and his gaze already returns to it. He reaches for the glass, but then he probably realises that drinking after every single word would make him look ridiculous, so he does not take it after all. With anxious eyes, he turns to his audience, but in the next moment his gaze is once again, obsessively, drawn towards the glass. How come nobody noticed that the country was run by a obsessional neurotic?

In *Triumph of the Will* we see and hear Hitler deliver a number of speeches. Each time, his arrival is announced in advance and preceded by the jubilant roaring of the crowd. When he finally arrives he does not begin to talk right away. The camera shows his face: he is waiting and trying to absorb the emotions of his audience. He waits until he gets a feeling of how best to begin: in a low voice gradually increasing in volume or with a shout followed by a lowering of his voice. For a few moments he appears to hesitate, yet one can also see his eyes light up with the desire to seduce, to wrestle you to the ground and rape you. And then, always unexpectedly, he begins to speak.

The film footages of Stalin and Hitler, though originally intended to enhance their glory, actually show an anxious paranoid and a perverted rapist. We must learn how to read the eyes looking back at us from the television screen.

So, to ask once again, is film capable of offering anything original, does it have an independent character of its own, or is it merely a combination of other art

forms, exploiting their achievements? I found one thing that no other art form can convey, and whose presence charges the moving picture with peculiar energy. Film can show the living human face close-up, revealing within the individual's gaze the birth of a thought or the transformations of an emotion. It can show the movements of a face as love gives rise to jealousy before our very eyes; and it can show the spark of a new thought in the eyes, the face of the living, feeling, thinking human being. These are things that only the moving picture can depict. It is only in moments of the utmost intimacy, when an impulse is born, that the most beautiful changes in life, and the permanence of movement itself, can be captured.

The life of the ever-changing human face, its relation to another living face, the condensation and release of tension between living faces, and, of course, the relation of the face to its environment, nature, society, the world—this is, then, film. Everything else can be depicted through painting, dance, or song, but it is only on the cinema or television screen that the secrets of the face are revealed with the intimacy of close-ups. If this is true, then the peculiar energy of film is carried by faces appearing on the screen. And this means that the twentieth-century history of this new art form is a history of living human faces and glances.

In order to feel secure it is crucial that we find a companion, someone who feels as we do, someone who has the courage to say what we do not dare to say, someone who can be a model for us, someone who can express what we want. The face of this figure is different in each and every age, as are the challenges facing us and, consequently, our secrets and fears.

Greta Garbo became important to viewers at a time when uncertainty and fear of the future led millions to hide themselves behind uniforms, where they could feel as though they were protected and as though they belonged somewhere. Hiding behind ostensible shared goals, they forgot themselves and their own desires. Yet, deep down inside, they would have still liked to remain themselves and to keep their backbones straight, just as that exemplary woman remained herself in every single role, regardless of whether she played Queen Christina or the Soviet party secretary Ninochka, retaining her integrity even in the most intimate moments of passionate love. But as the dance atop the volcano became more and more reckless and the war was approaching, another female figure took on an increasingly prominent role in the public eye, a woman who embodied danger, seduction, vertigo—Marlene Dietrich. The war arrived, it devastated the world, and human beings learnt that their lives were worth precious little. It is thus best to enjoy life as long as possible, to take pleasure in the body, in the sun and in wine and beauty. Audiences thus forgot the intangible mystique of Marlene Dietrich and began to rave for Marilyn Monroe, who embodied the attractions of nature, femininity and the living body. But then feminism entered the stage, glorifying women who demanded an active role in shaping the future of the world. With flags raised high, they demonstrated for women's rights and took leading roles in the anti-war

movement, representing various political groups. And, lo and behold, new faces appeared on the screen: Jane Fonda, Vanessa Redgrave. In just a few years, we find women in ministerial positions and in the highest echelons of banks. A new type of woman appears on the screen, beautiful but tough, smart and implacable: Fay Dunaway, Catherine Deneuve. And slowly, a debate unfolds about the role of women in the new world, about the working woman and the mother, can she take the lead in society and keep the family together—a debate touching on family planning and sexual liberty, condoms and morals. Everything became confused, to the point where today one would be hard pressed to name a single female star who represents women in the same way as Garbo or Monroe did once. Maybe a handful of karate-fighting women and perhaps Julia Roberts still draw sizeable audiences, but by and large viewers go to the movies to see the men.

Let us have a look at the men, then. The tanned, sinewy cowboys of the pre-war era—John Wayne, Robert Taylor, Clark Gable—who fearlessly confronted evil and always stood on the right side, defeating robbers, wild animals, tempests, and mighty cliffs. They went to fight in the war, faced death and killed other men. And when they returned they could not find their place in society because they could no longer solve their problems with guns. They lost their bearings in the world; the directness of their gaze vanished and their faces began to express insecurity, anxiety and confusion. James Dean became the new hero. The end of the war, however, also brought increased responsibility for America, and this responsibility called for a new way of thinking, for a greater role played by intellectuals. Suddenly university teachers found themselves in government positions. Not surprisingly, the new hero was a real intellectual, Anthony Perkins.

Then came the assassinations of JFK, Martin Luther King, and Robert Kennedy. Audiences began to sense that university teachers were not going to protect them; they needed men who were smart, who had feelings, but who could also fight back without thinking too much: Al Pacino, Dustin Hoffmann, Gene Hackman. But this era would not last long. The next hero wields a gun coldbloodedly, ready to take on the world all alone: Sylvester Stallone. It is only when the camera comes very close that you notice the fear of loneliness in his eyes as he furtively glances around for companions, recalling those lost children who drift around in underpasses and train stations. But soon the computer age ushers in another sort of hero, the technologically engineered fighter on whom no weapon can inflict a wound: Arnold Schwarzenegger. He survives every battle without a scratch, without bleeding, without breaking a bone. His clothes are never torn; he does not even get dirty.

In ten to twelve years, however, society, politics and the economy confront the individual with new challenges, and in the altered situation new faces offer themselves to express his concerns and anxieties. Likewise, new faces become the symbols of strength and security. Now the face of the movie star must radiate personality and charisma, while it must also meet the greatest challenges of the times head-on. It must convey the necessary message, representing the in-

nermost feelings of the viewer. The bearer of this face has to be a hero of the day, for only very few faces remain relevant throughout several eras—perhaps only Humphrey Bogart's timeless sadness and loneliness.

This is why casting is just as decisive in film as words are in literature or the choice of colours in painting. Who will stand for the desires and secrets of the audience? The same question comes up in politics: who can credibly stand for security? If a face has character and if the personality behind it has charisma, the message will work. If the information, the energy and the atmosphere captured in the moving picture can exert a powerful effect on the viewer, it will leave an enduring mark on his memory. Especially if it is unexpected, an original image can say a lot more than any number of words.

I remember another news report. President Reagan had just undergone surgery for cancer, and the world was full of uncertainty about the United States, even though the day after the surgery the President was shown waving languidly from the window of the hospital. About ten days later he held a press conference in the White House. Cameras for television channels worldwide awaited him. He walked down a hallway towards the journalists along a long carpet. The carpet was about one meter short, it did not reach all the way to the podium. Noticing this, the President jumped from the edge of the carpet onto the podium. It was not a particularly big leap, still, it was big enough to show the world that the president of the United States was strong again and doing his job.

Let me recall another example of the power of images. At the conference of Commonwealth leaders, the Queen gives a reception. She walks past all the prime ministers and diplomats, and as she passes by the prime minister of Canada, Pierre Trudeau, Trudeau turns around and does a pirouette behind the Queen's back. This pirouette was to become a symbol of the Trudeau era, an epitome of Canadian independence. When Trudeau died several years later, and his coffin was transported across the countryside to the capital, thousands of Canadians lined up alongside the railway and did a pirouette as the train sped by. An entire country did a pirouette before his coffin; no politician can achieve more.

A single unexpected televised image gave birth to this symbol. But a powerful and meaningful image can be created by much simpler means. Just think of Charlie Chaplin, in abstraction from any particular situation, just on his own, as he lives in our memories. A little man with a toothbrush moustache in a black coat which is clearly too small for him, so he can barely button it up, and with sleeves too short as well. His pants are way oversize. So are his shoes, toes turned upwards so he can barely walk. In other words, a poor fellow in hand-me-down clothes. And yet, his shirts are clean and an elegantly tailored waistcoat shows from behind the threadbare coat. However poor he may be, he clearly cares for a good appearance. His freshly washed shirt and his tie are indicative of a better past, a life of consolidated order. So he must have sunk this low from a

position of security. But from where? Walking stick in hand and hat on head, he could be coming home from the London City—except for his shabby coat. Perhaps he is an immigrant with British roots, a sunken citizen caught in the economic crisis of the New World. The moment Chaplin appears we know who he stands for: for tradition and order-loving poor people, for the middle-class European, who immigrated to America only to have the carpet pulled from under his feet in the Great Depression. It is an image designed with almost scientific precision, one that conveys its meaning before the person incarnating it has said or done anything.

If the message conveyed by an image, without reliance on words, is so carefully and effectively worked out, it can be exploited for any purpose, as propaganda or advertisement. Beloved by younger audiences, American films have had a pervasive influence on our lives, ranging from clothes to behaviour. Remember when everyone wore jeans? Every self-respecting intellectual wore jeans in the sixties and seventies; university teachers who wanted to impress their female students taught in jeans. The distinguishing sign indicating class difference, social position and financial situation was an expensive pair of shoes. These days, baseball caps play a similar role.

But it is not just the outfit borrowed from the cowboys and the other props of American life—from Cokes to hamburgers—that conquered the world. More importantly, the entire way of life, the quality of human relationships and the behaviour patterns shown in these movies can function as models. How parents and children, husbands and wives, employers and employees, teachers and students, presidential candidates and voters talk to each other: all these things carry a message, the message of a way of life, a social order, a message communicated quite apart from the plot of the film. And this message exerts a more powerful influence on audiences than the so-called "artistic message." American films never simply tell a story; they convey a way of life.

It is often asked why we Europeans cannot make such powerful movies as the Americans.

The most frequent answer blames the lack of money. Unfortunately, this is not true. I think the difference lies in our heroes. Good film-making is based on lived experience, and our experiences—just like those of our grandparents—are born of wars, crushed revolutions, ideological dictatorships, political regimes that tear through private lives, humiliations, compromises and mean stratagems of survival. The heroes of our greatest films are losers. Whether in *The Last Man,* in *Tin Drum,* in *Bicycle Thieves,* in *Rome, Open City,* in *La Notte,* in *Viridiana* and *The Round-Up,* there is something wrong with these heroes; they fail or their sacrifice turns out to be futile. The message of the European film has to do with the circumstances under which I must live, with the ideas to which I must conform in order to be left alone, and with the inability to envision a future. American films, by contrast, speak the message: you are on your own, and your

goal is to be rich and powerful. So go ahead, fight and prevail. Obviously all this is very superficially said, and you will have realised that I am putting all this ironically. Nonetheless, the playful contrast does raise a thoroughly serious question: what sort of future is Europe capable of envisioning?

We should not expect film to give us positive heroes. What is needed first of all is a vision of the future that has not been compromised yet, and for the sake of which the heroes of cinematic tales can sacrifice themselves. For two brief hours spent in a dark room, film is a secret source of solidarity and consolation. In this dark room, we can be alone with someone we can identify with, and do so without the risk of others finding out. Film is an exchange of intimate human touches. The language it currently employs, the language of "intimate human touches," emerged as a result of the persecution that forced a score of talented people to immigrate from Europe to America. Remember the makers of the Berlin film *Menschen am Sonntag:* Siodmak, Zinnemann, Billy Wilder. Béla Balázs lived there, and so did Alexander Korda, Béla Lugosi, Ernst Lubitsch, Erich von Stroheim, Marlene Dietrich, and Sternberg. Otto Preminger worked in Vienna; Michael Curtis a.k.a. Mihály Kertész, the director of *Casablanca,* Ferenc Molnár, Pál Fejős, Adolf Zucker, the founder of Paramount, Vilmos Fried, later to become famous as William Fox, who founded 20th Century Fox, in Budapest. They did not want to leave. In a café in Los Angeles in the 1930s, Michael Curtis and Béla Lugosi were talking in Hungarian. They must have been making a lot of noise because after a while Billy Wilder, who sat at a nearby table, told them: "Enough Hungarian, boys! You are in America, so you should talk in German!"

They all left. They did not speak English, but they were full of stories that they were eager to tell. So they invented a language of their own, the language of simple human feelings, which consisted of gestures of love, jealousy, hatred, joy, fear and determination, and which operated with fleeting looks and touches rather than words. *The human touch.* This is still the language of American film. The difference between their cinematic language and the one predominant today is that they still had a European culture, openness, tolerance and self-restraint. This is probably the crucial element. They were never arrogant and reckless because they had absorbed self-irony at the universities of Vienna, Berlin, Prague, Cracow, Budapest or Trieste, or perhaps on the marketplace of a small village in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, where merchants, if they wanted to sell their products, had to speak at least three languages and address their customers according to the customs of three or four religions.

About a hundred kilometers from Budapest there is a town called Kecskemét. Around the main square of this town stand a number of churches. There is a Roman Catholic church next to the city hall, a Greek Orthodox church to the right, then a Lutheran one, next to it a Calvinist *gimnázium* and church, across the square a synagogue, and on the other side of the square there is a small street with

another Catholic church. The citizens of this town built their churches not in segregated communities but right next to each other, around the main square. There was a single building in the middle of the square. This was the coffee house, for people coming out of any of the churches. Yellowed photographs show them drinking coffee, playing cards or billiards together. This is the spirit of Europe: the spirit of tolerance, co-existence and respect for others, which inspired even the American films of Alexander Korda, Mihály Kertész, Billy Wilder, Ernst Lubitsch, and Erich von Stroheim. We must re-discover this spirit if we are to recover the intellectual strength of Europe and if Europe is to be more than an air-conditioned museum, a vast city of ruins, a festival re-enacting our passage from the Acropolis to Auschwitz, displaying the European mind from Athenian democracy to the demise of East Germany. Max Reinhard's idea of the future was based on the communication of experience and the constant presence of youth in a large audience. Of course I know that Satan also wants to seduce a large audience and to seduce the young in the first place.

During the hundred year-old history of this art form, several films have been made whose aesthetic merits, and in particular visual beauty, cannot be disputed, and which are nonetheless rightly condemned in the judgement made by the moral consciousness of the aesthetic consciousness. Talent is a gift that can serve any number of purposes. Beauty is always some sort of system or order. The regular columns and powerful steps of uniformed humans can appear beautiful to those who find it confidence-inspiring rather than terrifying. When shown in films, this effect seems wonderful. The cameraman who shoots the scene and the director who cuts and assembles the images can partake in the joy of creating the beauty of order. Yet how many of these films actually serve intolerance, indeed terror. How many artists have committed a crime in serving the darkest powers, while being preoccupied solely with beautiful movements and images, with the aesthetics of power, will and triumph. Today, when moving pictures reach everyone in a matter of seconds, the power of film-makers has become enormous, its arrogance and barbarism unstoppable. If an artist is not careful enough, he can contribute to the extermination of a people. Unfortunately, there is nothing inherent in cinematic language that guarantees its commitment to humanity. But it is true of other art forms and of the sciences as well that they do not lose their voice when they become instruments of inhumanity.

Ultimately, I only wanted to put one question to you. What should art be like in an age of struggle for survival? Or, to put it differently, has art contributed to progress? And has Salzburg contributed to art? I think it has. The moment when Toscanini declared that he would not come to Salzburg as long as the Nazis were in power was surely a moment of progress. But I am reminded of what Tacitus said: "We survived Nero, Tiberius and Caligula, but in the meantime our lives have been spent."

What I wish you, Ladies and Gentlemen, is that you will always be able to tell genuine from false values. There are many false prophets and they are loud, so be on your guard. ❧

György Rába

Poems

Translated by Daniel Hoffman

The Weathercock

A szélkakas

Up there on the rooftop
neither dead nor living
ever walk or give me
any sort of greeting
none wishes me good night
or good day's blessings send
how am I no rival
asks nor does any friend
when the wind arises
it's northern and it's harsh
no wind voice advises
but gives vent to its rage
just roughly tosses me
about so my joints creak
without a grain of strength
left to resist I'm weak
so I am praying for
a change in the weather
may a huge southern breath
then alter my posture
from right to left I'm spun

György Rába
is a poet and essayist. He worked for a while as a secondary school teacher of literature, then spent 27 years as a research fellow at the Institute of Literary History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and is now retired. He has published a dozen volumes of poems and five collections of studies and essays on literature.

neither the West nor East
from my perch throws me down
while I can turn and creak
and when dawn comes down there
a Cock-a-doodle-doo
rings out banishing care
and casts grief away too
but he who owns the voice
can his crowings suffice
to match an iron life

The Sirens

A szirének

They fade away and I'm aware
on weekdays a few hours of holiday
they were the sirens so even now
I should be glad that one of them
in the metro humming in my ear
gilded her singing to a romance
afterwards the other leaned
toward me over a quarter-pound
of Russian salad a gentle lamb
it's slander that they end in fishtails
below the waist I gained admittance
to Eden they didn't pull me onto shoals
or into whirlpools remembering this
is a red-letter day now when
the horizon's landless then I long
to hear again the sirens' song

The Dryad

A driád

The dryad known from myths I chased
like one who moves under a spell
shining through the foliage I saw
her in the gently sloping hill
I sought her lest she change into

a tree or fallen leaves, her human
body breathless as I threw her
down while she had the shape of woman
I breathed the scent of cinnamon
from her skin for then she fed
my hunger tales of flesh about
the endless presence of her breed
although she slipped right through my fingers
again she hovers there before me
as her cinnamon-scent still lingers
but she glitters a tender shoot
with the frailty of budding life
I run to embrace her and protect
her ripe wheat-locks from harvesters' knife
I caught her melting in thin air
her mirage transformed into spring flame
in the flamboyance of her new spell
I could but follow another change
though by then weakened I was and weary
still gasping I kept on my quest
of scent and sight the hunt became
imprinted deep within my breast
for she doesn't matter the dryad can
a hundred different shapes acquire
from within my self I still can hear
her charmed voice singing of desire

The Triumph of Winter Trees

Téli fák diadala

Why stare at twisted boughs on leafless trees
at wintry tangle, arch, loop, texture of twigs?
Even in their death they do not cease
to speak standing against the sky you realize
the graffiti on imagined paper they incise
and what is or lately was alive in space
so as to vanquish it each sends its trace
even if not in words of human speech
each in perennial time will leaf
whatever once had to be born express
the strength by which it conquers nothingness

An Exotic Travelogue

Exotikus útirajz

A journey an exploration how audacious
it was to roam about in my story here
no eye had ever rested where the region
was still undiscovered made me fear
natural wonders formed a threatening scene
luxurious living-space for baneful creatures
my hazadous heart pursued me in the dawn
up an alluring hill without a map
I never knew what lay ahead an inn
or some adventure as each day expired
I could just look at where I'd been
now that my engine sputtered and misfired
astonished I cast about my backward glance
on this exotic travelogue my fate
discovered for me entirely by chance

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A magnum opus by Éva Kovács

Éva Kovács: *L'âge d'or de l'orfèvrerie parisienne au temps des Princes de Valois.* Dijon, Éditions Faton—Budapest, Balassi Kiadó, 2004. 412 pp. Illustrated.

Éva Kovács's lifelong preoccupation with *The Calvary of King Matthias Corvinus* started in the 1960s, when she undertook the cataloguing of the goldsmiths' work in the Esztergom Cathedral Treasury. From that time onward, this wonderful item continued to occupy centre stage in her work, closely followed by her lively interest in the historical sources related to late-Medieval goldsmith's work in France. Her magisterial book, *L'âge d'or de l'orfèvrerie parisienne au temps des Princes de Valois,* jointly published in Dijon this summer in a lavish edition by Éditions Faton and Balassi Kiadó, Budapest, highlights an extraordinary academic career that ended abruptly and prematurely. Danielle Gaborit-Chopin had a long-standing personal and professional friendship with the author and had a major role in bringing about the publication of the volume.

The Calvary of King Matthias Corvinus is among the most precious possessions of the Esztergom Cathedral Treasury. Ever since the sixteenth century it has been described as an "Opus regio", or royal artifice, and it has been the Treasury's centrepiece. Yet, it has remained practically unknown to the wider public: it has never been exhibited and has hardly ever left the Treasury. All during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries successive archbishops did not approve loans for exhibition purposes. Now it has been presented to the world at large, at least in the form of this sumptuously illustrated scholarly work in which it is discussed as the most outstanding of the very few items—51 as according to the Catalogue (Appendix II)—that remain to us from a glorious chapter in the history of art.

Weighing nearly 5 kilograms and measuring 72 centimeters in height, the beautiful goldsmiths' work is a composite piece: the Calvary and the pedestal were made at different times and in different places. With its parallel arrangement of the Crucifixion scene and the depiction of a shackled Christ held prison-

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Erika Kiss
is the Curator of the History Department and the Silver and Jewellery Collections at the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest.
She specialises in goldsmithry and has written extensively on this subject.

er in the High Priest's house, the upper part, a dyptich, can justifiably be regarded as the most important surviving artefact made by Paris goldsmiths around 1400. At the top of the composition, we see Christ crucified, with the Virgin Mary on his right and St John the Evangelist on his left. The cross is adorned with pearls and rubies and surrounded by enammelled bunches of grapes and wreaths, all set with pearls. The back features a reliquary compartment, which originally housed a small piece of the Holy Cross, but this relic went missing at some point in the past. "Erected" on top of a Gothic tabernacle, the crucifix caps the Mount of Golgotha depicted as a rocky landscape. The fragile vaulted tabernacle itself represents the High Priest's house; in it stands Christ bound with ropes to a pillar, on the night of His being taken. The combination of the two scenes, Christ thrown into a "condemned cell" and His crucifixion, serves to glorify Christ's Passion. The *émail en ronde bosse* technique (the encrusted, mainly white, enamelling of the golden figures) and the multitude of jewels and pearls are the most prominent features of this opulent, richly decorated work of art.

The golden Renaissance pedestal on which the upper part now stands was crafted by a master trained in Northern Italy in order to replace the original, which went missing in the fifteenth century. This new pedestal was specifically designed for the piece, as evidenced by the technical methods and structural arrangements. The three enamelled sphinxes of the Renaissance pedestal hold the royal coat of arms of Matthias Corvinus, King of Hungary and Bohemia, between their paws, and with the family's heraldic beast the raven *(corvus)* shown in the escutcheon. It was on this ground that the base was dated to after 1469.

In 1494, Matthias' natural son, János Corvinus, pledged the unique and priceless work as security on a loan from Tamás Bakócz, then Bishop of Eger. Bakócz, who eventually became archbishop and came into full possession, donated it to the chapel he had founded and designated as his own burial place. Escaping the ravages of history, the Bakócz Chapel of Esztergom has survived as the most important Renaissance monument of Jagellonian Hungary. Ever since 1516, the year of the donation, the artwork has continually been inventoried among the treasures of the episcopal see of Esztergom. In this way, we are able to track its fate down through the centuries: we know, for example, that in the late sixteenth century the art-loving Archduke, Matthias, had the work moved to Vienna so that he could admire its extraordinary beauty in person.

A sensational turning point came in the mid-1970s, when Éva Kovács, the author of the book under review, stumbled on important data (See: "L'orfèvrerie parisienne et ses sources." *Revue de l'Art* 28, 1975, pp. 25–33). Following his death in 1404, an inventory of the property of Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, was compiled. Listed there was an "elongated [i.e. tall] gold cross", which the author could positively identify with the golden Crucifixion of *The Corvinus Calvary* after comparing the type and arrangement of the figures, the precious stones and the pearls. The inventory revealed that this unique artwork had been given to Philip

the Bold by his wife, Margaret of Flanders: "And this was given by my lady to my said lord on New Year's Day of 1402."

The French courtly custom of those days required that the exchange of gifts on New Year's Day take place according to a strict protocol. In addition to elaborate festivities and tournaments and exchanging (and also rewarding) envoys, important family events, such as christenings and betrothals were held on this occasion. The New Year's Day of 1402—1403, according to our modern calendar—marked an especially important event: this was when Philip the Bold founded Burgundy's first order of chivalry, a political alliance and an interest group. Besides adding to the grandeur of the occasion, Margaret of Flanders' gift was meant to underscore the theme of the ceremony through its special depiction of the Calvary scene.

The identification of *The Calvary of King Mattias Corvinus* with the item listed in the inventory was an exceptional discovery. It was not just new information on an outstanding work of art, it thoroughly transformed earlier held views on goldsmith's work in Paris around 1400, an art which reached its zenith with the virtuoso technique known as *émail en ronde bosse,* by which email can be applied to rounded surfaces without the use of cells or hollowing out the base. The then known surviving pieces of this group were described by Erich Steingräber and Theodor Müller in the *Münchner Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst,* 5, 1954, pp. 29–79, in a catalogue raisonné. In the years to come this provided the platform for a view that relied on the analysis of the existing works themselves to establish both the evolution of the technique and the chronology of its stylistic development. Accordingly, the most important point of reference was a charming *grand joyau*—"great jewelry"—meaning a jewel-like sumptuous ornamental piece that was not meant for personal adornment—which survived in Altötting in Bavaria. The identification of this item, known as *The Goldenes Rössl,* or Golden Horse, was a great scholarly accomplishment in the second half of the nineteenth century. The sources revealed that Isabeau of Bavaria had given it as a present to her husband, Charles VI of France in 1405. The date assigned to *The Corvinus Calvary* as the 1430s was primarily based on stylistic considerations: its mature and dramatic effects and the completely white enamel covering of the faces and the bodies were seen as the direct continuation of the more lyrical line represented by *The Golden Horse.*

The discovery of the artwork's description in an inventory dated 1402 shattered the earlier chronology. Scholars were surprised to learn that *The Corvinus Calvary* must have predated the *Goldenes Rössl* and, even more importantly, that the time difference was so small. On top of upsetting the established chronology, the discovery also administered the *coup de grace* to the illusion that a history of the *ronde bosse* technique, and of Paris goldsmith's work from around 1400 in general, could be written simply by analysing the stylistic marks of still-extant works. (This, I might add, applies to later periods as well.) This chronology failed to synchronise the abundant information retrieved from writ-

ten sources, many of them published in the nineteenth century, with the surviving objects. By extending the scope of her study to these written sources, Éva Kovács abandoned the familiar course of earlier research.

The compelling cover of the book, together with the table of contents, immediately makes it clear that the author focuses on *The Corvinus Calvary,* and its top section in particular. This is both the point of departure and the final conclusion to which Éva Kovács was led by her research. Part One is a thorough description of the work, which covers every detail and technical aspect, including a definition of the composition's complex iconographic programme. After having traced *The Corvinus Calvary* to Philip the Bold, Éva Kovács sets out to draw up a chart, using a novel method of starting from a broad perspective and zooming onto *The Corvinus Calvary* again and again. In the first three chapters she discusses in detail the history, iconographic features and stylistic marks of the Esztergom Cross. Although strictly speaking it is not her subject, she does not shy away from addressing the relationship between the Gothic *grand joyau* and the Renaissance pedestal. The alternatives she puts forward in connection with the eight decades that are unaccounted for in the artwork's history are important precisely from the viewpoint of the latter. After the death of Philip the Bold, the grand jewel passed into the hands of the widow of one of his creditors, Pierre Varopel, in way of a settlement. At this point, however, the work disappears from sight, only to re-emerge in 1494, in the list of pledged items in connection with a transaction between János Corvinus (the illegitimate son of Matthias) and Tamás Bakócz. After further decades of obscurity, the "Opus regio" turns up again in the middle of the sixteenth century in an inventory of the Esztergom Cathedral Treasury, rarely displayed to outsiders. In the Appendix, the author lists the Hungarian sources related to the Esztergom Cross.

Many of the book's findings have already been published in earlier essays by the author; in fact, some of the chapters from *L'âge d'or...* had already been completed by the 1990s. By that time Éva Kovács had uncovered numerous details, which led her to modify or clarify some of her earlier views. Most important among these revisions was a definition of the range of application for the *ronde bosse* technique. It has now been firmly established that works which employed this technique were regarded as the apogee of any goldsmithry. The technique was reserved for artefacts that, playing a distinguished role in personal representation, were designed for rare occasions, and quite often for a unique event. As Éva Kovács pointed out, in trying to cross-match an object in the sea of the period's luxury artefacts with a source, such as an inventory or a description, we stand the best chance either when some special iconographic programme is involved or when the artefact was commissioned specifically for a unique occasion. Here the key word is "commission". We must bear in mind that, no matter how wonderful and special they seem to be, most of the works that have survived were, if not exactly mass-produced, commercially marketed.

There was no specific agreement between the future owner and the craftsman: once completed, the work was put on sale. However, the situation was different in the case of the distinguished diplomatic or family events I referred to earlier: in such cases the person commissioning the work acted as a patron in the true sense of the term. The foundation of the Order of the Passion, the first Burgundian chivalric order, was undoubtedly a momentous event. One of the greatest propagators of the knightly orders that arose in the wake of efforts to recapture the Holy Land was Philippe de Mézières, a member of Charles V of France's royal council. Philip the Bold, who was Charles' brother, shared Mézières' ideal. As Éva Kovács has demonstrated, the iconographic programme of the Esztergom Cross was closely related to the New Year's Day celebrations in Corbeil.

In subsequent chapters Éva Kovács discusses the emergence and development of the *ronde bosse* technique in the art of Paris goldsmiths of the period, according to the chronology she thus established. But instead of simply going through the list, she dwells on the works that served as milestones, using them as reference points when painting the full picture. Which precisely are these? First of all, she selects those works that we can relate to written sources (wills, inventories, bequests, bills), along with those whose history can be traced with the help of written sources, even though we only know them from descriptions, as for example the Ingolstadt statuette depicting St. Michael. These works are *The Madonna of Toledo,* the Paris *Reliquary of the Holy Spirit, The Golden Horse* and the *Narrenkette*—they stake out the main stages in the development of the *grands joyaux* employing the *ronde bosse* technique. The author regards the encrusted enamelling applied to a silver base as the genre's predecessor. Of these, only two works have survived as fragments: the Hallwyll reliquary (Basle, Historisches Museum) and the Scheiben-Reliquiar in the Aix-la-Chapelle Treasury. From a technical viewpoint, the crucial moment in the emergence of the *ronde bosse* technique applied to a gold base was the employment of white enamel. Previously, flesh-coloured enamel was used to cover the surfaces of the silver-based artworks. In contrast with earlier views, Éva Kovács found the earliest mention of an example of encrusted enamelling in a document dated 1351, which described an ornamental cover enamelled in natural colours *(émaillée après le vif).* This was replaced by the white bodily surfaces of the gold-based *ronde bosse:* the primary naturalism of the coloured figures of a waxen appearance was replaced by a less direct and more refined representation.

Focusing on *The Corvinus Calvary* from yet another angle, the author discusses the owners, the goldsmiths and the purveyors involved, based once again on a brilliant survey of the written sources. What at first sight seems to be no more than anecdotal information actually serves to reveal the splendour, the personal relations, the quarrels and the secret liaisons of prominent members of the House of Valois. From these bits and pieces, Éva Kovács can conclude with con-

fidence that the French royal court, the courts of Charles V's brothers and their descendants, were all parts of a flourishing cultural mechanism with Paris as its centre and model. Charles V and his brothers, Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, Louis of Orléans and Jean, duc de Berry, who was one of the greatest collectors of all times, were the main actors of this mechanism. Together with their extended families, they constituted a broad intellectual and courtly circle.

Once again, the historical sources provide the information which allows us to reconstruct the splendour of country life, with its insatiable demand for luxury items, including the place and role of goldsmiths' workshops. Éva Kovács provides compelling evidence for a predominance of artefacts that were not commissioned individually. This even applies to works decorated with personalised elements, such as the coat of arms or the badge of an aristocratic family. By defining the specific skills of the various subgroups of artisans, we can also establish the craftsman associated with proper art patronage. This approach will help us single out works with the best chance to be "individually" mentioned in documents: in uncovering their iconographic or heraldic programmes or hidden symbolism, we are able to associate them with a prominent event or a patron of the arts. The picture that gradually emerges reveals that in the creation and purveyance of goldsmiths' works the Lombards played a crucial role, those enterpreneurs, mostly from Northern Italy, who dealt with banking transactions and also traded in precious stones. In addition to the great host of Lombard merchants, there were the merchant-goldsmiths *(marchand-mercier),* who both produced and sold jewellery. They supplied tableware *(vaiselle),* and also produced and repaired it. Some of the prominent Paris goldsmiths worked for more than one court, although each of the leading craftsmen had a favourite "client". Éva Kovács draws important conclusions as regards the activities and spheres of influence of various goldsmiths' workshops. Her work, especially her findings about the "court goldsmiths", may also be of use to students of the ducal and royal courts, a field of study in the limelight recently. These craftsmen, who often rose to the rank of chamberlains, were mostly responsible for the repair and design, rather than the execution, of goldsmith's work. (Although we know of some cases where they undertook the entire job from start to finish.) Students of the early modern period can learn much from studying this mechanism: a well-defined structure emerged around the Valois courts, the direct descendants and various elements of which can be traced in Central European courts as late as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. One such example is the luxury mechanism of the seventeenth-century Principality of Transylvania, which, although clearly archaic and "patriarchal" at the time, was in many respects comparable to that of the Valois.

Reconstructing the web of the intricate networks, Éva Kovács reached the conclusion that by tracing the relations of the assumed original owner, Philip the Bold, with court goldsmiths, the circumstances might be revealed under

which an artefact of unrivalled beauty even in its own age, *The Calvary of King Mattias Corvinus,* was created, and even the identity of its maker. This is the type of work detectives usually do: a relentless search for the motive. Without exploring these diverse paths, however obscure or far-fetched, Éva Kovács would never have arrived at the point where she could attempt an—admittedly hypothetical but now generally accepted—identification of *The Corvinus Calvary*'s maker. This was a rare moment in the history of the profession, since a similar tour de force had earlier been achieved only once, when the marks on the Holy Thorn Reliquary of Rheims, one of the last masterpieces of this genre, were attributed to Guillaume Lemaistre, who joined the Paris guild in January, 1458.

In her attempt to identify the master craftsman who made the Esztergom piece, Éva Kovács had however only the sources to turn to. Which one of the period's goldsmiths had been experienced enough by 1402, sufficiently familiar with the monumental stone sculpture of Charles V's period, and able to apply the drama and pathos along with the conventions associated with André Beauneveu, the outstanding sculptor of the times? The craftsman in question must have mastered the complete range of technical skills of the given period, and must also have been quite close to the court of the duke of Burgundy, Philip the Bold. In search of the origins both of an iconography characteristic of a specific occasion and of the actual method, the *émail en ronde-bosse,* Éva Kovács furnishes evidence for links with miniature painting, a genre that also had its centre in Paris. This further narrowed the circle of goldsmiths who could have made *The Corvinus Calvary.*

The tireless study of the written documents, a process once compared by Éva Kovács to that of sifting through sand, eventually bore fruit. Among the names of numerous goldsmiths, she singled out a craftsman, who was known to work for Philip the Bold's court through an earlier commission. Hermann Ruissel was the maker of the *Trois Frères,* a piece of jewellery of austere beauty only known from paintings and written documents, which was decorated with balas-ruby (a rose-coloured precious stone popular at the time), diamonds and pearls. Master Ruissel (also spelt Rinssel, Ruisseau) was a "trusted artist" of Philip the Bold, whose professional career closely matched the profile Éva Kovács drew during her research.

Notwithstanding the minute exploration of written sources, Éva Kovács believes that the primary source is the object itself and she draws crucial conclusions through close scrutiny. In connection with *The Calvary of King Matthias Corvinus,* but also with other examples of the *ronde bosse* technique, she discusses the technical characteristics, physical damage, repairs, the colour and consistency of the enamel. In doing so she displays both thorough familiarity with the technical aspects of goldsmith's work and remarkable sensitivity. Reading her presentation, scholars and the general public alike develop an almost physical feel for the artefacts. On top of everything, all this is done in an eminently readable manner. By way of illustration, let me refer to her scatching de-

scription of *The Corvinus Calvary*'s belatedly added angels as "microcephalous figures made of cream, with blotches of paint" or to the caricature-like Prophet having "winding, swelling eyebrows, greasy hair and an emaciated face." The editors deserve credit for publishing such comments alongside a photograph taken in 1953, when the work was taken apart.

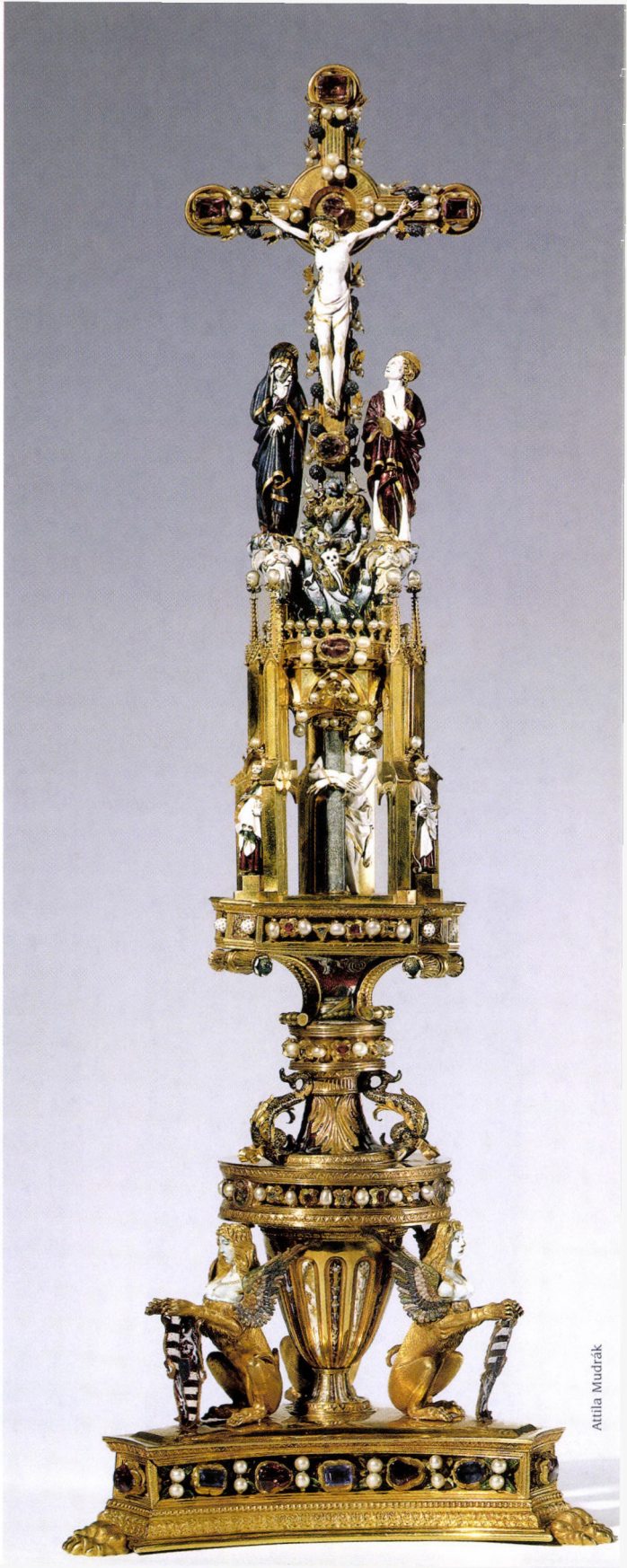
It should be pointed out that the manuscript was seen through the presses after the author had died. At the time of her death in the winter of 1998, Éva Kovács left behind a finished manuscript, the result of prolonged and thorough work. Written at various times over a long period, the individual chapters were further modified in order to accommodate the latest findings. This sort of continuous polishing as well as a critical attitude towards her earlier work were characteristic of Éva Kovács. In her own words, "I work slowly, carrying along the accumulating burden of my insights into objects and perspectives on them even after the completion of work on a topic: like a scarab pushing several balls at a time." The arrangement of the text into chapters reflects the author's original conception. In the title she promises to provide the history of Paris goldsmiths' art around 1400. In my view, she has faithfully fulfilled that promise.

While on the subject, a painful omission in this otherwise carefully edited beautiful time must be mentioned. The complete, scenario-like documentation of *The Calvary of King Matthias Corvinus* is, sadly, not in it. To my knowledge, every detail has been photographed; it would have been possible to illustrate both technical observations and interpretive commentary in a more effective manner, as was done with the photograph on page 25, which shows the head of Christ in bonds, clearly indicating the place where the earlier aureole was fitted. It is understandable that illustrations and editorial intentions must be balanced against production costs, but being aware of the outstanding quality of the Esztergom photographs (Attila Mudrák's inspired work), I can only express my disappointment over the omissions. Serial numbers identifying the illustrations could have been of service for the accompanying texts: it is often difficult to match the picture of works mentioned in the text with the relevant passage. All the same, the illustrations neatly complement the author's intellectual achievement. One instantly realises that the editors have managed to avoid clichés: this they have achieved not only by including photographs that show previously unseen details, but also by devising a novel method for highlighting correspondences and analogies. For example, the identically scaled pictures of the figures of *The Corvinus Calvary* and details from monumental sculptures by masters from the circle of André Beauneveu are used to corroborate Éva Kovács's conclusions about the interconnections. Specifically, her claim that instead of a direct and unidirectional transfer of motifs and patterns between sculpture and goldsmithing, the two fields shared common roots of perception and representation. In her view, "the sculptural problems of the figures of the Calvary reproduce the dilemmas that were at the core of the tendencies associated with the two sculptors (André Beauneveu, Jean de Cambrai)."

The importance of the topic surveyed by Éva Kovács is indicated by the fact that several books with a novel approach have emerged in the past few decades not only on the subject of the *ronde bosse* technique and the period's luxury industry but also on *The Calvary of King Matthias Corvinus* itself. One such example is the comprehensive catalogue raisonné published for exhibition attracting widespread scholarly attention by the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum to mark the restoration of the *Goldenes Rössl,* including also a full documentation of the restoration work *(Das Goldene Rössl. Ein Meisterwerk der pariser Hofkunst um 1400.* Ed.: Reinhold Baumstark. Hirmer Verlag, München, 1995.) The catalogue partly drew on the findings of Renate Eikelmann: *Franko-flämische Emailplastik des Spätmittelalters.* Phil.Diss. München, 1984). Most recently there is the magnificent catalogue accompanying the Louvre's exhibition on Art in the Age of Charles VI, which came out almost simultaneously with Éva Kovács's book (*Paris 1400. Les arts sous Charles VI.* Ed.: Elisabeth Taburet-Delahaye, Fayard, Paris, 2004). Included in this publication for the first time is one of the lesser known examples of the *ronde bosse* technique, a veneration plaque representing the infant Jesus and preserved in the Cathedral of Valencia, which was "discovered" by the editor of the catalogue. In the planned German-language edition of Éva Kovács's book, this relic will probably be added to her catalogue of the *ronde bosse* technique as item No. 52.

Helmut Trnek's work (Helmut Trnek: *"ein köstlich creuz, so von dem haus Burgundi herkomt" in: Studien zur europäischen Goldschmiedekunst des 14. bis 20. Jahrhunderts.* Festschrift für Helmut Seling. München, 2001, pp. 201–220.) discusses *The Corvinus Calvary*'s fifteenth-century history, including the circumstances of its transfer from France to Central Europe and the origins of the Renaissance pedestal. Jan Hirschbiegel's recently published book (*Étrennes. Untersuchungen zum höfischen Geschenkverkehr im spätmittelalterlichen Frankreich der Zeit König Karls VI.* (1380–1422), R. Oldenburg Verlag München, 2003) indicates the rising interest of historians in the subject. A scholarly work complete with an impressive bibliography and notes, the book examines one of the most important types in the transfer of works of art, also in the foreground of Éva Kovács's research, the aristocratic practice of exchanging gifts on New Year's Day. Unfortunately, this excellent work pays less attention to *The Calvary of King Matthias Corvinus* then this truly exceptional item deserves. This is further proof of the timeliness of Éva Kovács's book.

The author describes herself as a scarab pushing several balls at a time. We can hardly agree with her metaphor, useful though it may be in describing her dedication, relentless researching and the creativity behind her constantly renewed interest. But when it comes to the final result of her toils, a better metaphor springs to mind, evoking a precious object formed over a long period of time: a pearl. ❧



Attila Mudrák

The Calvary of King Matthias Corvinus.
Esztergom, Cathedral Treasury.

One of the most prized items in the Treasury, which figures in inventories as far back as the 16th century. The upper part, of gold embellished with balas-rubies, pearl and *ronde bosse* enamelling, is an outstanding example of Paris goldsmith's work of the early 1400s, one of the few surviving *grands joyaux*. It was Margaret of Flanders's 1402 New Year's gift to her husband, Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, and is mentioned in a 1404 inventory of the Estate of Philip the Bold as an "elongated cross". According to Éva Kovács, it is presumably the work of Herman Ruissel, who was repeatedly commissioned by Philip the Bold. The Renaissance pedestal for the cross was made in the 1490s, replacing an earlier pedestal that had been lost.

The figure of the Crucified from the upper part of *The Calvary of King Matthias Corvinus.*

Ronde bosse enamelling was a challenging technique of enamelling irregular surfaces of objects or figures on the round thereby enhancing their plasticity.

Portrait of Philip the Bold.
Dijon, Musée des Beaux-Arts.

Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, brother of Charles V, King of France, was the first owner of the Cross. He founded the Chivalrous Order of the Passion on New Year's Day 1402. The Duchess's gift of a gold cross was meant to underscore the theme and spirit of this momentous foundation.

Jacopo Barbari: *Portrait of János Corvinus.*
Munich, Alte Pinakothek.

After the death of King Matthias, the Crucifixion came into the possession of his bastard son. The first mention of the golden Cross, completed by a Renaissance pedestal, is in a 1494 deed documenting arrangements between János Corvinus and Tamás Bakócz, then Bishop of Eger.

Attila Mudrák

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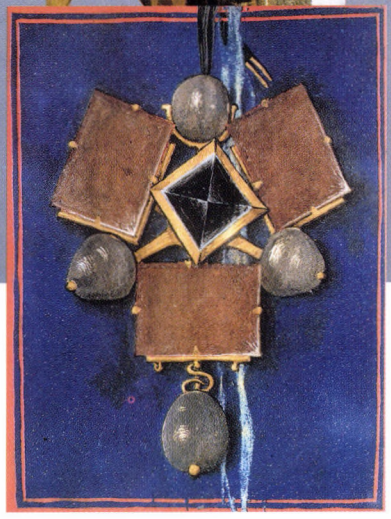
The figure of Christ tied to a column.

Christ tied and bound, locked in the High Priest's House, one of the scenes of the Passion. The enamelling of the column deceptively imitates porphyry.



A watercolour of the *Three Brothers.* Basle, Historisches Museum.

A famous jewel, made by Herman Ruissel for Philip the Bold, whose name is due to the three equal rectangular balas-rubies. Though lost in the 17th century during the English Civil War, it was depicted in this watercolour.

The figure of the Virgin in the Crucifixion scene of *The Corvinus Calvary.*

Mary's harrowed, prostrate figure and the delicately crossed hands show how much she shares Christ's suffering.

The Virgin and Child.
Toledo, Cathedral Treasury.

One of the earliest datable examples of *ronde bosse* work. This exquisite *grand joyau,* made before 1402, was once in the personal collection of Jean, duc de Berry. He gave it to Eleonore of Castille. From her it found its way to the Toledo Cathedral Treasury.

The Reliquary of the Chivalrous Order of the Holy Spirit.
Paris, Musée du Louvre.

Contrary to earlier suppositions, this is most likely English work, which found its way to France as part of the dowry of Anne de Bretagne.

The Tabernacle known as *Das Goldene Rössl.*
The abbey church of Altötting, Treasury.

A gift from the queen, Isabeau of Bavaria, to her husband, Charles VI of France, on New Year's Day 1404. It is chronologically very close to the cross of the Calvary of King Matthias Corvinus, but the style could not be more different. The charming scene shows the King in the company of his patron saints, in adoration of the Madonna and Child. The eponymous royal horse is discernible in the lower part of the composition.

Attila Mudrák

The Renaissance pedestal of *The Calvary of King Matthias Corvinus.*

The pedestal was made by a goldsmith trained in Lombardy in the 1480s. Shields between the claws of the sphinxes display the coat-of-arms of Matthias, King of Hungary and Bohemia, with the raven coat-of-arms at the centre. This prompted an earlier dating at some time after 1469. Stylistic considerations, however, suggest that the golden pedestal was made some fifteen years later.

Attila Mudrák

Zsolt Láng

The Birth of Emma Kovács

(Short story)

1

At the police station in the town of V., haggard people are waiting in the windowless room of the passport section—a room that the local wits had dubbed Auschwitz. The on-duty soldier is snoring on the only seat. In accordance with the latest fashion, a white plastic tag is dangling on the breast pocket of his jacket, his name scrawled on it in black marker pen: ISVÁN SZABÓ, with the 'T' missing from the Christian name. Huddled in the doorway that opens onto the corridor is an elderly couple, between whom is their daughter with no name paraded on her breast, though I know what it is: Evie Ujj. She used to play basketball for the school and was a head taller than even Max Holl. Hard to tell whether she was itching like mad due to the flea powder or excitement. She had only just stopped hiccuping.

The Ujj family had been planning the trip for weeks, though—if only out of superstition—they said nothing about it to one another. Now, capitulating before the dizzying possibilities, they try to think of nothing. They have had plenty of practice in that. They think of nothing and meanwhile their cerebellum is quivering in delight at the very idea. Maybe there will be a way back from the hereafter, just let them get their hands on the papers at long last!

Neither the 50-watt bulb inside the room nor the neon tube in the corridor can prevail over the other. In the end they join forces but even so they lose out to the approaching gloom. Lifting a newspaper myopically up to her eyes, Evie Ujj starts to read it out under her breath but has not reached the end of the sentence before the glass-panelled door at the far end of the room is thrown wide and the hitherto closed metal grille springs open.

Zsolt Láng

is a native of Transylvania, Romania. He works as an editor of the Hungarian literary journal Látó *at Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureş). His books include four volumes of fiction and a collection of essays.*

Names fly about the air, and ringing or hoarse "yeses" respond from all sides. After the twentieth name Evie starts hiccuping again. She hics so loud that it even wakes up the soldier, but who gives a damn about that right now. The three names are read out in succession, whereat the whole family feels a weight has been lifted from their shoulders. Outside in the street they no longer even remember the airless room, though even two blocks further on they still reek of the flea powder. At the third corner Evie brings up the matter of the news item in the paper, and by the time they take the turn before their house her mother pronounces the verdict: they will delay their journey by one day. Some cake is left over from Easter, and they cook a nice bit of chicken soup to go with it. Yes, it's gone Easter, that's true, but a winter coat is still a good idea. They linger for a while in front of the street door, being for some reason in no mood to go into the house. All sorts of nonsense passes through their minds. The streets are full of rubbish, a stale mustiness is seeping from the cellar windows, but those clouds that are slipping over the town are graceful—they'd hold their own anywhere. And that's to say nothing about the starry space opening up between the clouds. It's disconcerting that even now the evenings are longer than the period one can comfortably spend in admiration beneath a freezing heaven.

2

Evie makes better meat broths than her mother does, at least in her father's opinion. They borrow a thermos carrier from the next-door neighbour because their own is so terribly battered. After a lengthy search, and in the fourth stairwell, they finally hit on the name they were looking for. In the tiny hall two women saying their goodbyes prepare to go, so until they have left they wait around before the door. Father, whom they refer to as Papa among themselves, is getting increasingly edgy. He anyway has an aversion to anything to do with lying in bed and does not even like seeing his own body in pyjamas, let alone naked, but never mind, that's another story. His only hope is that he will be offered an espresso and a brandy. He doesn't utter a word. Unlike the wife! They agreed not to bring the matter up; of course, he would have bet his life she was asking just to annoy him. Darn right! She'd been dying to all day! It had tumbled out like an ecstatic sneeze whilst she had enquired in her sweet-as-honey voice, "Tell me, Marika, is your son-in-law happy?"

Sister-in-law Marika grimaces in disgust then ushers them into the kitchen, where, still wearing their coats, they seat themselves around the table. Papa only unbuttons his coat when the coffee machine is put on the stove. The artificial leather of the upholstery on the seats farts disagreeably with every move a person makes. Slumped on the stove, the sister-in-law waits for the coffee to perk and meanwhile bad-mouths hospital conditions. She blabs on unstoppably. On Papa's face there are reddening blotches: despite being allergic to razor blades, he shaved both yesterday and again today. He is waiting for the cognac and he is

going to have at least three shots; the wife will keep her mouth shut. Anyway, he is musing about his own daughter. He is dreaming that something similar could happen to her, and although it is attended by a lot of unpleasantness, who will remember afterwards?

The mother-to-be shouts out something, the sister-in-law fumbles to turn the gas tap off and hurries into the room. They sit for several minutes, at a loss what to do, but then Papa can stand it no longer and jumps to his feet. He starts rubbing his face roughly with the palm of the hand. He looks accusingly at his wife. How in hell's name had she not seen it! That child was not even puffing yet! There wasn't even a hint of a baby-smell, and he was particularly sensitive to that. In the old days it had made his stomach turn; that's when he had got into the habit of drinking brandy. It's common knowledge that the sister-in-law wasn't quite right in the head, and so her daughter and grandchild couldn't be either. He paces around the confined kitchen with much puffing and blowing, so the women think it better to leave him be. They leave in a hurry, saying goodbyes from the corridor, don't even stuff money in the nappy and they even forget the thermos carrier, though the neighbour had made them swear they'd bring it back without fail since she too wanted to take soup to a confined mother.

3

The tiny tot, whose birth was also greeted in the small ads column of the local paper, was a normal enough toddler. Nothing gruesome had occurred around her conception: the fruit of customary brief (barely three-minute) act. Celia, who had been tidying up the stockroom at the Vizafogó Street high school, having rolled up and put in the cupboard the maps that had been taken out during the day and fed the fishes. She would have gone home long ago, but that morning Zacharias, the school porter, had tipped her the wink that, once the coast was clear, he would go up to her; she should wait there for him. She sprinkled a good lot of water-fleas into the aquarium and, leaning over it, watched what the fish would do. The guppies grazed like sheep; the neon tetras would bite on a larger chunk and then do a headstand to swallow it; the xiphos first chased their companions away then swam under the feeding ring; whilst the zebra fish just froze in alarm. Celia pressed her brow to the glass wall. That was when Kiddo Kovács, the high school's deputy caretaker, dropped by: at this hour of the day he was looking to weld the school director's (his father-in-law-to-be's) cracked barbecue grill. He had already got the blowtorch going that morning but then, considering the boss had been bawling out useful bits of advice at him from behind his back, he had simply been unable to braze iron to iron. He had spotted the light in the stockroom window from down in the school yard. He had known Celia from childhood on as they lived in the same street. The girl's scent reminded him of old wallowing places in the frog-filled backwater barely ten minutes from the end of the street. It was not on her account that he made his way up to

the stockroom, however; it was the fish that interested him. He stood behind Celia because an open cupboard door prevented him from slipping in beside her. The next thing, perhaps mesmerised by the guppies' mating dance, he was clinging to Celia's back. Nothing was going through his head. He gripped Celia's bony hips as if he were jerking a hundredweight sturgeon by its gills out of the marshy river branch that had once—before the waters were regulated—stretched where the school now stood. The hips started to cut the palms of his hand, so he strayed over to her breast for preference. Celia, who up till now had been smooching the wall of the aquarium, now started to yell out, I lo-o-ove you, lo-o-ove you! That disturbed Kiddo, but not a lot. If the truth be told, he had already been party earlier that afternoon to another, far less successful act, and on being liberated from its depressing memory he too would have shouted out in joy. However, by the time he had opened his mouth wide Celia had been reduced to silence in her bliss and was merely writhing in recurrent spasms like a mobile telephone that had been set to vibration mode. The stockroom's imposing wall clock, which the student body nicknamed Perpeter, struck six, though that is just by the bye.

4

Kiddo Kovács had at first wanted to marry his elder sister. He planned that they would have just one child, one just like he was at the age of five. He was going to school by the time he transferred affections from his sister to his cousin. His cousin seemed to be willing as well, and once, amidst the lilac bushes, had even shown him how she did her number ones. It was a more complex phenomenon than might have been reckoned on, for something in his body had started to tingle even before the onset of the jet, giving Kiddo no small pause to think. But to revert to his dealings with women, his face was already showing a growth of stubble by the time he first ventured out into foreign realms—in a manner of speaking, since Sophie Boros was not a total stranger either. They went together for piano lessons at Auntie Mary's, an unfrocked nun. The entire town respected anyone who sent their child to Auntie Mary's for piano lessons. Auntie Mary would point to the score with a cane. When she rapped down on those fingers, her football-sized bun would quiver. To be more precise, the cane only rapped Kiddo's knuckles because everyone spoke with Sophiekins as though she were a delicate porcelain figurine—handmade so to say. Kiddo too was badly smitten by this protectiveness toward Sophiekins. At the high-school ball they only got as far as snogging, after which they went out with one another for six years until they finally became engaged. Both the Boros and the Kovács family saw themselves as leading lights: to be sure, from being an insignificant teacher in the old regime, Mr Boros's appointment—against the opposition of a substantial portion of the teaching staff—as headmaster could be put down to his family's former connections as county sheriff. Sophie was not admitted to university in

the capital; she was only able to take an extramural degree locally, whilst Kiddo studied at an even more dubious polytechnic college, where the only concern was how to rake in the tuition fees. At the engagement party, Pa Boros read the following saying from his notebook with the checked cover: "A secret lies in wedlock, though whether that is a heavenly or earthly secret, it matters not: just be curious about it." After the engagement, Sophie announced that henceforth Kiddo would be sleeping at their place. Pa Boros acceded without kicking up the least fuss; indeed, he tearfully announced that he would like first a grandson, then a granddaughter, then another boy and finally another girl. The Kovács parents did not go to the engagement party because Kiddo forgot to tell them. It may well be that they harboured some old antipathy, from those high-sheriff days, but no matter.

Their lovemaking was tortuous and a failure. Sophie was never satisfied, even though Kiddo strove to do her every bidding. Sophie had read that if she received the seed whilst lying on her right side, the child she bore would be male.

For months, therefore, Emma Kovács was a boy. She wasn't even called Emma but Ernest. Or Thomas. Or Mark. Or Nicholas. Or Peter. Or David. Or Christianandrasultan. Or Raymond. Pa Boros would have liked to see him given a nice Hungarian name, Ma Boros, a Catholic one. Kiddo didn't care; he just nodded enthusiastically. The time when Sophie had changed her mind by the hour (which Kiddo supported) having long elapsed, his sustained affirmation had turned into opposition that was to be overcome. I don't know how anyone can have such rotten taste, Sophie, forehead blazing, tore a strip off him.

Emma Kovács was an infinite radiating sphere that was elongating steadily. For Sophie's name-day a girlfriend gave her a four-week-old Pekinese pup in a basket lined with pink silk. The whole thing was tiny enough to fit in the palm of her hand. She could feel the beating of the dog's heart even through the bast. This touch captivated her, so it was no mere chance that for several days Emma Kovács resembled a puppy dog. Then in early June, a film star—the one who played Spiderman. In the days that followed the parish fair, she was like the infant in Mary's arms in the fresco behind the altar at St Anthony's. For a single hour she waved like a thoroughgoing yet likeable banker from afar. During the St Stephen's Day festivities the entire gallery of Hungarian historical portraits—as in the sombre-toned paintings of the Romantic school—found their way onto the sphere's wall. The next week they were joined by world-famed notables, Einstein among them, whom Sophie recognised only from his portrait and believed to be an over-the-hill rock star.

5

Kiddo Kovács headed back home without the barbecue grill. He was sidling a little beside his bicycle because his groin was giving him a twinge or two. These days he and Sophie tended to have a lie-down after lunch as well, though

in that regard there was no question of resting. Sophie would arrange herself on her right side, so he had to lie on his left, which was not medically advisable as he had suffered an episode of myocarditis when in high-school and had been exempted from gym that year. He would therefore raise his right foot at a forty-five degree angle and kick in the air. Hup-two-three, hup-two-three, he would say over and over again to himself in the same tone as Nyéki, the rough-spoken gym teacher. He pretended that he too was working away, Hup-two-three, hup-two-three... He came round to find Sophie pushing him away from beside her. You've gone and done it on me again, she rebuked him, giving another shove so she might turn comfortably onto her back and, for want of anything else, trust gravity to bring the spermatozoon safely to port. She helped it on its way with her tiny finger all the same, indeed even started humming an ancient incantation: Little seed, little seed, make your way through..., was all that Kiddo Kovács picked out before snoozing off again.

Yawning away, he trudged along Vihar Road, screwing his eyes up in the strong September sunshine. Though there was nothing to divulge that the street's inhabitants had been evicted and others moved in to take up their places, strange pairs of eyes were spying from the windows. No, maybe not so strange after all, for they had greeted him countless times before from the shelves and glass-paned cabinets of the stockroom. For instance, a feral cat was gazing out of Aunt Teri's window, a long-eared owl from Auntie Nanci's, the nursery teacher's, an ostrich from Frankie Semsey's, a lynx from the Gózners' place. At the corner of Kölcsey Street the town's solitary traffic lamp, which had changed from red to green just as slowly ever since his childhood, reminded him of Gonzo, the one-eyed orang-utan. Pallay had scratched out the other eye and sold it for a silver coin of Franz Joseph vintage. Two thirds of the way down the street, opposite the cobbler's shop, a crucifix was still standing from the times when that had marked the town's boundary. Christ's green eyes looked as though they wished to communicate something. What they signalled to Kiddo, in any event, was that there were only four houses to go and he would soon be home. A bird huddled on the top of the stone cross. It lowered the lids of its eyes like some sort of resigned, self-important writer: when the world is enthusing about the latest sensation, he pooh-poohs it, having already written it up a long time back. For my part, I can say without complacency that I even know the bird's name. Everyone called it Jókai, same as the writer. As a matter of fact, not many birds had lived in the town since, on the occasion of a visit by some party secretary-general or other in the early Seventies, Kálmán Nyéki, who later became director of the Sports Academy, got the idea from abroad of dyeing them red with aniline. Red being the colour of loyalty in those days. The birds for their part fled, and the behaviour of those that stayed showed aggressiveness combined with confusion. Zakariás knows how many times he has had to call out a glazier because the high school had a first-floor window

on the Vizafogó Street façade, alongside the canal, that they would dive-bomb, kamikaze-like, every month.

Kiddo Kovács could have found his way home from the high school with his eyes shut. It was as if a fine thread, spun from a silvery, wet mass, were reeling him in. Yet the dangers lying in wait for him were truly not negligible. Though accidents were uncommon in V., were the town to be enlarged merely to moderate size, their number would multiply alarmingly. At least three tiles on the roof of the Uszkais' house were ready to hurtle down at any moment, to say nothing of old Ma Surányi's hovel, one of whose walls would have been demolished by the gentlest of earth tremors. Even that afternoon there were at least three people driving whilst drunk, one of whom ended up on the river bed after smashing through the Castle Hill Street parapet. He might also have run Kiddo over. At the same time, one should not lose sight of the internal catastrophes that befall the human body. It could have happened (after all it was the end of a tiring day) that a capillary burst in his brain, or his heart stopped. What is more, the probability of a meteor falling on his head could not be said to be absolutely nil. Last but not least, one could not entirely eliminate street disturbances or spontaneous demonstrations; crowds are unpredictable and can crush even innocent bystanders. Were I able to follow Kiddo's path, not from down below but right up on high—let's suppose from a space station in terrestrial orbit—I would be able to report on a labyrinth spiked with obstacles, forks and pitfalls in which reaching the goal was far more improbable than stood to reason from V.'s scale.

Since the sun was still shining, he pushed his bike into the woodshed then, without looking in to greet his parents, who had already installed themselves in front of the TV, he climbed the cherry-tree to enter the comfortable hut he had fashioned for himself. The sparrows under the eaves started clamouring. He took his catapult off its peg, dug up a pebble from a tin can, and fired at the gutter. The metal gave a big ping after which there was silence.

The sky overhead was lighted up like on a huge cinema screen. Light poured upwards, leaving the bottom of the gardens in darkness. Blinding flashes chased about angrily and jeeringly. They failed to find a single cloud on which they would have been able to settle and so they excited floating specks of dust with their caresses. Kiddo too longed to be up on the very roof of the sky. For twenty years he had forged his dreams, and every time he jumped down he was suffused by the hope that he would start to float and also slowly and ceremonially sink towards the depths of the sky. As he was continually racking his brains about inventions, he imagined he ought to become electrostatically charged. He shut his eyes, poked his index finger over his head out of the regular sphere of the cherry-tree and, taking deep breaths, imagined that an enormous ebonite rod touched him, whereupon he would start to flutter toward the sky like a scrap of paper.

A smell of cabbage and pasta eddied around the courtyard. Kiddo's stomach rumbled loudly, his eyelashes flew open. The stellar phenomena that took the place of the flitting specks of dust sparkled in the ophthalmoscope. Anyone living in a small town on a flat plain knows how many of them fit onto a sky that reaches down so far. Kiddo called the Big Dipper the Goose, whilst Cygnus was the Carbuncle. What appeared on maps as the Little Bear was the Water Spider, Cassiopeia he called Little Eight. With his extensible spy-glass he made a separate telescopic visit to each of Lyra's stars, addressing them as Springwater, Wildflower, Tear, Earthworm, Mole Ear, Stysihunter. If he was in a good mood, he bestowed names non-stop and remembered all of them the next day.

He grabbed a horizontal branch, pushed himself off and lunged forward in a wide arc. For a single minute, floating above the darkness, he felt that the earth's strength had slackened and was exceptionally releasing him. But that much daydreaming was a lot for him for that day, and his arm had also been weakened, so he flopped down on the ground.

And in the very moment that he flopped down the infinite radiating sphere of Emma Kovács shrank to a size of two millimicrons in a negative explosion.

6

The moment of the sphere's collapse was followed by a renewed explosion, this time positive in direction. The name of this new, expanding sphere was none other than hunger. An eating frenzy took over two millimicron-sized Emma Kovács, and she gobbled up everything she came across. She had the delirious experience of how easy it was to come across companions in this furious gorging, and how easy to reach agreement with them. New cables interwove, new channels were built, mouths and stomachs scooped out at a dizzying pace. A high degree of understanding, occasionally a noble solidarity, called the labourers together, as if one and the same song were resounding within them. No one was familiar with the plan, and yet arms grew like a very triumph of methodicalness in order to be able to grasp the nutriments, legs sprouted so as to reach fresh fields, brains fizzed so as to devise the most titillating flavours that would inject new juices into a slackening stomach. Emma Kovács wanted to recover the infinite radiatingness, not a centimetre smaller.

By the time Kiddo had eaten a second helping of cabbage and pasta, Emma Kovács, surpassing all expectations, had swollen to the size of an ant's egg whilst her shape resembled one of those bogeys that Kiddo, having picked from his nose, would flick by the dozen from his comfortable tree-house. By the time Kiddo had drunk his mint tea, brushed his teeth and gone to bed, the ant's egg had rolled over into its new abode and made acquaintance with the unfamiliar climate there; she messed herself in her excitement when a stranger into whom she had bitten did not just spurn her approach but by way of a warning gesture opened a shielding umbrella over her head.

7

Kiddo Kovács's former friends were ashamed about returning to a world of catapults, tiddlywinks, catching butterflies and climbing trees. What would their children say if they couldn't flick a ten-point button two metres? If instead of hitting the badminton shuttle they were to thrash empty air. Nor did new friends turn up for Kiddo so no one found it odd that he was staying at his parents' house all the time. Even Sophie did not miss him, what's more; it did not even register on her that he had not been to their place for weeks on end.

He spent the warm, honey-coloured afternoons of autumn in his tree-house, studying the life of a new generation of sparrows with his telescope. Things went back to the way they had been before Sophie singled him out.

The weather grew colder in the last days of October. The leaves turned yellow and were shed from the trees in a single night. November arrived with its rime and hoar-frost. The copious rains that had long been waited that autumn definitively failed to arrive, and the ground froze hard as rock. The Kovács family prepared for All Souls' Day. On these occasions, Kiddo's sister also came home from the other end of the country, where she worked as a geologist for a mining company, along with her husband. Over the past year she had doubled in weight because she had only been given office work and had no field trips.

Kiddo Kovács liked to gaze at candle flames and he collected the strange wax forms that trickled down the sides in a matchbox. He would linger by the home-constructed lanterns that protected the easily chilled little flames from the wind.

His family prepared in a grim mood for the afternoon outing, though he did not notice any of that. Admittedly, his father had spoken to him balefully, but only on setting off, whilst they were bundling themselves into their Skoda, saying that he didn't even deserve to be taken with them. He asked why they had said that, whereupon his father replied that he must know full well why.

They stood speechless around the grave. Shortly afterwards, his brother-in-law went off to the grave of his own relatives, so they were left to themselves. That is when his mother started. Eyes flashing with anger, she hissed, "What's up with Celia?" Kiddo did not understand what she was getting at, though meanwhile of course the penny dropped. "Why would anything be up?", he mechanically flung the question back. His mother's face started to fume mutely. He was only too familiar with that phase, or rather the ghastly one that was to come; little wonder that he cast an imploring look at his sister then at his father. He had always been able to count on his father to remain neutral but, sooner or later, to side with him. This time, however, his father wrinkled his brow questioningly, then as if he couldn't bear to wait until the scene that was getting under way had reached its climax, spat out, "You good-for-nothing!" Kiddo's mother, angry at being pre-empted, huffed her way to the front and began strewing her epithets almost incoherently on that filthy, broken-healed, crack-brained little whore.

"Hussy," the sister slid in. This was the first time Kiddo had heard the word, but he was able to infer its meaning straight from his sister's face. Still, he raised an eyebrow uncomprehendingly, because he had often found that his sister would forget about promised clips round the ear if she was able to preen herself by explaining something to him. Hussy, a daft slut, can't keep her knickers on, their mother took over again.

Keeping his head down, Kiddo Kovács stood hemmed in among the graves. He was growing smaller by the minute. He was pole-axed by the news that he too had suspected for at least a fortnight. Celia had constantly skirted around it, going down more than once into the workshop, and if he took to his heels, as he always did, she would dispatch in his wake a curious gesture of pretending to stroke an imaginary swollen belly. He would eventually catch on to everything, of course, with his sixth sense, if not his conscious mind. Why had he gone to the school that afternoon? If it hadn't been for that barbecue, or if Sophie would have left him in peace, or if the light had not been on, or he had not looked up, or if Zakariás had secured the doors... The heavy sands of two weeks of self-deception landed with a thud around his shoulders. He hoped nothing had happened, that warm summer evenings would last forever.

He looked out from among the graves to the gravel path, where an old woman dressed in black was slowly crunching her way toward them, shifting her body from one leg to the other. He shivered with cold because he felt he was naked. Celia's belly was like an X-ray machine... He was standing there before the prying eyes, and it was useless trying to cover up his crotch, a draught was fanning his backside, a pair of stained pyjamas was dangling in his hands, he was doggedly crumpling them, in his nostrils the unsettling smell that was presumably being picked up not just by his parents but also the neighbours. He was bathed in sweat. He was shuddering from the freezing wind that was buffeting him. He hoped that by the evening he would have a fever so he could stay in bed. Yet that was no good either, because then his mother would stay beside him, nursing him and scanning him with her X-ray eyes. There were no secrets before her. She knew about everything but would still carry on castigating him to spill it all out. Gone was the customary All Souls' Day mood. Futile his dreams of candles... The wind whistled ghostlike on the pipes that were welded together to make the crosses. If only the earth would swallow him up! It might sort out the situation if a single small clod were to shift. Except everything is covered in concrete, carefully swept with a feather-duster. The handles on the grave vaults were so rusty not even a monkey-wrench would shift them. Interesting, it suddenly crossed his mind, they were not in the habit of ever mentioning the dead. They would get to the state of the grave at most, the work of the cemetery's caretaker, the quality of the wreaths, but not so much as a single word about the residents of the graves.

His mother fell silent, then asked him something to which admittedly he could not supply an answer, but at least he had a chance to get a word in edgeways.

"What month is she in?"

"Where do you get this stuff from?"

"Come off it, son, even the dicky birds are talking about it."

That was one of his mother's pet phrases, and when she trotted it out one knew that she was no longer in the grip of anger. "It can't be too many," she replied in her son's stead. The anger had also drained from her voice; she had become pensive, as if something else were on her mind. A favourable state to come, the wheels start spinning and grind the flour for the paste of the solution.

The usual family council sat, with everyone chipping in something, out of which emerged an idea, conceived in the spirit of their shared headache, for reaching a solution one way or another. They also managed to solve nebulous and complicated issues because even though failing to alight upon a tangible result, they would have shifted out of their lethargy and, being in motion, would be able to look on things from a new angle. When his grandmother was found to have cancer and they all knew there was nothing that could be done to help her, they had still managed to sweep on past the impasse, persuading grandma that she should elect to have the operation, even though it was pointless. The burial had gone like clockwork then, and even Kiddo drank a glass of brandy at the wake. By the time his brother-in-law got back the teeth-baring was over; they jolted homewards in a distinctly cheery mood.

8

Celia arrived at 6 p.m., as Kiddo had told her on the telephone. She had already seen Kiddo's mother earlier—a proud woman, who kept her back straight as a poker even when bending down to pick out potatoes at the market. Nor did the mother stand on ceremony on being introduced, immediately reaching out to her stomach.

Celia had washed her hair with the nettle shampoo that Zacharias gave her for Christmas. Otherwise she habitually used soap. She had put on a fluffy, puff-sleeved cardigan; for underwear, leaving nothing to chance, she had on black lace panties. How right she was. She had also made up her eyes with a black liner.

Kiddo's mother tugged out the white blouse beneath the sweater to plant her warm palm under the waistband of the skirt and panties. Soft, she said to her daughter, who had stayed on a few days because work at the mine was suspended due to some accident and only her husband had to return. "See for yourself!"

"No, it's not soft," thus Kiddo's sister as her hand also made its way under the sweater. "It's quite firm."

Celia herself palpated her own tummy and nodded.

Finally Kiddo's mother came across the spot; her palm stopped dead and her brow darkened. "Firm," she nodded grimly. At this, Celia unbuttoned her cardigan and pushed down the waistband of her panties in order to give better access to her belly. Also present was Kiddo's father, who after being forced to interrupt

his studies at the Technological University had become a salesman in the porcelain department at the Vasudvar; so, he had a good eye for the wares, for one thing, and for another, he had a splendid feel for the language of the customers, which is to say he got on well with people. He was able to convince even the most stubborn that a cracked jug was an advantageous purchase, and in any case that little crack was only a scratch which would soon wear away with usage. He did not even have to feel the belly; he could see how firm it was.

And indeed, Emma Kovács was already bigger than a pea in Celia's tummy. She most closely resembled three grains of pearl barley that have stuck together, a bigger one and two smaller ones. As if sensing the looks of interest, she thrust out her chest. Life for her was intoxicating, more and more intoxicating from one day to the next. The primeval infinite radiating sphere did not shatter completely; its memory oscillated in the aether, or to be more precise, each particle of the ether preserved traces in its frequency of oscillation.

A great many hours had ensued after this 6 p.m. on Perpeter's face, probably several tens of thousands, by the time Emma Kovács got to hear those oscillations with her own ears. A man was whispering something to her, and in that whisper (to say nothing of the aniseed odour of the breath, at which the dress had already fallen away from her more than once) she satisfied herself about the existence of the infinite radiating sphere. What an afternoon that was! A crazy happiness was staining the sky crimson—so much so that one ought to trumpet out to people to come with buckets and blankets, take it away, there was plenty for them too. She had not yet been in love that morning, nor at noon, but by the afternoon, yes. Nor did she understand it. The light shone for days, she knew neither day nor night. At night she filled up four notebooks with her writing; the next morning she could barely make out the words. She did not manage to get on with the story, although it was more real, more horrific, more glittering, more compact and more secretive than the others. The hell with it! Someone else would write it.

The three fused grains again soiled themselves in their excitement. They went limp for a second but then hastened to preen themselves. The skin on Celia's belly quivered. "There!" Kiddo's mother poked at it, though in such a way that her finger did not come to a stop at the skin but hit with an impetus gathered from a fair distance away.

"It has to slacken. It will hold fast as long as it's firm!"

The kitchen table was the father's idea. He helped Celia step onto it from the kitchen stool and later to get to her feet from the kitchen flags. And he was the first to palpate. "Keep lifting rather," said Kiddo's mother.

Nothing useful came into Kiddo Kovács's mind. He was ashamed that he of all people was so powerless. although he was the one who should be taking the lead. His sister, of course! She was extremely well up in this subject, and just how well was now becoming clear. It was she who suggested the chaise longue,

given that one only has to reach under it, it is comfortable to the touch, and it is already heavier if someone is sitting on it, indeed it makes a difference where the person sits. At last Kiddo too was also able to set himself into service. It was he who hit upon the idea of jumping on the bed to produce a shock-wave type of reverberation that would bring even bridges crashing down. His father, fearful for the springs, talked him out of that however. What matters is the effort, the sister fussed, one has to sweat.

Celia groaned loudly so they could see the effort. Her face became flushed; later a lazy moistness of some kind began to run down her thigh and she grew alarmed. Just the sweat trickling down from her back; no result. Kiddo's mother again came up with the new idea that what was needed was some direct action, a more precise one that would act where it was needed. She already knew, of course, what she wanted but would have preferred that she did not have to start. Her daughter guessed what she was thinking and, having told Celia to get her stuff together and hold it up, prodded her there with a lightning-quick thrust of the right fist from which the knuckle of the middle finger protruded.

They did not lose patience throughout the entire evening, and if they sometimes got tangled up with one another, that was merely because they all had the same wish and a common intent to prove it, wishing to signal to the others that they were doing everything they possibly could in the interests of success. Even Celia was sucked into this maelstrom and was by now willingly pummelling her own stomach. Her fist would keep on amusingly bouncing back as though from a ball. That was when Kiddo's father, fed up with all the inaccuracy, slammed her with a deliberate right jab, from close to but with all his might. Celia doubled up, even lost consciousness for a second and dropped to her knees, but looking up straight away to say, "No harm done. In fact maybe now... Yes, it's definitely softened," and she exposed her bad teeth to laugh through the tears that had sprung involuntarily to her eyes. Kiddo's mother eagerly made a grab. They watched intently. No, it hasn't loosened, came the verdict. A shadow of alarm passed over Celia expression, but all the same she happily raised her rags and turned her belly once more towards the Vasudvar salesman.

Kiddo Kovács marked time with growing impatience by the kitchen table. Though he tried to dismiss it, he could picture to himself the scene when his father had angrily dismantled the prop-driven aircraft that Kiddo had once put together from a sewing machine—with what even his father had admitted were considerable engineering precision and masterly inventiveness for an eleven-year-old kid. It annoyed him that they were again ruining something that was, after all, his business. He got angry at his father, who wanted to be a jack of all trades yet was incapable of doing quite basic repairs. His eyes were no longer any good, and he was lazy in his aim. Jumping in ahead of his father, therefore, he let fly an irascible blow, having seen that it needed to be at least two finger-breadths lower down. He aimed two finger-breadths lower down and he was

spot on. This time Celia really did faint away. Panickily, they cleaned up and sat her down on the chaise longue. Kiddo's sister offered her a nip of brandy, and later on they made her down a mug of tea. They agreed that they would carry on the next day, but Kiddo's mother recommended in the meantime mustard seed tea and a scalding-hot bath. You have a bathroom? Water from the hot tap isn't hot enough; you have to heat a panful on the stove. And come here again tomorrow, after dusk.

9

In her state of euphoria Emma Kovács always reached a stage of philosophical reflection. She chewed over the idea that solicitude, being evenly distributed in the world, accumulates all that lies at hand with its goodness. Or to put it another way, if an existing being presents itself to solicitude, then the existing will be "at hand" in principle. She became utterly intoxicated at all the attention that was being directed towards her. Then from the first she glimpsed stars. She did not understand how they had reappeared; before they had twinkled on the wall of the infinite radiating sphere. It's hardly surprising, then, that she was immediately brushed by the butterfly wings of hope: well now, little girl, you've achieved what you longed for so much, you've regained your sphere. Shortly afterwards, however, darkness moved in to replace the stars, and the three fused grains of pearl barley writhed in the icy squalor of pain. Bound together as they were by the suggestive whispering of desires and the noble silver threads of health, the cells would have taken flight in all directions with almost prodigal impudence. What up till now had united them in delicate balance would have run away. The past stepped into the present, the future shrouded the ancient. Emma Kovács resembled a bird, huddled on the crucifix, legs growing on its shivering back, so that on taking to the air it looked as if it were flying tail first on its back. Matter decomposed and time along with it. God himself would not have been able to make anything of the chaos. I was able to say what the bird's name was, but I had no hope that I might have any insight into Emma Kovács's mind. I can only suggest what she pictured to herself. She stood before a horse, across from the former cobbler's shop in Vihar Road, with her back to the cross. The horse was stretched out on the road, raising its head from time to time. No, to start with it was still standing. Beside it was a cart, with billets of wood strewn around the cart. A stubble-chinned man who stank like a brewery was beating the horse with a bludgeon thick as your arm. The protagonists in the scene also show the extent to which time has stood still in V.: wood is the fuel for heating and horse-and-carts were still going round the streets even then. The sole change in the picture is the internet café that has opened where the cobbler's shop was. The carter was ceaselessly belabouring the horse about the head. The horse's eyes were swimming in blood but the eyeballs were protruding from the pool of blood and gazed clearly at Emma Kovács. At whom else could they have gazed?

Aunt Theresa was standing there but she was just laughing. Likewise Uncle Steve Gózner. Dessie Kodra was also laughing even as he tossed a greeting out to her: "Hi, there, Emmy, I hope you're not bunking off school!" Beside him was his wife, Aunt Elly Kodra, who wasn't entirely sober even now but still gave a friendly smile; if she really had taken a drop too much, she would go into the classroom and, her skinny arms or not, was quite capable of making mincemeat of Túróczi or Judit Kádas. A namesake, Enid Kovács, and Kovieni were laughing as well. The truth is Emma Kovács never did have a sense of humour. Transfixed to the spot, she watched brewery-breath panting as he thrashed the horse's head; his dirt-caked donkey-jacket emitted an irritating swishing sound... God's teeth—that's what he kept on yelling. Emma Kovács was not a churchgoer, nor was she in the habit of praying, but an icy thunderbolt ran through her at the words. She plugged her ears but she did not want to cover her eyes, because she feared the next blow would be for her. She ought to have moved on but was unable to stir from the place. She had no idea how this day would end. Would she get home at all? After which she became accustomed to the spectacle, even started to become annoyed: if the horse was capable of standing the roughest blows without kicking out, biting or running away, then surely it couldn't take any more effort for it to knuckle down and do whatever it was that would assuage brewery-breath's fit of rage. Although she soon reached home, because a neighbour who happened to be going that way took her by the hand and brought her back, the story continued the whole evening, the whole of the night and the next day as well. It continues to the present moment. One may also question why, if it was incapable of kicking back or running away, it did not perish? That was almost the most dreadful aspect of all. Why didn't it give up the ghost? She knew the answer, was fully alive to it, even whilst having not the foggiest idea.

The second blow was also unexpected, the third too. By the fourth, though, she was expecting it. What a turn-up! She was nonplussed and gritted her teeth, hanging on with pig-headed determination. She did nothing special, having no stratagem of any kind. Perhaps it was not she herself but what arose from the desire to recover the infinite radiating sphere—yes, anger, stubborn anger that stiffened like a concrete post within her, embracing her. A grown-up person who does not take a breath of air for two minutes will have a notion of how serious her determination was. You ask how long two minutes is? Eight swings of the pendulum for Perpeter, or a sentence of moderate length. It was never the blows that tested her, that was almost gratifying, but the ensuing reaction, which, gaining energy from the nearby elastic walls, magnified the force of the waves so that the oscillation could smash into the depths with self-destructive triumph like a tidal bore that has been whipped up to the point of being able to dump all the water in the ocean onto the coast.

10

Sophie first thought of Kiddo when, after weeks had gone by, news of Celia's condition came to her attention. She threw a fit, ranted and raved until it made her ill. As she was leaning over the toilet bowl to vomit, the thought took on colour like a soap bubble, that the true cause of her indisposition could be nothing other than the longed-for pregnancy. She even felt that her belly was larger than usual, her breasts too. Even a bead of milk formed on her nipple. If she was counting back correctly, several due dates had already gone.

A gold chain glittered on the wrist of Gábor Bátori, a gynaecologist with a name of venerable distinction. It was on Sophie's account that he went to his surgery on Boxing Day. She had been waiting agitatedly since the morning. "A Jew," Sophie's mama appended to the name under her breath as if she were talking about a sore hidden beneath one's clothing. Although no one had expressly forbidden Sophie to have anything to do with him, her mother's voice and expression had been enough to deter her. Gábor for his part would gladly have wooed her, for in any case he too had marvelled at the boyishly slender body straining under the backboard during basketball games. It was quite probably Sophie who made Gábor become a gynaecologist. The things a rejected lover is capable of dreaming up!

He hid his discomposure with pompous small talk. Medical science had achieved its greatest successes in its studies of the female body. It was an incontestable fact that the human hormonal system had been most thoroughly studied through the secretions of the female organism. When Sophie slipped out of her knickers to step behind the screen, Gábor, left alone with the blue glow of the underwear, could not resist the temptation: at a single twitch of the pituitary the intoxicating hormone whistled like a black arrow to the gonads, causing even the hairs on his close-cropped head to stand on end. Trembling, he leaned over and brushed the hem of the silk with his lips. With him all but passing out from its fragrance, the muscular tone of the quiver hit its peak. He stood for a while and looked up the ceiling, focusing his attention on a missing screw-head on the light fitting. He stepped behind the screen with a deep sigh, mechanically smeared white jelly over Sophie's abdomen, then pressed the head of the ultrasound scanner onto that.

Long minutes passed. In Gábor's brain the profound and heavy scent flushed out the heavy alluvium from ever deeper down. A provocative, wild, audacious scent! It would strike him down, but he did not mind becoming her eternal slave. If only...

You would be ready to give birth tomorrow. You have the dilatation for it too. I'll crack the cervical index in a moment, but the sponginess can be picked out even by ultrasound. The mouth of the womb has almost vanished. The glands of the uterine tube are squelching in anticipation, the muscles of the base of the pelvis have become distended. I'm amazed there are no labour-pains. I see the

perineum has also thickened. You would be ready to give birth today—even right now, never mind tomorrow. It's just that there is nothing there. A false pregnancy. It looks as though you wanted it very much, or else were very frightened of it.

"I want it very much! Want it!"

Gábor Bátori completed yet another a cowardly circuit on the outside of the screen, tottered over to his desk, rummaged through the index cards then went back and clumsily flopped on Sophie, burying his head and inhaling her scent, inhaling it deeply. I can help, he croaked.

Sophie did not dare fall asleep for two days because if she did fall asleep, she would see Gábor's face bobbing up from between her thighs as if she were giving birth to him. She regretted having gone to him and felt a sense of shame, or maybe it was that childhood aversion of hers. She despised herself. She took a shower every two hours. Finally, during the afternoon of the last New Year's Eve of the old millennium she discovered with relief that her menstrual bleeding had come. She gazed tearfully at the pink-tinted drops that were dripping into the bath then said out loud, "No mercy. I'm going to get Kiddo Kovács booted out, that's for sure. And as long as there's breath left in my body, I'll make his bastard my business!"

11

Emma Kovács noticed that she had a new sphere. A garish neon-blue one. She could not compare the pain with any other pain and yet she was quite sure that the greatest pain of all had fallen to her lot.

After a blow bigger than any hitherto, it flashed through her mind that annihilation would be a solution. If everything were to disintegrate, the pain would also come to an end. She resolved not to cling on, not to shrink, not to harden; like the horse, she would allow herself to be beaten. The enraged, obdurate matter within her, though, would not permit this: it kept on kicking back.

And there was another thing too. Through the intimidating numbness of the pain, she sensed the warmth of the kind hand that had guided her home from beside the horse-beating carter; she felt the warm silkiness of the palm of that hand. Then there were two outstretched palms that clung to one another, into which someone buried their head and, bowing low, shouted out that they would give everything they had, even life itself, in exchange for hers.

Then there were distant beings who jerked their heads up uneasily each and every time her condition tipped threateningly and the threads snapped dangerously. Their faces were captivatingly one and the same face, her wizened, deformed, semi-finished face. The huge heads of ring-dove nestlings, animated little hammers. And as to how big a distance the dynamics of connections act across, a good example is the restlessness of the silver macaques that live in Japanese forests. They are said to have been human beings once upon a time, but then they became animals and yet a divine clear-sightedness still resides

within them. When Emma Kovács got into trouble and had ambitions for her own destruction, they disclosed a secret source of power out of which they pumped over the energy required. Matter from Emma Kovács kicked back, anti-poisons were elaborated to smother the injected snakes. Her muscles twined around the column of immovability like the sinewy arms of apes. After a while, she was taking so much delight in her strength as to make mountains even out of molehills, hitting back lustily at even the gentlest touch.

12

Two months passed, then another two, during which things took a rest; even the sphere of pain did not grow. A single thought, or more particularly hunch, is worth mentioning. Emma Kovács could justifiably suspect that she too had something to do with this tranquillity. Maybe she did not win with her obstinacy but with something else. But what? She would not see it if she looked in a mirror, yet it was written on her face. If she reached out for it, it would melt away; if she nevertheless managed to capture it, it would instantly transform. It did not slake thirst or relieve hunger yet when it was lacking it was still possible to feel hunger and thirst.

And then the things that had not recurred for two months bore down on her all in one go. This hit her unexpectedly; it was awful. The light that blazed up in her eyes was awful. An enormous force took hold of her and with elementary force tore her away, like a mere slip of paper, from the column of her stubbornness and pushed her forward in such a way that she slid along on her nose. It was awful and yet she felt a relief as never before. Maybe it was from then on that the word *elementary* became familiar to her. There are words that are not fully articulated. They have a meaning, that's true, but more important than that is their music. If they were to be collected from all sorts of spoken tongues, the primeval state of the world could be described. *Ígéret,* 'promise', is a splendid word, but so is *tyúkszemirtó,* 'corn remover', or *Schurkenstreich,* 'villainy', to one who hears in them the sounds of the infinite.

From that second, every path down which an enormous force sweeps became familiar to Emma Kovács. Thus, Vihar Road with its silvery texture became familiar. Another street with another house. Sugár Avenue, on which a lily-white taxi speeds with her to hospital. A flight of steps, the number of whose stairs she wants to count but gets mixed up. An anyway uncongenially narrow corridor that leads into a floodlit room. She was able to walk down paths that carried her to the deepest depths of hells and the flowery meadows of heaven as if she had already stepped upon them. If a map of her life had become indecipherably shaded in by a confused jumble of little lines, these luminous straight lines burned through the paper.

Naturally, she also knew the path that had led her back from this life to the infinite radiating sphere. Knew it well, though that's by the bye.

At last, she thought, and a scalding-hot weeping welled up from inside her. At last everything will become clear.

She found out what she was able to find out. Nothing really well. It's not worth being made of the world's matter. Other might hosanna it, but not she. The fault was in the matter! In the admired laws. There is plain bad abiding in mass attraction, in causality, in interaction. Transformation is attended by annihilation, annihilation by pain. The worm resides in the laws. It's bad that one plus one makes two. It's bad that an electric current is induced in an electromagnetic field. It's bad that carbon and silicon atoms burn more violently than all this; others only dare to flicker on tiptoe. It's bad that even the smallest grain of dust behaves in the same way as the largest. It's bad that this whole world is the same. It's bad that it's not possible to move away to somewhere else because the world lets no one escape from it. Its prisoner remains its prisoner forever.

All of a sudden, her skull jammed, got wedged. She started to wriggle. She could feel a painful thump, this time from inside herself. Maybe her heart had throbbed that hard. She froze, at which she sank further in, or in other words it became clear that she was flailing in the wrong direction, and as soon as she stopped doing that she slid on further with ease. A renewed sense of relief precipitated new waves of weeping. She hiccuped, blubbered and growled like an angry little marmoset. The midwives who thronged from all around took a peek inside with tight-lipped, horrified expressions at what sort of monster was on its way, ready to make a dash for it at the first sign of trouble. That day, as it happened, Gábor Bátori was the on-duty obstetrician, but why he was not there is another story. My God, my God, Celia cried out, and at this the room expanded, growing deeper towards the ceiling, as if a real sky were enveloping it above. In that spaciousness there was a lessening of the pain that had up till now been forcing her thighs apart when she would rather have drawn them together but was unable to do so because she was strapped down. Wide apart, that's right! She was trembling as if she were actually coming off ... Emma Kovács also senses it is easier. She is no longer being tugged by that force, but it is enough to recollect it for just a single second, the memory alone is enough to bundle it off. What a ghastly light! Her body becomes rigid, she can't move either arms or legs, the crying is trapped in her chest though her soul demands its long-due right. She tumbles out like some sort of flagstone, all but plopping into the slops bucket. Only when a hand pats her back and sprinkles cold water over her does the trapped air howl out of her, with a great many tears, vomit, snot, mess and blood—so violently that it spatters even those standing further off. For a moment the atmosphere is frigid, as when a stranger drops into a room that not long before had still been cosily intimate. "There now, got you!" exclaims the midwife, holding her on her palm of her hand. Then her body again cramps up. Her mouth is open and yet she is not breathing in. She looks as if she were smiling. She has power over her own will; she is able to issue commands to her

muscles. No doubt she feels that there never was—and never again will be—such a victor; that now, for once, her fate is in her own hands. All she has to do is not draw a breath of air. She constrains her lungs under her own dominion... forces her muscles into submission... It'll be a doddle doing it, however much her body might protest. So drunk is she with happiness she can hardly rejoice that her eyesight is dimming again. Then, even more rapturously, she glimpses the renewed brightness of darkness. She had come to this world in order to turn back straight away, incinerating even the useless experience of getting out in the approaching brilliance. The light is terrifying, the brilliance of the darkness intoxicating. She does not know what is beyond it. There is something. When a smack stronger than all this jolted her out of herself, she was nowhere. But she had to be somewhere, because after she had returned she remembered that she had been nowhere. Now she would be able to find everything out. Perhaps another story exists in which she can emerge once again. Bye-bye, Emma Kovács!

At that decisive moment a sound broke through to her ear. Right then, in the next-door bay, they were unstrapping the other mother who had been giving birth in parallel, meanwhile laying the crimson infant briefly on her panting belly. They stick a piece of sticking plaster to the infant's wrist and on that wrote its name in ink: Lazarus Szabó, and he starts crying his eyes out at being pestered this way. He is not consoled by his mother's touch but reaches the height of despair, as if he had been placed at the breast of his murderer. Emma Kovács recognises the bad, recognises the infinite radiating sphere, in these sounds. She herself does not understand why her hand should stir, her muscles relax, a spot of light trickle onto the pupils of her eyes, or she should take a breath of air: she too strikes up. She feels sorry for the weeper, sorry for the weeper's deathly pale mother, sorry for her own, sorry for the midwives. Her weeping is a single cry, but it swells like a throbbing grand aria that takes the public's breath away. It grows quiet in the delivery room. The tepid rainfall of true relief begins to flow, arms and legs relax, and a reassuring shiver runs lightly down moist spines. ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

Mihály Borsos

Tamás Fekete, Sculptor

Tamás Fekete, a sculptor who works in wood, stone and metal and in all the three-dimensional art forms, is one of the most strikingly original figures in Hungarian art today. He was born in Budapest, in 1931, and as a teenager experienced the vicissitudes of history and existence in Eastern Europe: his Jewish father was deported in 1944. His last memory of his father was when he stretched out his hand from behind the barbed wire and handed him his ring. The sculptor still has the ring; he has never worn it. His father never came home again. He is still present as a simple yet moving bronze small sculpture: on a side table stands a typical wireless set from the 1920s, beside it a slim, elegant man in a bow tie, listening intently with head down (most likely to the BBC news, as did most of the Hungarian middle class at the time). The statue was given the title *Poor Father in the Year Before Last of the War* by the sculptor's best friend, the recently deceased novelist Imre Szász. On top of everything else, in 1944 Jews had to hand in their radios. The memory of this old radio is affectionately preserved in another of Fekete's small sculptures. Just as his father's memory is captured in another poignant piece in which the man himself is not present, just a jacket thrown nonchalantly over the back of a chair *(Chair with Coat).*

At the age of 13 Tamás Fekete was left alone with his mother. "My mother managed to live from hand to mouth with elegance," he says of his mother, who raised him single-handed through those harsh years that included the siege of Budapest, the Stalinist era, the 1956 Revolution and then the early Kádár period, years of fear, uncertainty, lack of freedom and deprivation. The life-size wooden sculpture *My Mother,* showing her anxiety in bringing up her son and her all-embracing love, appeared many years later. The ochre surface of the finely polished wood, the resignedly lowered head with hair braided in a wreath, the sunken shoulders, the thin, worn, but perfectly straight, almost Cubist,

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Mihály Borsos
is a photographer who runs an art gallery in Budapest.

figure together with disproportionately large hands hanging from outstretched arms, and an old-woman's slightly pigeontoed feet showing below the long skirt, carry a rich emotional message. This is a deeply moving statue and almost tells a story to the viewer. It radiates tragedy, fragility, transience and love without a trace of sentimentality.

As a member of the middle class, Fekete was not admitted to the Academy of Fine Arts. His teacher at secondary school encouraged him to draw. But he had to earn his living. He got a job as a crane driver, and then learnt the trade of technical photography. In 1951 he was called up for army service. As a reward for saving a life, he was sent on an officers' training course. After being demobbed he took a job in a large factory. In 1956 he took advantage of his officer's training to help the fighting revolutionaries; as a consequence he was stripped of his rank after the Revolution was crushed. He could consider himself lucky that he escaped prison. In time he became a tool-maker, later a designer, learning the technicalities of working with metals. In those days there were various educational courses available for workers. Fekete continued his studies in the factory fine arts circle. He soon became a member of one of the important art groups of the period, The Young Artists' Club, the members of which (naturally under supervision and restrictions) were given a chance to exhibit their work. He learned from very good artists. The oeuvre and exemplary moral, intellectual and human attitude of the outstanding Hungarian sculptor of the period, Béni Ferenczy, by then a classicist after Cubist experiments, had the strongest influence on him.

The young artist wanting to break out of a technical and working class environment tried to find his own path. The world of Budapest intellectuals, lively and colourful despite the scant opportunities and strictly controlled limits set by cultural politics, turned him increasingly into a thinking intellectual and conscious artist who was not prepared to compromise. He made friends with fellow artists, began to get commissions, and, at the end of the 1970s, held his first exhibition. He managed to go abroad: first to Munich and Florence, later travelling widely in Europe and even visiting the US. He resisted the constant temptation to emigrate, however, and always returned home.

In 1972 he got his first monumental commission. At this time he started to create his very individual small sculptures in metal. These enchanting pieces in copper and bronze, hardly more than a span in height, made to scale and with a realistic effect, reflect the gentle melancholy of passing and the affectionate nostalgia of the artist for the environment and experiences of his childhood as well as his playful character. *Stove with Umbrella* consists of a man's umbrella drying off beside a typical old iron stove. *My Grandmother's Dresser* is an exact depiction of the time; on top of the old-style dresser typical of a middle-class home stand a couple of jars of bottled fruit; who knows what is hidden in

the slightly pulled out drawer, and the open door of the lower part of the sideboard reveals the saucepans standing orderly on a shelf. At one time the *Tailor's Dummy* was an essential accessory of small dressmaking workshops, just as the former bellows *Camera* on a tripod was of a photographer's studio. Perhaps the most moving of these pieces is the *Cobbler's Workshop* with its scattered tools and true-to-life untidiness. Or the infinitely sad *In Memory of Fallen Soldiers,* with its shot up machine gun and the soldier's greatcoat on the ground, beside which one should imagine the dead, most likely young, machine-gunner and the whole madness of war: whoever he didn't manage to shoot shot him. (This sculpture has a life-size version too, in the Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.) These thought-provoking small masterpieces, full of feeling but never sentimental, are unique in today's Hungarian sculpture. In the words of an art critic: they are slightly hyper-realist object statues, touched by pop art. But every one of them—including those I haven't listed here—could only have been made by Tamás Fekete.

During his small sculpture period, portraits make their appearance in Fekete's oeuvre. Two of these could be part of this series, one of a film director and the other of a well-known film and stage director and actor, though in fact they are models for lifesize portraits erected in the open air in Budapest. By sculpting the characteristic stance and gestures of the figures Fekete achieves what he wants and what is expected of a portrait: not only are the figures immediately recognizable to those who knew them, but the essence of their character is also clearly depicted in these two very diverse full-figure portraits. This is naturally valid for his lifesize bronze busts too of the 1970s and 80s. Among these are portraits of writers who are near to Fekete both thanks to their works and as human beings: the tragically-fated Isaac Babel, and two Hungarian friends, the outstanding poet István Vas and the absurdist satirical prose writer and playwright István Örkény. On a pillar in Museumstrasse in Vienna stands a bronze bust of György Bessenyei, Maria Theresa's body guards officer and the reformer of Hungarian literature, a work which is a far cry from the clichés of so many statues of great men in public places. In this same spirit Fekete models the full-figure statue of the greatest Hungarian statesman of the nineteenth century, Lajos Kossuth (1998). Kossuth's statue stands in the squares of numerous Hungarian towns in various heroic poses, Fekete, however, doesn't portray him as the powerful statesman who dethroned the Habsburgs, the legendary orator, the daring initiator of the struggle for freedom, or, after its defeat, the exile hoping to return for 45 years, right up to his death. This Kossuth is leaning back in an armchair on a plinth supported by two pillars; beside him is a table on which there is a ancient printing press. He is sitting cross-legged, one of his hands rests on the table, while the other might be getting ready to gesticulate; his head is raised, maybe he is about to say something, his attentive, familiar features suggest a wakeful restlessness, his dynamic being. At that time, in 1848,

he was the Finance Minister of the first responsible Hungarian government, but soon he would become the leader, and somehow the sculpture seems to give a hint of this too.

Among Fekete's statues in public places is the *Tree of Life* (1975), in memory of the composer Zoltán Kodály. It used to stand in the main square of the town of Kecskemét, the home of the internationally renowned Kodály Institute. The huge intertwined tree in bronze with its amazing amount of leaves, each one welded separately, not only presented a special vision, it could also be considered a living symbol of renewal: since people often broke off the leaves to take them home as souvenirs the sculptor kept having to replace them—to such a degree that eventually he could not keep pace with the "vandalism" and the famous tree was removed to safety. The bronze *Engine* (1975), this lovely old steam engine with its coal tender, was produced to life scale too, and today stands in the playground of a nursery school. Many of its parts are moveable and the whole piece is absolutely true to life. You can clamber onto it and play at being an engine driver.

This movability, ability to operate and functionality is one of the important characteristics of Fekete's latest period, which started in the 1980s and still continues. Once again he is doing something completely original and unique: he is creating ingenious machine statues out of copper, bronze and steel in the size of small sculpture. But these are not any old machines, they are wonderful to look at, complicated, mystical, never before seen and in reality never existing, silkily shining machines. They have distant ancestors, however: the great Italian Renaissance architect Fillippo Brunelleschi built, or rather, drew them, for the most part centuries ahead of his time. It was partly Fekete's trip to Florence in 1968, and partly an album containing Brunelleschi's drawings that set him to work on this new series of sculptures; so far he has completed eleven and is currently working on the twelfth. With amazing ingenuity, he designed and made a cross-section of Brunelleschi's chef d'oeuvre, the dome of Florence Cathedral, in the course of construction *(Homage to Brunelleschi VI)*. It is interesting to note that the master built the huge dome in an unprecedented way, without the use of scaffolding. It is here that Fekete's experiences as a factory tool-maker and designer really come to the fore: on the basis of the existing drawings we see a partial solution to the incredibly daring architectural and mechanical task—which may not actually have been solved in this way, or not entirely. The rest of the Brunelleschi statues are in a similar vein: various complicated and asymmetrical hoists and elevators, transmissions' solutions, ratchet mechanisms, pulley systems, or, for example, the cog-wheel system reminiscent of a clutch which was designed to avoid having to constantly turn and reyoke the oxen when loading the cart. In fact this is more or less the predecessor of the clutch in our cars today. And other unnameable constructions à la Brunelleschi, but copyright

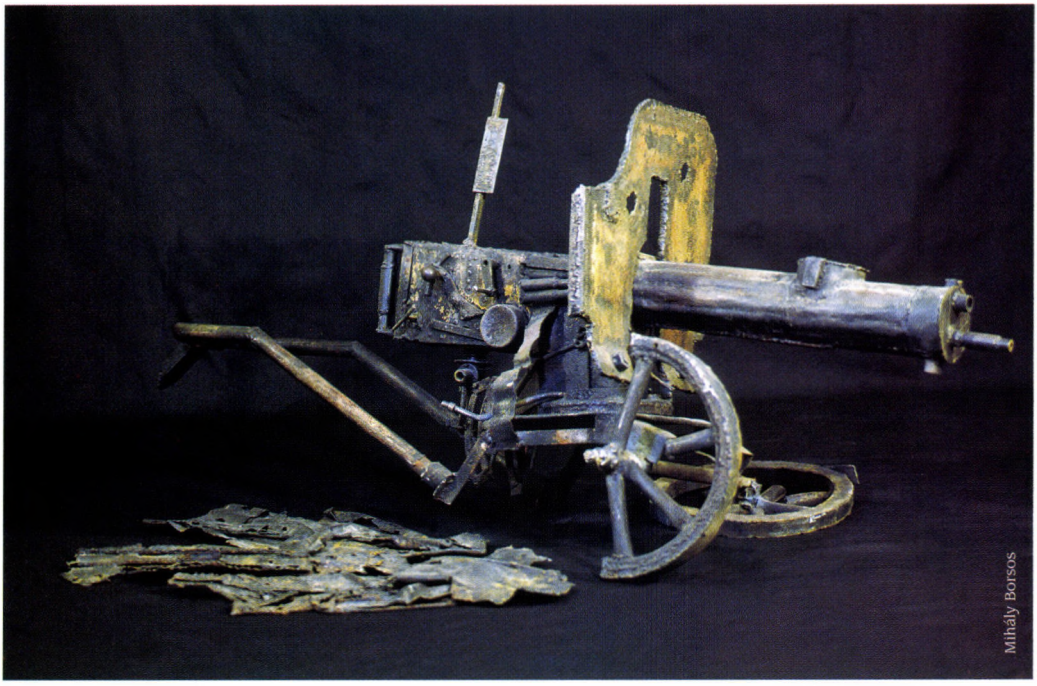
Tamás Fekete:
My Mother, 1968.
Linden-wood, 183 cm.

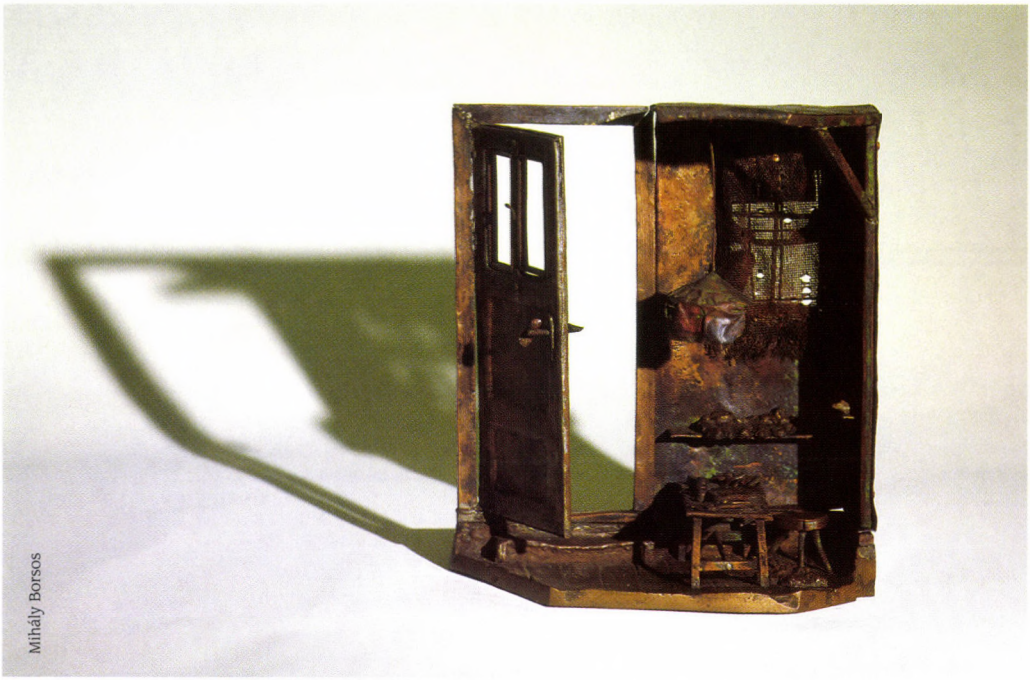
Tamás Fekete: *Poor Father*
in the Year before last of the War, 1983.
Bronze, 32 cm.

Mihály Borsos

Tamás Fekete: *My Grandmother's Dresser, 1975.* Copper, 31,5 cm.

Tamás Fekete: *In Memory of Fallen Soldiers, 1975.*
Steel, 180 cm. Hungarian National Gallery.



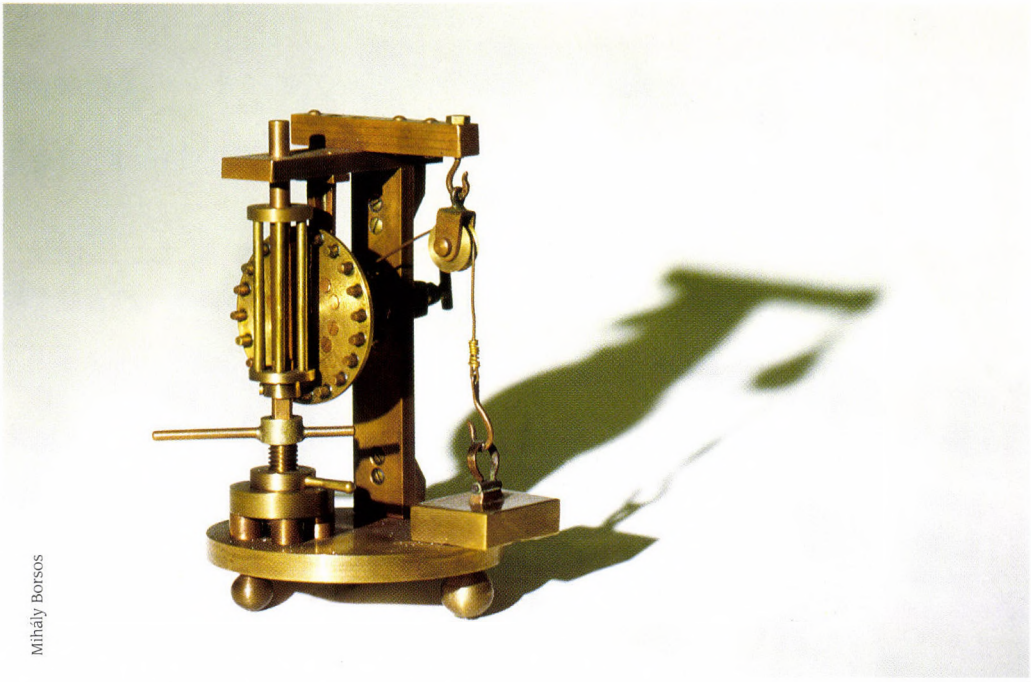


Tamás Fekete: *Cobbler's Workshop, 1974.* Bronze, copper, 26 cm.

Tamás Fekete: *Stove with Umbrella, 1973.* Bronze, copper, 23 cm.

Tamás Fekete: *Homage to Brunelleschi VI.*
Bronze, brass, copper, silver, 11 x 32 cm.

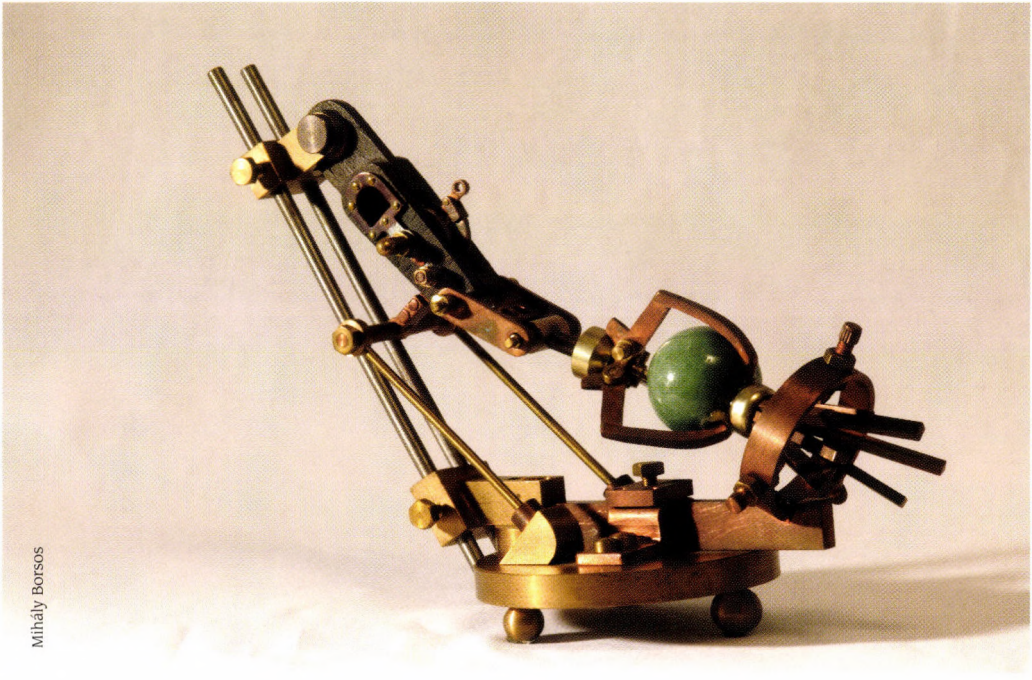
Mihály Borsos



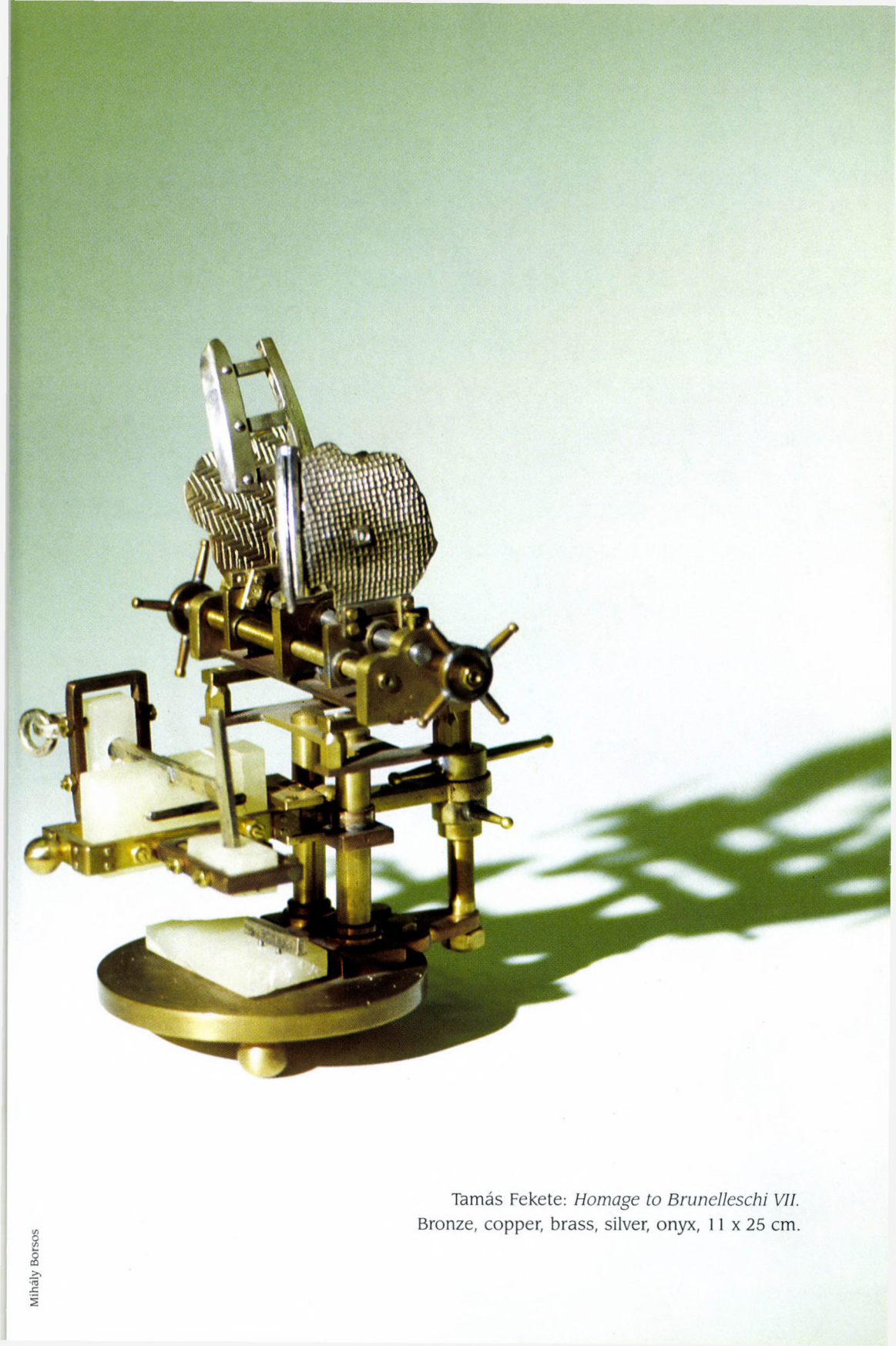
Mihály Borsos

Tamás Fekete: *Homage to Brunelleschi I.* Bronze, copper, brass, 11 x 19 cm.

Tamás Fekete: *Homage to Brunelleschi V.*
Bronze, copper, brass, oak, steel, aventurin, 11 x 34 cm.

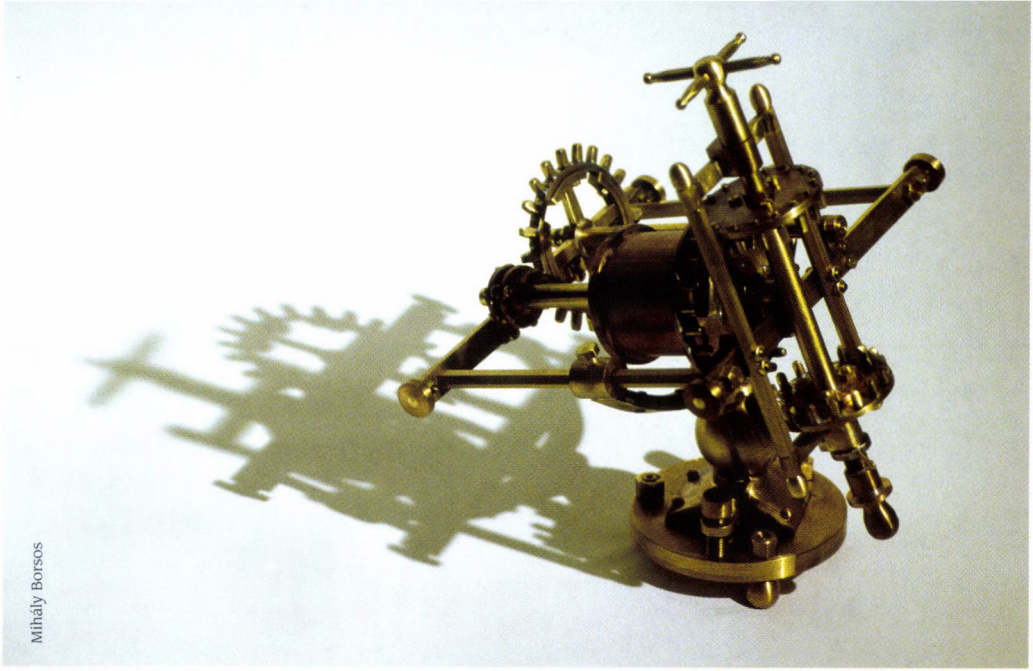


Mihály Borsos

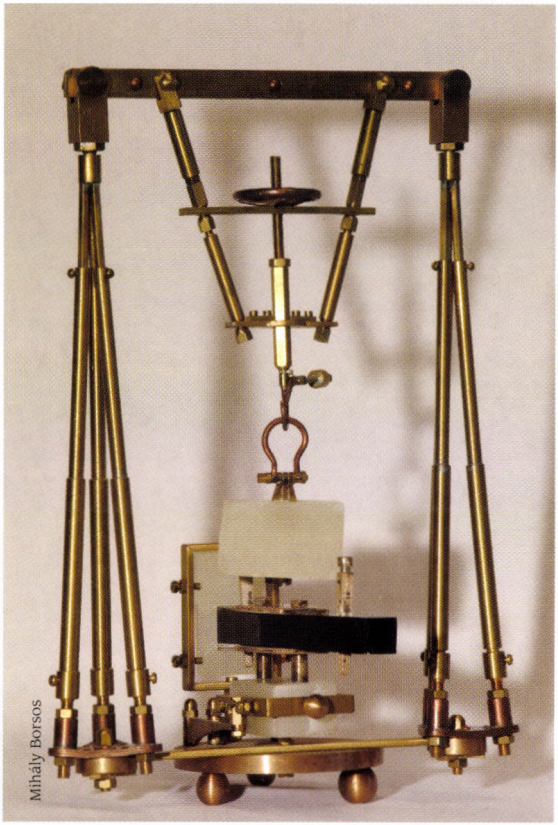


Tamás Fekete: *Homage to Brunelleschi VII.*
Bronze, copper, brass, silver, onyx, 11 x 25 cm.

Mihály Borsos



Tamás Fekete: *Homage to Brunelleschi IX.* Bronze, copper, brass, 11 x 31 cm.



Tamás Fekete:
Homage to Brunelleschi VIII.
Bronze, copper, brass, ebony,
silver, onyx, 11 x 40 cm.

Fekete, because he develops them from the mechanical point of view and raises them to an aesthetic plane, to works of art. They all "work", and are truly delightful—one can't resist walking around them, lifting them up, touching the gorgeous, smooth metal surfaces and trying out the moveable parts. Apart from bronze, copper and steel, some of them have parts in oak and ebony.

Today Fekete is a known, recognised and exhibited artist with several important awards to his name. He has been written up frequently in art magazines, and two beautifully illustrated books have been published on him. Besides small sculpture and statues in public places, he has been commissioned to make gravestones, medals and relief sculpture. He lives alone, working with great energy in his studio (which at times seems more like an assembly workshop than an artist's studio) on the third floor of an apartment block in the centre of Budapest. He is an open-minded, serious, wise man, interested in everything, of wide experience and with a real sense of humour. As for future works, Fekete claims that his Brunelleschi statues will give him enough inspiration to last a lifetime. ❧

István Deák

The Holocaust in Hungary

The Final Solution of the Jewish Question, as the Nazis called their genocidal programme, evoked widespread collaboration. With the admirable exception of Denmark and Finland, all the governments, national administrations and local authorities in Hitler's Europe participated in the execution of the Nazi programme. There was, however, a fundamental difference between the Nazi leadership, which aimed at a truly "final" solution, and the collaborationists, who were satisfied with partial extermination, trying to distinguish between "our Jews," and "their Jews," "good Jews" and "bad Jews," the wealthy and the poor, the assimilated and the non-assimilated. In other words, according to German Nazi standards, the collaborationist leaders of Italy, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Norway, the Baltic countries, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria,[1] Slovakia, Serbia and Greece lacked the necessary dedication and toughness. But then what else to expect from people who were, after all, not Germans?

The extent to which other Europeans assisted or sabotaged German intentions depended on such factors as the number, the proportion and the relative wealth of the Jewish population; the domestic tradition of anti-Semitism; the strength of the local fascistic parties; and the diligence and reliability of the bureaucratic machinery. Nor was it immaterial whether the country was an ally of Germany or had been conquered during the war. Finally, there was the crucial question of the apparent chances of a final German military victory when the time came for the Final Solution. The Netherlands, for instance, had scarcely any anti-Semitic tradition; its Nazi parties remained weak even under German occupation and most of the Dutch loathed the German occupiers; still, the

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István Deák

is an American historian born in Hungary. He teaches modern Central and East European history at Columbia University. His books on Weimar Germany's left-wing intellectuals, the 1848 Revolution in Hungary and the officer corps of the Habsburg Monarchy have appeared in English, German, Italian and Hungarian.

Netherlands allowed nearly all of its Jewish citizens to be deported to the East. This was, in part, because the German army occupied the Netherlands as early as 1940, when final German victory seemed inevitable, and, in part, because the country's queen and government had fled to London, so that there was no central authority to negotiate the terms of collaboration with the Germans. No less significantly, the Dutch bureaucrats were zealous enough in the performance of their duties to make deportation a success; for example, they issued identity cards that were virtually impossible to forge. In Romania, on the other hand, hatred and contempt for the Jews had long permeated every stratum of society and, as early as 1941, Field Marshal Ion Antonescu's pro-Nazi government, the army, and the gendarmes perpetrated their own Holocaust in Bessarabia as well as in such regions of the Ukraine that the Romanian army occupied during the war. Moreover, a huge Romanian army fought on the side of Germany in the anti-Bolshevik campaign. But Romania had a king and a strong central government enabling it to determine when and to what degree it would participate in the Final Solution. Thus when it seemed to Antonescu and his colleagues that Germany might not, after all, win the war, they made sure that the lives of Romania's remaining Jews would be spared. The situation for the Jews was also considerably alleviated by the corruption and sloth that characterised the country's bureaucracy. Thus it came about that non-anti-Semitic Netherlands lost a much higher proportion, over seventy per cent, of its Jews than anti-Semitic Romania which protected the lives of over half of its Jews.[2]

How did Hungary fit into this complex picture? To this there is no easy answer because of the extremes of Hungarian governmental policy at the time, varying between decency and evil, relatively mild and murderous anti-Semitism, pro-Nazi and anti-German behaviour. And what applies to the government, applies also to a great many of the country's inhabitants, although, as it happened in all countries, the vast majority of the population just stood by. From a Jewish point of view, what counts is that on March 18, 1944, the day before the German army occupied Hungary, that is, at a time when millions of Polish and other Jews had long been shot or gassed, there were still approximately 760,000 such persons in Hungary whom the law regarded as of the Jewish race. These people lived in their own homes, went to work daily, wore no discriminatory marks, and were free to move around in the country. Three months later, however, at least half of them were dead, in part because of the actions of the German occupation forces, but to an even greater part because of the actions of the same Hungarian authorities that, until March of that year, had protected the country's Jewish population.[3]

Altogether about two-thirds of such Jews died who lived within Hungary's 1944 boundaries, but while we must assign responsibility for their death mainly to the government and people of Hungary, we must also credit the government and the people for the survival of the remaining one-third. The fact is that the two to three hundred thousand survivors were not simply those who would have

been killed anyway, had there been time to do so, but were mostly persons whom government officials, army officers, clergymen and nuns as well as scores of individual Gentiles had saved at some risk to their own lives. Thus the balance sheet is mixed, which explains why some Jewish survivors would not hear of paying a visit to their former homeland, while others have re-affirmed their patriotism, and why Western historiography, in general, does not know how to deal with Hungary's wartime behaviour.

The age of hope

Where did it all begin? Historians agree that the unfolding of the intensive Hungarian–Jewish relationship must be sought in early nineteenth century history. Jews had long been living in what is today's Hungary when the conquering Magyar tribes arrived from the east in the ninth century, but originally theirs was a traditionalist and isolated existence. When persecution did occur, it was generally milder than in medieval and early modern Western Europe. The story becomes more exciting, and more complex, with the step-by-step integration of Jews into Hungarian society that began late in the eighteenth century as an integral part of a nation-wide drive for modernisation. Because the landowning nobility that, until the mid-nineteenth century, counted as the embodiment of the nation, was loath to engage in commerce and industry, it needed the services of the Jews. Also, once the ideas of nation and nationality took root, the same nobility became painfully aware that the Hungarian-speakers formed a minority in the country. All the more reason for them to foster the acceptance of the Jews who combined their economic usefulness with a willingness to become patriots and to exchange their German or Yiddish speech for Hungarian.

Understandably, the story was not simple, and one meets with as many signs of anti-Semitism among the reforming nobility as one meets with signs of reluctance on the part of Jews to give up their ancient way of life. Still, one can state with confidence that, in nineteenth century Europe, no country was more hospitable to Jewish immigration and assimilation, and no country won more enthusiastic support from its Jews than the Hungarian kingdom. One might say even that there existed, at least since the liberal, nationalist revolutions of 1848–1849, a tacit agreement between the ruling gentry and the enlightened, educated and patriotic segment of Jewry for a division of labour in modernising Hungary. The Jews would contribute the investment capital, supplied by some great Western banking houses, and their own business acumen, dynamism and diligence. The non-Jewish political elite would provide the legislative and administrative assistance necessary for economic expansion.[4]

The resulting success of Jews was dazzling. Although they constituted less than five per cent of the pre-First World War population, Jews created, owned and managed the majority of Hungarian heavy industry and mining, and nearly every

one of the great banks. They were hardly less successful in commerce, small entrepreneurship, crafts, the liberal professions and all aspects of culture and the arts. By the beginning of the twentieth century, they had also made significant inroads into state service, the judiciary, the officer corps and large landownership. Assimilation for the Jewish elite increasingly took the form of intermarriage.

Hungarian Jews were, as a whole, very patriotic; they supported both the Emperor-King Francis Joseph and the governing conservative-liberal parties in Hungary. Of course, not all Christian inhabitants of the country were happy with these developments; those who did not profit from the economic boom, or profited less than the others, for instance members of the ethnic minorities, impoverished gentry, the clergy, small shopkeepers, artisans, peasants, etc. tended to blame the Jews for their misfortune. In 1882–1883, there was a wave of wild anti-Semitic outbursts in connection with the so-called Tiszaeszlár blood libel trial, but the government and the dominant liberal press firmly rejected what they considered a return to medieval obscurantism.[5] The anti-Semitic political party that was set up at that time disappeared from the scene within a few years. Meanwhile, the Jewish elite would not even consider creating a separate Jewish political organization. Although Theodor Herzl was born in Budapest, his calls for a Jewish state met with categorical rejection among Hungarian Jewish leaders and in the press. For educated Jews, Judaism was but a religious denomination; therefore, Zionist nationalism amounted to treason. Few people paid attention to Herzl's warning, in 1903, to a Hungarian Jewish politician:

> The hand of fate shall also seize Hungarian Jewry. And the later this occurs, and the stronger this Jewry becomes, the more cruel and hard shall be the blow, which shall be delivered with greater savagery. There is no escape.[6]

If Zionism made no inroads in Hungarian Jewish life, political radicalism and socialist ideology did, mostly among the sons and daughters of assimilated and successful bourgeois, who turned with messianic zeal against the Hungarian ruling elite, which they identified with both retrograde feudalism and oppressive capitalism.[7] Truly, for a young intellectual imbued with the ideas of Marx, Nietzsche and Kautsky, it must have been hard to stomach such a surreal spectacle as the celebration of the 1000th anniversary of Hungary at the new and beautiful Dohány Street synagogue in Budapest. Here is the scene as described in a Neolog Jewish newspaper.

> In front of the temple, which was decorated with flags, there stood... an entire barricade of coaches that had brought the ladies and the gentlemen in white tie. In some of the more decorative private coaches arrived [Jewish] co-religionaries sporting splendid Hungarian national gala costumes, complete with sword, clasps, egret feathers [on their high fur hats], cocky, with pelisses thrown on one shoulder, frogs and loops laden with jewels, as well as gold or silver spurs attached to long and

dashing cordovan boots... The most dazzling Hungarian national gala costumes were worn by Berthold Weiss, Sándor Deutsch de Hatvan and Lajos Krausz de Megyer.[8]

Then came the First World War, in which Jews participated en masse, providing, among other things, more than one fifth of the Dual Monarchy's reserve officer corps.[9] But whereas in the armed forces anti-Semitism was not tolerated, in politics, the press and public opinion, it experienced a quick revival. Very simply, scapegoats had to be found for the suffering of the population and the death of half a million Hungarian citizen-soldiers. The defeat of the Central Powers in the fall of 1918 came as a terrible shock to a misinformed public, yet also as a welcome relief from what was perceived to be Habsburg/Austrian oppression. The fact that, in the eyes of the other peoples of the Monarchy, the Hungarians were the quintessentially dominant nationality did not in the least influence the Hungarians' perception of themselves as oppressed victims. Thus the end of the war was celebrated as the beginning of an independent and more progressive Hungary; celebration turned to despair, however, when the terrible costs of war became more visible, and when the armies of Hungary's old and new neighbours occupied much of what in pre-war times had been officially known as the "Hungarian Empire" within Austria-Hungary. For the Jews, the First World War had marked the apogee of their success; in 1944, nothing would symbolise more their fall from grace than the war-time decorations they had to leave on the walls of the houses and flats from which they were deported.

Counter-revolution and the end of the Christian-Jewish symbiosis

The military collapse brought two successive revolutions, one democratic, the other Bolshevik: in both, the youngish Jewish reformers and social critics played a crucial role. In fact, they made up almost the entire leadership of the Soviet Republic, which functioned for 133 days in 1919.[10] This regime was put an end to by the invading Romanian army acting under French guidance; the ensuing power vacuum allowed a small band of White counter-revolutionary officers to seize power in the same year. For this, they enjoyed the support of the French and British governments.

Post-First World War Hungary was not only impoverished but was inundated by refugees from the newly lost territories. Many of the refugees were civil servants and professionals, who now engaged in a desperate competition with the Jews for even the lowliest positions in commerce and the professions. This, combined with the country's dismemberment and the frightening experience with the revolutionary Soviet Republic, led to a deepening of middle-class anti-Semitism.[11]

Interwar Hungary stood for a mass of contradictions and so did its Jewish policy. The country was a kingdom without a king; its head of state was Regent

Miklós Horthy, a former Austro-Hungarian admiral, of course without a fleet. The system of government was constitutional, but the counter-revolutionary movement that had brought Horthy to power was characterised by violence and terror. Hungary had a parliament in which, as late as March 1944, sat a few Social Democratic and other progressive deputies, but the majority of deputies proclaimed fascist ideas. Both the Lower House and the Upper House were obsessed with the "Jewish question." In fact, pre-occupation with the Jews was akin to a sickness that afflicted all strata of society, but especially the educated classes.[12]

In 1920, the Hungarian parliament adopted a law meant to reduce the presence of Jewish students at the universities to something approximating their presence in the general population, which was a little less than six per cent, but this law was suspended eight years later. What counts is that the old silent contract between gentry and Jews had come to an end. Now even the most moderate counter-revolutionaries expected the majority of Jews to leave the country eventually.

The Horthy regime was desperate to open jobs, especially in industry, commerce, and the liberal professions to Gentiles, yet as late as 1935, the proportion in Hungary of Jewish lawyers, medical doctors, journalists and engineers was higher than even in the pre-First World War period, often approximating fifty per cent. The proportion of Jews among the professionals practising in the capital and among those with the biggest income was higher still.[13] And now just one more data: as late as 1941, the absolute majority of the biggest taxpayers and those with the greatest personal wealth were Jews or baptised Jews.[14] These and similar statistics were constantly harped upon up by the press and the politicians but what they failed to say was that the absolute number of Jews was steadily declining because of emigration, a low birth rate and conversions, and that once the economy began to improve, as it did in the late 1930s, there would be ample space in lucrative positions for the newly educated Christian middle class as well.

The counter-revolutionary regime advocated a militant Christian ideology, which meant that it was opposed to free masonry, liberalism, democracy, atheism, secularism, Jewish influence, Marxism, Bolshevism, cosmopolitanism, modernity, abortion, homosexuality, divorce and avant-garde art, yet many of these sinful activities and ideologies flourished in Horthy's Hungary, creating, among other things, a new golden age of literature and the arts. Despite the government's incessant anti-urban and peasantist propaganda, Budapest remained a most sophisticated place in a much poorer and much less developed countryside. In the capital, Jews made up nearly one fourth of the inhabitants and nearly one half of those with the right to vote. The press was infinitely freer than in the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany and fascist Italy, and the judiciary, although certainly class-based, often ruled in defiance of government interests. The ruling elite was badly divided between those who cultivated old-fashioned conservative values and those with fascistic inclinations, between de-

fenders and critics of the rigid social hierarchy, between moderate and radical anti-Semites, between Anglophiles and the admirers of Nazi Germany. Nor are history books correct which claim that, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, the radical right was steadily gaining ground at the expense of the moderate rightists. Rather, things changed all the time; the fascist Arrow Cross Party, for instance, had three times as many members in 1939 than in the fall of 1944 when the Germans put it in power. Also, to give another example, the conservative, Anglophile elite operating under the guidance of former prime minister Count István Bethlen almost completely regained power in 1943 as well as in the weeks preceding the Arrow Cross takeover in October 1944.[15]

The Horthy regime's main domestic policy goal was to avoid such fundamental social reforms as the distribution of the enormous landed estates among the millions of landless; its main foreign political goal was to recover some, if not all the territories that Hungary had lost after the First World War. At stake were two thirds of the old kingdom and over three million Magyar-speakers now living under foreign rule. The government's policy goals were tightly intertwined with the "Jewish question"; after all, the anti-Jewish economic measures were the beginnings of a most unfair but still genuine redistribution of wealth.[16] Also, the recovery of the lost territories required the support of Nazi Germany; Hitler's insistence on drastic anti-Jewish measures was one reason for a series of Hungarian anti-Jewish laws that began in 1938. However, ideology and greed played their part as well.

Again at war

The adoption of the first anti-Jewish law coincided with the recovery, thanks to Hitler and Mussolini, of a part of what used to be northern and northeast Hungary.

From then on territorial recovery and anti-Jewish measures intertwined until nearly one half of the lost lands had been regained and the country's anti-Semitic laws had become at least as drastic in their definition of race as those of Germany. But, unlike in Germany, these laws were often respected in their breach and, strange as it may sound, until March 1944, most Jews still worked in their professions, if often at a reduced salary.

In June 1941, Hungary entered the military campaign against the Soviet Union, which gradually brought it into war with Great Britain and the United States. But while the Soviet Union and Bolshevism were seen as true enemies, the conservative Horthy regime went out of its way to show admiration and friendship toward the British and the Americans.[17]

In the winter of 1942–1943, a great Soviet offensive destroyed the Hungarian army at the front; among the dead, the frozen and the PoWs were thousands of Jews whom the army high command had drafted for labour service. By then, even highly decorated Jewish reserve officers had been deprived of their ranks

and those who had been drafted had to dig ditches or clear minefields in the firing line. It was as if the army found a particular delight in torturing and killing the decorated heroes as well as the intellectuals among the Jewish labour-service men. One of the victims tortured to death in Ukraine was the Olympic gold medalist and reserve officer Attila Petschauer, whose cruel death inspired a horrifying scene in István Szabó's celebrated film, *Sunshine*. But, again, by far not all Jewish labour-service men were mistreated by their guards, and the Jewish forced labourers suffered fewer casualties due to combat, the atrocious winter weather, and the sadism of their Hungarian guards than as a result of hunger and epidemics in the Soviet PoW camps. The Red Army treated the captured labour-service men no better than it treated the captured Hungarian military.[18]

The government of Miklós Kállay that Regent Horthy installed in March 1942, with the mission of cautiously counterbalancing the German and local fascist influence, at first adopted a few more anti-Semitic measures but, following the defeat of the Hungarian Second Army at the Don River and the German defeat at Stalingrad, changed its policy toward the Jews. The lot of the Jewish labour-service men was considerably alleviated, and the anti-Jewish laws were not always put into effect. Moreover, British and American bombers flying over the country were not fired upon, and Prime Minister Kállay attempted to reach a secret agreement with the Western Allies. But the British and US land forces were nowhere to be seen.[19] Fully informed through his spies of Hungarian machinations and alarmed by the approach of the Red Army, Hitler ordered the German armed forces into Hungary on March 19, 1944. There was no resistance and, within a few days, Regent Horthy was caused to appoint a new, strongly pro-Nazi government.

From March to October

Because the German occupation of Hungary was followed by the Holocaust of Hungarian Jewry, the mobilisation of the non-Jewish population for total war, the Soviet invasion and the country's destruction, Hungarians have been asking themselves ever since what could have been done to avoid it. During the first thirty years after the war, the unanimous judgment of both Communist and democratic authors was that Horthy and Prime Minister Kállay should have turned against the Germans and ordered armed resistance, at least on the day of the German invasion. Yet such a move was scarcely possible in a country whose pro-German elements, especially within the military, wielded enormous influence and power. A more sophisticated view is that of Randolph L. Braham, the foremost historian of the Hungarian Jewish Holocaust, who writes:

> Ironically, it appears in retrospect that had Hungary continued to remain a militarily passive but politically vocal ally of the Third Reich instead of provocatively engaging in essentially fruitless, if not merely alibi-establishing, diplomatic maneuvers, the Jews of Hungary might possibly have survived the war relatively unscathed. [20]

Unfortunately, it is highly unlikely that had the Kállay government collaborated more vocally, the Hungarian Jews would have escaped relatively unscathed. The Final Solution was too important for the Germans to let nearly a million Jews stay alive in Central Europe. Still, Braham's argument makes clear that, in 1944 at least, Jews and non-Jews did not have the same immediate interests, and that the meaning and consequences of resistance and collaboration cannot be given a uniform interpretation. For the Jews, every day gained improved their chances of ultimate survival; therefore, it was not in their interest for the government to provoke German aggression. But it was very much in the interest of Hungary as a whole to show, no matter how symbolically, that it was not a German satellite.[21]

When General Döme Sztójay's puppet government took over, late in March 1944, 60,000 odd Hungarian Jews were already dead. Among them, 15–20,000 had been killed by the SS and the Ukrainian militia in the spring of 1942, following the deportation of these Jews from northeastern Hungary to Galicia who were unable to provide evidence of their Hungarian citizenship; another one thousand or less were massacred by the Hungarian military during a "cleansing" operation in northern Yugoslavia, and the rest died, as already shown, either in a theatre of war, in 1942–1943, or in Soviet PoW camps. Now the operation began in earnest against the remaining 760,000, about one hundred thousand of whom were Christians by religion. Within a few weeks, those whom the law regarded as Jews were excluded from all skilled employment and their food and clothing rations were drastically cut. They were subjected to the authority of the newly created Jewish Councils, who were then ordered to help confiscate Jewish telephones, radios, dogs, horses, stamp collections, art works, jewelry and bank accounts. In addition, huge bribes had to be paid to Eichmann's Gestapo detachment, who arrived in Hungary with the German troops.

On April 5, all Jews were made to wear a yellow star and two days later the first secret directives were issued concerning the ghettoisation of Hungarian Jewry. The transfer of Jews into the newly created ghettoes began late in April; systematic mass deportation started on May 15 and ended only in July; in that short period 437,000 persons were dispatched to Auschwitz of whom the great majority were gassed immediately without anyone bothering to register their names. The suffering of the deportees has been described innumerable times: the sudden departure from home, the move from a small ghetto to a larger ghetto and from there to some brick works outside a city with no shelter, hardly any food or drinkable water, and no sanitary facilities. There was the incredible brutality of the gendarmes and many of the city police who, in their ravenous hunger for silver and gold, indiscriminately tortured men, women and children. Finally came the march to the railroad station and the slow, tortured voyage in frightfully overcrowded cattle cars to the ramp in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Note, however, that some 20,000 of the deportees were diverted for industrial and agricultural labour

at Strasshof in Austria, where the great majority of them survived. Note also that those who were not gassed immediately at Auschwitz-Birkenau, meaning the relatively healthy of working age, had a fair chance of surviving the periodic "selections" as well as slave labour in German factories and mines.[22]

One of the many insoluble dilemmas of these mind-boggling events is why Regent Horthy allowed them to happen. True, he was a confessed anti-Semite but he also had some close Jewish friends; he often claimed to prefer the patriotic and assimilated sector of the Jews to the Arrow Cross "hoodlums and traitors," and a year before the German invasion he categorically rejected Nazi demands for the deportation of the Jews.

The event occurred in April 1943, at a meeting at Klessheim, where Hitler demanded that Hungary finally solve the Jewish question. According to a German report on the meeting, Horthy's reply to Hitler's comment on the matter was,

> "What, then, should [I] do with the Jews after they have essentially been denied almost every opportunity to earn a living. Why, [I] couldn't kill them."

Thereupon Goebbels wrote in his diary on May 8, 1943:

> The Jewish question is solved least satisfactorily by the Hungarians. The Hungarian state is permeated by Jews, and the Fuhrer did not succeed during his talk with Horthy to convince the latter of the necessity of more stringent measures....He [Horthy] gave a number of humanitarian counterarguments which of course do not apply at all to this situation." [23]

And now the same old-fashioned gentleman who claimed to follow in the footsteps of Francis Joseph, his famously tolerant former master, informed the council of ministers that he was leaving Jewish matters entirely in their hands. Horthy also quietly assured his visitors that the Jews were simply taken to Germany for useful labour; as a humanitarian gesture, the Germans allowed their families to go with them. He said this knowing full well that, aside from the Jews of Budapest, the only other Jews not deported abroad were men of working age; by June 1944, all Jewish men between the ages of 18 and 48 had been drafted into military labour service, and therefore those who went to the gas chambers were mostly women, children, the old and the infirm. There is really no other answer to the Horthy dilemma than that he was weak and easily influenced, a type of behaviour with which he certainly did not stand alone in Europe.

And what about those serving under the Regent? It has been calculated that 200,000 persons in public service participated in the swift and amazingly efficient execution of the deportations. They included, from Prime Minister Sztójay, through Andor Jaross, László Endre and László Baky, that trio in the cabinet who were directly in charge of the Hungarian Final Solution, down to county prefects and sub-prefects, the mayors, the entire administrative machinery, including the gendarmes, the police, the railroad men and such teachers who had

been drafted into assisting the bureaucrats. Even doctors and midwives were called upon to search the intimate parts of Jewish women for hidden jewelry. History does not record a single instance of a public servant openly refusing to co-operate, yet the punishment would have been minimal. It is true, however, that dozens were dismissed from the higher echelons of service and dozens of others chose retirement. Their deputies took over immediately and completed the process of deportations.

In many places people cried when watching the sorry parade of their former neighbours but then the lure of abandoned goods proved to be irresistible, and there was wholesale looting.[24] A few church leaders tried to intervene in order to alleviate the condition of the baptised Jews in the camps, but basically no one publicly protested the deportations. Nor did anyone attempt to sabotage the trains.

It was indeed a smooth operation, in which the Jewish councils, too, performed their assigned role. The Central Council in Budapest and the local councils have been the subject of much debate with, for instance, both Hannah Arendt and Randolph Braham strongly condemning the councils' collaborationist attitudes.[25] And it is true that these Jewish dignitaries, formerly with good governmental connections and often highly decorated by the Horthy regime, could think of no other action but dutiful obedience. They were patriots who remained confident that the Regent and their other Gentile patrons would not abandon them and their flock. There is no doubt, however, that some Council leaders and many Council employees were overzealous in trying to please the Germans and the Hungarian authorities. Witness the contemporary anecdote:

> There is violent banging on the door of a Jewish family early in the morning. All are terrified; finally, the wife gathers enough courage to open the door. She returns much relieved and smiling: "Relax, it is not the Jewish Council, only the Gestapo."

What would have happened if the Councils had refused to obey orders and instead tried to encourage their flock to flee for their lives? It is not clear how such a message could have been communicated and where the hundreds of thousands would have been able to hide. Also, the chaos created by massive disobedience would have benefited primarily the most enterprising, the wealthy, the secularised and the assimilated who were, in any case, often able to fend for themselves. Finally, to ask the Council members to engage in a massive disobedience or to commit suicide, as Hannah Arendt has suggested, is to demand that they get out of their skin.

But why did the Hungarian authorities obey Eichmann and his minuscule crew of a few dozen specialists? Clearly, there remained only a few months before the arrival of the Red Army when those who had collaborated with the Germans were likely to be punished. The answer can only be that those who participated in the Final Solution found the threat of eventual punishment less compelling than the immediate satisfaction of seeing the Jews go away and of

being able to acquire houses, apartments, shops and well-paying positions—or for a shoeless poor peasant to acquire a pair of good boots. One thing is certain: even those who bemoaned the fate of the Jews did not expect them ever to return. There is a shattering passage in Imre Kertész's Nobel-Prize-winning novel, *Fateless,* on the last encounter between the deported Jews and a Gentile Hungarian. Kertész's hero, the boy George Köves, reaches the Polish border in a crowded railroad car when a Hungarian gendarme appears at the entrance, offering to relieve the suffocating passengers of their hidden jewels, gold and money:

> "Men," he said to us, "you've reached the Hungarian border." He wanted to use this occasion to make an appeal to us... it was his opinion that we had no need of these where we were going... everything we might still hold on to would be taken from us by the Germans anyway... why shouldn't these things find their final resting place in Hungarian, rather than German, hands?

The gendarme's appeal got him nowhere because the inmates of the car demanded water first and only then would they give up their valuables; he, on the other hand, insisted on a reverse order of proceedings. "After all, you are still Hungarians," the gendarme exclaimed.

> Finally the furious military policeman concluded: "Stinking Jews, you make a business out of even the holiest of things!" And in a voice choking with outrage and disgust, he added this wish: "Die of thirst, then!"[26]

The deportations did not remain a secret and Horthy soon began to receive messages from István Bethlen, who was in hiding, as well from other such conservative, mostly aristocratic politicians whom the Gestapo had not been able to arrest. Now, at last, Pope Pius XII, King Gustav VII of Sweden, President Roosevelt, and other world leaders also began to send messages, urging the Regent to act to protect the remaining Jews in Hungary. Deeply impressed by Allied successes in Normandy, Horthy on July 7, 1944, forbade further deportations. The interdiction came when the gendarmes gathered in Budapest to begin deporting the 200,000 odd Jews in the capital. Persuaded by his conservative friends that the gendarmes and some far right politicians were planning a coup d'état against him, the Regent ordered some armoured units to Budapest.

The smoothness and speed of the deportation of the Hungarian Jews from the provinces was unique in the history of the Holocaust; but so was Horthy's decision to order military forces to prevent the deportation of Jews. Although Eichmann subsequently managed literally to smuggle a few thousand more Jews to Auschwitz, in July the deportations came to an end, not to be renewed until after Horthy's overthrow in October.[27]

Now came another surreal period in wartime Jewish history when those in Budapest were quartered in so-called Yellow-Star houses and suffered from

many humiliating restrictions but were also able to make plans for the opening of schools for Jewish children in September, and when it was relatively easy to obtain a certificate from the Regent's office exempting one from the anti-Jewish laws. Also, the Swedish, Swiss, Portuguese and Vatican representatives began to hand out papers, which offered a degree of personal protection with the vague promise of post-war immigration to their country or else emigration to Palestine. Moreover, those in labour service were generally decently fed and could feel quite safe; at the time of the deportations to Auschwitz, many of the men of military age had been literally saved in the last minute by the military authorities. Considering that, before March 1944, the army was notoriously more anti-Semitic and more pro-German than the civilian leadership, its relatively lenient behaviour in the spring and summer of 1944 belongs to the many unsolved mysteries of the period.

Early in September 1944, following Romania's sudden defection to the Allied side, the Red Army invaded Hungary. Horthy had already dismissed his pro-Nazi prime minister and he now began to negotiate an armistice with the Soviet Union —hoping for an agreement which would allow the German troops to withdraw unmolested—but discussions proceeded slowly. The Germans knew about these plans; they began to prepare for a coup d'état and, as a first step, on October 15 they kidnapped Miklós Horthy, Jr., the Regent's surviving son, whose older brother had been killed when his plane crashed on the Russian front. Horthy announced his intention to surrender to the Red Army that same day, but the army high command, imbued with the fanatical anti-communism which Horthy himself had encouraged, refused to follow his instructions and the surrender attempt failed. German SS and paratroopers arrested Horthy and, in order to secure his son's safety, the old man signed a piece of paper which made his archrival, the Arrow Cross leader Ferenc Szálasi, his successor. Horthy and his family were then put on a train to Bavaria where they were held under house arrest. A few military commanders went over to the Soviets; the army as a whole, however, swore loyalty to Szálasi—not that its fighting ability was of high quality.

Arrow Cross rule

The pre-March and post-March 1944 political leadership did not differ socially from one another; they were all products of the counter-revolution and had their origins in the old aristocracy, gentry and the civil service; only in that they held differing views on Hungary, its Jews and the war. Even the conservative and liberal critics of the Horthy regime originated from the same counter-revolutionary elite. But those whom the SS now entrusted with mobilising the country for a last-ditch defence were different, not because they had no titled aristocrats and old gentry among them (in Hungary nothing ever happened without a few counts and other noblemen) but because they included many people drawn from other classes of society, even from the Lumpenproletariat.

The Arrow Cross has been judged harshly; for instance, while the people's courts tried members of the Horthy regime as individuals, members of the Szálasi regime were branded collectively as traitors and war criminals. The politics of the group was described as of hare-brained ideas and extreme violence; today, Hungarian nationalist circles routinely blame the Arrow Cross for all the crimes of the period; indeed, Szálasi has become the supreme alibi of Regent Horthy and his cohorts. It is currently quite common to hear a younger generation of Hungarians, nay even some confused Jewish survivors, stating that Szálasi had come to power in March 1944 and that the Arrow Cross militia was at least partly responsible for the brutalities of the deportation to Auschwitz. In reality, the latter was the work exclusively of the old administration under Regent Horthy.[28]

Following Horthy's overthrow, Eichmann came back to Hungary to complete his deportation project, but things had changed substantially. The SS Führer Heinrich Himmler no longer allowed deportations to Auschwitz and, in any case, the Red Army was approaching. So late in November, 50,000 Budapest Jews, mostly women, as well as nearly the same number of labour-service men were marched off to the Austrian border, there to build fortifications. The monstrosity of the Arrow Cross militia and the soldiers who guarded the deportees was surpassed only by the monstrosity of the Austrian Hitler-Jugend and other local uniformed formations that took over the deportees at the border.[29] The behaviour of the peasant population ranged from the helpful through the indifferent to the murderously hostile in both countries.

Amazingly, thousands of Jews, especially among the old, were turned around and brought back to Budapest through the decision of Himmler and through the efforts, especially, of Raoul Wallenberg, who was a delegate of the American War Refugee Board, acting under the protection of the Swedish Legation in Hungary. The activities of Wallenberg, the Swiss Consul Carl Lutz, the Papal Nuncio Angelo Rotta, the pseudo-Spanish Consul (in reality an Italian anti-Nazi) Giorgio (Jorge) Perlasca, and the International Red Cross representative Friedrich Born constitute perhaps the best-known chapter of the Hungarian Holocaust.[30] These courageous men used mainly the promise of diplomatic recognition by their own governments to impress the Arrow Cross leaders; as a result, they were able to distribute protective passes to thousands of Jews as well as to bring back others from the road to Austria. Most importantly, the consuls caused the creation of a number of so-called Protected Buildings in a once heavily Jewish upper-middle class area of Budapest. But before we accept the claims of the enthusiasts that Wallenberg, for instance, saved the lives of one hundred thousand Jews, we have to consider that were all the claims true, the consuls would have saved more lives than there were Jews left in Budapest. We must also consider that Wallenberg and Co. owned at best a few pistols among them, and that they would have been powerless to save any lives had some Arrow Cross leaders, as for instance the Foreign Minister Baron Gábor Kemény, not been willing to co-

operate with them. Ultimately, the decision not to have all the Jews of Budapest killed was that of the Szálasi government. Of course, there is no particular merit in not committing even more murders, but the fact of Arrow Cross co-operation with the consuls must be registered.[31]

The most important of the regime's decisions was to set up a Ghetto in Budapest, late in November, which ended up housing nearly a hundred thousand Jews. This was at that time a unique institution in Europe.[32] Conditions inside the wooden-board fence were atrocious, but the Budapest municipality fed the inhabitants so long as any food could be found and a mixed crew of policemen and Arrow Cross militiamen offered some degree of protection against roving bands of other Arrow Cross militiamen and SS men; such protection was something sorely missing at the Swedish, Swiss and other Protected Buildings. As conditions in Budapest worsened and the Szálasi government took off to Western Hungary towards the end of December, the capital remained in the hands of local Arrow Cross leaders, who terrorized the entire population and, among other things, regularly took out inhabitants of the Protected Buildings to shoot them into the nearby Danube River. Meanwhile, however, small units belonging to Zionist organizations had installed themselves under the protection of especially the Swiss Consulate and forged thousands of papers, birth certificates and whatever one needed to hide in the city. This, of course, often devalued the real documents, and Arrow Cross authorities tore up such papers as often as they accepted them. The Zionists had long concluded that there was no point in trying to offer armed resistance; this was left to a handful of Communists and other armed partisans; nevertheless, the Zionists' efforts were invaluable.[33]

The Red Army reached the southeastern outskirts of Budapest at the end of November 1944 and, on December 24, in a dashing move, Soviet tanks surrounded the entire capital. The chaos and the hardships in the place are impossible to describe in a few sentences. Before the siege began, the Arrow Cross regime attempted to mobilise the entire population, or at least to force everyone to move to the West. Ever more bloodthirsty proclamations threatened recalcitrants with immediate execution. Because almost no one obeyed the mad orders, the city was now hiding thousands of deserters and draft dodgers, which meant that the population at large had become accomplices, in a way, with the Jews in the ghetto and, even more, with those in hiding. It seems that about 25,000 Jews and baptized Jews survived the war and the siege disguised as Gentiles. Considering, however, that in Budapest almost everyone was capable of detecting a Jew and also that most of those in hiding were not denounced, it is likely that at least a hundred thousand Gentiles gave active assistance to the Jews, while many more simply looked the other way.[34] The tragedy is that such popular solidarity was all but inconceivable in the spring when the deportations to Auschwitz took place.

Because of the furious madness of roving Arrow Cross bands, it was now truly risky to hide a Jew. In this connection, let me name only three of the saviours, the Catholic Grey Sister Margit Schlachta, the Lutheran minister Gábor Sztehló and the journalist Béla Stollár. The first repeatedly intervened on behalf of the Slovak Jews during the war as well as journeying to see the Pope on their behalf; in 1944, she mobilised her entire order to assist the Hungarian Jews. The second harboured hundreds of Jewish children in different homes. The third hid many Jews as well as providing others with forged papers; he also set up a small resistance group made up of deserters and Jewish escapees from labour-service. On Christmas Day of 1944, Béla Stollár and his companions were killed in a gunfight with the gendarmes and the Arrow Cross militia. That there were many others equally brave is shown by the hundreds of Hungarian names among the Righteous Gentiles listed at the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem.

Liberation and post-war trauma

The siege of Budapest led to enormous destruction and the death of about 20,000 civilians, maybe half of whom were Jews. The Red Army freed the starving Jews in the Ghetto and in the Protected Buildings between January 16 and 18, 1945. Many of those hiding on the Buda side of the city had to wait until February 13 to be free. No doubt, most were painfully aware that what was liberation for them, appeared as enemy occupation to their Gentile neighbours. In any case, both Jews and Gentiles suffered from the rapaciousness and unpredictability of the Red Army. The classic picture is that of the recently freed Jewish survivor being taken into a Soviet PoW camp and ending up in Siberia simply because the Soviets needed workers to help rebuild their country.

The Jews who had been dragged to the West from Budapest in Arrow Cross times were liberated only in the last days of the war in places like Dachau and Mauthausen, where they often met with the survivors of the death marches from Auschwitz and other concentration camps in the east. The death rate among the deportees was enormous both before and following liberation by the US army; many died because of the sudden availability of nourishing food. Soon, the majority of survivors made their way home, often in the company of Hungarian soldiers, right-wing refugees, students and others who had been ordered abroad by the Arrow Cross regime. Many among these people returned not to Hungary but to areas that now again belonged, respectively, to Romania, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, or to a land that had been part of Czechoslovakia then became Hungary but was now part of the Soviet Ukraine. Thousands of Jewish survivors as well as fugitive war criminals and other Gentile refugees remained in Germany, many Jews hoping to get to Palestine, others, whether Jewish or non-Jewish, eventually moving to the USA, Canada, Australia and in the case of the war criminals, mainly to Argentina.

The postwar fate of the survivors and of the perpetrators, the memory of the Holocaust or rather, how both Communists and nationalists attempted to play down its memory, deserve a separate essay. Here it should be enough to say that retribution under the aegis of a democratic coalition regime was more severe than in most other countries and that, despite many grave shortcomings, the proceedings of the newly constituted people's courts were adequate. Certainly, these were no show trials, and every defendant had his day in court. Many of the guilty escaped justice, especially those who had fled west with the German troops, but over three hundred of the principal war criminals were sent back by the US Army in 1945–1946. As a result, four prime ministers, including, of course, Döme Sztójay and Ferenc Szálasi, were executed, together with nearly two hundred other generals, politicians, high-ranking civil servants as well as ordinary sadists and the murderers of Jews. Prime minister László Bárdossy was shot for the debatable crime of having waged war on the Soviet Union, but crimes against the Jews figured in almost every trial. Regent Horthy was never tried, in part because the Americans refused to send him back from his German exile, and in part because Stalin appreciated Horthy's effort, in October 1944, to secede from the war. He died in Portugal in 1957, having been supported, as a penniless refugee, by a few American diplomats and by his Jewish friends. If anyone should ever have been both decorated for valour and executed for the vilest of crimes against humanity, it was this dignified, charming, rather dim-witted former Austro-Hungarian admiral.[35]

The reconstruction of a Hungary in ruins proceeded at an amazing pace in which Jewish entrepreneurs and engineers played a crucial role. Moreover, because the Jews alone were absolutely reliable and untainted by fascist crimes, the Soviet occupation authorities, and the first democratic coalition governments, entrusted the Jewish survivors with key positions in the police and administration. In 1947–1949, the Communist leaders, returning from Moscow, gradually established a totalitarian dictatorship; the infamous Bolshevik "Quadriga," consisting of Mátyás Rákosi, Ernő Gerő, Mihály Farkas and József Révai, were all of Jewish origin and so was the head, as well as many commanders, of the powerful political police. Thus it came that, following the massacre of most of the Hungarian Jews, individual Jews assumed control, for the first time since 1919, not only of much of the economy but also of politics and the administration. Ironically, it was as if the right-wing regimes had made sure that only the most vigorous, the most talented, and the most revengeful of the Jewish population should survive: the rich, the assimilated and the labour-service men who came home to find their homes pillaged and their families forever gone. The most mind-boggling aspect of these developments was that all the Communists firmly hid their Jewish origins, and that Jewish political policemen unhesitatingly tortured their Jewish—and Gentile—victims, more and more of whom were themselves Communists.

All this lasted only a few years. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, many of the Second World War expropriators of Jewish goods were themselves expropriated and very soon a new elite arose, often of peasant and working-class stock; meanwhile, most of the Jews, whether Communists, non-Communists, or anti-Communists, left the country. Today, there exists only a very small community of maybe 15,000 practising Jews, although there are many other Hungarians of Jewish or partly Jewish origin. Happily, the feared anti-Semitic scapegoating for Communist rule never took place, although there were some local cases in 1946, with maybe a half a dozen victims.

After the war, as a form of collective punishment, much of Hungary's German-speaking minority, nearly 200,000 persons, was expelled from the country. The great historic ethnic cleansing that marked the twentieth century was now almost complete, a procedure that seems to have taken place everywhere in Eastern and Central Europe at great cost in suffering, in economic crises and in declining public morality. Only slowly are the leaders of these countries coming to the recognition that the expulsions, deportations and killings were self-defeating madness; it is good to know that today's Hungarian government leads the way in this process of recognition. ❧

NOTES

1 ■ Please note that whereas the Bulgarian government refused to surrender its 50,000 odd Jews to the Nazi death machine, it readily deported to Treblinka in Poland the 11,000 odd Jews who lived in Macedonia and Thrace, territories in Yugoslavia and Greece, respectively, which the Bulgarians administered during the war. Almost none of the deportees survived the war. For an illuminating analysis of this subject, see Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fragility of Goodness: Why Bulgaria's Jews Survived the Holocaust* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999).

2 ■ The Holocaust in general, as well as in its specific aspects, boasts an enormous literature, yet information on individual countries is still hard to find, especially in English. For events in the Netherlands, see Jacob Presser, *The Destruction of the Dutch Jews* (New York: Dutton, 1969), and on Romania, Jean Ancel, "The Romanian Way of Solving the 'Jewish Problem' in Bessarabia and Bukovina, June-July 1941," *Yad Vashem Studies* 19 (1988), pp. 187–232, as well as by the same author, "Romania: Jews during the Holocaust," in Israel Gutman, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* (New York: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 1292–1300.

3 ■ By far the most important general work on the Hungarian Holocaust, in any language, is Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary,* 2 volumes (Revised and enlarged edition; New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). Professor Braham is the author of about a dozen other books on the destruction of Hungarian and, specifically, Transylvanian Jews. For other works on the Hungarian Genocide, see T.D, Kramer, *From Emancipation to Catastrophe: The Rise and Holocaust of Hungarian Jewry* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2000, and Vera Ránki, *The Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion: Jews and Nationalism in Hungary* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1999). Please note that statistical data on Jewish losses are always approximations for such reasons as, for instance, that at least ten per cent of those of the "Jewish race" were Christians by religious affiliation and therefore did not figure in the statistics on the Jewish population. Furthermore, more than one third of the Jews lived in lands that belonged to Hungary only during the war; therefore, survivors from those lands may or may not figure in the postwar Hungarian statistics. In addition, many

Jews did not report their survival after the war or simply remained abroad, meaning that official statistics could not account for them. Finally, the postwar regime deliberately and rightly ignored religious affiliation in its statistics.

4 ■ The best history of Hungarian Jews in English is Raphael Patai, *The Jews of Hungary: History, Culture and Psychology* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996).

5 ■ See Andrew Handler, *Blood Libel at Tiszaeszlár* (East European Monographs 68; Distributed by Columbia University Press, 1980).

6 ■ Theodor Herzl to Ernő Mezei, who was a member of the Hungarian parliament, on March 10, 1903. Quoted in T. D. Kramer, op. cit. p. xii.

7 ■ On the much debated subject of Jewish participation in the Hungarian radical movements before the First World War see, for instance, John Lukacs, *Budapest 1900: A Historical Portrait of a City and Its Culture* (New York: Weidenfels and Nicolson, 1988), especially chapter 6.

8 ■ *Egyenlőség* (Budapest), May 15, 1896. Quoted in Gábor Schweitzer, "Miért (nem) kellett Herzl a magyar zsidóknak? A politikai cionizmus kezdetei és a magyarországi zsidó közvélemény," [Why the Hungarian Jews did (not) need Herzl. The beginnings of Hungarian Zionism and Jewish public opinion in Hungary], *Budapesti Negyed*, Summer 1994, p. 42.

Note that the splendid and frightfully expensive national gala costumes were the creation of the nineteenth century Hungarian nationalist imagination. Their wearers, all members of the highest Hungarian political, social, economic and cultural elite, dressed the way they thought the ninth-century Chieftain Árpád and/or the sixteenth-century Hungarian aristocratic warriors were dressed. Needless to say, the great tailors who created the rather theatrical outfits were mostly of Czech, Austrian or Jewish origin.

9 ■ On Jews in the Habsburg Army before and after the First World War, see István Deák, *Beyond Nationalism: A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848–1918* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 172–178 et passim, and Erwin A. Schmidl, *Jews in the Habsburg Armed Forces, 1788–1918* (Studia Judaica Austriaca, XI; Eisenstadt: Österreichisches Jüdisches Museum, 1989).

10 ■ On the role of Jews in the Hungarian Soviet Republic, see Charles Gati, *Hungary and the Soviet Bloc* (Durham, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), pp. 100–107, and Rudolf L. Tőkés, *Béla Kun and the Hungarian Soviet Republic; The Origins and Role of the Communist Party of Hungary in the Revolutions of 1918–1919* (Stanford, Cal.: F. A. Praeger, 1967).

11 ■ On the over-production or better, the under-employment of the Hungarian intelligentsia in the interwar period, see Mária M. Kovács, *Liberal Professions and Illiberal Politics: Hungary from the Habsburgs to the Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994)

12 ■ A very fine work on Regent Miklós Horthy is Thomas Sakmyster, *Hungary's Admiral on Horseback: Miklós Horthy, 1918–1944* (East European Monographs 396; Distributed by Columbia University Press, 1994). For an essay on Sakmyster's book, see István Deák, *Essays on Hitler's Europe* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), pp. 148–158. On twentieth-century Hungarian politics and society, in English, see László Kontler, *A History of Hungary: Millenium in Central Europe* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), chapter VII; Paul Lendvai, *The Hungarians: 1000 Years of Victory in Defeat* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), chapters 30–33 and, especially, Ignác Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century* (Budapest: Corvina, 1999).

13 ■ For all further information on the role of Jews in the professions, business and industry as well as on the wartime spoliation of the Jews, the reader is referred to Gábor Kádár–Zoltán Vági, "Rationality or Irrationality? The Annihilation of Hungarian Jews," *The Hungarian Quarterly*, vol. 45, 174, Summer 2004, pp. 32–54. Please note that converts to Christianity, often the best educated among the Jews, were heavily represented in business and the liberal professions, adding substantially to the proportion of unconverted Jews.

14 ■ Dezső Zentay, *Beszélő számok* [Eloquent numbers] (Budapest: Globus, 1941), pp. 102–103.

15 ■ On Bethlen see, Ignác Romsics, *István Bethlen: A Great Conservative Statesman of Hungary, 1874–1946*, translated from the Hungarian by Mario D. Fenyo (New York: Distributed by Columbia University Press, 1995)

16 ■ It has been calculated that, in 1938, Jews

owned up to one-fourth of the national wealth. For all further details, see again, Kádár–Vági, "Rationality or Irrationality?" *The Hungarian Quarterly,* No. 174, Summer 2004, pp. 32–54.

17 ■ A characteristic victim of this charm attack was the US minister to Hungary, John Flournoy Montgomery, whose *Hungary: The Unwilling Satellite* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1947), exculpates the Regent and his advisers for collaboration with Nazi Germany and for the anti-Jewish laws. See also Horthy's self-apologetic *Memoirs* (New York: R. Speller, 1957).

18 ■ On the Jewish labour-service system, see Braham, *The Politics of Genocide,* chapter 10; the tragic fate of the captured labour-service men is well analysed in George Barany, "Jewish Prisoners of War in the Soviet Union During World War II," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 31 (1983), pp. 161–209. It seems that eighty per cent of the Jewish PoWs did not survive Soviet captivity.

19 ■ On all this, see Nicholas Kállay's *Hungarian Premier: a Personal Account of a Nation's Struggle in the Second World War* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1954), as well as Mario D. Fenyo, *Hitler, Horthy and Hungary: German-Hungarian Relations, 1941–1944* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972).

20 ■ Braham, *The Politics of Genocide,* pp. 233–234.

21 ■ On the question of Hungarian behaviour toward the Germans see, among others, István Deák, "A Fatal Compromise? The Debate Over Collaboration and Resistance in Hungary," in István Deák, Jan T. Gross, and Tony Judt., eds., *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and Its Aftermath* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 39–73.

22 ■ There are only a few memoirs, in English, on the process of deportation as, for instance, Judith Magyar Isaacson, *Seed of Sarah: Memoirs of a Survivor* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990). Christian Gerlach and Götz Aly, *Das letzte Kapitel. Der Mord an den ungarischen Juden 1944/1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2002) analyses the Final Solution on the basis of German documentary sources.

23 ■ The Horthy statement is cited in, among others, Lani Yahil, *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 501. The Goebbels Diary entry is in Louis Lochner, ed., *The Goebbels Diaries, 1942–1943* (Garden City, N.J., 1948), p. 357.

24 ■ On the wasteful dissipation of Jewish goods and, in general, on the catastrophic economic effect of the anti-Jewish measures, see Kádár–Vági, *The Hungarian Quarterly,* No. 174, Summer 2004.

25 ■ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: On the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking, 1963, p. 104 et passim, and Randolph L. Braham, "The Holocaust in Hungary: A Retrospective Analysis," in David Cesarani, ed., *Genocide and Rescue: The Holocaust in Hungary 1944* (Oxford: Berg, 1997), pp. 42–43. For a review of this book, see Deák, *Essays on Hitler's Europe,* pp. 159–162.

26 ■ Imre Kertész, *Fateless,* translated from the Hungarian by Christopher C. Wilson and Katharina M. Wilson (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1992), pp. 54–55. On Kertész, see István Deák, "Stranger in Hell," *The New York Review of Books,* Sept. 25, 2003, pp. 65–68.

27 ■ It must be stated that some other Jews, besides those in Budapest and those in labour service, also escaped deportation. One small but important group consisted of the members of the Baron Jenő Weiss, and related great capitalist families who, behind the back of the Sztójay government, negotiated their transportation to Portugal with representatives of the SS. In exchange, they handed over much of Hungary's heavy and armaments industry to the SS. Another, much larger group, consisting of 1,684 individuals, was allowed by Himmler to be transported out of Hungary, and all eventually reached Switzerland. The release of the group was negotiated by Rudolf (Rezső) Kasztner and other Hungarian Zionists in exchange for money and for the vague promise of Himmler and other SS leaders ultimately escaping the hangman's noose in the case of the Allies winning the War. Both the Weiss and the Kasztner cases provoked an enormous literature, which would constitute the basis for another essay. For an introduction to the subject, see Yehuda Bauer, *Jews for Sale? Nazi–Jewish Negotiations, 1933–1945* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 145– 251, as well as Gábor Kádár and Zoltán Vági, *Self-financing Genocide: The Gold Train,*

the Becher Case and the Wealth of Hungarian Jews (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), especially pp. 175-278, which discuss the case of the SS officer Kurt Becher, who was deeply involved in negotiations regarding the fate of the great capitalist families and the so-called Kasztner train.

28 ■ Nicholas Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and Others: A History of Fascism in Hungary and Romania* (2nd edition; Portland, Oregon: Center for Romanian Studies, 2001), usefully compares the Hungarian Arrow Cross movement with the Romanian Iron Guard.

29 ■ Note that after the War, most of the Austrian people's court trials dealt with the case of such Austrian soldiers and Hitlerjugend who had beaten Hungarian Jews to death. Several of the defendants were executed.

30 ■ Of the many works on Wallenberg, see especially Kati Marton, *Wallenberg* (New York: Random House, 1982) and Danny Smith, *Lost Hero: Raoul Wallenberg's Dramatic Quest to Save the Jews of Hungary* (London: HarperCollins, 2001) as well as Per Anger, *With Raoul Wallenberg in Budapest,* translated by David Paul and Margareta Paul (New York: Holocaust Library, 1981). The Swiss consul's extraordinary achievements are lovingly presented in Theo Tschuy, *Dangerous Diplomacy: The Story of Carl Lutz, Rescuer of 62,000 Jews* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2000).

31 ■ The activities of the neutral consuls are convincingly discussed in Robert Rozett, "International Intervention: the Role of Diplomats in Attempts to Rescue Jews in Hungary," in Randolph L. Braham and Scott Miller, eds., *The Nazis' Last Victims; the Holocaust in Hungary* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1998), pp. 137–152.

32 ■ On the Jewish policy of the Szálasi regime see, among others, László Karsai, "The Last Phase of the Hungarian Holocaust: the Szálasi Regime and the Jews," in Braham and Miller, *The Nazis' Last Victims,* pp. 105–116.

33 ■ On Zionist activities in Budapest see, among others, Asher Cohen, "The Dilemma of Rescue and Revolt," in Braham and Miller, The Nazis' Last Victims, pp. 117–136. Also, by the same author, *The Halutz Resistance in Hungary, 1942–1944* (Social Science Monographs; distributed by Columbia University Press, 1986).

34 ■ A characteristic case of a Jewish family in hiding is that of the financier and philanthropist George Soros, who was then fourteen. Their adventures in Budapest in 1944–1945 are entertainingly described in the memoirs of his father, Tivadar Soros, in *Masquerade: Dancing Around Death in Nazi-Occupied Hungary* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2000). The book was translated into English from the original 1965 edition in Esperanto. Not uncharacteristically, the Soros family in disguise had regular access to swimming pools, restaurants, and opera performances in Budapest and, not uncharacteristically, the author fails to recognise how many Gentiles had assisted him or, at least, how many had failed to denounce him, his mother, his wife, his sons, and other relatives in hiding. For a critique of the Soros memoirs, see István Deák, "Artful Dodger," *The New York Review of Books,* November 15, 2001.

35 ■ Retribution in post-Second World War Hungary is well discussed in László Karsai's essay, "The People's Courts and Revolutionary Justice in Hungary, 1945–46," in Deák, Gross, and Judt., eds, *The Politics of Retribution in Europe,* pp. 233–251.

John Lukacs

The Battle of Budapest Sixty Years After

Any history of the siege of Budapest in the winter of 1944–45 poses a problem for readers thousands of miles and at least two generations away. This is why I took it upon myself to write an introduction to Krisztián Ungváry's magisterial work. To the difficulties of its very complicated subject I must now turn.

One is the psychic situation even now. A curious condition that, to the best of my knowledge, has not been approached, let alone analysed, by psychohistorians, is the distinct reluctance of most civilians to talk about their horrible and demeaning experiences during a war. A recent description of this phenomenon is by the excellent German writer W. Sebald. He was astounded by how few German men and women spoke about what they suffered under the air raids during the war: strange, since they and we knew of the increasingly indiscriminate bombing of German cities, and we also know of the otherwise frequent German tendency to self-pity, especially after their defeat. Such a psychic condition applies to a great extent to Budapest and to much of Hungary in 1944–45, when the horrors of war included extensive pillaging and the rape of thousands of women by Russian soldiers. Shame and fear may explain this condition of unspoken or suppressed memories. But in the case of Budapest there was, and remains, something more than that. For many reasons—political and not only psychic—many Hungarians have not been able or willing to rethink (in plain English, to digest) the tragic history of their country and its people in 1944–45. And this in a city where a few ruins and some buildings pockmarked by shellfire during the siege are visible even now.

John Lukacs

is a Budapest-born historian, living and teaching in the U.S. since 1946. His books include Budapest 1900 *(1988),* Confessions of an Original Sinner *(1990),* The Duel *(1990),* The End of the Twentieth Century—The End of the Modern Age *(1993) and* A Thread of Years *(1999).*

This is a slightly modified and abridged version of the introduction written for the American edition of Krisztián Ungváry's The Battle of Budapest, *to be published by Yale University Press in 2005.*

I must therefore sum up Hungary's situation in 1944 and its then recent history briefly. After the First World War, for all kinds of reasons, most of them wrong, the Western allies and their newly attached "allies", Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia, applied the dubious principle of national self-determination to amputate the historic Hungarian state, depriving it of two-thirds of its territory under the terms the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, and leaving more than three million Hungarians under foreign rule. Hungary at Trianon was punished more severely than was Germany at Versailles. This happened soon after a revolution in Hungary in late 1918 which then debouched into a short-lived Communist regime in 1919, followed by a nationalist counterrevolution. The traumas of revolutions, defeat and mutilation marked Hungarian politics during the next twenty years. Hungary was still a kingdom, but only in name: the head of state was a Regent, Miklós Horthy, a former admiral. During the 1920s Hungary recovered—somewhat. During the 1930s the German Reich rose again, led by Hitler; it rapidly became the principal power in Europe, discarding and tearing up the Versailles Treaty article by article. It was thus no wonder that the Third Reich had many admirers among Hungarians, especially among the military hierarchy. Hitler had no particular sympathies for Hungary; but because of the, hardly avoidable, alignment of Hungary with Germany from 1938 to 1941, some of the lost Hungarian lands were actually reassigned to Hungary.

But now Hungary's fate was already bound to the coming Second World War. When Hitler annexed Austria in March 1938, the giant Third Reich became Hungary's immediate neighbour. Gradually it was (or at least it should have been) evident that the principal problem for the Hungarian state was no longer the regaining of its lost lands; it was (or at least it should have been) the preservation, in one way or another, of Hungary's independence. This priority was neither acknowledged nor thought about by most of the governing classes, nor by many of the Hungarian population, and especially not by the Hungarian military. The latter were largely willing to accommodate themselves and their country to the political strategy of Hitler's Germany (believing that Germany was invincible). Anti-Jewish laws (about which more later) were instituted. In November 1940 Hungary joined the Tripartite Pact, the German–Italian–Japanese alliance. In April 1941 Hungary took part in Hitler's war against Yugoslavia, despite having signed an Eternal Friendship Pact with Yugoslavia but a few months earlier. (The conservative Prime Minister Count Pál Teleki shot himself in shame). In June 1941 Hungary joined in Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union. In December 1941 Great Britain declared war on Hungary and Hungary declared war on the United States a few days later.

A Hungarian army fought alongside the Germans in Russia. But in 1942 and 1943 there were subtle changes. A few patriotic (rather than nationalist) conservatives and the Regent chose to reduce the Hungarian commitment to Hitler carefully and secretly. There was a new Prime Minister, Miklós Kállay. There

were clandestine attempts to establish contact with British and American officials. In January-February 1943 Russian forces largely destroyed the 2d Hungarian Army. By tacit consent Hungary and Budapest were not bombed by the British and American air armadas crossing Hungarian airspace. (Budapest had undergone one minor Soviet air raid in September 1942.) Save for the tragedy of the Hungarian 2nd Army, Hungary and Budapest (including the Jewish population) lived largely, though not entirely, unscathed by the war, even as the advancing Russian armies were approaching Hungary from the northeast.

Hitler now had enough. He summoned the Regent on 18 March 1944. He ordered the latter to appoint a pro-German and pro-National Socialist government. The Regent thought he had no alternative but to comply. German divisions moved into Budapest and other cities the next day. Soon after that Budapest was bombed by British and American planes. The humiliation, persecution and suppression of Hungarian Jews was now merciless. On German directives, and with the compliance of many Hungarian military and civil authorities, about 400,000 Hungarian Jews were corralled in ghettoes and then deported, most of them to Auschwitz. The great majority of them did not survive the war. The last to be collected and deported were the Jews in Budapest, about 160,000 of them. In late June and early July the Regent emerged from his apathy. Spurred by messages from President Roosevelt, the King of Sweden and Pope Pius XII, he directed a halt to the deportation of Jews from Budapest. The first Russian troops entered Hungarian territory from the southwest. On 15 October the Regent, after woefully inadequate preparations, broadcast Hungary's offer of armistice and surrender to the Allies. Within hours he was arrested by the Germans, who installed a government formed by the Arrow Cross, the Hungarian National Socialist movement, whose composition included not only fanatics but also criminals. What followed in Budapest were months of terror and then the seven-week siege.

The first Russian units approached the southeastern fringe of Budapest on 2 November; the full siege began at Christmas and it ended with the German and Hungarian collapse and surrender on 13 February 1945. Meanwhile, the hot rake of war had moved over most of Hungary, across burning villages and towns, maiming the lives of millions of people, searing their bodies and their minds. We must say something about that, too, since the Battle for Budapest involved civilians as much (if not more) than soldiers. It was a struggle of armies as well as a struggle of minds.

When the siege of Budapest began, the people of Budapest were badly, indeed tragically, divided. It is not possible to ascertain the extent of these divisions. There had been no opinion surveys (also no elections after May 1939). Divisions and contradictions frequently existed within the mind (and heart) of a single individual. Here I must essay the approximate lineaments of that torn

and racked population, in my capacity as a historian as well as a witness and participant in those memorable months.

I estimate that when the siege began, perhaps 15 per cent of the (non-Jewish) population of Budapest was willing to continue and support the war on the Germans' side. These people ranged from the fanatics of the Arrow Cross to many other men and women (not necessarily Arrow Cross) who were convinced that the arrival of the Red Army was the very worst prospect of all, one that had to be resisted. Another 15 per cent had arrived at the very opposite conclusion: that Hungary's alliance with Hitler's Reich was a political and moral disaster that had to be resisted and opposed in one way or another; that the Arrow Cross government consisted of criminals, and that therefore the sooner the Russians occupied Budapest the better. (Among this minority Communists and their sympathizers were a minuscule portion). The rest, perhaps 70 per cent of the population (please consider this as a merely approximate, indeed, arguable rule of one sensitive thumb) were numbed by their circumstances and by events, sometimes willing, sometimes unwilling to think much ahead; they were preoccupied with the existing and looming dangers for them and for their families, and had nothing like a clear idea of what the end of the siege would bring.

There was (and is) no sociographic explanation for these deep, and sometimes fatal, divisions. It may be interesting to note that the remnants of the Hungarian aristocracy were largely anti-Nazi (and therefore, at least temporarily, awaiting the Russians), even though it was they as a class who had the most to lose and fear from Russian and Communist rule; pro-German and National Socialist inclinations and even convictions were still widespread among the working classes. (So much for the theories of Marx et al.) The "Christian" (meaning, at that time, non-Jewish and non-socialist) middle classes were divided, probably reflecting the above mentioned 15–70–15 ratio. During the siege some of their preferences and opinions would change—because of their dreadful experiences, naturally.

And so did their memories, which, as I have already said, so many found it easier to suppress rather than to reconstruct and to rethink.

One of these difficulties, persisting to this day, more than sixty years after these events, involves the state of the Jewish population of Budapest, and their relations with their neighbours. There was this extraordinary condition that at the end of 1944 when the Battle for Budapest began, the Jewish population there was the largest surviving Jewish population in Hitler's Europe, indeed, in all of Europe. They had been discriminated against, persecuted, suppressed, but most of them were still alive, fearing for their very lives and waiting for their "liberation", no matter by whom.

There were many gradations among the Jews themselves. For one thing, it was (and it still is) impossible to ascertain their exact numbers—mostly because

of the high rate of intermarriage with Christians and also because of the considerable number of Jewish Christians, that is, converts. Before the Second World War the assimilation of Hungarian Jews may be described as extraordinary. But then modern anti-Semitism was not religious but racial; it was a reaction and resentment against the most assimilated and most successful Hungarian Jews. Hungarian anti-Semitism, only sporadic before the First World War, was tremendously boosted by the national reaction against the short-lived Communist regime in 1919, in which at least two-thirds of the commissars had been Jews. The result was the anti-Semitism of the Horthy regime, and the anti-Jewish laws and regulations in 1938–1941, not always responses to German demands, made though they were. Twenty-five years of anti-Jewish education and propaganda had their effects on many. And now the fate of the Jews hung by a thread (or, more precisely, by a few frail and silken threads). Budapest was now ruled by a fanatical anti-Jewish Arrow Cross "government". But this was November 1944. There were, there could be, no more transports to Auschwitz. Jews of all ages and sexes were to be marched on foot, westward towards Austria and Germany, but most of these forced marches were then suspended, because they were impractical.

By early December, before the actual siege began, the situation of Jews in Budapest was as follows. (1) The government cordoned off a ghetto in the mostly Jewish-inhabited quarters of the city, to which most Jews were forced to transfer. Nobody was allowed to pass through their high wooden palisades, within which about 72,000 Jews were crowded under terrible conditions. Most of them survived the battle for Budapest. On 16–17 January the first Russian troops reached that part of the city. (2) Another 25,000 or 30,000 Jews dwelt in a scattering of apartment buildings in another part of Budapest. These "Jewish" houses (marked by a large yellow star on the portals from April on) were under some kind of "international" protection. The Swedish government, the Swiss, the Portuguese, the Spanish and the Vatican legations had declared that, temporarily, Hungarian Jews living in thus designated houses were under their protection. For the sake of maintaining their few existing diplomatic relations with such neutral states, the Arrow Cross Foreign Ministry accepted this. The criminal groups did not. Such gangs invaded these houses in which Jewish families were cowering, herded many of them into the wintry streets and marched them to the lower quays of the Danube, murdering them there and throwing their bodies into the icy waters. Still, most of the Jews in their "internationally" protected houses survived the siege. (Their brave protector Raoul Wallenberg, present all through the siege, disappeared thereafter, taken away by the Russians.) (3) Many other Jews—perhaps as many as 40,000—also survived, often furnished with false identity papers, hidden and harboured by their non-Jewish neighbours, friends, acquaintances, or harboured in convents, presbyteries, monasteries and other religious institutions before and during the siege. Within the Battle for Budapest, within the clash of

armies, within a civil war in Budapest rending its people, within those who hoped for their "liberation" by a returning German or by an advancing Russian army, there was this other murderous struggle between those who were indifferent to the fate of the Jews of Budapest and those who were not. That alone renders the history of the Battle for Budapest so extraordinarily complex, much more than a chapter in general histories of the Second World War or of the Holocaust.

But the fate of Budapest was not determined by its population, and not even by the hordes of soldiers stumbling and struggling within the city. It was largely determined by the supremos, Stalin and by Hitler.

In August 1944 the Russian armies had reached the outskirts of Warsaw. Stalin halted their further advance westward. He decided on an advance into the Balkans, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, and then on to Hungary. This choice was logical, strategic and geographic, but also political. The Germans were about to retreat from southeastern Europe (though not from Hungary). No British or American forces would be inserted there to fill a potential military and political vacuum. Churchill knew this. That was one of the two main reasons (the other was the future of Poland) that compelled him to fly to Moscow in October to reach some kind of an agreement with Stalin. They did. Stalin agreed to leave Greece to the British, in accord with an agreement on the relative percentages of British-American and Russian influence (hopefully, but only hopefully, temporary) in the Balkans and in Hungary. At first Churchill and Stalin agreed on a 50–50 ratio for Hungary; a few days later Molotov insisted and Eden agreed to revise that to 75–25 in Russia's favour. The Russians had already conquered much of southern and eastern Hungary* and were moving toward Budapest. At the end of October Stalin ordered and urged Marshal Malinowski, the commander of one of the two Russian Fronts in Hungary, to take Budapest as soon as possible. The first Russian advance units reached the outskirts of the capital a few days later; but Malinowski was unable to penetrate the city. The real siege did not begin until Christmas, when the other Russian Front, commanded by Marshal Tolbuchin, had encircled it from the southwest. Here I must register a very slight) disagreement with Krisztián Ungváry. Of course Stalin wanted to advance westward as soon and as much as possible. But I do not think that this was his primary concern at that time. Of course he was not pleased with the delay in the capture of Budapest, with the duration of its siege. He was vexed but not particularly grieved by it. The relative slowness of the Russian conquest of Budapest is one indirect piece of evidence for that. Stalin wanted to make certain that Hungary and Budapest would come under his control. His minions knew that only too well. One example of their political determination was that they arrested Raoul Wallenberg and spirited him to Moscow a day or so after the Russian occupation of Budapest.

* There was another factor in Churchill's acceptance of this revision. It was the collapse of the Hungarian armistice attempt during the very time of Churchill's stay in Moscow.

Perhaps more interesting were the purposes of Hitler. His principal desire was obvious. It was to halt and delay the Russian advance toward Vienna as much as possible. If that was to involve the destruction of Budapest, so be it. Here he was relatively successful: the siege of Budapest cost the Russians much time and many casualties. That is why Hitler forbade the breaking out of the garrison defending Buda even when two German counteroffensives came nearer to the city and when such a breakout was—perhaps—possible. Let Budapest (or at least Buda) remain a thorn in the Russians' flesh, compromising their progress to Vienna. Yet it is significant that the greatest German counteroffensive in western Hungary was mounted only after Budapest had fallen. After some initial breakthroughs that last German offensive on the eastern front (indeed the last in the entire war) also failed; but its significance resides in what it shows of Hitler's mind. His main (and only) hope, as it had been for years now, was to divide his enemies. To achieve that politically or diplomatically was well nigh impossible; but perhaps something could be achieved by a sudden great German victory in the field. This, and not something like the retaking of Paris, was Hitler's purpose for his attack in the Ardennes (the Battle of the Bulge); this was his purpose in trying to inflict a damning blow on the Russians in western Hungary in March 1945. He did not succeed—though he delayed the progress of the armies of his enemies somewhat.**

The merits of Krisztián Ungváry's work are at least twofold. First: as a military history it is unrivalled. None of the military histories of the battles of Stalingrad or Warsaw or Berlin come close to its minutious detail and to its vivid reconstruction of where and when and how troops moved and fought. Military historians ought to study *The Battle for Budapest* with jewellers' eyes. So must the people of Budapest, and the diminishing minority among them who had experienced its siege sixty years ago (as had this author, a historian, who found many details in this superb reconstruction that were new to him).

** Here I must add something seldom if it all recounted by historians. This was Hitler's tacit consent to the efforts of some of his cohorts to cause trouble between the British-Americans and the Russians. There were many instances of this in 1944. Where Budapest is concerned, this may be illustrated by at least two affairs. One involves Raoul Wallenberg, who was not even a Swedish diplomat but who arrived in Budapest spurred by his humanitarian convictions and with the help of Jewish and American organizations. The Germans allowed him to travel to and remain in Budapest, and treated him often as if he were a representative of the Western Allies' interests (which, in many ways, he was). One of their many reasons was their wish to cause trouble between Americans and Russians. The Russians knew this (and the Germans made sure that they knew), which was the principal reason for their immediate arrest of Wallenberg and his being carried off to Moscow. The other significant matter were the instructions of Heinrich Himmler: he expressly forbade the destruction of the Budapest ghetto and the murder of its inhabitants. Indeed, two days before the Russians reached the ghetto there was a plan by some SS units and the Arrow Cross to invade the ghetto and massacre its inhabitants. A German major general stopped this, threatening the would-be perpetrators with arrest.) There is every reason to believe that Himmler's directives were not made contrary to Hitler's wishes.

Krisztián Ungváry's second merit may be even greater. This is not only a military history par excellence but a civil, political, sociographic reconstruction of a dreadful and sordid (and, on occasion, heroic) drama of a siege of a great capital city, inevitably including one million inhabitants whose very existences and minds were involved in a brutal civil war that was a war within a war at the same time. And so not only the extent but the complexity of that dreadful (yes: full of dread—there may not be a better word) drama is without equal, with a meaning that lives even beyond the history of the Second World War.

The siege of Budapest ended on 13 February 1945,—the day after the Yalta Conference had ended. Not a word was said at Yalta by Churchill, Roosevelt or Stalin about Budapest or Hungary which, evidently, were falling under Russian control. Sixty years later, in 2004, the alleged heroism of the last defenders of Buda is still being proclaimed and extolled in a few periodicals and by hundreds of demonstrators from Hungarian right-wing organizations. There was nothing simple about the Battle for Budapest; and there is nothing simple about its history and the memories of its people. ❧

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George Gömöri

Gabriel Bethlen–the "New Gideon" or an Unreliable Ally?

Some historians believe that the ancestor of modern journalism was in fact a dynasty of bankers—the Fugger family. Their newsletters, regularly published from mid-sixteenth century onwards, gave information about important or just odd events all over Europe and the New World. It was probably the success of these newsletters that prompted the publication of a semi-annual "newsbook" in Latin, the *Mercurius Gallo-Belgicus,* from the 1580s onwards. It is hard to tell how many people read the *Mercurius* regularly in England, but in 1615 Robert Boothe, a Cambridge don (who also wrote poetry in Latin), decided to venture into publishing: he brought out an English version of the Latin newsbook then edited by "Gotthard Arthus", that is the historian Gaspar Ens in Germany. Entitled *A relation of all matters passed, especially in France and the Low-countries... since March last to this present, 1614* was printed by William Welby in London, with the following subtitle right after the dedicatory epistle by Boothe: 'A Discourse full of Delight, containing the relation of the things in most parts of Europe that have passed worhty the remembrance, since March last, 1614, to this present' [i.e. 1615]—and, remarkably, it starts with a description of events in Transylvania after the "lamentable overthrow and death of Bathorie" when "Gabriel Bethline" was appointed Prince of Transylvania "by the Turkes".[1] As far as we know, this was the first time the name of Gabriel (Gábor) Bethlen had appeared in print in England. The praise allotted to him by the *Mercurius* (and in its wake, by Boothe) is not unequivocal, for although the Turkish envoy to the Emperor Ferdinand of Austria, King of Hungary, is quoted calling Bethlen "a Prince of great wisdome and valour", it is also mentioned that at the imperial Diet of Linz voices were raised expressing the fear that Transylvania could be annexed to the Ottoman Empire, and on this ground advocating intervention.[2] The Emperor did not give in to this demand, for he wanted to keep the peace with the Sultan and, consequently, the new Prince of Transylvania escaped military intervention. He had to cope only with a mi-

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George Gömöri
is a Hungarian poet, translator and essayist, Retired Lecturer at the University of Cambridge, and Honorary Fellow of Darwin College. His latest book Erdélyi merítések *(Transylvanian Catches) appeared in Kolozsvár (Cluj, Romania) in 2004.*

nor incursion of troops hired in 1616 by a Hungarian pretender, György Homonnai, who was quickly defeated.

Consolidating his power in Transylvania, it was only some years later, in 1619, that Gabriel Bethlen took up arms against Emperor Ferdinand. His campaign was started in the context of the election of Frederick of the Palatinate to the Bohemian throne in 1619, vehemently opposed by Ferdinand, the new Holy Roman Emperor; to most contemporaries it was clear that this conflict would lead to a long and devastating war.[3] Bethlen's alliance with the Bohemian confederates was not motivated solely by his wish to conquer (as claimed by some Western historians) or his ambitions to gain the crown of Hungary, but also by the religious grievances of the mostly Protestant population of Norhtern Hungary. His armies, even without Turkish help, were sufficiently strong to inflict painful defeats on the imperial forces, a fact gleefully commented upon by most English newsletters or *corrantos*. In fact, from 1620 to 1625 the deeds of Gabriel Bethlen remained "headlines" in these publications, some of which were first printed in Amsterdam, then with increasing regularity in London. Most newsletters were translations from German or Dutch, for example the *Articles of the League, Made betweene Fredericke, King of Bohemia... and the High and Mightie prince GABRIEL, Prince of Hungaria and Transiluania...* (n.p. but probably Amsterdam, 1620) was the translation of a Dutch pamphlet with an almost identical title,[4] whereas in the case of *Courante or newes from Italie, Germanie, Hungarie, Spain and France,* a produce of London printer/bookseller Nathaniel Butter with the date of November 2, 1621, the newsletter claims to have been translated from "A High Dutch" (i.e. German) copy.[5]

In this phase of the war, that is before the Battle of the White Mountain (November 8, 1620), expectations vis-à-vis Bethlen (usually spelt "Bethlehem" or "Bethlem") ran high. Events on the continent were followed with great excitement and some anxiety. Until 1624 James I, whose daughter Elizabeth, the 'Winter Queen', was married to Frederick of the Palatinate, favoured "mediation not intervention" in the war[6], but English public opinion was openly interventionist. No wonder then, that the London-based *Our last Weekly newes* compared Bethlen to heroes of the Old Testament praising him as "the great hope of the Protestant religion".[7] As the Bohemian forces suffered a crucial defeat and the war reached the Palatinate, the newsletters divided their attention between the northern and the southern theatres of war, and during periods of truce between Bethlen and the Emperor kept writing hopefully about the Transylvanian's "warlike preparations". Because of Gabriel Bethlen's alliance with Frederick, the 'Winter King', often discussed in the English newsletters,[8] the latter's ambassador to England, Johannes Joachim Rusdorf, realising Bethlen's potential value in harassing the Catholic powers, tried to secure English recognition and material help for him. As long as James I lived this was impossible, although Rusdorf "moved heaven and earth" to that purpose, all in vain.[9] It is likely that the negative reports of Sir Thomas Roe from Constantinople were also hindering the realisation of the Anglo-Transylvanian alliance. The change in English attitudes occurred in 1625/26, when first on December 9, 1625 the Hague Convention establishing an English–Danish–Dutch coalition was signed in London, and in the spring of 1626, when Bethlen married Catherine of Brandenburg at Kassa (Cassovia, Košice in Slovakia). Mostly due to

Rusdorf's persistence, but also to the support of Roe and Isaac Wake, the English envoy in Venice, Transylvania joined the Protestant Alliance on November 30, 1626. This diplomatic success of Gabriel Bethlen was, however, undermined, or rather devalued, by his conclusion of the peace treaty of Pozsony (Pressburg—now Bratislava, capital of Slovakia) with the Emperor just a month later. True enough, Charles I did not have much confidence in this "inconstant" warrior of Protestantism who always demanded substantial sums of money for waging war against the Habsburgs; sums which the English treasury was unable to deliver.[10] But as (before the Swedish intervention) he was the only European leader who managed to defeat the imperial troops in more than one campaign, he had to be taken seriously if England ever wanted to see the restoration of the Palatinate.

Bethlen also paid more attention to England than any of his predecessors since Stephen (István) Báthori. When sending his nephew, Peter Bethlen, on a grand diplomatic tour round Western Europe in 1627, he wrote to Buckingham about his nephew's impending visit to England.[11] This event, which took place in February 1628, was reported from Dover Castle, stating that "A lord of Hungary, nephew, as they say to Bethlen Gabor, and some six with him landed at Margate. He has the Archduchess's [Izabella's] pass and is coming to London,[12] which shows the awareness of the Captain of Dover Castle about "Bethem Gabor", clearly a household name in Stuart England. There is also a much more detailed report, a letter written from Paris by János Pálóczi Horváth, a member of Péter Bethlen's retinue, to the young man's father, István Bethlen. This relates how Charles I received the "famous Count Bethlen" providing a very handsome coach for his personal usage while in London which was followed by the Hungarians' visit to Hampton Court, possibly Windsor, Oxford and Cambridge. Pálóczi Horváth claims that there are 122 churches in London in which, apart from English, services are held in four other languages. He also relates (for a Hungarian Calvinist) very strict observance of the 'Sabbath', that is Sunday, when "one cannot sell anything... card-games and gambling are strictly forbidden.[13] But what fills him with awe is the grandeur of Oxford and Cambridge: "These two universities have altogether more or less 36 colleges... and we have not ever seen more magnificent buildings than these... Some of them tower over the others like some kind of a citadel (if only our country could have but one of these!). All these colleges have richly endowed libraries of selected books".[14]

Gabriel Bethlen's fame was at its zenith in England probably in 1625, for in this year we have more than one literary reference to this distant (and according to some, 'inconstant') protector of the Protestant faith. A(braham) H(olland) as well as Ben Jonson mock the zeal of the newsbooks commending their hero to the reading public, Holland ridiculing the compiler/jorunalist who is a 'Decaied Captaine' or just a 'Rook' (cheat, swindler)" whose hungry braines compile prodigious Books / Of Bethlen Gabor's preparations, and / How termes betwixt him and th'Emperor stand"[15] whereas Jonson in his play *The Staple of the News* ("acted in the yeare 1625" that is in fact early 1626)[16] indicates his disbelief in the sometimes wild stories printed in the *corrantos* of Gabriel Bethlen's military or marriage plans. As one of the characters reports:

> We heare he has demis'd
> A Drumme, to fill all *Christendome* with the sound:
> But he cannot draw his forces neare it,

To march yet, for the violence of the noise.
And therefore he is faine by a designe,
To carry 'hem in the ayre, and at some distance,
Till he be married, then they shall appeare.[17]

Paradoxically, the first creditable full account in England on the ruling Prince of Transylvania was published only some months after his death, in 1630. This is in the sixth edition of Giovanni Botero's cosmography, *Relations of the most famous kingdomes and Comon-wealths throuwout the world...* enlarged "according to moderne observation" by a certain R.I. (Robert Johnson), the author being a Hungarian, Petrus Eusebius Maxai (Péter Maksai Őse). Hungary and Transylvania are discussed in three spearate chapters (on pp. 378–394, 394–399 and 399–408) under the titles "Hungarie", "The State of Bethlen Gabor in Transilvania", and "The Estate of Gabriel Bethlen or Bethlen Gabor in Hungaria, which came to him either by Election, or by Conquest achieved from the Emperour: With a Brief Relation or Chronicle of his Birth and fortunes". The first chapter, a general survey, had already appeared in the previous (1616) edition of Botero and is probably based on the so-called Hansard manuscript, written at the end of the sixteenth century.[18] A new chapter describes the geography and main cities of Transylvania, devoting only the last two passages to Gabriel Bethlen, whereas another surveys the Partium (the parts adjoining Transylvania) and the seven counties that Bethlen won in his campaigns against "the German Emperour", continuing with a short biography of the prince. Maksai gives detailed information about the state of education in the lands under Gabriel Bethlen's control, including the fortified town of Várad which is "adorned... with a College of five and thirty Fellowes, an hundred Schollars, a Master and a publike Reader"; Debrecen is also "adorned with a goodly College of Students", and finally "this yeare of 1629... [Bethlen] erects an University at *Alba Julia* which crownes and blesses all the fame of his former actions".[19] As for the prince himself, it is stressed that Bethlen is "a zealous Calvinist, seldom going without a Latine testament in his pocket", and later Maksai refutes slanders spread about him being "basely borne" and "a Turke in religion", which are but "Jesuiticall knaveris".[20] Bethlen's refusal to accept the Crown of Hungary is explained by the author with his wish to preserve his relative freedom of action vis-à-vis the Sultan; at the same time his dealings with the Emperor are discussed in a carefully balanced tone. Maksai Őse ends his essay with a piece of information which is sadly out of date by the publication of the book, according to which Bethlen was "dangerously sicke" this [1629] summer but "we have heard newes of his safe recovery".[21]

A few words have to be said about the author of the Hungarian chapters of the 1630 Botero edition. Péter Maksai Őse was born in 1599 and as he calls himself "nobilis Transylvanus", came from a family of a higher social standing. He went to school at Kolozsvár (Clausenburg—Cluj in Romania) and left Transylvania for higher studies abroad in 1622. After a stay in Frankfurt/Oder, Franeker and Leiden, he returned to his native parts where he published a theological dissertation in Alba Julia.[22] It was during his second peregrination between 1628–1632 that he visited England; although he matriculated in Leiden on March 4, 1629, he could not have spent more than a few months at that university, for at the end of his English text he refers to events "this summer", so it was some time during the autumn of 1629 that he composed his essay for the new

edition of Botero's *Relations*. While it is known that he visited Oxford in the summer of 1632, otherwise all that can be said about his time in England is what Gábor Haller wrote in his diary: that he spent a long time, probably three and a half or four years in London, where "he lived at the Archbishop of Canterbury's".[23] This, or course, opens up an intriguing possibility: was it Calvinist-leaning Archbishop George Abbot, always sympathetic to the cause of foreign Protestants and an early supporter of Gabriel Bethlen, who encouraged Maksai to write two informative chapters in Latin about the much-slandered Bethlen? Did he suggest to Robert Johnson to translate and include this piece in his new edition of Botero?

In 1630 therefore the educated English reader could learn as much about contemporary Hungary and Transylvania as was possible in the circumstances; he could have had reliable information on Bethlen's actions and character, much better presented than the often contradictory and sensationalist reports of the *corrantos*. After his death Bethlen was evaluated both by Sir Thomas Roe and other seventeenth-century Englishmen as having a rare "greatness of Soul" and "activeness of Spirit". He was thought to be a prince whose support of the Ottoman power could have had "ruinous consequences", but whose balancing act between great powers could be understood and, indeed, approved by the detached observer. In Sir Paul Rycault's opinion, "being seated between two such powerful Monarchs, as the Emperour and the Turk, there was need of dexterity and courage to steer between the rocks of such opposite Interests".[24] ❧

NOTES

1 ■ A *Relation of all matters passed...* London, n.y. [1615], B

2 ■ op.cit., F1

3 ■ E.g. Count Solms's letter quoted in Geoffrey Parker, *Europe in Crisis,* 1598–1648, 2nd ed. Fontana, London, 1981, 163.

4 ■ *Artyckelen van het Eeewich Verbondt, ghemaecht tusschen Frederick... Met... Heer Gabriel, Prince van Hungarien ende Transylvanien,* by Ian Evertz, Amsterdam 1620, listed in RMK III: 1275.

5 ■ Folke Dahl, *A Bibliography of English Courantos and Periodical Newsbooks 1620–1642,* London, 1952.

6 ■ Geoffrey Parker, *Europe in Crisis 1598–1648,* 2nd ed., 1981, 163.

7 ■ *Our last weekly newes* Nr.7 (November 4, 1621).

8 ■ E.g. in *More newes from the Palatine and more comfort to every true Christian...* (n.p., 1622), 6.

9 ■ J.J. Rusdorff, *Consilia et Negotia politica,* Frankfurt and Lepizig, 1727, 45.

10 ■ *Memoires et Negociations Secretes de Mr.de Rusdorf,* ed. E.G. Cuhn, Lepizig 1789, 681 and 689, also Angyal Dávid, *Erdély politikai érintkezése Angliával,* ("Transylvania's political contacts with England) Budapest, 1902, 60.

11 ■ British Library, Harleian 1760 f. 29. The letter is dated 27 August 1627 from Alba Julia.

12 ■ *Calendar of State Papers. Domestic Series. Charles I, 1627–28,* London 1858, 543.

13 ■ *Utazások a régi Európában* (ed. Pál Binder), Kriterion, Bucharest 1976, 87.

14 ■ ibid., 88.

15 ■ A.H. *A Continued Inquisition against Paper-Persecutors,* London 1625, 7.

16 ■ Martin Butler corrects the date, pointing out that it refers to the 'legal year', *The Library,* 7th Series, Vol 4:1, 58.

17 ■ Ben Jonson, *The Works,* Vol. VI. (ed. C.H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson), Oxford, 1954, 337.

18 ■ Two copies are extant in the British Library: Harley Ms 7314 and Lansdowne Ms 775.

19 ■ *Relations of the most famous kingdoms and Common-wealths throwout the world...* Translated out of the best Italian Impression of Boterus. And since the last Edited by R... London, 1630, 400

and 407, also reprinted in *Irodalomtudományi Közlemények* (ItK), Budapest, 1976, 224229.

20 ■ *ItK*, 1976, 227–228. Bethlen spoke fluent Turkish and was held in high regard in Constantinople.

21 ■ ibid, 229.

22 ■ *Disputatio de iustificatione hominis peccatoris coram Deo*, Alba Julia 1628, cf. *Régi Magyar Nyomtatványok*, Budapest, 1983, II:1408. Earlier in Franeker Maksai was a respondent in Ames's anti-Bellarminian series: Amesius, Gulielmus, *Bellarminus enervatus*... Franekerae, 1625, Disputatio XV.

23 ■ *Magyar utazási irodalom*... 434

24 ■ Sir Paul Rycault, *A History of the Turkish Empire, From the Year 1623 to the year 1677*... London, printed by J.D. for Tho. Basset, R. Clavell, J. Robinson and A. Churchill, 1687, 13.

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Géza Perneczky

Cultural Revolution

Just this spring, I happened to be taking photographs in the botanical garden in Cologne. As is usual for April, light conditions were very changeable. Every quarter of an hour, sunshine of blinding brilliance would sweep across the land, then a dark mass of cloud as the invariable response, a thickly overcast dullness, a near-crepuscular gloom. At times spots of rain began to fall, though there was no need to take this seriously—at least not up to the point when the sky became so overcast that everything around was plunged into an inkily purple murkiness.

This botanical garden was not the institution established for the edification of the general public that is located directly beside the Zoo, but more of an arboretum, the city's experimental forestry and plant-breeding station. It lies outside the city and is big enough to get lost in. At its centre, though, is a small rest place, a round, thatched building looking like a mushroom, because its conical thatched roof stands on a single large pier, a stout pillar. Around the pillar, facing outwards, are benches. If it should start to rain, a visitor can take a seat there and scan the sheets of rain whilst waiting for the blessing to pass.

As a rule, few people visit the garden, but this was a Sunday, and when it started to rain the benches under the thatch filled up. Beside me, to my left, the places were occupied by a family with several children. Of course, the children did not remain seated but bustled around here and there. One small kid planted himself in front of me to ask what was the tube of black paper attached to the back of my camera. It turned out that this was also of interest to the child's father, so I told him that the monitor on my digital camera was not bright enough for a person to see properly what he was photographing.

Géza Perneczky
is an art historian who left Hungary in the 1970s and made his home in Cologne, Germany, where he became a secondary school teacher. He frequently contributes essays and short stories to Hungarian journals.

On the other hand, you could not get the sort of viewfinder that you had on the older type of cameras. The only answer that had suggested itself was to cover the camera's screen with a dark mask something like the black silk curtain on an old-fashioned studio camera.

"Did you stick it on?"

"Yes, so that you can see more clearly what you are photographing, you need to have something dark around the picture. It's a contrast effect. Just think of photograph albums: the pictures in those are also surrounded by black paper.

"Einleuchtend!"—now that remark came from my right, where an elderly couple were sitting. Obviously I had been declaring a bit too loudly. The man who had spoken, a sturdy-looking chap of pensionable age, wore metal-rimmed spectacles. As I turned toward him I could see from his expression that he had not intended it as a derisory or admonitory remark, though admittedly there was no sign of delight on his face either as he returned my look. The gesture he made was also compatible with what the brief remark had denoted—a nod that settled the facts of the matter and threw just a bit more light on things.

He then turned away from me to look at the rain with the assurance of one who knows that he is not going to get soaked to the skin because he's only playing a part in a big-screen costume drama. He was trusting a cloth overcoat that could be buttoned up to the chin to cope with rain and cold. It is an occupational disease with me, but it flashed through my mind that the person sitting on the bench here might easily have been a contemporary of Immanuel Kant or Johann Wolfgang Goethe. That his calmness derived from knowing that the world is steered by the celestial heaven whilst the creation is a grand *Natur* and the human beings who are found in it are *interessant,* worth acquainting oneself with, because they are interesting. And all that will make itself manifest—one need only bide one's time—with clockwork precision. When the hour strikes, the man in the cloth overcoat will utter, "Clear. *Einleuchtend.*"

Why did Goethe of all people spring to mind? Perhaps because what emanated from my neighbour on the bench was the sort of calm and restraint that, so I imagine, must have distinguished public officials in the past. A dignity of a now all but antiquated character. In those days, even Goethe's ministerial rank would not have seemed like an official title—at least not in the modern sense. He was endowed more with the prestige of a secretary who happened to serve a duke. My cloth-coated neighbour on the bench might have been something like that, a retired judge or pensioned-off tax-office counsel, those being the dukes of the modern age. They are under superiors who attend to their writing desks with a propriety that has been handed down from monarchical days, and they preserve a vocabulary that is just as incorruptibly matter-of-fact. The whole image as I am now conjuring it up, I have to admit, is like a woodcut printed on yellowing paper, but it could provide a wonderful background to that cloth-coated gentleman's passing remark. Like the grey light coruscating around

us, just an arm's length away (I'm thinking here of the shot-silver curtain of rain), that too was right on the nose. A classical woodcut.

Yes, I am an art historian, though no expert on the late eighteenth century. Artistically, that was a boring era; but then woodcuts do not feature at all in the art now in vogue, the study of which is my immediate speciality. How interesting, see! Even just sitting on the bench and this is the question that comes up. The child's father had now become worked up and started to gesticulate, saying that he had an acquaintance who reckoned that modern art was just photographs. That there was nothing else these days except photographic art.

I replied that it may well be there is not even that much. Because contemporary art is more just a leisure activity, *Unterhaltung,* entertainment. Artists seek nothing more than to divert, to fill the surplus time that has arisen in the mindless void between family and workplace, or between the fury of sex and the frenzy of making money. That does not mean, of course, that artists do not wish to find their way with their works into museums. Fame is still very important today, probably more so than in the past. Museums are also more important than in the past, if only because nowadays many more people have time to go to museums. As I said: it's a leisure activity, entertainment. But that does not mean art really exists—in the old sense, I mean to say.

The child's father got to his feet and declared that he had never heard anything of the kind before. Not that he took it amiss, and I shouldn't take it amiss either, but the notion was very fresh for him. I strove to mollify him, asking him to believe that it was a serious problem. It wasn't me who had dreamed it up; university professors spend their time dealing with the issue. And I too, whilst I was a teacher, had included it in my own modest syllabus, so that when I was recently called upon to tackle it, all the relevant essays were to hand and I had no difficulty in finding sufficient material to translate to fill a whole volume.

"Into Hungarian?" This was the cloth-coated gentleman again. Then, to take the edge off the question, he added: "You are Hungarian, if I'm not mistaken?"

I nodded: of course, from my accent. He must have recognised it. So I asked, "Have you been to Hungary yourself?" His wife answered in his stead, saying that they visited Hungary fairly regularly and were somewhat acquainted with how things are there. She was curious to know, for instance, where I was born. Then she dropped the news that she dabbled a bit in Hungarian art. She collected Herend porcelain, you see. Every time they went to Hungary she would buy a piece. I must surely be familiar with Herend porcelain—maybe even have pieces of it myself.

"I don't, but I do have pieces of porcelain whose decorations used to be copied on the finest pieces of Herend porcelain. Chinese wares. There are still a few pieces from an original Chinese tea service that was produced for domestic use. It has a butterflies-and-roses pattern, though I'm not at all sure about the roses, they are so highly stylised. Even the butterflies look rather as if their ge-

nealogy had got mixed up with that of the dragons. Quite fabulous, even though the pieces of the set produce a fairly exotic effect. More than likely, Europeans would not be able to make much use of them straight away since they would not know what to do, for instance, with the unusual little lids that go with the tea cups, their function being to retain the aromas that would otherwise escape with the steam. Nor would they understand the purpose of the tiny contrivance like a candlewick-holder that could be pulled under the cups, which is in fact to keep the tea hot. Drinking tea in this fashion most certainly calls for more patience. Then there is a better-known problem: that the tea cups, having been produced for local use rather than for export, have no handles.

The lady's gaze was glowing with interest: "You acquired them over there?"

"No, here in Cologne, at Hollstadt's. The bowls cost two marks fifty each, the saucers and lids one-fifty each, and the slimly tall, inimitably graceful teapots were between eight and twenty marks. The little candlewick-holders did not even have a price tag on them to start with, but I ended up paying one mark each for them. I purchased lots of other things as well at that time, such as tiny saké cups of that inimitable green tint peculiar to pottery fired with a celadon glaze. That was a long time ago, some thirty years or so.

There was a silence. No great expertise was needed to know that the price of such pieces of porcelain nowadays might be a hundred, even several hundred, marks each. Still, those sitting around me sensed that I was telling the truth. I attempted to forestall the gathering flood of questions by saying, "It's a true but very strange story." And I proceeded to tell it.

I had photography to thank for getting mixed up in it. The reason I went to Hollstadt's, the department store, was to buy a funnel like the ones housewives use in the kitchen for decanting drinks for instance. What I needed one for, of course, was to facilitate the pouring of the chemicals used to develop and enlarge films from one tank to another. And it also happened to be April then, just like now, coming up to Easter.

The household appliances department at Hollstadt's was on the third floor, but on reaching it I could see that they were in the middle of reorganising the floor. Tall shelving of an elegant design was being assembled and they were in the process of unloading from a goods lift the sort of heavily laden chests that one can only meet nowadays in old editions of the novels of Jules Verne. Out of the first chest to be opened came to light porcelain wares wrapped in newspaper. I would not have given them a second look if my eye had not been caught by a piece of the packing paper, because as the rumpled sheets dropped to the floor and unfolded they turned out to be pages of Chinese newsprint. And the porcelain items that were being placed on the shelving seemed to be Chinese.

I picked up the first piece to come out of the chest. It was a wide-bellied vessel that resembled a teapot but couldn't be that, because though it had a handle, it didn't have a spout. It had a dark green background glaze that was decorated all

the way round with an even darker-toned, patchily matt landscape motif reminiscent of Chinese pen and ink drawings. As I was looking at this, the first shelf was starting to fill up. I picked another object off it at random—a bowl in a light glaze. On it were the hand-painted forms of figures warming themselves by a fire, perhaps merchants or Buddhist monks. A few other bowls were decorated with ornaments of garlands fashioned from floral patterns, the rippling chains of which were interrupted by wriggling dragons and dancing storks. Most of the bowls were adorned inside, on the bottom, with some brand name composed of six Chinese characters. I picked up the first item again, the dark green vessel, and I tried to touch its bottom with my index finger, but I could feel that it was coming up against some dried-up muck. I managed to scrape a bit off and saw that some yellowish-brown lumps had dried to the bottom of the vessel, the residue of some wax-like substance. I finally tumbled to why the little teapot had no spout: it wasn't a teapot at all but an incense burner—a vessel that was still holding on its bottom the incense-like material that was customarily burned at tea ceremonies. Only now did I look more closely at the price tag: three marks fifty.

"Sold!" I almost shouted out, then started feverishly picking out what else I should buy. When I had collected about as much as the money on me ran to, I unloaded my booty onto a still empty shelf, but then I saw right away that I had not made a good choice. Further chests had arrived in the meantime, so I had to start off all over again. I have no idea how many times I swapped the treasures, meanwhile taking care only not to let the very first object that had emerged from the chests, that incense burner, go astray. I knew, somehow sensed, that another find like that was not going to crop up again in a hurry. And that was indeed the case, because neither the next day nor the day after nor even later on, not even the following year, did another little incense burner come to light from that shipment.

"Why? How much porcelain had arrived?" The wife's face was completely tensed up as she searched my face. Her husband, on the other hand, was looking at me with the grimace of someone who had already formed an opinion about the whole matter but would be prepared to forgive me even if it were to turn out that I had been up to some mischief. He smiled, shook his head, and merely asked:

"How come there were still items from it even months later?"

"Thirty-six thousand," I replied, "that's how many pieces arrived, though I only learned that later on, two days later."

The uncertainty and panic that overcame me on the first day, there on the third floor, were justified. For all that I was an art historian, porcelain was not part of my particular expertise, and apart from a few well-chosen items which had found their way into my hands more by sheer accident, my purchases were poor. The way this came to light was that on the way home I bought a pocket manual which had in it the identification marks for Chinese porcelain wares—

some two or three millennia of the art of porcelain condensed into a chart of tiny diagrams. Back at home, then, using the manual, I tried to identify what was in my haul. The first thing on which light was instantly thrown was that the characters painted on the bases of porcelain objects were the reign-marks of Chinese emperors. The vessels could then be dated on the basis of those marks. It also became clear that these hand-written signs could only be used by the imperial factory in Beijing. Other workshops could be identified from square-framed red stamps, rather like the signatures with which one may be familiar from Chinese pen-and-ink drawings.

The next day, I went back to Hollstadt's with my cheque book, and this time I was more careful to restrict my pick, as far as possible, solely to wares from the imperial factory. On getting back home, I called up a few of my acquaintances who I thought might be interested in old porcelain. Then the day after that I went yet again.

The third floor of the department store was now crammed full of people. Most of them were citizens of Cologne, people who had somehow got to know about the Easter bargains with which Hollstadt's was seeking to surprise its customers that year. They were wandering around in the crowd with disconcerted smiles, grabbing left, right and centre as they took their pick among the porcelain articles, then, after a while, fleeing homeward with a parcel, meticulously bound with twine, that had been pressed into their hands at the counter. It was not them but the experts who were the trouble. Obviously, I had not been the only one to whom it had occurred to telephone round my acquaintances: a lot of similar tip-offs must have been fired off the previous day, so it was not hard to imagine how wires must have been humming in the centres of the antiques trade as well. There were experts not only from the German provinces but also from the nearby Benelux countries and from Switzerland.

Anyone who is familiar with the atmosphere of auction houses and has been a participant in an auction would have been able to discern straight away that it was not the cream of the international antiques trade who were milling about there now. It seems the pots were not antique enough, or of such breathtaking value, after all. These were from the second tier: owners of little antiques shops, representatives of that class of tradesmen who have to fight hard in order not to go under in the competitive struggle. They were women, for the most part, razor-sharp in profile, hawk-eyed, intelligent, with excellent taste, and implacable. Even as they reached for the shelves with one hand, they were perfectly capable of keeping an eye on the others with their residues of vigilance and the other half of their expertise and energy—watching what they laid their hands on.

"Futterneid," said the cloth-coated gentleman. The word is of near-untranslatable compactness, meaning roughly 'the green-eyed monster', the sort of mindless envy that is merciless even when there is a full trough to swill at.

"They didn't have much time to pick and choose, and they worked out the best

method quickly enough. Clearly, arriving at the solution may well have been preceded by a few pots being swept off the shelves in the jostling, but the store's employees had not made a big fuss about it, on the grounds that there was plenty to go round and then some. By the time I arrived the process was in full swing. The antiques experts—though possibly others too who, knowing a thing or two about porcelain, were following their example—were indiscriminately taking items off the shelves, one after another, and merely casting a quick, searching glance at the bases of the pot. If the stamp or signature to be seen there did not seem interesting enough, the grip formed by index finger and thumb would relax and the pot would drop with a sharp crash to the floor, thereby saving the time it would have taken to return the articles to their place. The floor was littered with shards of pottery, crunching and cracking with every step one took.

I looked for the sales staff, but they were nowhere to be seen. Only the cash desks were functioning. Finally, off by the lifts and escalators, I noticed a few plain-clothes security guards, the customary ID tags pinned to their jackets. They were running practised eyes over the public, watching that no one went off without paying. After which I came upon a Hollstadt employee after all, who must have been a department head of some sort. She was the only one who was not even looking around but, ashen-faced, sunk into total passivity, was simply standing by the wall. From time to time, driven by some motor compulsion, she would nervously start to wring her hands. I asked her if she was in charge. She nodded. As is only good manners, I introduced myself then asked what was going on.

"A cultural revolution," she replied mechanically. But then she came to her senses, and it was obvious that she was thinking how she was going to restore order. Straight away, however, the facial expression changed yet again as it possibly flashed through her mind that I was a reporter. Finally, she gave up and, making a weary gesture, said merely: "There's nothing we can do about it, believe me. We didn't know what was in the chests. The pricing was done in Beijing, and no expert was present when it was done." "That's all very well, but this is now the third day...!" burst from my lips. She nodded. Then she tried to reassure me: "We'll be closing the store tomorrow. There's nothing that can be done about today; we'll just have to stick it out until closing time."

She went on to relate that one of their buyers had gone to Beijing to purchase basketware, but when he arrived his hosts had seized him by the arm and dragged him off to a warehouse in which household pottery—"bourgeois porcelain"—that was seized during the Cultural Revolution was being collected. The warehouse resembled a battlefield, because the students engaged in the campaign had taken bamboo poles to the confiscated pots that were piled up on the ground and smashed them to smithereens. Many of the articles had nevertheless survived intact, having been buried beneath the growing tide of debris. The hosts were offering these for sale for a lump sum, on the sole condition that

Hollstadt's undertook to sort the pieces out for themselves. It is possible that by doing this the Beijing foreign-trade people wanted to put their warehouses into a usable state again. The buyer made a call back to his office to check what he should do, then he took on some fifteen to twenty men and, using some of those machines for dispensing self-adhesive price stickers that he had brought along anyway to mark up the basketry, he got them to put price labels on the still salvageable porcelain articles as they were being wrapped up, all in one go. The only consideration that he can have passed on to the hastily employed men was that in doing the pricing they should pay attention to the size of the pots. From the number of rolls of price stickers that were used up they were subsequently able to calculate that around thirty-six thousand items had been gathered together in this way.

The department head also said that it had been out of the question to think of sorting out the purchased goods back home in Germany—trying, for instance, to group the pots by period and style, or even simply on their art-trade value—because to do that they would have had to take on dozens of museum curators or auction-house valuers for weeks on end, which would have cost a small fortune. To say nothing of the fact that there was not a single plate or bowl that had been packed together with a partner piece, for the services had already been mixed up at the time they were confiscated, and only a small fraction of the sets had survived the bamboo poles. Hollstadt's were trusting that purchasers would be patient enough to pick out things that matched one another. Saucers with bowls...

"That's exactly what is happening now," I interjected.

The department head's face twitched. Then it was evident that she was trying to come up with some kind of punch line that would stand up in a newspaper. And she did indeed come up with one: "No one reckoned that purchasing those wretched porcelain articles would end up with us importing the bamboo poles to go with them."

The cloth-coated gentleman laughed: "Clever. But from what you say they must have picked through the porcelain after all, or at least re-priced it."

"Yes, they did. The next day the third floor was indeed shut, and when it re-opened nothing was as it had been. Though they had not been able to do anything about selecting the pieces, the prices really had been put up, drastically so what's more, and they also took care to cut right down the stock that was put on display. Just a few shelves were filled, and the hysteria did not recur either. A few days later it was Easter anyway, after which the entire stock was locked away, with a smaller display only being put on again while the Christmas sales were on. It went on like that for several years. There would be a small sale of porcelain every Christmas and Easter, but if one looked it out, it was usually to be disappointed. It became more and more difficult to come across good pieces, added to which one had to dig ever deeper into one's pocket to purchase anything.

"But then you still have that incense burner and the few fantastic pieces from that butterfly-and-roses set. Do you actually use them?" The lady was trying to picture my treasures. What a pity it was, she added abstractedly, that they had missed it all; they had only moved to Cologne a few years later.

As to using those pieces of porcelain, that would be difficult. There are several pieces whose purpose I am still ignorant of even now. The last piece that I bought, for example, was a small dish that was separated in two by an S-shaped division. It is possible this merely signifies the yin-yang duality, but equally there is no question that the dish also served as a household utensil. Maybe they had put sauce in it, two different kinds: one light, the other dark. But how was I supposed to use the incense burner? What sort of altar was I to set it before? Then there is a dish that on its outside is decorated with those short lines that are cited by Taoist books and that the entire system of Chinese calligraphy supposedly began with some four thousand years ago. The dish itself is nothing like that old, of course, but at home I immediately placed it in the wall cabinet with the glass door that I chanced upon in a corner junk shop in some Dutch small town.

The only way I could find room for the other pieces was to buy a larger, glass-doored cabinet, a genuine IKEA display case. Except that, as tends to be the case with these Scandinavian furniture designs, this one did not have a lock on it, only one of those magnetic catches to stop the door swinging open. Since they were easy to get at, I fell into the habit of taking my pieces of porcelain out to handle and inspect them, then pack them away—that is, until one of the finest pieces dropped. Those paper-thin porcelain items are so fragile they instantly shatter into a thousand pieces. I had no choice but to buy a lock, and once I had fitted it, I put the key in a place that I would have the greatest difficulty digging it out of again. Almost thirty years have passed since then, during which time I have only let my eyes run over the form and colour of those pots. Never the hands!

"Shame," said the woman. "After all, it's not as if they were snakes or piranhas..."

"It's me who is a piranha," I cut her off. "Or a bamboo pole, if you prefer, for all it matters. It is often said that knowledge is power, but so is ignorance, and people tend to forget that. The fact is that, bit by bit, I would destroy my collection of porcelain. Through not knowing how to use them."

"You know other things," said the cloth-coated gentleman, but meanwhile looking at his wife, giving the distinct feeling that it was more her whom he wished to console with this remark. But then he really did turn to me: "Children these days know plenty of things that I haven't the slightest idea about. As a former teacher, you must have experienced much the same thing. But tell me, did you ever come across a student who read something by Goethe that he had not been given as a piece of set work?"

I was speechless for a second. So that had been a good guess, then: all along, somewhere in spirit or our historical subconsciousness, if there be such a thing,

we had been hovering in the proximity of the ministerial-rank prince of poets. I did not answer the question, merely said, "I prefer Hölderlin, if only because, rather than accepting any office, he went mad from these questions. To say nothing of the fact that the most Greek of all Germans never managed to get to Athens."

My interlocutor got up from the bench. Only now did I notice that everyone else had long been gone, because in the meantime the rain had stopped. The sun had returned but was now only shedding a weak light and barely giving any heat. Now, late in the afternoon, it did not have the strength to dry the sodden ground.

In standing up, the cloth-coated gentleman looked even stockier. And he ran to one more remark: "I am drawn more to Rilke. He loved Paris, and he managed to get there as well. He also managed not to go mad from it."

He smiled at me then helped his wife up from the bench. As they walked off and he raised his right hand in farewell, he turned round for one more moment: *"Es war interessant. Danke!"* ❧

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Endre Lábass

"If There Is Still A God..."

I used to drop in on a barber's in the Seventh District, though never to have my hair cut. No catch there, just the stuff of life. I'm not one of those young men whose photos appear now and then in a barbers' windows. All my born days I have cropped my hair with paper scissors, to the point that the resultant mop-head has become my sole distinguishing feature, and I'm also fond of scare-crows (poor old farmers, they have no idea that birds are our mutual friends). I went to the barber's shop to play chess or more simply, to live, and let me say in my defence that there were others who went there for much the same reasons. After a while, I got used to Mr Szlatki.

During the first few years Auntie Ilonka was still alive and a low-ceilinged gallery upstairs served as a women's hairdressing salon. They fitted in up there because the womenfolk round our way aren't so tall, easy to look over. At the time when beehives were all the rage no beanpoles went to Auntie Ilonka's, if they did, their stiffly lacquered bouffants would have been flattened.

Since 1926 the barber had worked in the heart of a tenement block with the longest through-passageway in Budapest. He had been the apprentice there but in time had inherited this mini gold mine. And a mini gold mine is what it was, yielding roughly as much gold as could be recovered at the end of each year from the leather aprons of the goldsmith apprentices in the neighbouring street. Scrap gold, as the masters were on the watch for ways even the tiniest filings might go astray. They soon caught on to the fact that sly apprentices would frequently brush back the unruly locks that fell over their brows, thus leaving substantial amounts of gold dust sticking to their sweaty hair. Gold, though, is dead

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Endre Lábass

is a painter, author and photographer, who has been photographing Budapest for decades. His last book was a collection of essays about 17th-19th century British literature. The above is a shortened version of a piece from his forthcoming book Vándorparadicsom *(A Wanderer's Paradise).*

heavy, so the first thing those wastrels would do of an evening, on getting home, is wash their hair. They would bend over the wash basin and thoroughly rinse their hair, then wait till all that lovely gold had settled to the bottom of the rusty tin basin. Well then! Before leaving the workplace the goldsmiths were required to wash not just hands but their hair as well. Well, it was scraps like these that Mr Szlatki made from his customers.

Barbering is an easy-going profession. After all, one can't position a traffic cop to direct in customers, can one? Hair may grow, proliferate, if you will, but each to his own taste. Sometimes the shop is full of gentleman clients, at other times the autumn afternoons just drag by, with only those taking the dog for a walk dropping by for a word and, say, one of the cantors like Abrahamson on his way to the synagogue in Tobacco Street: "Good day, Mr Szlatki! And what's new in the big wide world?"

The real drift of that question becomes crystal clear when one knows that diminutive as the barber was—just like his wife, Auntie Ilonka—the two of them were great globe-trotters. Of an evening, on closing up the small shop, we would shuffle across the slippery, rain-slicked clinker paving of the passage to make our way between the two soaring poplars and through the rusty little cast-iron gate into the Raven Street block, the residence straight out of an Andersen fairy-tale, into the ground-floor flat, and there the barber would project slides to a spirited running commentary from himself and his wife about their bygone travels.

"We would go somewhere every year. Seven times to various places in Yugoslavia, Dubrovnik and the Bay of Kotor—before the earthquake, thank God. Greece—Athens, that is to say. Rome, Barcelona, Sochi, Moscow and, most interesting of all, modern Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn. So I have some idea of the political lie of the land and where places are, what is situated where, and what the people there are like. I've got stacks of slides, even two Super 8 films. Then we were also in Bulgaria, but I've not yet made it to America, not been to skyscraper heaven."

All in all, they might have stepped right out of the *Arabian Nights* with the pearls of wisdom they reeled off to me of an evening.

"Oh yes, the notebook, the pearls of wisdom, that's in the shop right now, but I'll bring it over in a flash, if needs be, it's just a step away. Whenever anything interesting crops up somewhere I write it down for myself. No gate stays shut before an ass laden with gold, for instance. It doesn't matter what kind of an ass it is, the gate will open. This one's not bad either: it says that God merely dictated how the universe should be, he didn't sign for it. Nor this one: A person stays young only till he begins to envy the young. And here: Respect old age, it will be your future too—that's from the writer Miksa Fenyő, if I'm not mistaken. Or this one, a Middle Eastern saying which goes: Even men with clean hands can have dirty thoughts. There you are! I said that in court to the judge: a statement was issued that with due consideration to my age—I was eighty-two at the time, you see—I was tax-exempt, but then I wasn't tax-exempt the moment they

Endre Lábass

came out with that twenty-five per cent VAT. Well, I said to the judge, that's rather like something Mark Twain said: A banker is a fellow who lends you his umbrella when the sun is shining and wants it back the minute it begins to rain. In other words, I was tax-exempt as long as there was no taxation, but the second they dreamed a tax up that was the end of my tax exemption.

"Wealth is like salt water, it says here: the more one drinks, the thirstier one gets. Every one all too true. Then again: We have thousands of chances to spend money but only two ways to acquire it: either we work for our money or money works for us. Or how about this: Don't spit in the well, you may have to drink from it yourself. A poor man who strikes it rich keeps the heating going even in summer. Those are the things I read. Here's another, superb: There's one thing even worse than illness, and that's having a useless doctor. This one is something Churchill said, I think, because the English statesman wrote that there's no such thing as abiding friends or allies, only abiding interests.

"I've got a book by Leo Tolstoy. It's amazing how much is in it, all collected by him, from the Chinese, like Confucius, from Seneca and so on, and written under each saying is who it comes from, or if not, then something like 'of Asian origin'. When I wake up it's always there, above my bed, and that's what I read. Then you have that passage in the Bible, the Proverbs of Solomon—that one. Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die. Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me. Well, that I do get, thank God—food convenient for me; but as to riches... Never mind, the main thing is to have the other."

Literature really was useful for that little old barber. After half a century of reading the pearls of wisdom of King Solomon and others he was well-nigh totally protected against the depressing reality of the world around, for even the most banal harassment would instantly remind him of an adage, and right away he would chuckle away to himself that the office clerk could just carry on rattling his stuff off, he would eventually be able to hear a pithy summary of the matter, its essence as it were.

"I read out this little item to the local council's lawyer. You could do worse than take note of it, let me tell you. This one's a Dutch proverb: Milk the cow but don't tear its udder off. That's so true, I told him: if you ruin small businesses, there'll be no one left to pay the shop rentals."

Bit by bit, I was able to visualise the barber's daily routine. I knew what noises could be heard on the ground floor of that narrow Raven Street passageway. I was also acquainted with the young caretaker across the way, Mr Barcsa. I would down shots of spirits at his place; as best I can recollect, he was studying drawing. Through the window of this acquaintance I could look out onto my friend's window and door, since the windows to the barber's flat looked out onto the courtyard just in the same way the arty caretaker's did.

Anyway, I pictured how Auntie Ilonka would wake up, with the sun not shining into the flat but just a bluish-tinged semi-gloom, and she creeps by the dark mass of the wardrobe out into the kitchen, switches on the light and puts on the coffee, by which time there may also be a light in Mr Barcsa's window. Uncle Bandi then saunters across into the next courtyard along the passageway, unlocks the door of his barber's shop, turns the heating on, tidies up the table, and when the newspapers have been delivered, spreads them out on the chess table to read as he waits for customers and anyone who might drop in for a chat. At one fixed point in the week—Tuesday afternoon, to be absolutely precise—he used to go off to pick mushrooms.

"It's a pity, but I don't dare go picking mushrooms any more on account of my age. I'm in my eighty-fourth year, so I now feel a bit of a twinge around the heart if I try to walk faster. Not to mention that if you want to go to the woods these days you have to put on really shabby clothes so people are more likely to give you things rather than strip them off you. But I used to be very fond of it, going off with the wife, carrying the kids on my shoulders all through the wood, that's when they were still small of course."

Meanwhile every afternoon, getting on for dusk, I would sit there in the shop. And indeed there were many who'd drop by just to exchange a few words or make a 'phone call. Back then there were still plenty of people in this block who didn't have a telephone. They would make their call and leave a couple of forints by the 'phone to pay for it. Any messages they would get free of charge; he was happy to do that free of charge, any time.

"That's why I had no quarrels with anyone. I was even on good terms with Ozorocki here in the house. A very good friend he was—an engraver; dead now. Then there was a married couple, very good friends of ours. The four of us'd make trips together, so wherever we went our company was sorted; no one plonks themselves down at a table where four people are seated. Genuinely honest, decent people, they were. Sadly, they've passed on, both of them, but we have pictures, there's a film of us too; we'd go around together. As for the woods, I'd go picking mushrooms with the Romanian priest, my wife, the kids, my brother-in-law.

"I can tell you that all sorts slip off to a barber like myself. All sorts have turned up here, I'll have you know, from road sweepers to a high court judge, even a general staff captain, though admittedly that staff captain and the judge were working as caretakers by the time they turned up at my place. They'd been dismissed and had had their pensions stopped, so they became caretakers. But any advice they gave was excellent.

"One thing that happened was when the ghetto was set up here, you know. Part of my clientele was... well anyway, there was this 'If there's still a God, Bandi, save us from here', because there were thirty or forty of them packed together on the upstairs floors, children, the sick and whatnot. Something like a rolled-up cigarette they dropped as I came out of the shop, so I picked it up and

that's what it said: 'If there's still a God...' Well, I said to myself: Save? I can't save anyone. I went into the shop, and there's the telephone, so I put in a call to the ambulance service to say: Sorry to trouble you, but we've some sick people here locked up together with children. Anything you can do to help, please... Blow me down if, just a bit later, a double ambulance doesn't draw up to take them away. Lumme! When I saw that I pulled the blinds down smartish, what with me being the only one in the whole house then with a telephone. By the time the authorities realised they were being taken away they were no longer there, so a search was made. Who had it been? Where had they been taken, and so on. A search. Yes, indeed, there were searches too.

"Then another of those stories, here, through the gate. One of my customers was Uncle Ungár, and once I had half a loaf of bread to hand over to him. There was a police post up at the front, by the ghetto entrance, and they spotted that someone had come up to the ghetto fence. My word, they didn't half skate back here! Meantime I made myself scarce. I was wearing a cap, so I quickly snatched that off and slipped into the shop. They tried to find out who it had been, but they didn't find out, no, never found out. They went over the other side too and made a real stink about who had it been, what had been passed over, even grabbed the old chap. But he never let on who had passed the bread across. They beat him with their rifle butts and all, with him having to hold his arms in the air, but he never squealed. So anyway, when that section of the ghetto was eventually liberated and everyone could get out, Uncle Ungár comes across. Thanks for not squealing, I said to him, because I heard there was a bit of a to-do. Otherwise if you had let on, they would have slung me too into the ghetto—that's to say, if they hadn't shot me on the spot. 'Look here, Bandi,' he says, 'I couldn't have cared less. What I wanted was for them to shoot me. I couldn't have cared less, so why would I have dropped you in it?'

"To say nothing of the time that pro-Nazi General Beregffy announced that all army deserters and all Jews on forced labour service were to report for duty, otherwise they'd be strung up—well, I didn't report, did I? People came along to tell me: At least come down to the cellar and hide, Bandi. Don't take this the wrong way, I said, the only way I'm budging out of my flat is if they carry me out in a coffin. I kept my head down and waited there. Whilst I was there, no kidding, I thought over my entire life. Word eventually came that they'd left. So I said: That's all right then, so they've gone. Well, let me tell you, two labour service men and an army deserter were lying here, shot through the head, at the corner of Raven Street and King Street for three whole days—it was winter at the time—and if I'd been in the cellar, then I'd have been shot as well. Not going was a real break for me, sheer luck. People ask why I don't put these things down in writing. Well, as I say, they were just things that happened.

"There was a lawyer by the name of Szentkirályi, and he brought over all manner of silver and who knows what for me to hang on to for him. Fine, here

you are, doctor—that was when lawyers were called doctor. His wife's still alive, so you can check whether this is true or not. Anyway, when the Russians eventually arrived I went upstairs to tell her: Would you mind taking all that silver back off my hands, ma'am, because I can't look after it any more. I could see which way the wind was blowing. 'Oh dear, hang on to it for just a little bit longer,' she goes. What was I to do? I took it down to the cellar. Thank God I was able to return the stuff to everyone, down to the very last article!

"The name escapes me for the moment, but he's dead now, his wife as well... Oh yes! Komlós. That was his name: Komlós. Anyway, I say to him, Komlós, old fellow, I don't know what to do. Why don't I write it all down, he says, they'd plant a tree for me in Israel. Leave off, I tell him, the people who could testify to the things are no longer alive. This was one of the entrance gates to the ghetto. There was another nice bit of business there—a chap who had my marriage certificate and my daughter's certificate of baptism. A married man, he was, and called up for labour service. Well, I gave him the papers so he could use them to go underground. Fair enough, I said. When they eventually returned, he was profuse in his thanks. That was right after the siege was over, when I was in hiding too but my brothers were bringing me food. I happened to be eating jam dumplings when he turned up. I could see how hungry he was. Don't mind me, I said, offering him one: Would you care for a bite, because I've eaten already? So he tastes one and says: No offence, but I'd rather like to take some for my daughter. So I said... I say... why not, just take them.

"In the end he emigrated to Canada. About three years ago, who should open the door to the shop? Well I never! You still here? And who are you? Oh yes!

You're the one who has my marriage certificate. He broke down in tears and went away.

"I served my apprentice time under Mátyás Slechter, back in Tokodaltáró, at the colliery. He paid no attention to business, none at all: it was me who took care of that. He played cards and the gee-gees, which is when I learned about horse-racing. I went to the races, the flat races, that is. After I set up on my own, one of the work-out jockeys used to come to my place. Well, they're the ones who prepare the horses for races, so they always know which ones are on form, right? So he would say something like: Look here, Bandi, old pal, we'll win the Nursery Stakes with this one. I'd go to the track and put money on the Nursery Stakes, and win what's more. But then there would be ten other races, so if I had won fifty pengő at ten to one, I'd lose all my money on the other ten races."

"Eight Raven Street. There's a Romanian Orthodox chapel here, and the priest was a trustee of the Gozsdu Foundation. Ever since the foundation was set up, whoever was the current priest was a trustee. As a result, the whole building came under his authority. In actual fact, it was a charitable trust for students from the Romanian minority in Hungary. The foundation was eventually nationalised—expropriated, that is to say. Lots of people got plenty out of that—all except the ones for whom it had been set up in the first place, they got nothing. Actually, even Gozsdu's own tomb is terribly neglected; they didn't leave any of that expropriated money to keep his grave neat. So if you want my honest opinion, I'd never put my money into setting up a foundation. The priest, Tamás Ungureán, was someone I used to go picking mushrooms with in the woods.

"Fifty-seven years I've been renting these premises on my own. Even before that I was in the same place, working for Mátyás Slechter. Back then Gozsdu Courtyard was such that anyone, man or woman, could walk through the courtyards, from King Street to Drum Street, and kit themselves out from head to toe, because there were men's and even women's ready-to-wear shops, several jeweller's too, so one could even buy a ring for a bride-to-be.

"I may be rash here, but I make so bold as to declare that no other barber anywhere in the entire inner city has been in business on his own for as long as me. Not that I don't know how conspicuous a business it can be; but these premises are tucked away in such an out of the way place that no cooperative or state enterprise had any use for it, so they always left me in peace. There were regulars—until they died off or emigrated, that is. If one thinks of it in those terms, this place—the whole district—everything it has undergone is frightful. This is where the ghetto was, and it was a Yellow Star house as well; loads of people were evicted, a great many of my customers emigrated. From New York, one woman sent me a little clipping once, saying her husband had come across it in a magazine in the dentist's waiting room, and hoping the letter found Bandi and Ilonka in good health. Not Uncle Bandi and Auntie Ilonka, mark you, be-

cause we were the same age. Anyway, the old clientele also pay occasional visits from America, Israel, Germany, or wherever they emigrated to: if they're still alive and they come to Pest, they drop by."

The barber's photo had started cropping up in more and more newspapers and magazines, with him standing behind customers in his beret, and I was the only one who knew that over the decades he had worn a rut in the blackened, polished deal flooring, quite a deep furrow in the space behind the back-rest of the revolving seat.

"I asked how I had found my way into a magazine for goldsmiths. Well, there was one client who came, and I served him, he asked if I'd been acquainted with them, those goldsmiths? Not just *acquainted,* I said to him, they were all *clients* of mine. Anyway, there was a goldsmith in nearly every one of the houses around this courtyard here: one would make chains, another cases or caskets, a third rings, because these are all different specialities in the goldsmithing trade. László Orbán was one of them, András Misna another. Then there was Gerhardt, a silversmith he was, went off to Israel... He paid a visit once... up on the first floor, he used to be... He sent me oranges; I used to play chess with him too. Szántó—now he was a jeweller, such a delicate hand that he fashioned roses out of gold and flower petals out of diamonds.

"There was so much gold in this courtyard! There was even a gold foundry next door, the agent for a Viennese firm, Dvorzsák he was called. The jewellers would take in their scrap gold to him; they would even rip out the flooring and have that burned so the gold could be smelted out of the ashes. One of the jewellers from next door, for instance—he would come in for a shave—once handed me a little nugget. 'Just hold this a tick,' he said and dropped it into my hand. Well, my hand all but fell off it was so heavy! Goodness, what's that when it's at home, I asked? That? Oh that's pure gold for you.

"The three courtyards at the Drum Street end were part of the ghetto. The iron gate was locked, and later on boarded over. At one time it wasn't possible to get anywhere very much from Gozsdu Courtyard; it was only later on that they cut the brick wall through and the caretaker could go across. Then a bunch of film-makers tricked out the house block as a street, installing street lamps and suchlike...

"Yes, that was another interesting incident, when one of the actors, Péter Andorai, looks at that children's seat and comes out with 'Many's the time I had my hair cut in that. My father used to bring me here.' The props man ran his eye over it, and I mentioned that it was a chair from the Thonet factory. 'I'll tell you whether that's a Thonet chair or not,' says the props man. Fine, so he brings it in, unscrews it, and right there on the bottom is inscribed 'Thonet'. Told you, I said. Still, it's good you said because I've had the thing for fifty years and now at least I know it's stamped on it. I never thought to turn it upside down.

My customers have included cantors famed throughout Europe, indeed the


Endre Lábass

world. Lunecki, for instance, he was a famous tenor cantor, whilst Abrahamson, he was a bass, also very famous. Kovács, the head cantor, still comes here, though he's retired now, then there's Rabbi Berger and Uncle Stern—he too was a cantor, out at the cemetery. Pious Jews won't allow themselves to be shaved with a blade, so I made special arrangements to bring in a beard-cutting machine from Dresden at a time when you couldn't get one in Budapest.

"I've been here since the Horthy era. I survived the Arrow Cross period, survived the post-war coalition years, then the Rákosi and Kádár eras, and now we've got the change in regime with Antall or whoever. I can remember all the things that have happened in the courtyard here.

"The chandelier? That's from the time after Budapest was liberated, so to say, from Hitler's Nazism and the big wave of emigration had started. That was when I bought this cupboard, the chairs and the table—the chandelier as well. Tell you what, I said, I'll buy those. 'If you take it down yourself, it's all yours!' So I took it down—almost fell off the ladder doing so, it was such a weight! I bought the clock from another jeweller. You heard the chime? Lovely tone, that has. He was another of the ones who left; I bought the sewing machine and that clock from him."

"I find it hard to believe, you know, that these shops that are being planned now for the new avenue or for the Gozsdu Courtyard can amount to much business. For that, if you please, you need the supply and demand and also promotion on the scale they used to have for King Street in the old days. That takes

at least three generations, I reckon. In those days you could go to the smallest village in Hungary, get into conversation with an old peasant, and he would ask where the salon was... He would say something like, 'Oh yes! King Street.' He'd have no idea where Andrássy Avenue was, but King Street—that he would know! Even in the tiniest village they would know what was where in Budapest: Rákóczi Avenue, King Street, Népszínház Street and Teleki Square—they were known throughout the region, in villages, the smallest hamlets in the country, but they weren't acquainted with Andrássy Avenue or anywhere in the city centre: those were places only rich Budapesters would frequent.

Now that they've begun to chop up and dismantle the courtyards, there were people from Holland—a hulking great fellow with Aljona, for instance, you know. Anyway, he asked my wife if she'd be his wife when I die. So I say, I'd be a mug to kick the bucket. Ha, ha, ha. Yes, well anyway I spoke with him too through an interpreter. Others also came along to take a look at the courtyard; they were all entranced by the communicating passageways in this big block, the Gozsdu House. Well, at the time it was built, in the early years of the twentieth century, it was one of the sensations of Budapest, connecting Drum Street and King Street as it did. And that's to say nothing about what was incorporated into it. One stipulation was that entry was forbidden to iron-shod horses and carts with iron-clad wheels, because they would have cracked the clinker bricks of the paving, which don't have any elasticity, they simply break. When they dug the paving up due to a gas leak right here, in front of my place, looking for the fault – well, the clinker was this thick, and underneath it was a layer of concrete this thick! A real marvel of construction it is. When they were drilling, the paving gave off sparks, that was the quality of the fired brick the clinker's made of. Demolishing that would be a sin, I say. Not to mention the fact that the film studios make use of it. At the very least they ought to repair Gozsdu's tomb. I'm not Romanian myself, so it's not for that reason; but a founder-figure like him, with a charitable idea like he had, he deserves at least that much."

On occasions, Auntie Ilonka, the women's hairdresser, would come down from the mini-gallery and relate one thing or another about her own life. Most of the time, though, she would simply watch her husband and nod, show tears in her eyes or chuckle: she was able to have a good laugh over her husband's jokes and she understood all the finer points, what with them having lived through so many things together. She was a wonderful wife, a fairytale wife to a fairytale barber. I suppose any person who behaves decently deserves one.

Early one afternoon, with the sunshine beating back off the yellow wall of the house on the far side of the courtyard, a young man walked in the salon door. The newcomer was a fastidiously shaven boy with clean-cut looks. He stepped through the door, came to a standstill and spotted me. The barber introduced

us. 'Oh, so it's you!' the young man said in a somewhat surprised tone. He looked exactly like Leslie Howard in those old black-and-white films: 'Oh, grandpa has told me a lot of nice things about you.'

After he had talked with his grandfather he said good-bye and left, at which point I asked who the handsome, fresh-faced lad had been. 'Oh him? That's my grandson, the new Romanian priest." Well, he was the young man who sent me a telegram that I would be most welcome to attend the barber's funeral, if I was so minded and not superstitious about that sort of thing.

It seems that once, setting off from either Chinchin's or 'Guttersnipe' Hunyadi's place, I didn't go back to the studio but wandered over towards the Gozsdu Courtyard and the chess game. I was desperate for peace and quiet. One plays chess when one wants to calm down, not get excited; just watch, the game will be completely different from what the others were, the overwrought ones. An hour later and we were already pushing the completely identical pieces around on the board, for over the years the black and yellow paint had worn off the stems of the pawns and kings. I set the daily papers to one side, pulled the adjustable lamp a little bit further away from the wall, pressed the button on top so that the chequered board was flooded with light, with happy, festive brightness. The gentleman clients were far away, and I mean the gents only, because by then Auntie Ilonka was long gone and the women's salon on the low gallery, now vacant and plunged in gloom, had closed for ever.

After the first few games, it became clear that the powers-that-be were looking to kick the eighty-year-old out. 'I got a letter, young Bandi. I'm supposed to vacate the premises within thirty days. I've been here since 1926 and lived through so much. People have come and gone; some were taken away by force, others left for America under their own steam. And now when I've not much longer to live—let's not mince words here!—they want to evict me. A woman in the office said that I would get 119,000 forints. I ask you, young Bandi, take these three mirrors here, Venetian glass they are. They alone are worth that much. And then what about the shop, my old business, which so many people patronised? Where am I supposed to go? Am I to sit at home from now on? But they don't even try to understand; they simply say that they're driving Madách Promenade through and they need the land. Right here there's going to be tower blocks. A totally new town. If there are any strings you can pull up, please do so.

I did. The brief postponement that I managed to win for him could not have put the officials out all that much. Barely a year later the master barber was dead and the new blocks could safely proceed. Indeed, they lost no time at all in demolishing the barber's shop where we had played chess of an afternoon under the cheap goose-neck lamp. They dismantled it so thoroughly that they even pulled up the parquet floor, and all that was left was a rectangle of bare earth slap up against the asphalt path of the passage itself. All around were clinker bricks, cobblestones, much-patched asphalt, and that rectangle of bare earth on the site

of the hairdresser's. I thought I could die on the spot. There's nothing romantic about this. I stood next to the patch of earth and was afraid to step on it. An image of Neil Armstrong on the Moon came to mind, and that was when I burst into tears.

The entire intercommunicating block of apartments—all eight courtyards—were gradually vacated, all the windows were smashed, the workshops boarded up. Iron grilles were fitted over the gateways of the numbered stairwells, and only cats were able to skip their soft leaps on the stone steps, because only they could slip between the bars. Two hulking fellows, security guards, installed themselves nice and cosily in a stairwell by the King Street entrance. With their black shirts and side-arms, they set up a portable television on the main stairway under which lay an Alsatian dog. The stairwell would flicker bluishly, the dog growl every now and then in its dreams. The guards knew me by then; I made my way along the old route just one more time like a ghost.

The barber's shop had been demolished; there was earth where it had stood—a miniature phantasmagorical football pitch. Table soccer. Fittingly too, for across the way, around the time of the First World War, Uncle Endre Lábass, first Hungarian king of the soccer ball, had operated on a bit of vacant lot bounded by a stone wall. The wall round that lot had collapsed. I went on to the next numbered courtyard. The small gate between the two poplars, the entrance to the barber's place, had been bricked up. Just picture two poplars with a regularly stuccoed chunk of wall stuck onto them. The goldsmith's workshop and the jeweller having likewise moved out long ago, the doors to their dwellings are overgrown with impenetrable ivy.

They are shooting films again, and then someone with inside connections has obtained use of part of the courtyard as a café; maybe it's our armchairs that they set out in the rain for searchers after nostalgia to lounge in and feverishly order their Malibus and Bloody Marys.

As I left behind the two poplars, entered the house from the fairy tale and strolled through the eight courtyards of No. 8 Raven Street, I reached Raven Street. On the walls were old memorial plaques for rabbis now of interest to no one; in the garden of the nursery school grew a huge willow-tree that had been planted during the Fifties by a mutual friend of Pedro, owner of the singing dog of Kazinczy Street, and the barber. This sprawling weeping-willow, then, is a contemporary of the sumach that my father planted by the wall of the Supreme Court, at the Buda end of the Chain Bridge, around the time I was born. ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

György Szegő

The Gozsdu Court in the Jewish Triangle

Buda, Old-Buda (Óbuda, Alt-Ofen) and Pest were legally united as Budapest in 1873, during a period of unprecedented economic upswing and urban growth. The newly named and rapidly expanding metropolis, radiating avenues and boulevards from its centre, was in the vanguard of Hungarian modernisation, one which combined a specifically national spirit and a powerful drive towards urbanisation. What had been the bustling quarters of Greek and Armenian merchants, the marketplaces of Serb fishermen, the vineyards and orchards of Bulgarian and German settlers gave way to tenement houses and lavish public buildings. The landed gentry, with their town houses in the Palace Quarter of Pest, enterprising German and Jewish burghers, embracing Magyarisation and assimilation with enthusiasm along with a cultural and professional elite drove the process which created the city as we now know it, despite the subsequent ravages of war and the (fortunately not too numerous) mindless interventions by planners over the last half century.

Today little is left of what used to be a checkered board of extraordinary ethnic diversity, of cities within the city. For Budapesters, the still-used street names themselves are evocative of this past: Dohány (Tobacco), Holló (Raven), Király (King), Dob (Drum), Síp (Whistle). The dense Jewish quarter which had evolved by mid-nineteenth century in the Terézváros and Erzsébetváros districts (at that time the latter was part of the former) is the only one left, a maze of alleys flanked by the three great synagogues as its geographical and spiritual cornerstones (hence its name: the Jewish Triangle) though in dilapidation and decay. The arrogance of money and sheer indifference are no less to blame for the state of affairs than the ravages of time.

The Orczy House and the associations

For an entire century after the Turks were driven out, Jews were barred from settling in Pest, indeed they were not even allowed to stay overnight in the city. The first concession was made in 1755, when Jews were permitted to attend markets and fairs in the town. Prior to this concession, there were Jews who were

György Szegő
is Editor of Új Építőművészet, *an architectural bi-monthly.*

granted temporary sojourn (the so-called *commorans*). The real breakthrough came with the Edict of Toleration issued by Joseph II in 1783. Jews started to move from Óbuda to the environs of the Kaiser Karl Barracks (today's City Hall), whose canteens they in fact rented and ran, contributing to the rapidly growing communities of Terézváros and Erzsébetváros. Slowly, the Jewish quarter of Pest began to emerge around the area where today's Király Street runs into Madách Square. A Jewish market was set up on the northern side of today's Madách Square, with merchants selling grain, livestock, leather and textiles, and it gradually spread all the way down Király Street. As the Jewish population of Pest grew, the organisation and differentiation of various religious communities got under way. Jewish clubs and associations built their houses of worship and communal buildings within the area, the most important operating in the Orczy House on the east side of the present Károly Boulevard, which was built in the early 1700s. The Orczy family, enlightened aristocrats, showed itself receptive towards the Jewish tenants who settled in Pest. The Orczy House was the largest tenement in Pest around the time, with three hundred homes based around two courts, and with time it was completely taken over by Jews.

Called *Judenhof,* this metropolitan *shtetl,* close to the marketplace, was also used for storage purposes and became a kind of Jewish centre, complete with a ritual slaughterhouse, a kosher restaurant and a café, a Jewish bookshop, ritual baths, religious associations and with a commodity exchange in its main hall. The Café Orczy was a household name for one and a half century, famous not only for its strictly kosher *(glatt-kóser)* kitchen but also for its grain and leather merchants and Jewish teachers. As the novelist Zsigmond Móricz wrote, "here the Balkans and the West, as well as Vienna, held hands."

Giving to charity was quite common. The Jewish Scholarship Association supported the education of the young. Various Talmud-Torah Associations were set up for the cultivation of religious studies, the oldest of them being the National Israelite Teachers' Society, established in 1866. Industrial associations were established to support apprentices, and there was an organisation as well for the collection and distribution of donations in support of young Jews working in agriculture. In 1842, the Israelite Community of Pest founded the first institution for Jewish vocational training, the Hungarian Jewish Crafts and Agriculture Union, among whose supporters were Lajos Kossuth and the Palatine Joseph. Last but not least, cultural associations were established to promote literature and the arts. The second half of the 19th century saw the construction of buildings planned as houses of worship and public places for the discussion of social and religious issues, mostly in Terézváros and Erzsébetváros.

Following the Holocaust, there was little more left for the few survivors to revive secular Jewish life than the barber's shops, the ritual slaughterhouses, the second-hand bookshops or, outside the Jewish quarter, the terraces of football stadiums.

Early synagogues

The first house of worship built expressly as a synagogue was established in the Orczy House in 1796. It was in the expanded Orczy House that the precursor of the reform movement that came to be known as the first reformed community of Budapest, the Chesed Neurim Society (Piety of Youth), was accomodated. This associa-

tion was founded in the 1820s with the goal of renewing ceremonies. They followed the Viennese model, sermons were in high German rather than in Yiddish, and there was a musical accompaniment that was influenced by Christian church music. A polyphonic choir was established, a far cry from traditional individual prayer. Within a few years, the community introduced separate services for women. Since the controversy with Orthodox Jews had yet to intensify, the Jewish Community of Pest accepted the reformist association, they were allowed to build their synagogue next to the Orthodox *shul,* in the Orczy House. Contemporaries nicknamed the two synagogues as "the silent synagogue" and the "loud synagogue". The Orthodox was filled with the mumbling of worshippers praying individually—which outsiders identified as noise—while worshippers listened silently to choral prayers in the congregation of the Reformed synagogue. That congregation provided the base for the Neolog temple in Dohány Street in 1859. The Orczy House was demolished in 1936 for the sake of an aggressively bold city development plan: this was to be the starting point of a new avenue (Erzsébet sugárút) leading to the Városliget, the City Park. What we actually find there today is a dead-end.

The Dohány Temple

By the 1850s, there were some twenty thousand Jews in the city. The variations of religious life were embodied in different congregations and synagogues, with no rift between the Orthodox and reformed groups. There were plans for the construction of a synagogue in Dohány Street and a school building in Síp Street, and the community decided to create the new synagogue in the spirit of reform.

With seating for three thousand people, the new synagogue—a Neolog temple—was to be the largest of its kind in Europe. Three architects were invited to submit plans: József Hild, Frigyes Feszl (who was later to design the Redoute but was not yet well known at the time) and his two associates, as well as the Vienna architect Ludwig Förster. The latter thought that what would be the most fitting would be the Orientalising style of synagogues and mosques built after the destruction of the Second Temple. A radical historicist, Förster went so far as to proclaim that "at least in its main features, the Israelite synagogue should reflect the hallowed ideal of every synagogue, Solomon's Temple." Accordingly, the proportions of the interior followed the Biblical description. Yet the Dohány Street synagogue ended up recalling the characteristic forms of Christian churches more strongly and thus became a vehicle of the idea of Hungarian–Jewish brotherhood as well as embodying the symbolism of the reform movement. The two towers and the rose windows of the façade are formal elements pertaining to Christian architecture. The tympan of the crown cornice reads: "And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them" (Exodus: 25,8). In its centenary year, the Dohány Temple stood in urgent need of restoration, yet the decision-making process was much too slow. Finally, in the 1980s and '90s, a donation from the Emmanuel Foundation (named after the father of Tony Curtis, the Hollywood star of Hungarian extraction), covering fifty per cent of the restoration costs, was matched by the Hungarian state. Today, the synagogue is once again as packed on major Jewish holidays as it used to be in the olden days.

The Rumbach Sebestyén Street Synagogue

This synagogue, once known to the Jews of Pest as "the Rombach," is a major building (and his first commission abroad) of the great Viennese architect Otto Wagner, one of the founders of the Viennese *Sezession* and a pioneer of early modernism. Although ninety percent of the renovation work is done, the synagogue remains closed, an empty, orphaned monument.

Following the 1867 Compromise between Austria and Hungary, the basic law regulating citizens' rights—active and passive voting rights—throughout the Empire granted Jews equal legal status. The uniquely dynamic cultural and economic development that began after the Compromise was to a significant degree powered by Jewish bankers, industrialists, and intellectuals. The *status quo* community succeeded in building a synagogue of such proportions (the interior spans 24.8 meters and reaches a height of 28.15 meters) through donations from members of the congregation.

It was against this backdrop of social change that the General Jewish Congress of 1868–69 was convened. After its wide-ranging reforms were accepted, Hungarian Jewry split into three different organisations: the Neologs, accepting the reforms of the Congress; the strictly observant Orthodox; and the *status quo ante* congregation of those who wished to abide by the pre-Congress situation. Although the splendid and just then completed Dohány Street synagogue remained open to all Jews, Orthodox and *status quo ante* Jews did not recognise the Dohány Temple as their own.

The Rombach synagogue also adopted elements of an Orientalising-Moorish style

but, unlike the Dohány Street building, its front is integrated into a tenement row. The octagonal central space, covered with a dome, adjoins the front in a rather loose fashion through one of its segments. By virtue of their octagonal shape, the minaret-like towers of the Rombach synagogue harmonise with this central octogon. The *status quo* synagogue also features towers, even though the use of this Christian feature in the Dohány Street synagogue elicited criticism. One explanation for the change in taste might be the immigration of numerous Eastern Jewish refugees at the time, though the process met with much intolerance. As against this, noted artists of the time saw the East through the romantic gold-rimmed spectacles of a rising Sun.

The Oriental effects are reinforced by the arcaded portal at the ground level, as well as by a series of arched, parapeted windows of arabesque design, which vertically connect the two levels. These are accentuated and horizontally divided by rows of red brick, running the entire length of the street front, as well as by the stalactite work of the cornice on the gable and above the ground level. The protruding central section, which encompasses the arcaded triple portal, is the dominant feature of the ground level.

The octagonal central space is surrounded on seven sides by a gallery. The eighth side opens into a rectangular space, where the Holy Ark stands on a *mizrahi* estrade. With its painted beams, the coffered ceiling looks like a paper fan of Oriental design. The walls, the gallery and the arcades are lavishly painted in blue, red and gold. No Jewish symbol other than the Star of David is employed either internally or externally.

Exactly seventy years after the inauguration of the Rombach synagogue, as early as in August 1941, 18,000 Jews of "unclear citizenship", namely refugees from countries outside Hungary's borders were deported by Hungary to the Ukraine and murdered by the Germans in Kamenets-Podolsk. "One of the temporary internment camps was at this location," as

we read on a plaque placed recently next to the gate.

After the Holocaust, it was still possible to worship in the Rombach synagogue. In 1959, however, the congregation, seriously diminished in number, stopped using it. As a consequence, the decay of the building accelerated. After the roof collapsed in 1979, the debris and the once splendid furnishings were removed. At that point, the congregation sold the building. Restoration started in the late eighties and progressed quickly. It was mooted that the building could serve secular purposes as a stock exchange. Media pressure and public opinion forced the owners—who later had to declare bankruptcy—to abandon this plan. In 2003, the property reverted to the Jewish community, yet no decision has been made as to its future use. In the summer of 2004, Rabbi Slómó Köves re-established the *status quo ante* congregation.

The Orthodox synagogue in Kazinczy Street

This synagogue was built four decades after "the Rombach", in 1912–13. Fifty years after the construction of the Dohány Temple, the one in Kazinczy Street was built in opposition to the reformed practices of the latter. The strictly traditionalist Orthodox Jewish congregation of Budapest wanted to meet the challenge posed by the representative buildings of the Neolog and the *status quo ante* community. The 1909 architectural competition called for designs for a multifunctional building complex for the religious congregation, including a synagogue, a central office, a kindergarten, a school, and a kitchen with a dining hall. The central office of the community, in the Dob Street wing of the complex, was the first to be completed.

In the second stage of construction (1913), the architects Béla and Sándor Löffler made a virtue out of the shortcomings of the location and thus achieved the characteristic medieval Oriental atmosphere of the Kazinczy Street synagogue as we know it. The building turns

towards both Wesselényi and Dohány Streets, thereby almost creating the impression that the street ends with the synagogue. In spite of the constraints, it thus manages to look imposing. Creating a sense of organic growth, the insertion of this building is an urban architectural reflection of the traditionalism of the community which commissioned it. A harmonious combination of tradition and innovation is achieved through the alternation between moderate ornamentation and large empty surfaces.

A few years after the famous radical doctrine of the Viennese Adolf Loos—"ornament is crime"—a mature synthesis was realised in Budapest: ornamental *Sezession.* Made of wrought iron, bronze and glass, the coffered portal on the front is decorated with a geometric design. The few stairs that lead up to it are flanked in a protective manner by two terraced wings. With its arched middle section and two side entrances with rectangular frames, the triple portal changes into a high pedestal. Even the stone divisions of the windows are carved, with the design extended to the brickwork in the form of two tree-of-life motifs. Placed above the two rows of windows along the axis of the portal and the stone tablets, there is a small rose window decorated with tracery in the shape of a Star of David. The frontage, which is covered with brick, comes complete with an ornamental battlement with two ledges, reminiscent of Mesopotamian architecture. Its floral ornamentation, intertwined with Hebrew letters, recalls the portal of the Budapest Workshop, was founded by Lajos Kozma in 1913 and modelled on the Wiener Werkstätte (3 Vécsey Street). Built of reinforced concrete, the synagogue is arranged into a nave flanked by two aisles in the inside. Despite its wire-lattice walls, the monolithic interior radiates power. Along the eastern wall between the galleries (they are more like the balconies of a theatre), we find the Holy Arc on the monumental *mizrahi* estrade. Rather than the area around the Holy Ark, it was the *bimah* at the centre of the synagogue that formed the dominant element of the Orthodox sacral buildings in the old days. In this case the Arc of the Covenant is expanded into an inside façade. The metallic lustre painting of Zsolnay ceramics, which ring the enormous marble pillars of Jachin and Boaz, is a reference to the original ones in bronze. As we move towards the middle, we come across the architectonic Oriental thrones of the cantor and the rabbi. Above us we see a "backdrop" reminiscent of a battlement. The Oriental wall painting around puts in mind modern carpet design: the motifs of the menorah and the Star of David are arranged in a chess-board pattern.

Tradition requires that the *bimah,* the five-step platform for the lectern, is placed at the geometric centre of the architectural space. Imposing candelabra made of bronze stand on the corners of the platform. The furnishings, and especially the lectern, are of first-class craftsmanship. The ornamentation combines the Sun motifs of a Transylvanian hope-chest, and the Star of David. Running along three sides, a two-level gallery was built for women, who accessed it through flights of stairs at all four corners of the building. An Oriental-style filigree of woodwork separated the women on the gallery from the central space.

A decade-long renovation of the synagogue's interior is near completion.

The Gozsdu Court and the Romanian Orthodox chapel in Holló Street

The arcades of the Inner Erzsébetváros are characteristic of the district. The largest arcades link Dob Street with Király

Street. The narrowness of these plots can be traced back to the strips of land owned by the citizens of Pest which lay outside the city walls and were used for growing vegetables. With the urban explosion, the richest among those moving into the city bought streetfront property, while those of more modest resources bought property further inside and opened shops and workshops there. In daytime, the courts functioned as public areas, with workshops, small factories, shops and storage areas in the ancillary buildings. The mixed status of the arcades corresponded to the practice of "circumventing but observing" the strict rules of Jewish rites and customs. For example, observant Jews are not allowed to step into the streets on holidays, but those moving through the interlinked courtyards felt satisfied that they respected this law.

The most strikingly original arcade, which has few peers anywhere in Europe, was built in 1903, however, not by Jews but by a foundation set up by Emanuil (Manó) Gozsdu (1820–1870), a Romanian writer and lawyer. The architect, Győző Cziegler, linked two narrow plots with a row of interconnected gate-houses built upon them. The resultant six courtyards connecting 13 Király Street and 16 Dob Street are complemented by three atriums. With each courtyard measuring 15 meters in width and 10–20 meters in depth, the entire complex is no less than 230 meters long.

Emanuil Gozsdu, the donor, was born in Nagyvárad (Oradea) in Transylvania. After studying in Pest and Pozsony (Bratislava/Pressburg), he ran a very successful law office in Budapest. Inspired by the spirit of the Hungarian Reform Age, in 1826 he arranged for the Hungarian-language publication of the liturgical books of the Romanian Orthodox Church. In 1860, he entered Parliament as the member for Krassó County, and in 1866 he was appointed a Justice in the Supreme Court.

He bequeathed his considerable fortune to "Romanian youth who are eager to study," that is, to a foundation set up for the advancement of the education of young ethnic Romanians in Hungary. By the end of 1918, the endowment of the foundation, which stood under the patronage of the Orthodox National Congress of Transylvania, and later of the Orthodox Province of Transylvania, exceeded ten million golden crowns. By 1918, approximately five thousand students had received scholarships from the rental incomes of the seven four-storey tenements of the Gozsdu Court. In 1938, the Hungarian and the Romanian governments reached an agreement about the transfer of the property to Romanian ownership, but the war and the forced liquidation of the foundation in 1952 prevented this agreement from being put into effect. In 1998, the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate re-registered the Gozsdu Foundation in order to halt attempts by the local council of Budapest's 7th District to arrange for the sale of the Gozsdu Court and other buildings in its environs, all to be demolished for the sake of a projected Madách Promenade. By the time the move went through, most of the tenants had been forcibly evicted from their shops and homes. The Council then proceeded to sell the entire complex to the Hungarian Real Estate Corporation, which plans to invest 12.5 billion forints in luxury apartments and various entertainment facilities to be developed at this location. Even though there are international agreements precluding the transfer of the property to the new owner, demolition has already begun. When activists committed to urban protection realised the sheer scale of the destruction, unleashed ostensibly for the sake of a promenade, they set up an organisation called Óvás! (the word means both "veto" and "protection"). Their goal is to achieve a revitalisation of the old Jewish quarter of Pest, declared a World Heritage site in June 2002, in keeping with the traditions of the area.

The one-storey Late Classicist building built by József Hild for Sámuel Králik in 1850 (8 Holló Street) was saved thanks in part to their intervention. This building was linked to the Gozsdu Court by an arcade and, from 1914, it housed the chapel of the Budapest Romanian Orthodox Parish, with the priest's accomodation next door.

The opposite side of Holló Street was demolished in 2003; the year 2004, with protests of no avail, saw the demolition of the Silversmith's House in 11 Holló Street, designed by the architects Novák and Goth (1909), where the Hungarian Jewish Cultural Union (MAZSIKE) was housed.

Recently, bombarded by protests and petitions, local council authorities have seemed to abandon their projects. Some sixty houses within the district have come under protection orders. There are also plans of protecting the half-demolished building adjacent to the Gozsdu Court (12 Holló Street). Another neighbouring building, 4 Holló Street, was also built in the Classicist style around 1840. Since 1891 it housed the Israelite Boys' Orphanage of Pest. The great Orientalist Ignác Goldziher, for thirty years the secretary of the Neolog Jewish community of Pest, lived there. After his death, his home was supposed to be the location of the Hungarian Jewish Museum, which was to be based on his private library.

Gozsdu Court and its sorroundings epitomise the co-existence of multiple cultures in Budapest. ❧

Miklós Györffy

Deep-frozen Hungarian Drama

Zsuzsa Radnóti: *Lázadó dramaturgiák. Drámaíróportrék* (Rebellious Dramaturgy. Portraits of Playwrights) Budapest, Új Palatinus Könyvesház, 2003, 337 pp.

The critical and historical reception of Hungarian fiction and prose (though perhaps not fully balanced or proportioned) can be said to be thorough from the viewpoint of the current canon and the latest fashions. Nor is poetry neglected. However, for literary scholarship and criticism, contemporary Hungarian drama seems virtually nonexistent. Just to point to two typical examples: Péter Kárpáti, one of the dominant figures of the Hungarian theatre in the 1990s, is not even mentioned in the latest, revised and enlarged edition of the three-volume Hungarian literary encyclopaedia published by Akadémiai Kiadó in 2000. I shall refrain from listing which authors *are* mentioned. The other example I wish to cite is that of the more than a dozen volumes in the series "Yesterday and Today. Contemporary Hungarian Authors" published by Kalligram, not a single one is devoted to an author who has merited being studied and presented first and foremost on the basis of his or her dramatic works.

True, "full-time" dramatists have always been rather scarce in Hungary, one of the reasons for critics writing off Hungarian drama as a hopeless case. In a recent book, *Az elme szabad állat* ("The Mind is a Free Animal"), the critic Zoltán András Bán put it this way: "There is no such thing as Hungarian drama: this complaint, this lament, this final conclusion is nearly two hundred years old. It is tragi-comic enough that this is still timely, just as it was in every era, and it suggests no less than that there never was a Hungarian dramatic art." Nor does Bán find much consolation in contemporary Hungarian drama, and views even Péter Nádas's work as a playwright as an artistic failure.

The Hungarian theatre has existed for well over two hundred years, even if this is not apparent in literary scholarship, publishing or theatre programmes, and Zoltán András Bán actually happens to be one of the few who have studied it in depth; he has found much of worth in certain plays by György Spiró, László Márton and Mihály Kornis, even if not in those he was specifically reviewing at any given time. Apart from occasional or regular detours by some other critics, contemporary drama has had little attention in the otherwise welcome revitalisation of literary discourse. In the same way the actual plays

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Miklós Györffy
is a regular contributor to this journal.

were rarely allowed to speak for themselves by the theatres, often because they were prevented from being shown earlier by censorship, or by the conservatism of the prevalent theatrical culture; by the time they did get staged, it was already too late, or the production was unable to rise to what the play demanded. The dramatic output of some major authors (Miklós Mészöly, Sándor Weöres, Péter Nádas, László Márton) was cut short temporarily or permanently precisely because their plays were either never performed or performed in a dishearteningly poor manner.

The critical reception of what was staged nevertheless *was* the purview of theatre reviews, which, of course, always gave room to such a reception; in the last twenty years or so that field became its only refuge. That was where the better part of what was to be said about contemporary Hungarian drama was spelt out and, in line with the nature of the genre, always in connection with specific productions. An obvious role was played in this by current trends in the theatre, which increasingly cease to regard a play as a given and finished text that serves as the immutable basis of a performance. We are witnessing the evolution of a new theatrical practice where plays, including translations, give rise to as many variants, occasionally adaptations, as there are productions. This also means that the literary text is only one element, and frequently not even the most important, in a production. The play is on the way to being reduced to a simple script, which barely has a literary existence of its own. Certain "plays" or translations are being written specifically for the purpose of a given theatrical production, and may even evolve in rehearsal with the active participation of the actors, including improvisations produced during rehearsals or the actual performances—turning out differently night after night, and ceasing to exist afterward. That, of course, does not favour drama as a literary genre in the traditional sense, and may itself contribute to the withering away of drama criticism and perhaps even to the diminishing inclination to write plays. Screenplays too are written by established authors only for money, when actually commissioned to do so, if they write any at all.

Still, plays (even Hungarian plays) do exist, whatever the theatres do about them. According to Zsuzsa Radnóti, an experienced, professional dramaturge, someone outstanding in her field, who, if anybody, is very much at home in current theatrical praxis, contemporary Hungarian drama deserves to be held in far higher esteem by the public, both from the literary and the theatrical point view, than it actually is. Her book, *Lázadó dramaturgiák. Drámaíró-portrék* (Rebellious Dramaturgy. Portraits of Dramatists), undertakes no more and no less than to identify Hungarian writing for the theatre which was right in front of our noses all the time and which we failed to pay proper attention to. We of course knew about plays and playwrights. However, that the total picture is so varied, and some achievements so great, when the spectrum as a whole is seen and the whole output of the last decades is weighed, may come as a surprise even to readers who are, so to speak, "in the trade".

The discoveries of the book begin when the portraits of the eleven most important playwrigths of the past four decades are put into the perspective of "a hundred years of rebellious dramaturgy" by Radnóti. Thus she approaches the "second Golden Age", beginning in the 1960s, from the direction of the "first Golden Age", which began with the emergence of Ferenc Molnár and some pioneering but largely ignored plays written between the two world wars. Looked at in this way, the the-

atre of the early twentieth century still made an effort to accommodate the new dramatic forms of the age. With their radically new approach and language, the "rebellious dramaturgy" of the drawing room comedies of Ferenc Molnár, Jenő Heltai, Menyhért Lengyel, Lajos Barta, Lajos Bíró and Ernő Szép found receptive audiences and theatres ready to take risks, and they created a highly original, autonomous stage world. True, those limits were already too narrow for the symbolist games of Béla Balázs, the "tragi-grotesques" of Géza Csáth or Milán Füst's masterpieces; by the end of the century, the comedies of Ernő Szép and Dezső Szomory as well turned out to be a great deal more than what they had seemed to be in their own time. At any rate, "Hungarian theatre accomplished its modernising change of period at the beginning of the twentieth century". Between the two world wars, however, this evolution was halted, the innovative, rebellious authors were relegated to the fringe, and "from the point of view of drama history, their lot was oblivion or a tragic belatedness". According to Radnóti, the great losers of the period include the poet and novelist Milán Füst, author of important plays *(Catullus, King Henry the Fourth),* the novelist Zsigmond Móricz, whose dramatic work, standard theatrical fare up to this day, was also important, as well as Tibor Déry, Zsigmond Remenyik, Gyula Háy and Áron Tamási.

The "second Golden Age" set in in the 1960s when, in the conditions of the "consolidated" Kádár regime, a kind of conspiratorial "interplay" came about between the stage and the public: the experience of a huge deficit in freedom in life and the new conflicts were conveyed, coded into metaphors and parables, as secret messages. From a professional point of view, Radnóti is reminded by this state of affairs of the identification characteristic of the early years of the 20th century, when middle-class audiences could feel what they watched onstage was about them, and playwrights and theatrical professionals were able to precisely gauge who would be sitting in the auditorium, and what those people wanted to hear about whom. (That rarely occurring miracle, a completely organic relationship between the theatrical trinity of author, stage and audience, is what gives rise to the great periods of theatrical and dramatic history.) It also points to a relationship between the two "Golden Ages", namely that the new forms of the new era were built partly on those of the old one, which developed them further. Thus, for instance the comedies, with their absurd and grotesque elements, by István Csurka, Ferenc Karinthy, Gábor Görgey, István Örkény and György Spiró drew on the dramatic traditions of the middle-class comedies of the early part of the century.

Echoing György Lukács, the critc already referred to, Zoltán András Bán, emphasised that "each major Hungarian play must re-create its own past, its own history, and its own medium over and over again. It must always start everything anew... There is no such thing as an integral, autonomous, contiguous Hungarian drama evolution which might be divided into schools or traditions." Zsuzsa Radnóti, although her book is not a systematic history, nor does she enter into polemics with views different from her own; obviously feels differently. She definitely believes that there are palpable relationships and continuities in the evolution of Hungarian playwriting. That integral evolution was broken again and again by the merciless interventions of censorship, yet it was sometimes the very pressure to adapt to the dominant theatrical idiom that helped develop a measure of continuity. Spiró, for example, deliberately turned his back on

the romantic and philosophical "world dramas" of his early career, which had no forerunners in Hungarian, and began to write well-constructed comedies and *Zeitstücke* so that he could address audiences schooled on the earlier Hungarian theatre. The procedure may be condemned from the viewpoint of universal dramatic development, but a genuine playwright can rarely reconcile himself to writing plays "for his desk drawer" in complete disregard of the predominant theatrical conventions of the times. If he is a genius, he will find a way to create a "rebellious dramaturgy" out of the familiar forms. The Viennese playwright Ödön von Horváth, for instance, revitalised the tradition of the Viennese *Volkstück* by turning it back upon itself. Imre Madách's *The Tragedy of Man* (1861) never initiated a Hungarian dramatic tradition, but the success of *Pisti a vérzivatarban* (Pisti in the Bloodbath, 1969) by István Örkény, was no doubt due partly to the fact that its chronological episodic structure recalled the construction familiar from Madách's tragedy. True, in an earlier period Tibor Déry's *Az óriáscsecsemő* (The Giant Baby, 1926) used a similar method, yet the Madách effect was of little help at that time; the play had to wait for another forty years before being actually staged.

In any event, according to Zsuzsa Radnóti, the very best of recent Hungarian plays were characterised by experiments with radically new dramaturgy, rather than by turning and twisting accessible conventions in various ways. The plays, however, in much the same way as their predecessors in the interwar years, remained unperformed, which meant they could not create a new tradition. Radnóti's first portrait is devoted to Miklós Mészöly, whose *Az ablakmosó* (The Window Cleaner) created a genuinely absurd theatrical universe in 1957, at almost exactly the same time as Harold Pinter, and thus in advance of such great figures of the future East European theatre of the absurd as Slawomir Mrożek, Tadeusz Różewicz or Václav Hável. But Mészöly's play, in which—similarly to *Magasiskola* (The Falcons), a short novel he wrote at about the same time, which was later turned into a fine movie directed by István Gaál—the absurd sense of being, and totalitarian dictatorship (in other words, a modelling of the universal fear following 1956) were put side by side and intensified each other, was condemned to silence both by political and aesthetic censorship. When the time came that it could finally be put on stage, it had no voice, because this pioneering, rebellious and revolutionary play, like those which were never born in its wake, was unable to create a lively theatrical medium for itself in its own time. Mészöly's subsequent play, *Bunker,* which met a similar fate, also arrived into a vacuum.

Oszlopos Simeon (Simon Stylites) by Imre Sarkadi fared somewhat better, inasmuch as a play as dark and bitter can fare well at all. Its author did not live to see the premiere of his play which he wrote in 1960 and which remained banned for a long time after his death. Even with only a barely semi-legal night studio performance, followed by a couple of subsequent productions, it made a powerful impact. It is a pity, Radnóti notes, that the greatest actor of the times, Zoltán Latinovits was never given the legendary role, even though he was "Simon himself". It is "an eternal an irreplaceable loss".

Oszlopos Simeon, "the first Hungarian existentialist play", is regarded by Radnóti as one of the most important of all Hungarian plays, and, like Mészöly's absurd play, she places it into a world perspective. She compares it to Camus' *Caligula,* not only from the viewpoint that both portray, in a model-like form, "the terribly powerful desire for Evil" inherent in man, but also

looks at it from the angle of Simon's "rebellious dramaturgy", which contains something beyond Camus: it exposes the destructive mission of its hero in a nascent state. The metamorphosis of János Kis takes place before our eyes, in the present tense of the play. And just as the experience of the absurdity of being was with Mészöly, the sense of revolt in Sarkadi's play is more of this world than that of the western existentialists, because it originates from a real world that can be actually located in history. In Sarkadi's oeuvre, however, next to the rebellious dramaturgy of *Simon,* there is the more comfortable *Elveszett paradicsom* (Paradise Lost), which was more in tune with Hungarian dramatic and theatrical conventions, and was therefore more readily accepted and popular with theatres and audiences alike. If *Simon* really is the great and enduring play that Zsuzsa Radnóti says it is, then it is bound to be revived sooner or later. However, there is little sign of that happening. According to Radnóti, "Hungarian theatre is more comfortable with specific, history-centred themes", and since in *Simon* the historical and social components have been pushed to the background by now, "there is less affinity for the metaphysical planes of the play". I think this is only partly true. Just as in more recent times, Hungarian literature and cinema has been wary of historical and political meaning, so is the theatre now. What seems more likely is that the hero of the play, János Kis, is a larger-than-life character even in self-destruction, and that is something not really credible in our times. If Zoltán Latinovits were alive, and played János Kis with the kind of passion and rage that was his hallmark in such roles, he could easily appear ridiculous.

What makes the portraits of authors and the drama analyses in the book special is, first and foremost, the extraordinary feeling and sensitivity with which Zsuzsa Radnóti fits her heroes into the context of the Kádár era and interprets their works on the basis of contemporary conditions. That is partly due to her being a highly experienced dramaturge, and partly to her tendency to approach the works from a double perspective. As a contemporary, she is familiar with their original implicit messages, sometimes latent up to this day, and she also projects our own current knowledge and perspectives onto them. That results in some astonishing recognitions. For example, a study of Sándor Weöres's plays, which did not have much of an echo in their own time, and may not even have been taken quite seriously (and so, for safety's sake, were not staged) comes up with the conclusion that these were not only major works in their time, the 1960s, with rebellious dramaturgy, but—unlike Sarkadi's *Simon*—have every chance of success if performed today. It may well be that in this Post-modern age their time has come. This has been amply testified by the enormously successful production of Weöres's *Octopus avagy Szent Görgy és a sárkány* (Octopus, or St George and the Dragon) at the Katona József Theatre in Budapest. However, Radnóti's convincing text analysis of Weöres's play, complemented by the explanation of another Weöres play, one that deals with a Hungarian historical subject, *A kétfejű fenevad* (The Double-headed Monster), goes well beyond the implications of Gábor Zsámbéki's production. She asks the astounding question whether "the achievement would not have been even greater if the level of poetic abstraction had not been quite so high, and Zsámbéki had allowed more of the socio-political and historical memories, experiences, strayings and crimes of our recent past onto the stage? In other words, if he had made a greater effort to show that

«the story was about us», recalling our own former social selves wherever this was allowed by a proper interpretation of the dialogue, the situations and the characters." In the knowledge of the production, this appears questionable, but certainly pinpoints something we know little about. It reveals that the fairy-tale-like poetic plays of the great poet Sándor Weöres, who to most appears as a naïve outsider, actually portrayed the misery of East and Central European history with an incredibly sharp vision and an extremely high degree of invention, with special respect to our trials and tribulations in the Kádár era and—something that the poet did not live to see—in the years of the changeover to a parliamentary democracy.

The same "dual perspective" reveals so far unnoticed planes also in the "failure plays" and "confessional plays" of one of the emblematic dissident figures of the Kádár era, István Csurka, the playwright turned right-wing extremist and racist party chief after 1989. The very fact that Zsuzsa Radnóti continues to count Csurka among the eleven most important playwrights of recent years—and sees his *Ki lesz a bálanya?* (Fall Guy for Tonight), *Deficit* and *Házmestersirató* (Lament for a Concierge) as enduring and profound dramatic portrayals of the age, as "powerful and moving works"—clearly shows her fair-mindedness. It may be only just to remind readers today, in 2004, that back in their own time these plays were handled by the censors in much the same way as the works of Mészöly, Sarkadi, Örkény, Eörsi, Weöres or Nádas. Thus, for instance, *Deficit* was banned for twelve years, and publications, performances and the official critical reception of Csurka's works fell into the same context of rebel culture, sometimes banned, sometimes barely tolerated, as other works of the same period which have since become canonised. Radnóti not only had to dig out Csurka, the outstanding dramatist that he once was, from under the rubble of his later inglorious political career, but, as a drama historian, also had to face the "deficit" that the last book to deal properly with Csurka the writer was Part Three, published in 1990, of the "official" Academic summary, "The History of Hungarian Literature, 1945–1975". Now, as one of the best witnesses of the one-time legendary Csurka productions at the Vígszínház, where she worked as dramaturge, Radnóti evokes the relationship of these plays to "the crisis literature of the mid-century" (Camus, Beckett, Edward Bond, Osborne, Albee) and their world, akin most closely to that of Imre Sarkadi's plays. At the same time, she projects onto them what could not be known back at the time: that behind the depressive and aggressive state of mind of their main characters, their self-tormenting and self-deprecation, what is noticeably at work is the sense of guilt and self-hatred of an author, who had been, as it became known after the changes, recruited as an informer.

The best and perhaps most important chapter is that dealing with the plays of Péter Nádas. Proper emphasis is given once again to what is the fundamental theme of Radnóti's work—"the key to Péter Nádas's stage dialogues has never been found by Hungary's theatre-makers, either then or now" (in so far as they were allowed to seek for it at all by the censors); the chapter is distinguished especially by the complexity of the analysis. Starting from the Beckettian dramatic etude published in 2000, *Az utolsó utáni első órán* (First Lesson Following the Last), it discusses Nádas's work "backwards". It explores the various possible ways in which Nádas's "autobiographical" trilogy *Temetés* (Funeral), *Találkozás* (Encounter), *Takarítás* (Cleaning Up) could be approached: the genre-critical,

theatrical, and specifically Kádár era interpretation of *Funeral,* the various layers of *Encounter* and, finally, *Cleaning Up,* "the most scandalous Hungarian play ever", with at least six planes for its multiple meanings: the stage thriller, the perverse psycho-drama, the identity crisis drama, the first Hungarian gay drama, soft porn for over-18s, and the plane reflecting stage reality—planes which, in Radnóti's view, bring Nádas's play close to the theatrical world of Jean Genêt. And then the fundamental autobiographical plane and the one associated with the era of the Kádár regime have not even been mentioned. The significance of Nádas's plays is compared by Radnóti to Milán Füsts's epoch-making dramatic talent, which remained long unnoticed. A long time had to pass until the director Gábor Székely deciphered and put on stage Milán Füst the dramatist, whereas the novelist and poet had long received recognition. "Péter Nádas's silent dramas are waiting for a director who will give voice in their full depth to what they conceal in self-knowledge and national, individual and cultural traumas."

One portrait each is devoted also to the rebellious dramaturgy of István Eörsi, Mihály Kornis, László Márton, György Spiró, Péter Kárpáti and, last but not least, István Örkény. In the chapter on Örkény, Zsuzsa Radnóti, who is the widow of the dramatist, on account of her personal involvement, but also because Örkény's work has been the subject of numerous thorough studies, simply assembled a kind of montage of selected quotes from his critics, with special regard to *Tóték* (The Tót Family) and *Pisti a vérzivatarban* (Pisti in the Bloodbath). The place of Örkény's dramatic output will have to be established much more precisely in a future systematic, scholarly work on the history of Hungarian drama. Similarly, the portraits of authors whose oeuvre is not completed also await additional touches. True, László Márton declared at 45 that "I will neither write nor translate any more plays, and in general, will never again speak publicly about the theatre." The discussion in this book of his "highly ambitious" grotesque, "catastrophist" historical plays which, however, won little recognition from the public, will have important things to say for those studying Márton's more highly acclaimed pseudo-historical prose fiction, which is conceived in a similar spirit. The self-imposed halt in Márton's dramatic work appears to repeat the centuries long history of rebellious Hungarian dramaturgy, though the reasons are once again not political but concern matters of taste, just as in the interwar period.

The theatre of Spiró, Kornis and Kárpáti, however, is, at least for the time being, alive and growing, and Spiró and Kárpáti have, indeed, become the most-performed contemporary Hungarian playwrights. The next generation of full-time or part-time dramatists is already following in their footsteps, a generation whose work could hardly be overlooked by any future overall review of a similar kind. Theirs is no longer a deep-frozen literature. Zsuzsa Radnóti's book ends on an encouraging note, even though the words specifically concern only the work of Péter Kárpáti: "'At the moment the chronicler is in the position of being able to paint a cheerful picture, which is a rare thing' was what I wrote about Spiró and the Hungarian theatres a number of years ago. Now I can repeat that sentence. It is hoped that Kárpáti will not be the victim of as many disappointments as his highly regarded fellow playwright." It is also hoped that the editorial board of the *Hungarian Literary Encyclopaedia* will come to recognise that we do have authors who—for reasons that may be unfathomable—want to achieve their immortality by writing for the stage. ❧

W.L.Webb

Mapping a Nation's Soul in Hard Times

George Szirtes & Miklós Vajda (eds.): *An Island of Sound: Hungarian Poetry and Fiction before and beyond the Iron Curtain.* London, The Harvill Press: Leopard V, £14.99

Older readers may recognise this anthology as a successor to Miklós Vajda's *Modern Hungarian Poetry* of 1977, the harvest of his grand project to get the work of two generations of rare Hungarian poets out of the gilded cage of their esoteric language into a broader poetic stream. He did this in cooperation with Hungarian PEN by importing, summer by summer, good English poets like Tony Connor, my old tutor Donald Davie, Edwin Morgan (especially fruitful), and George MacBeth, and from the other side of the Atlantic, poets like Kenneth McRobbie, Daniel Hoffman and William Jay Smith. They met their Hungarian contemporaries, and through discussion of symbols and 'music' in their work in whatever parts of various languages were available, and with the help of good 'plain' translations, they were set to produce English versions representing as well as poet-translators might the spirit and force of the Hungarian originals.. Most of this was published in *The New Hungarian Quarterly,* of which Vajda was then the literary editor. It was a remarkable, and remarkably successful, sustained effort, probably unparalleled in the history of literary translation.

Some of those poems and translations make a welcome reappearance here, but the brief has been expanded to include a generous selection of the best prose fiction. The period is extended by another thirty years, when contesting its often crude or paranoid politics no longer had to be done primarily through poetry's charged ambiguities and ingenuities.

This panorama of the literature of Hungary in the last gruelling sixty years or so, then, is suspended between two turning-points of history at which history did actually turn, and frames another critical moment, the 'premature' anti-communist uprising of 1956, when it tragically refused to turn. So it begins with a beginning which is seen as an ending, and ends with a new beginning in which the poet Péter Kántor, debating Liberty with Diderot, appears to find "no novelty at all":

W. L. Webb
wrote about literature and politics for the Guardian *for more than 30 years, and was subsequently a research fellow at Nuffield College, Oxford. He has edited* An Embarrassment of Riches *(Gollancz) from the work of the magazine* Index on Censorship.

...we have a premonition
that for every new liberty we gain
we pay, and are newly enslaved,
whenever we break down a barrier
we immediately erect a new one in its place,
something more shapely, perhaps, more
attractive, more clever
more enlightened, dear Mr Diderot.
There's no novelty at all in it.

Even more dismissively disillusioned is Péter Zilahy, one of the younger *Nachgeborenen,* to borrow a useful category (those who came after) from Brecht.: "What", he concludes, in a lively rant about the unreality of television news and its customary contexts, "is the difference between a state-sponsored and a commercial hell? One of them is superficial and runs more ads?"

But perhaps George Szirtes and some older writers would see these as late manifestations of what he calls "The deep myth of Hungarian history... that of defeat snatched from the jaws of history."

The book's opening extract, wonderfully vivid and emblematic, is from Sándor Márai's journals of 1944–48, the year in which he became an exile, eventually to die in poverty in California by his own hand in 1989, at the very moment of the change which repealed the regime whose arrival haunts these pages. Márai admits us to a dinner party given on a March evening in 1944 in an old house in Buda, candlelight playing on old family furniture under book-lined walls: a gathering of relatives for his name-day. As the talk goes on, he has a growing feeling that "This evening was special... as if we, the bourgeois progeny of Upper Hungary and Buda, had reprised for ourselves the lives of our fathers for one last time." It was a just perception, for what was to follow, he writes, "was nothing less than the total destruction and extinction of an entire way of life."

It followed with shattering swiftness. That night, the Germans occupied Hungary, to be replaced within months by the Russians, of whose arrival and startling otherness he writes: "It was as if a monstrous, dreadful, enigmatic travelling circus had set out from the distance, from the dim remoteness, from the East, from Russia"; a circus however which camouflaged an indomitable military machine. He has a baffling encounter with his first 'unreadable' Russian soldier, riding alone into a village by the Danube, and reflects that he is experiencing something Europe had only experienced twice before: with the Arab breakthrough to Autun in the ninth century, and the advance of the Turks into Hungary in the sixteenth century. And each time, the invaders had posed for Europe's thinkers and rulers a question not unlike the one put to him by that young Red cavalryman: "Who are you?"

The question echoes throughout the pages of this book, and there are many answers, most of them complicated. George Szirtes, one of the London-based poets of Hungary's large twentieth century literary exile, turns over some of the more obvious ones in his admirable introduction. Recalling Auden's description of the inter-war years as an Age of Anxiety, he concludes that for Hungary, most of the nation's history since the arrival of the Turks in the sixteenth century has been a succession of such anxious ages, with its identity constantly called into question.

Who are these people on the eastern edge of Europe whose language and primary ethnic identity (derived, after all, from peoples riding from even deeper in the remote, enigmatic East than Márai's Red cavalryman) seem so 'other' compared to neighbours as various as Poles, Germans, Serbs and Italians? How to communicate, how survive, with such a birthright? Only by exile, adaptation, translation at best? Or if refusing physical exile, how not to retreat

into melancholy and withdrawal—internal exile—when history so relentlessly handed out defeats, expropriation, and long seasons of repression and misery? For another locus of national angst, of course, is geopolitics, which played so ruthlessly with the frontiers of countries in central and eastern Europe, and with none more drastically than with Hungary, save, perhaps, Poland. The fallout of the treaties of Versailles and Trianon alone, which amputated two thirds of the country's territory and half its population, means that an appreciable number of the writers represented here were born or still live in separated Hungarian communities, mostly in Romanian Transylvania, parts of northern Serbia, and southern Slovakia. (These in addition to people exiled by later mayhem, like Márai, and the London Hungarians, Szirtes and Victor Határ—90 this year and celebrating a lifetime's production of poems and other subversive work gleaming with a dark gaiety and tough resilience).

The fact that this book is so largely structured by history and politics—much more so than would be the case with a comparable English selection from any time after the Thirties—may lead to oversimple expectations that it will explain just how the Great Alteration of 1989 affected such deep-rooted anxieties. Its final section, 'Crossing' (over into Jordan, back into Europe, out of 'goulash communism' into the soup of globalisation), certainly has voices singing the songs of post-modernism in a different world, such as those of Virág Erdős, a fine, funky virago, who herself has much more fun with her name in a poem called *A Lying Tale:*

> Virág Erdős:
> no such brand name
>
> Virág Erdős
> is one of the best-known Hungarian writers
> but sadly she is dead,
> or rather, not dead, it's just that
> she always gets home very late...

(and so on, hilariously—and don't-you-mess-with-her!)

But then, a taste for the grotesque, opening into the more comprehensive subversions of post-modernism, was evident in Hungarian literature long before 1989. It is a spirit that flickers in the 'one minute stories' of István Örkény (born 1912), in Victor Határ, even here and there in Sándor Weöres *(Antithin)*, though this greatest of all modern Hungarian poets, as variously rich and strange as Swift, Edward Lear and late Yeats (to give very rough bearings to English readers) but entirely and originally himself, is not to be confined by such light labelling. Péter Esterházy, scion of one of Hungary's oldest and grandest families, and himself just about old enough to be Erdős's uncle, has sailed piratically under postmodern colours since the late Seventies, brilliantly enough to be one of the few modern Hungarian novelists—Péter Nádas is another—already widely published in translation. Western publishers have tended to go for exhumed and admirable older novels, like Miklós Bánffy's trilogy or Sándor Márai's own profoundly romantic *Embers,* elegies for the lost world of near-feudal Transylvanian castles and country houses familiar to English readers from the latest volume of Patrick Leigh Fermor's memoirs, and rather more to conservative tastes.

Other writers in this section broadly representing work from the last decade or so write devotional poems (Flóra Imre's *Psalm*), some—Mónika Mesterházi, Krisztina Tóth, Anna T. Szabó—love poems, private poems (so, 'bourgeois', according to the old classification). László Krasznahorkai, known obliquely to a wider audience through the success of Béla Tarr's translation to the screen, in *Werkmeister Harmo-*

nies, of part of his novel, *The Melancholy of Resistance,* is a late modernist working in immense sentences which, like Beckett's in the trilogy, and with something akin to the Irish writer's improbable comedy, breathe more like music than prose fiction. On the other hand the mysterious crisis—gang war or civil war?—that erupts in Lajos Grendel's story seems to be a metaphor for the unreconstructed politics of the Slovakia where his own Hungarian community lives, "part of a new world", as George Szirtes says, "which in many ways is not so different from the old one." So while some of the old anxieties have relaxed or fallen away, there are no simple generalizations to be made about the character of writing under the new dispensation, beyond the fact that in Hungary as elsewhere in the world, women writers show more strongly than before.

The weight and centre of the book, though, seems to me to lie in the work of earlier years. No doubt the stability of survival and enduring reputation plays a role here, but so also, surely, does the forcing nature of the pain and drama of the times on the creative imagination (though I have heard the Czech poet Miroslav Holub and other experienced contemporaries speculate about what may have been lost by this forcing of talent into certain channels, closing off other possibilities).

The poets stand out most clearly: Weöres (represented here by only two poems), János Pilinszky, Határ (was his extraordinary 'Vampire' love poem inspired by a wife with a Modigliani neck?); and Ferenc Juhász still, in spite of the damage done to his reputation by being adopted by the Party as a People's Poet and the subsequent decline of his talent, for *The Boy Changed into a Stag Cries out at the Gate of Secrets,* that great wild poem, rooted in the Magyar's creation myth, and mourning a peasant people's stretching on the ruthless rack of modernization. Auden thought this one of the finest poems of the twentieth century, and it reappears here in a resonant new version found among the papers of Ted Hughes after his death. (Ted Hughes was also the champion and translator, with János Csokits, of Pilinszky.)

With them, among the prose writers, stand the Nobel Laureate and graduate of Auschwitz Imre Kertész, and Péter Nádas, represented by stories which fix vividly in the mind both the everyday actuality of the time of the 1956 uprising (but an actuality carrying still the scars of the war and Holocaust), and the sudden shock of erupting violence as Soviet tanks swivel ponderously to blast the windows of an apartment block, or in Nádas's *Blown Away,* a queue of people who have finally found a baker's shop that has bread. Kertész's story, longer, denser, and more inward, is told retrospectively, on the narrator's birthday, to an audience of students or younger writers, and also deals with the incomprehensions involved in an intergenerational negotiation of history, and much else. Iván Mándy, Esterházy's old master Géza Ottlik, Miklós Mészöly with his exact and revealing notations of reality, the ebullient Esterházy himself, and of course Sándor Márai are of this company too.

With few exceptions translations generally read very convincingly, though the obvious importance of word-play and richness of symbol in much of the poetry make one wistful for the pulse and pace of its native music. Two complaints only. When history is so integral to the form and composition of the collection, it would have been helpful to have individual items dated. The other complaint, I suppose, fails as soon as it is enunciated: it does seem hard to have such brief samples of many good and some great writers, but the editors' aim was a detailed outline of the literature

of an historic nation in a critical period of its history, and it's not easy to find much that might have been omitted. Readers and particularly cataloguers may raise another objection: Harwill neglected to name the editors on the cover or on the inside title page.

A Postcript to the anthology's historical narrative, *Two Deaths,* contains memorable poems by two admired poets who died in the first years of the new millenium, György Petri, a Brechtian wit and important socialist opponent of the state communist regime, and Ottó Orbán, orphan of the war and the Holocaust, who was also an important translator of Robert Lowell, the Beats and other American and English poets. These brave, wise poems, defiant of the poets' own imminent and expected deaths, make a good memorial for the hard historical experience and the literature it produced which this anthology records. ❧

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Ivan Sanders

A Terrifying and Beautiful Novel

Károly Pap: *Azarel.* Translated by Paul Olchváry. South Royalton, Vermont, Steerforth Press, 2001, 219 pp. $14.00.

In a 1983 reassessment of Central European Jewry's assimilation and integration in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the historian Péter Hanák contrasts Károly Pap's autobiographical novel *Azarel* with Lajos Hatvany's family novel *Urak és emberek* (*Bondy Jr.* in English), citing the latter as the triumphant saga of the Hatvany-Deutsch clan, and the former as a bitter exposé of the utter failure of Jewish assimilation in Hungary. It may be argued that *Urak és emberek* is a subtle enough novel to suggest the drawbacks of the whole assimilation project; wealth did not bring personal fulfilment or even social acceptance to every member of the prominent Hungarian Jewish family called Bondy in the novel. To Péter Hanák, Lajos Hatvany is the paradigm of successful assimilation, while Pap is seen as an unappreciated writer who rejected the assimilationist model, tried, when it was no longer possible, to remain a Jew and a Hungarian, and died a victim of the Holocaust at the age of forty-seven.

It is true enough that Károly Pap's life was as tragic as his death. He was barely out of his teens when he broke with his family. As a writer he couldn't make ends meet. In the early forties, like most Jewish men, he was called up to serve in a labour battalion. Less typically, after the Hungarian Fascist putsch in October 1944, he disappeared without a trace in the "concentration camp universe". In late 1944, he was deported to Buchenwald, but is believed to have perished sometime in early 1945 in Bergen-Belsen. At the same time, however—and this is one of the ironies of Pap's life—his literary career *can* be seen as a testament to the success of Hungarian Jewish assimilation. He may not have been widely known in prewar Hungary, yet some of the best writers of the period—Zsigmond Móricz, Gyula Illyés, László Németh—recognized his unique gifts and considered his writings revelatory, a breath of fresh air. We should quickly add that there were also extra-literary reasons why some writers applauded Pap's appearance on the literary scene in the nineteen-thirties. László Németh, for instance, praised Pap's highly controversial pamphlet, *Zsidó sebek és bűnök* (Jewish Wounds and Sins, 1935), because he discovered in Pap a kindred spirit.

Ivan Sanders
is Adjunct Professor at Columbia University's East Central European Center. He is currently at work on a book on Central European Jewish writers and literature.

We could say that the racialist theories of the times affected both Németh and Pap. "Jewish Wounds and Sins" is an imaginative, socially aware and also *völkisch* retelling of Jewish history, and an impassioned, uncompromising and rather muddled profession of faith delivered in highly suggestive and poetic language, a language somewhat reminiscent of Németh's own essay style. In it, Pap rejects liberalism and condemns Jewish assimilation in Hungary as a sham, a futile exercise in self-deception, a mutually disadvantageous bargain between Hungarians and Jews, which nevertheless allowed the assimilated to reap the benefits of the process. Like many an anti-Semite, Pap calls Jewish riches ill-gotten gains, which should be relinquished. He maintains that Jews remained a people, a race, even in the Diaspora, though oddly enough, he rejects Jewish nationalism. Zionism is not the solution; Jews should remain in the country of their birth and learn to coexist with their host nation as an ethnic minority—though just how he envisages this coexistence, he doesn't say.

Someone like László Németh considered Pap a worthy partner, or rather opponent. "His writings do not try to deny or gloss over the fact that he hails from another community," Németh wrote in his response to Pap's polemical essay. "In the fate of his people he searched for his own roots. His work reveals the profound sense of fate missing in other Jewish writers. In the course of our brief friendship, during all-night debates, we sat facing each other like the representatives of two warring nations—*the* Jew and *the* Hungarian, and often as the Easterner and the Westerner." It was clearly an ego-boosting experience for László Németh that a fellow writer several years his senior "appeared to complete, with a well-chosen phrase, my own half-sentences"—as he noted in one of his other essays on Pap.

By way of contrast, the official organs of the religious Jewish community in Hungary were quick to attack Károly Pap for his ideas. And while there were individual Jewish critics—Aladár Komlós, for example—who came to his defense, and who read "Jewish Wounds and Sins" as the provocative musings of an anguished man of letters, the most important Jewish-born literary figures of the time—a Milán Füst, an Ernő Szép, or the influential Lajos Hatvany, for that matter—had virtually nothing to say in public about Pap and his criticisms. In a way, one can understand their position. They couldn't have liked very much Pap's scathing attack on nineteenth-century liberalism. In the late thirties and early forties, these and many other assimilated Jews obstinately clung to a compact concluded long ago, whose terms were being repudiated, the achievements of a hundred-year-old process undone, with ever-growing ferocity. But they were probably not in the mood for further divisiveness, so they remained quiet.

When Károly Pap's *Azarel,* his last and perhaps greatest work of fiction, was published in 1937, some critics treated it as a *roman à clef,* a tell-all account of a childhood spent in a stultifyingly respectable and loveless home. But there were those who perceived that the story of *Azarel,* though rooted in Pap's own childhood experiences, has mythical dimensions. They realized that, like Kafka or Thomas Mann, Károly Pap created a modern myth, a narrative of Biblical starkness and allusiveness without totally abandoning the conventions of realism; on the contrary, he infused his story with a degree of psychological realism that is truly astounding. The first thirty or so pages of the novel are the most remarkable. Here we learn that little Gyuri Azarel, the child narrator of the novel, stayed for a time with

his devout grandfather, Jeremiah, who, like his Biblical namesake, is a raging, implacable, long-bearded figure, who heaps invective on his son, Gyuri's father, for taking "the pagans' bait: 'emancipation'" and becoming a modern rabbi. This gaunt, half-crazed, fanatical old man demanded that his son give him one of his children, so he could save at least that one from the "pagan world", and also from Jews who have become "hypocritical heretics". He wants that child to serve Yahweh, a stern and demanding deity, the way He ought to be served. Papa Jeremiah, who all but renounces physicality in favour of the life of the spirit, takes to spending nights in a tent with his charge, holding on to the fringes of the boy's little prayer shawl even while they sleep, and thus wait for the right moment to set out for Jerusalem. Gyuri is intimidated and awed by his grandfather; he senses something of his dour grandeur, his purity. When Jeremiah dies and Gyuri returns to his parents, he cannot adjust to the daily routine of a middle-class household. For while his father is a rabbi, the spiritual leader of a community, his demeanor and habits are those of a punctilious bookkeeper. Gyuri is too wild, too curious, too emotionally needy to obey the rules, and that's when his troubles begin.

What makes the first part of *Azarel* so extraordinary is that it reads like a suggestive, stylized parable, yet it is firmly rooted in family history as well as contemporary reality, reflecting the tensions and compromises within turn-of-the-twentieth century Hungarian society in general, and the Hungarian Jewish community in particular. The conflict between Gyuri Azarel's grandfather and father highlights the rift between the traditional and progressive segments of Hungarian Jewry. Károly Pap's grandfather was himself a strictly observant village Jew, a wool trader. His son, Dr. Miksa Pollák, a graduate of Budapest's Rabbinical Seminary, became and remained for almost fifty years the chief rabbi of the reform-minded "neológ" congregation of the town of Sopron, whose Jewish community could trace its history back to the Middle Ages. As a first-generation emancipated Jew, Miksa Pollák scorned the obscurantism of his father's generation, and was equally disdainful, and fearful, of the chaotic and subversive modernity his son's life and work represented to him. Like many others of his generation, he was a cautious liberal, a patriotic Hungarian, but also a loyal citizen of the Dual Monarchy. Mention is made in *Azarel* of the solemn moment in the Sabbath service when Rabbi Azarel intones the prayer for the health and safety of the Emperor-King Francis Joseph I. Károly Pap's father, just as the fictional rabbi, valued above all stability, security and proper decorum. It was inevitable that he should reject vehemently his nonconformist son's intellectual and spiritual radicalism.

In the novel, Gyuri Azarel is nothing if not a rebel, a naysayer, a malcontent. And because he has an overactive imagination—*Azarel,* among other things, is a portrait of the artist as a babe—he finds his parents' conventional and prosaic responses to his challenging questions infuriating and, in time, almost unbearable. He also knows of course how important appearances are to them, is smart enough to see through their pettiness and hypocrisy, so he says and does ever-more outrageous things. Why doesn't God show Himself? Why can't he jump out the window if he feels like it? Why won't the furniture talk to him anymore? Why does Father write a short eulogy for a poor man and a real long one when a rich man dies? It's clear to Gyuri that he can never be like his brother and sister, who are model children, that is, pliant and obedient. He is labeled the "Selfish Child," the "Unruly

Child," and he gets to be very good at playing the part. "All I want is to be wicked, completely wicked," Gyuri Azarel declares. "Like a mad dog. The mad dog that Father thinks I am. But even worse." After being beaten by his father for asking one of his impertinent questions, Gyuri makes good on his threat, runs away from home, begs on the street, "even from the Christians," and to further humiliate his parents, decides to denounce his father for *his* wickedness in the synagogue during a Friday evening service. He does go there, but collapses in front of the Holy Ark, and is delirious for days. His father for once shows some tenderness, the boy eventually recovers and is reconciled with his family. There is no happy end, however. All that happens is that rebellious Gyuri acquiesces in a life that deep down he still hates.

Some early critics of *Azarel* had considerable sympathy for the hero's parents, and felt that they handled their "problem child" as best they could. Given the spirit of the age and their own socialization, they couldn't be expected to act differently. And there were those who identified with the real father, Miksa Pollák. At a "literary tribunal" convened shortly after the publication of *Azarel,* the "prosecution" sharply criticized the author for airing family intimacies and humiliating his own father, a well-respected public figure. Károly Pap's response to these charges was strikingly candid: "What I've been criticized for and will yet be criticized for is completely true —this book is ruthless. Yet it was precisely and only through this ruthlessness that I could achieve what I wanted, which was for my book to make itself felt all the way down to the depth of the Jewish soul... [and] it is impossible to reach this eternal, human aspect of the Jewish soul with a gentle hand..." Contemporary readers, attuned to modern psychology, are more likely to be shocked by Gyuri's parents' lack of sensitivity. It may be clearer to them that Gyuri "acts up" because he is starved for affection and attention. (When their maid tells him that she breast-fed him when he was a baby, he says he wants some of that milk. A smile from his first-grade teacher is enough for him to start daydreaming: "She would be my second and *real* mother... the one I'd thirsted for so often.") But Károly Pap, an astute psychologist himself, highlights the manipulative and narcissistic side of the boy.

The question of who really deserves our sympathy is actually a moot one—in the final analysis, *Azarel* is not a realist novel, but a symbolic drama about crime and punishment. As in his other major works of fiction—*Megszabadítottál a haláltól* (You Freed Me from Death), a cycle of stories about Jesus, and *A nyolcadik stáció* (The Eighth Station), a novel about a saintly painter—Pap is preoccupied with themes of privation, sin and redemption. (Dostoevsky was the author whose works he read most avidly in his youth.) Gyuri Azarel may claim that he wants to be wicked, but he is also racked with guilt. Reexamining his childhood feelings at forty, Pap is still seething with anger and resentment; but *Azarel* is also full of conciliatory gestures and hopeful signs. (The name he chose for his fictionalized family, Azarel, means "helped by God" in Hebrew.) However, on a personal level, it was too late for reconciliation. Pap's father had disowned him years earlier; his successful brother wanted to have nothing to do with him. The only thing father and son could still share was a common fate—both met their end in a death camp.

Soon after the war, attempts were made to reacquaint the reading public with Pap's writings. Several of his books were published in new editions; a society was formed to further Pap scholarship; a street

was named after him in Budapest. But within a few years he again became a more or less forgotten literary figure. In the sixties and seventies, collections of his stories and plays appeared sporadically, due largely to his widow's tenacious efforts to keep Pap's literary memory alive. Well-known writers like Endre Illés, Dezső Keresztury and József Fodor published reminiscences and appreciations of Pap's works, which tended to de-emphasize his Jewishness and focused on literary questions and biographical details. Other critics in this period stressed his social criticism, his solidarity with the poor and the downtrodden. After 1989, a new generation of critics and literary historians turned their attention to Károly Pap and tried to revive his legacy. Studies appeared, symposia were held that discussed Pap's significance as a Jewish writer. A new monograph on his oeuvre, written by Tamás Lichtmann, was published in 2001. And János Kőbányai, who in 1989 relaunched *Múlt és Jövő* (Past and Future), an important prewar Hungarian Jewish journal, published the complete works of Pap in seven handsome volumes.

Leading Hungarian critics have maintained, practically from the time Azarel first appeared, that by any standard it is a world-class modern novel. At last, non-Hungarians can judge for themselves. After the German translation of the book, we now have Paul Olchváry's highly readable and literate English version. It is an unabashedly American translation, which is fine, though the translator might have considered dispensing with some of the colloquial expressions and Americanisms he saw fit to employ. In a book written in the thirties and set in early-twentieth-century Hungary, phrases like "You've got to be kidding me," or "That lousy butcher gypped me again" (said by a rabbi's wife!) can be jarring. But Paul Olchváry more than makes up for these lapses; he renders beautifully the anguished lyricism of Pap's prose, a prose that also conveys, as does his translation, the brashness and wiliness of a precocious child. The response to Azarel in the United States has been quite favorable. The *New York Times* called it "terrifying and beautiful." And the *Los Angeles Times* praised Pap for his "anthropomorphic manner of composition", for creating an "utterly animistic universe" in his work.

Károly Pap was indeed a visionary artist, a man with a mission, whose call for Jewish renewal went unheeded. For many—as pointed out by Peter Hanák in the essay referred to earlier—his own fate, not just his work, exemplifies the failure of Hungarian Jewish assimilation. Hanák himself ends his essay with a famous dictum that can be taken as an endorsement of total and unconditional assimilation: *"Navigare necesse est; vivere non est necesse."* But it is worth noting that when he republished the essay in a collection of writings on the Jewish question in twentieth-century Hungary, Péter Hanák modified the ending by inserting a few sentences in which he reminds us that there will always be those who, though thoroughly assimilated, will want to "preserve something of the *other* heritage". ❧

Bernard Adams

Between the Earth and the Sky

The Night of Akhenaton. Selected Poems of Ágnes Nemes Nagy, translated and introduced by George Szirtes, with an essay by the author. Bloodaxe Books, 2004, £8.95

Ágnes Nemes Nagy (1922–1991) is considered in Hungary to be among the nation's most distinguished poets of the post-war years, on a footing with János Pilinszky. Born in Budapest, she was educated there and lived there most of her life. She studied at the Pázmány Péter University during the Second World War, graduating in 1944, and began writing poetry while still a student.

Her early work was published from 1945 onwards in periodicals—always under her maiden name—and her first volume *Kettős világban* (In a Double World) appeared in 1946. In that year she and her husband, the essayist and critic Balázs Lengyel (they divorced in 1957) founded the literary periodical *Újhold* (New Moon); this—upon which the mantle of the pre-war *Nyugat* (West) had fallen—was allowed to continue only until the autumn of 1948, when it was banned, through the ideological help of the philosopher George Lukács.

In the harsh years of the dictatorship Nemes Nagy was able to publish little other than translations—mainly from French and German—and children's literature. From 1946 she was on the staff of the educational periodical *Köznevelés* (Public Education), and in 1954 she became a teacher at the Petőfi Sándor Gimnázium in Budapest. Leaving there in 1958, she became a freelance writer. She published her second volume *Szárazvillám* (Dry Lightning) in 1957. This was followed in 1967 by *Napforduló* (Solstice) and in 1969, 1981 and 1986 respectively by the cycles *A lovak és az angyalok* (Horses and angels), *Között* (Between) and *A föld emlékei* (Memories of Earth).

In addition to her poetry, Nemes Nagy was also a distinguished essayist, publishing a number of volumes from 1975 on. Notable among these is her study of the poet and novelist Mihály Babits (*A hegyi költő,* 1984). In this connection the Ágnes Nemes Nagy Memorial Essay Prize was established in 1999.

In the 1970s and 1980s Nemes Nagy became a leading figure in the world of

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Bernard Adams'

translation of Metamorphosis Transylvaniæ *by Péter Apor was published by Kegan Paul in 2003. He is the translator, among others, of* The Letters from Turkey of Kelemen Mikes *(Kegan Paul, 2001) and co-translator, with Kálmán Ruttkay, of József Katona:* The Viceroy *(Budapest, Akadémiai, 2003)*

Hungarian letters, maintaining contact also with Hungarian writers outside Hungary. She did much to represent Hungarian literature abroad, taking part in international writers' conferences and public readings in a number of European countries and Israel; in 1979 she spent four months at the University of Iowa. She was awarded a Baumgarten prize (1948), an Attila József prize (1969) and a Kossuth prize (1983), and jointly with Balázs Lengyel—but posthumously for herself—the Israeli Order of Yad Vashem in 1997.

In 1986 she and Balázs Lengyel relaunched *Újhold* in the form of a series of biannual almanacs. These contained not only literature but also essays and a wide range of academic material, and in the years preceding the collapse of the communist regime made an exemplary attempt to promote co-operation with the authorities in terms of principled intellectual quality instead of taking up arms against them. The new *Újhold* ran for only twelve issues, however, ending with Nemes Nagy's death.

The present work is the third collection of English translations of her work—the previous two were translated by Bruce Berlind (1980) and Hugh Maxton (1988)—and all but a very few of the poems selected by Szirtes are contained in one or both of the others. Without seeking to explore the philosophy of retranslation, one may on the one hand regret that more new material does not appear, while welcoming the opportunity of comparing Szirtes's versions with those of his precursors. At the same time, the retranslation of the same poems, especially with the involvement in all three cases of Nemes Nagy herself, indicates that these are the central core of her work. Both Berlind and Maxton knew little or no Hungarian and were therefore heavily dependent on informants; one must question the intrinsic validity of this approach to translating, and certainly many of the results seem distinctly flat. As a Hungarian who has lived most of his life in England, Szirtes has a foot in both linguistic camps, and as an accredited poet writing in English he should be expected—as indeed he does—to produce versions both less laboured as translations and of higher poetic quality.

Nemes Nagy thus combines the qualities of academic and poet. In her own introductory essay to Berlind's book (here printed as an appendix) she expounds her poetic philosophy: delight in being a Hungarian poet in particular, for the linguistic advantage and the social status that this confers; belief that the poet is 'a specialist in the emotions', and that she feels it her duty to 'obtain citizenship' for a horde of nameless ones; the importance of objects and of Kék Golyó utca in Buda, where she lived; and that she holds poetry to be 'one of the great roads to human cognition'. She adds the unhelpfully dismissive comment that 'all poetry is untranslatable, and Hungarian poetry even more untranslatable'— this despite being herself a successful translator, in particular of Rilke.

Nemes Nagy is in many respects a poet's poet; her imagery is of the finest:

The trees, and then the stream behind,
the wild duck's silent sway of wing,
the deep blue night, white and blind,
where stand the hooded tribe of things,
here one must learn the unsung deeds
of heroism of the trees.

(Trees)

Copper-red and grey
have plunged daggers into
each other: twilight is in turmoil,
the broad air of the sky trembles...

(Balaton)

and this can indeed be brought through in translation, even if refinements of metre and rhyme have to be left to the original. This imagery is frequently that of Nature, with special reference to trees, birds and water.

The tree is a complex symbol in her work. It may be seen as an object, reaching from Earth toward Heaven; it may stand for steadfastness and survival contrasting with the disappointments and harsh episodes in her life; it may have religious significance as the Tree on which Christ died. The Night Oak shows that tree in an unusual light, following a walker up the street in the night. This person, clearly one of steely nerve,

Stopped and waited for it. The oak
proceeded dragging on raw roots
still shedding earth, wriggling long
serpentine limbs
down the metalled road...

The oak is evidently female, as it is described as 'an awkward mermaid'. It has birds' nests in its hair, with birds asleep in them 'unaware, unremembered'. After a wordless yet urgent confrontation with the walker it

Turned round. Set off. Strange-footed.
It took its nests and birds
and before the solidifying eyes
of the night walker
neon signs sprinkled light on it,
and melted back into the hole in the ground
which was ready to receive it.

This is clearly a far cry from the oak in Miklós Radnóti's *First Eclogue,* which puts forth new leaves while marked for felling, clearly representing the poet himself. I am indebted to Judy Kendall for the suggestion that here the oak represents Nemes Nagy's work—in which case the night walker must be herself. There are times when the translator of Hungarian yearns for grammatical gender!

Nemes Nagy is not really a religious poet, but here and there overtones of her Calvinist background are detectable in the intellectual rigour with which she invests her work and in the occasional direct reference to, and quotation from, scripture. In the Akhenaton cycle she feels the need for a new god to proclaim that 'It is good':

There must be something I could bring
to bear on this long suffering,
some deity I could invent,
to sit aloft, omniscient.

(From The Notebooks of Akhenaton)

The eponymous poem itself recalls the confusion of the bloody events of October/November 1956:

He leapt over some rails along
with all the others,
together they rolled down an embankment,
piecemeal, jerkily, tumbled
under continuous gunfire over each other
like an avalanche.

(The Night of Akhenaton)

The All Souls night in question, the Western reader will need to know, was that of 2 November, after Imre Nagy had declared Hungarian neutrality and the intention to leave the Warsaw Pact, and talks were to begin next day on the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Hungary. The calm before the storm, indeed! A most important date for Hungarians, prelude to one of the greatest acts of treachery of modern times. One cannot but wonder—again—whether the third person pronoun in this poem should be feminine, making the experience of that fateful night and the days thereafter truly personal to the author, and one must find fault with Szirtes's translation of *fent sorozatok még* 'up above, au-

tomatic-bursts still' as 'under continuous gunfire', which gives a rather different impression of the situation.

Criticism may also be levelled at the translation of the next poem, *When,* in which much of Szirtes's English is not to be found in the taut original: 'When I carved a god I chose hard stones. Harder than my body, so that I can believe it if he consoles me'. In translating verse there is always the temptation—even the need—to 'pad' for the sake of keeping the original rhyme-scheme or metre, and there is no simple answer to the question of how closely one should follow form. Certainly, however, not to the point of distorting the sense, however pleasing to the ear the target-language result may seem. The translator should also avoid inappropriate vocabulary; the isolated dialectal words ('...rotting rags and clout') and archaisms ('...when Thespis prinks', '...if the world wags on') which appear now and then are out of place. There is a curious lapse in the prose poem *The Transformation of a Railway Station,* where—striking simile—the stems of dead plants being broken as they go into the bin are compared to 'as they broke Christ's limbs after taking him off the cross'; a good Calvinist ought to know her Bible better, one thinks, but her translator should know that in *(szinte) keresztről-levétel* the *(szinte)* implies a virtual image. It is easy to criticise minutiae, but when so much of the translation is so good such things are conspicuous.

Nemes Nagy's work is profound, and one could say a lot more did space but permit—I have scarcely mentioned the Prose Poems, for example, or the symbolism of water. The reader will see for himself the subtlety of it all and may well not agree with Szirtes that there is 'little, if anything, of the received notion of feminine in her'—but he must not expect an 'easy read'.

Ágnes Nemes Nagy was constantly in the forefront of Hungarian letters from 1957 on. Her output was relatively small—for which reason, coupled with her failure to write any truly long poems, some critics would question her status on the world stage—but although she was 'too distant, too unbending, too disdainful of popularity, to be a popular writer' her beneficial influence on her successors in Hungary has been very considerable. Her originality and poetic power have made her a symbol of her generation, and whatever may be lost in translation, her appearance in this slim volume is much to be welcomed. ❧

Steven Béla Várdy

Hungary and the Western Peripheries of Eastern Europe

Emil Niederhauser: *Kelet-Európa története* (A History of Eastern Europe). História Könyvtár Monográfiák 16. Budapest, História – MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 2001, 350 pp., 8 coloured maps.

To write the history of the eastern half of the European continent with its many dozens of nationalities and ephemeral states is no easy undertaking. It is a territory that embraces not only the small countries of the region known as "East Central Europe"—stretching from the Baltic down to the southern tip of the Balkan Peninsula—but also a great part of the Russian and the Ottoman Empires. There are few scholars who would dare to undertake this task with any hope of success. One exception is the multilingual Emil Niederhauser, known for several major scholarly works on various aspects of the region's history. His most recent work, *A History of Eastern Europe,* describes the historical evolution of East Central Europe in combination with the history of the two above-mentioned large multinational and multicontinental empires.

In post-Second World War Western historical scholarship, the history of the region embraced by Niederhauser's volume was usually treated under two or three separate categories: (1) history of East Central Europe, (2) history of the Balkans, and (3) history of Russia—although the first two of these regions did tend to merge in some of the works on East Central Europe.

The term East Central Europe *(Ostmitteleuropa)* was coined in the interwar years by German historians, and was not used in the United States until after the Second World War. The man who transplanted it after the Second World War was the noted Polish-American historian Oscar Halecki in his *Borderlands of Western Civilization: A History of East Central Europe* (1952). This book was the first comprehensive attempt to cover the history of the region from the Baltic down to the southern tip of the Balkans, and from the end of the classical age up to the postwar period. But Halecki treated Russia only peripherally, in conjunction with the Polish–Lithuanian union, and he barely touched upon the Ottoman Empire.

Steven Béla Várdy

is McAnulty Distinguished Professor of European History at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Director of Duquesne University's History Forum, and President of the Pittsburgh-based Institute for German–American Relations. A specialist in East Central European history, he has published eighteen books and many articles on the subject.

Halecki's pioneering work was followed by a number of other syntheses, several of them emphasizing only the modern period. We find among them Alan Palmer's *The Lands Between: A History of East-Central Europe since the Congress of Vienna* (1970); Leslie C. Tihany's *A History of Middle Europe from the Earliest Times to the Age of the World Wars* (1976); Robin Okey's *Eastern Europe, 1740–1985: Feudalism to Communism* (1982, 1986); Henry Bogdan's *From Warsaw to Sofia: A History of Eastern Europe* (1982/1989); E. Garrison Walters' *The Other Europe: Eastern Europe to 1945* (1988); Piotr Wandycz's *The Price of Freedom: A History of East Central Europe from the Middle Ages to the Present* (1992) and Lonie R. Johnson's *Central Europe: Enemies, Neighbors, Friends* (1996). These syntheses all had their strengths, merits and peculiarities, but—perhaps precisely because they did not enter a scholarly vacuum like Halecki's pioneering volume—none of them came even close to making the impact that Halecki had in the 1950s.

Others approached the region's past by treating only the history of the Slavs, thereby leaving practically untouched the histories of such non-Slavic nations as the Hungarians, Romanians, Greeks, or Albanians and the four Baltic nations: Finns, Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians. The most prominent among the authors with this approach were the Czech-American historian Francis Dvornik, and the French scholar Roger Portal. The former covered the high and the late Middle Ages in such pedantic, although rather traditional works as *The Slavs: Their Early History and Civilization* (1956), and *The Slavs in European History and Civilization* (1962). Roger Portal synthesized the entire history of the Slavic nations in a flamboyant single-volume work, *The Slavs: A Cultural and Historical Survey of the Slavonic Peoples* (1969). This work covered the entire history of the dozen or so Slavic nations from the Middle Ages down to our own times.

On the Balkan front, the pioneering and still unsurpassed postwar synthesis was Leften S. Stavrianos's *The Balkans since 1453* (1959), which for several decades became the "Bible" of Balkans studies in North America. It was followed by several other significant works, among them Barbara Jelavich's two-volume *History of the Balkans* (1983), and most recently Dennis P. Hupchick's *The Balkans from Constantinople to Communism* (2002).

Of course, there is also the still unfinished ten-volume *History of East Central Europe,* under the editorship of the late Peter F. Sugar and Donald Treadgold. But the worthiness of each volume notwithstanding, none of them can take the place of a single-volume synthesis of the history of the whole region, or any of its subregions.

As far as the history of Russia is concerned, postwar historiography has produced dozens of syntheses. They stretched from George Vernadsky's compact *A History of Russia,* first published in 1929 and then expanded in the 1940s and 1950s, through Michael T. Florinsky's enviable two-volume synthesis, *Russia: A History and an Interpretation* (1947), to Nicholas V. Riasanovsky's oft-republished *A History of Russia* (1963 and after). There is, of course, also the projected, but never completed ten-volume *A History of Russia,* which was begun as a joint project by George Vernadsky and Michael Karpovich, but of which only Vernadsky's six volumes have appeared in print (1943–1969). They cover Russia's historical evolution from the beginnings to 1682. All of these volumes touch upon East Central Europe and the Ottoman Empire, but their primary focus is the history of the Russian state.

The book under review, authored by one of Hungary's most prominent living historians, combines the history of all these regions, and does so from a different perspective than that found in the above-mentioned Western syntheses of East Central Europe. It is a perspective that—somewhat surprisingly—makes East Central Europe into the western fringe territory of Eastern Christian civilization. This is all the more unusual as ever since the Second World War, when the study of the former Soviet satellite states became fashionable, Western historiography treated East Central Europe as the eastern borderland of Western civilization. Niederhauser reverses the perspective. He actually refers to this subregion that some German historians have called *Zwischen-Europa* (In-Between Europe), and which for many centuries has been the home base of three long-standing and stable monarchies—Poland, Bohemia and Hungary—as "West-Eastern Europe" (p. 55).

While this approach may have some merits, particularly from a social and economic point of view, it is generally rejected by Western historians, as well as by the majority of the region's inhabitants. The former do so largely from a civilizational point of view, while the latter do so because of their much greater affinity to Western Europe. Historians who follow the model established by Arnold Toynbee in his 12-volume *Study of History* (1934–1961)—and most Western historians of East Central Europe do so—are convinced that the dividing line between West European and East European civilizations is the line that separates the world of Western or Latin Christianity from the world of Eastern or Orthodox Christianity. Based on this consideration, East Central Europe—which includes the lands inhabited by the Baltic nations, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, Slovenes and Croats—must be viewed as part of Western Christian civilization. After all, the whole region had been Christianised by Rome and not by Constantinople, and the region's cultural traditions have bound it for centuries to Western Christianity and to the Latin language. In point of fact, Hungarians have gone so far in their attachment to Western culture and the Latin language that the latter became for centuries the common language of their multinational nobility, and remained the official language of their feudal Diet right up to 1843.

The spirit, the language and the culture of the Orthodox Christian world was and remains foreign to Hungarians, and their contacts with the lands of Orthodox Christianity were limited to occasional military forays into the Russian principalities and to their on and off occupation of certain north Balkan provinces up to the early sixteenth century. The source of their literary, scholarly and administrative culture was always Italy and the Holy Roman Empire, and to a lesser degree, France. All manifestations of Orthodox Christian culture were, therefore, strictly limited to Hungary's northeastern and eastern borderlands, populated by immigrant Rusyn and Vlach peasants, who flocked across the Carpathians and gradually settled in those remote mountainous areas.

In the case of Bohemia, there was not even a shadow of Orthodox Christian culture. Bohemia had become a component of the Holy Roman Empire already in the tenth century, and it remained part of the German cultural world right up to the end of that Empire in 1806, and then of the Habsburg Empire up to its demise in 1918.

In the case of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Eastern Orthodox influences were limited to the country's Ruthenian (Ukrainian and Belorussian) inhabited eastern provinces, acquired at the

time of the political union with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the late fourteenth century. But even there, Western cultural manifestations became so strong that many of the Commonwealth's Orthodox Christian inhabitants accepted affiliation with Rome in a series of religious unions, beginning with the Union of Brest in 1596. By accepting Rome's leadership—while retaining much of their liturgy, liturgical language and socio-religious practices (e.g., a married priesthood)—these former Orthodox Christians gave birth to a kind of "in-between" Christianity, known variously as the Uniate Church, the Greek Catholic Church, the Ukrainian Catholic Church or (as in the United States) the Byzantine Catholic Church. Poland proper, however, was and always remained a strong bastion of Catholicism and of Western Christian civilization.

The lands to the east and south of these three medieval monarchies were part of a different world, the world of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. At the same time, even in those Orthodox Christian lands, there were major differences between the lands of the Eastern Slavs (Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians) and the Balkan Peninsula. In contrast to the first of these lands, which came late into the world of higher civilization, the Balkans had been part of the Roman and Byzantine Empires right up to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. With the decline and fall of Byzantium, the Balkans were conquered by the Turks and consequently became the Christian segment of the Islamic Ottoman Empire, remaining so right up to the second half of the nineteenth, and in some instances, the early twentieth century. The influences of these large empires have left their mark upon the people of the Balkans.

This naturally made them and their culture somewhat different from the people of the Russian Empire.

We may disagree with Niederhauser's choice of making East Central Europe the western borderland of Eastern European civilization, yet we cannot but marvel at his masterly handling of the region's history. His narrative flows smoothly and it clearly reflects his long decades of teaching at university level. Although his primary affiliation was and is with the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Niederhauser also held professorships at the University of Debrecen (1951–1983) and the Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest (1984–1994). *A History of Eastern Europe,* therefore, can be viewed both as a university textbook, as well as the signature of a seasoned historian, who wished to package his vast knowledge about the region's history into a single-volume synthesis.

The book is divided into fifteen chapters, each of them subdivided into three to nine subchapters. Niederhauser's coverage is both chronological and topical. During the medieval period he treats each of the region's more important countries (Poland, Bohemia, Hungary and Kievan Russia) as independent political entities, but also as victims of and sufferers under such powerful external forces as the Mongols, the Ottoman Turks and the German Holy Roman Empire.

He deals with the Balkan Peninsula before the Ottoman Turkish conquest in several subchapters. He discusses the Peninsula's Byzantine traditions, as well as its gradual transformation through the rise of the medieval Bulgarian, Croatian and Serbian states.

Niederhauser's coverage of the Middle Ages is balanced and well organized. What one has to note in this part of his narrative is a lack of willingness or desire to explore some of the more recent, somewhat unorthodox, views concerning the Hungarian conquest of the Carpathian Basin, and the

nature of the so-called "Great Moravian Empire".

During the 1970s, a Hungarian scholar of protohistory, Gyula László, had proposed the theory of a "dual" or "double conquest," which asserts that the so-called Árpádian conquest of Hungary in the late ninth century was really the second coming of the Magyars. He believes that the first Hungarian conquerors were the so-called "Late Avars" in the 670s. This claim is based on the constant recurrence of Magyar place names in those parts of the Carpathian Basin that remained unoccupied by the tribes of the Árpádian conquest. As described by Gyula László, this can only be explained by accepting that those regions had in fact been occupied by Magyar speaking people long before the "second conquest." This hypothesis has not been widely accepted by historians, but it is a view that is becoming more plausible and should therefore be explored and treated with respect.

This also holds true for the debate concerning the location of the so-called "Great Moravian Empire" of the ninth century, a state that was brought down after only a few decades by the late-ninth-century Hungarian conquerors under the leadership of Árpád. According to theories championed by such scholars as Imre Boba of the University of Washington (*Moravia's History Reconsidered,* 1971), Péter Püspöki-Nagy of Slovakia and Hungary (*On the Location of Great Moravia: A Reassessment,* 1982), Martin Eggers of Germany (*Das 'grossmährische Reich': Realität oder Fiktion?,* 1995), and Charles R. Bowlus of the University of Arkansas (*Franks, Moravians, and Magyars. The Struggle for the Middle Danube,* 788–907, 1995), this ephemeral state was not located in the centre of former Czechoslovakia, along the northern Morava River, as has been generally assumed, but rather in Sirmium, in former south-central Hungary—now northern Serbia—that is closer to the southern Morava River. Moreover, it was neither "great", nor even an "empire," but simply a small and ephemeral state of local significance. The adjective *"magna"* does not mean "great"—as has been generally assumed—but rather "early" or "first" (e.g., "Early Moravia," "First Moravia"). An analogous situation is the use of the element "great" or "grand" in the terms "grandfather", "grand-père," "Grossvater," and "nagyapa." In all of these instances the use of the terms "grand," "gross," and "nagy" simply means that these grandfathers have predated their second generation offspring.

By repositioning "Great Moravia" or "Moravia Magna" from former Czechoslovakia to the northern Balkans, this revolutionary hypothesis naturally alters significantly the region's history in the ninth century, and also cuts into the foundation stone of the national pride of the Czechs and the Slovaks.

Niederhauser's Chapter III describes the development of the three subregions: Russia, the Balkans and "West-Eastern Europe" (East Central Europe)—the latter embracing the three solid and lasting states of Poland, Bohemia and Hungary. This is followed, in the course of several chapters, by the description of the rise and expansion of Ottoman Turkish and Habsburg power, the gradual unification and expansion of Russia, the integration of the Balkan states into the Ottoman Empire, the progressive reduction of the independence of Bohemia, Hungary and Poland, the subsequent withdrawal of Ottoman power from Europe, and the gradual intrusion of the Habsburg and Russian powers into the Balkans.

Niederhauser's coverage is particularly strong when dealing with the national revival movements, the impact of national-

ism upon the region and with the region's social and economic transformation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These are topics that the author has already dealt with in several of his earlier books. These include the much-praised *A jobbágyfelszabadítás Kelet-Európában* (The Emancipation of Serfs in Eastern Europe, 1962), *Forrongó félsziget: A Balkán a XIX–XX. században* (A Peninsula on the Boil: The Balkans in the 19th and 20th Centuries, 1972), and *Nemzetek születése Kelet-Európában* (The Birth of Nations in Eastern Europe, 1976)—the latter of which also appeared in an English version under the title *The Rise of Nationality in Eastern Europe* (1982).

Niederhauser devotes six chapters to twentieth-century developments. They include his treatment of the post-First World War disintegration of the three multinational empires (Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire), the rise of several allegedly "national," but in effect smaller multinational states after the war, the resulting "Balkanisation" of East Central Europe, the intrusion of Nazi German power into the region during the interwar years, the complete takeover of the region by the Soviets after the Second World War, its four decades of domination by the Soviet Union, the disintegration of the Soviet Bloc, the further fragmentation of the artificially created small multinational states in the wake of the collapse of Soviet power, and finally, the search for new paths within a vacuum left by the disintegration of the Communist world and of the Soviet Union itself.

It would be difficult to argue with most of Niederhauser's finely chiselled summaries and analyses of modern historical developments, particularly in a short review of this type. He has come up with a rather balanced view and a very readable synthesis. It presents at least as good a picture of the historical developments of the eastern half of Europe as any one, or any combination of the works mentioned above.

This is a work that should also appear in English and in other Western languages. ❧

Thomas Kabdebo

Hungarians' Tribulation in Hungarian at Last

Thomas Morus: *Erősítő párbeszéd balsors idején* (A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation). Translated by Zsuzsa Gergely. Budapest–Kolozsvár, Szent István Társulat — A Dunánál Könyvkiadó, 2004. 462 pp.

This book, well illustrated with contemporary woodcuts and reprints of early texts, was born of a marriage of minds between Attila Fáj, Professor Emeritus of the University of Genova, and Géza Szőcs, the editor of the journal *A Dunánál*. It is difficult to believe that the Hungarian translation of this book by Sir Thomas More had to wait 470 years to be published in Hungarian, albeit there have been earlier, incomplete attempts. The present and completed translation is the work of Zsuzsa Gergely, a young lady in her twenties, whose solutions working with a difficult text betray a maturity well beyond her years. The Hungarian *Tribulation* is an authentic text with many good and some optimal solutions.

It would not have been published without the laudable efforts of Attila Fáj, whose researches and Kolozsvár (Cluj) lecture on Thomas More encouraged this *Morus hungarica* to be published in Budapest. We, twenty-first century readers, are not really sure why More was so specially concerned with Hungary, whether he had any direct Hungarian contacts, and whether his other famous book, *Utopia,* was or was not an allegorical description of Hungary. The introduction mentions a bishop, John Morton, who had received a Hungarian deputation in the fifteenth century and a more recent journey by king János Zápolya to England. It is more than likely that the latter met More and gave him an account of the disastrous defeat by the Turks at Mohács in 1526. It is unlikely that the dead bishop's former retainers would have remembered anything concerning the Hungarians. But there is a third possibility: King Henry VIII had sent a dozen English archers to King Louis II, they had fought in the battle of Mohács, then they disappeared. Sir Thomas More, through his office, would have kept a close account of all military personnel and expenditure. Every sentence of the *Dialogue* reminds us of the sombre mood of the post-Mohács era, although lacking the detailing of such witness accounts as the *Istvánffy Chronicle.*

The two main characters of the dialogue are Vincent and Anthony, two Hungarian

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Thomas Kabdebo,

left Hungary after the military defeat of the 1956 Revolution. He attended the universities of Budapest, Manchester, London and Rome and was library director of four libraries in four western countries. He wrote 36 books in English and in Hungarian. His main work is a novel: Danubius Danubia.

noblemen, who are relations. Their dialogue takes place throughout the three "books" in Buda, where Vincent visits, and Anthony dwells. (We can almost see the daughter of the humanist bringing him a supply of quill pens and paper). Although not called by name, the book makes it plain that its author despises János Zápolya and hates the Turkish sultan. More was a true Catholic who could not stand those Christians—renegates in his eyes—who had given in to the Turks. It is characteristic of the sixteenth century, and typical of More's position, that he judged the betrayal of the faith as the most horrific of crimes. Soon after Luther's rift with the Church, Henry VIII wrote a book defending the "true faith", which earned him the papal title of Defender of the Faith. It was an open secret that the book was written by Thomas More. And in this context we ought to mention that More had officially approved the execution of a number of English Protestants. It is very likely that in the Tower More remembered the fate of these "heretics" with remorse.

The Catholic faith teaches us that, above all, we have to be true to God. Regarding his own fortunes, More interpreted this loyalty so that the Roman Catholic claim is superior to the King's demands. The head of the Church was the Pope, divorce was forbidden. Henry VIII could put aside his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, could divorce her, could marry Anne Boleyn, but in all this he acted against the Pope, and against God.

We do not find one direct piece of criticism of his cruel king, but indirectly More scolds him in the name of the bestial sultan. More, to cover himself, called his book a translation; a white lie in his defence. He did use a number of sources, such as the Old and the New Testament—in the Vulgate version—and *De Consolatione Philosophiæ,* by Boetius, who suffered a similar fate in the sixth century.

More, considering his own fate, must have thought of Thomas à Becket, whose days were ended by King Henry's murderous knights.

It is common knowledge that More in the Tower was hoping to obtain the King's pardon. Failing this he was hoping to gain admittance to heaven. A whole chapter of his book is devoted to the fear of death and how to deal with it. In the Hungarians' case the fear of losing their country was an additional consideration.

The Turks, the Sultan, the Noblemen are real and not only allegorical figures. More recognises that Islam wanted to conquer the world. He knew of the successful defence of Vienna, and ten years later he heard with horror of the *sacco di Roma* by the army of Charles V. His Hungarians claim, rightly, that the West had neither the strength nor the desire to expel the Turks, who had degraded the Hungarians to slavery and made the Transylvanians their servants.

Despite its dark tone and the sadness of the events recounted, the *Dialogue* contains a good deal of merriment too, partly in the recollected humorous morsels of More's family life, and partly in the animal fables retold, Aesop-like.

Bishop John Fisher, who had denied the legality of the King's second marriage, was executed; More could hardly hope for a different fate. The first six chapters of the *Dialogue* are about aspects of death and dying. The body will perish but remorse in time will liberate the victim's soul, and he will be saved. To prepare well for death is to prepare for a "good death". Christianity is not too far from the Stoic's *ars moriendi.*

Sir Thomas More, the Christian humanist died a matyr's death, for a cause which would be also appreciated by a secularised world. He refused the demands of a tyrant, he too was a man for all seasons. ❧

Tamás Koltai

Marketable Hungarians

Lajos Biró: *Sárga liliom* (Yellow Lilly) • Béla Pintér: *A sütemények királynője* (The Queen of Pastries) • Árpád Schilling: *Fekete ország* (Black Country) • János Térey: *A Nibelung-lakópark* (The Nibelung Gated Housing)

The reputation of Hungarian theatre seems to have gone up in the world. Unlike earlier on, when the Budapest-based Katona József company was the only one in Hungary to create a stir on the international scene, recently more and more Hungarian companies have been invited to perform abroad. (Prior to the Katona's foundation in 1982, there had been no permanent companies in Hungary so invited.) Evidently, these companies address the same problems that most concern the public: they offer a true reflection of contemporary Hungarian society.

In November 2004, the Csiky Gergely Theatre of Kaposvár took part in the Berliner Festspiele, a series of events scheduled to run until March 2005. The organizers' choice fell on a musical with a Gypsy theme, *Csak egy szög* (Just a Nail, *H.Q.* 173, Spring 2004). The director, János Mohácsi, is himself a true original, producing his own scripts (in partnership with his brother) or else reworking well-known plays, usually classical, and usually altering them beyond recognition. His latest production, *Sárga liliom* (Yellow Lily) is currently playing at the National Theatre. It is based on a play of the same name by Lajos Bíró, premiered in 1910. A journalist turned playwright and short-story writer, Bíró settled in Great Britain in 1920, where he ended up writing plays for the English stage. His plays usually enjoyed good runs, some of them still being performed after his death in 1948. He also wrote many film scripts, including an Alexander Korda classic, *The Private Life of Henry the VIII.*

Sárga liliom is about provincial life in early-20th-century Hungary. The bourgeois elements of a county seat, mostly owners of businesses, tenants of land and retail merchants, decide to organize resistance against the "noble clique", the nobility and the gentry holding the reins of power in both the county and town administrations. When they decide to launch a party with a radical program, they elect Jenő Peredy, as their leader, a physician and journalist, a native son who has just recently returned from the capital. The founding members of the party gather in the Café Griffon. Situated on the town's main square, this venue also happens to be the favourite locale of the town's *jeunesse dorée,* whose celebrated and

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

feared leader is an *enfant terrible:*, a twenty-year-old archduke, whose family are the largest landholders in the area. He is a wild and sentimental tyrant who, together with his unruly company, smashes the café's mirrors every night, which doesn't seem to alliviate his frustrations. (He is bored both with women and with himself alike.) When he meets Peredy and company, he immediately takes a fancy to Judit, the physician's nineteen-year-old sister, who has just finished her convent schooling. A passionate courting scene follows, which nearly ends in a scandal, but Peredy saves the situation. After this, the young archduke goes to serenade in front of Peredy's house every night. On one occasion he uses Peredy's absence to gain entrance into the house by a ruse. Peredy unexpectedly returns, shoots him, then saves the young man's life, having just enough time to remove the bullet before he is arrested. Meanwhile, the wheels are set into motion to buy off members of the Radical Democratic Party one by one. So, by the time Peredy is offered a deal in exchange of his freedom, he finds he has no one on his side. Nevertheless he sticks to his decision to have the young duke prosecuted; Judit suddenly announces that she is in love with her suitor and wants to marry him, agreeing to a morganatic marriage. Deserted by everyone, Peredy finds himself alone with his honesty.

With its courage and its compromises, the play holds up a mirror to contemporary society. Bíró offers a powerful portrayal of the social dynamics of his time, pinning down the reasons why middle-class movements are bound to fail, though recoiling from drawing the obvious conclusions and—for the sake of a theatrical premiere—discrediting the entire play by resolving it with an operetta-like vaudevillian happy ending. It is rather telling that the short story forming the basis of the play (*Szolgák országa,* The Land of Servants) also had a go at anti-Semitism, but this strand was dropped from the stage version. The Mohácsi brothers have now reinstated this element. In other respects, they have used very little of Bíró's play: besides the basic plot, they more or less kept the first act, and then added two new ones, both taking place in a new setting. They have also added a number of new characters, mainly female. In their version, Judit is Peredy's ward, with whom he is in love. Iconographically, the love for one's ward adds a touch of ridicule and weakness to the hero's character (think of Molière or Rossini), which is in harmony with the authors' propensity for de-heroisation. János Mohácsi's direction tends to enhance this effect. For example, the wild revelry of the *jeunesse dorée* in the Café Griffon culminates in their removing the statue of a griffon from its pedestal in the main square and bringing it in the café. Instead of Peredy's home, the second act takes place in the corridor of a public hospital, where the young archduke is being operated on under the gruesome conditions that would befit a black comedy. The third act takes place in the café, now turned into an undertaker's parlour by its proprietor, a former member of the Radical Democratic Party, who received the concession for funerals in return for abandoning the cause. About a dozen coffins are brought on stage, an allusion to a scene from the American television series *ER,* which was dramaturgically prepared in the previous act by references to a railway catastrophe. Elements such as this bring us further and further away from reality and more and more into the domain of the absurd. This nicely falls in with Mohácsi's usual method, this time accompanied by ecstatic music and choreography. Nevertheless, the machinery is somewhat screeching, as the transition from quasi-realism to complete

madness is not as swift as it should be. The happy ending—multiplied for the sake of a strong counter-effect—is not powerful enough. Still, there are some critics who find the production too provocative for the classical traditions of the National Theatre.

With only six years behind it, the Pintér Béla Company has recently started to earn international acclaim. Its founder started out as a folk dancer and actor before making his debut as a playwright and director in his own company. With one exception, all the productions were performed in the building of the Budapest Technical University, in the small studio theatre formally occupied by the Avant-garde company of the Szkéné Theatre. Since they give their productions long runs, their persiflage of the myth of national folklore, *Parasztopera* (Peasant Wedding, *H.Q.* 172, Summer 2004), is still being shown. Also invited to the Berliner Festspiele of 2004/2005 is *Gyévuska* (meaning Little Girl in Russian, *H.Q.* 173, Autumn 2004), a musical piece set on the Russian front during the Second World War and describing the destruction of the Second Hungarian Army. It will be performed in Berlin under the title *Zerkratztes Zelluloid*, co-produced with the National Theatre.)

At a superficial glance, their latest première, *A sütemények királynője* (The Queen of Pastries), is about violence in the family. However, the label does not say much about the real message. Pintér's company invariably addresses issues that form part of the collective subconscious, "experiences buried in the deep." Although there is an element of journalism in their treatment of the material, an equally important aspect is the requirement that they express their personal view on the subject. Their plays are usually a collective effort, in the sense that the actors add their own experiences, thoughts and self-confessions to the material. In this case it is about the psychological and physical trauma of a seven-year-old girl, who is regularly beaten by her drunkard of a father. One symptom of retarded development is that she is not completely toilet-trained, which makes her position in the classroom unbearable. Significantly, the author sets the story in 1984. The father, a lieutenant colonel in the Communist regime's state security department, has a tendency to wield his political power (and a loaded gun) to terrorise everyone around him. The political criticism diverts some of the attention from the innate weight of the psychological conflict. It is clear, however, that Pintér's play was not meant to be a naturalistic socio-drama. Rather, it is a tragic grotesque and a surreal fable, where the child creates a phantom to act as her guardian angel.

The success of the production lies in the direction, rather than in the text. In creating the monstrous and—in the eyes of children—rather infantile world of adults, the actors offer their personal dedication and theatrical imagination. The audience look down on the disc-shaped, revolving stage from a steep arena surrounded on three sides, filling the tiny space entirely. The stage is kept in rotation with the help of a rope pulled by a bull-headed man wearing a visor, a character straight out of the Star Wars movies. The half-animal monster later changes into a uniformed half-man monster. (This character is played by Béla Pintér.) Adult actors play the roles of children. Sometimes they leave their role and turn to the musical instruments placed at the edge of the stage, accompanying their own drama with a song. The songs, whether the Internationale or some Hungarian Gypsy tunes, have a dramaturgical function: they stylise, alienate and elevate the play from reality, thus blending it with Pintér's style of ritual theatre, mixing the horrible with the ridiculous.

Krétakör Theatre is the Hungarian company best known abroad. Since its establishment a few years ago, the company has travelled in half of the countries of Europe, and also visited Canada recently. Belfast saw their latest production in November 2004. Lacking a permanent venue, they perform in different places, quite often in places that are not theatres. Several of their productions received foreign backing, often as part of some international project (Avignon Festival, Berliner Festspiele, MC93 Bobigny), as was the case with *Hazámhazám* (Fatherlandfatherland, *H.Q.* 168, Winter 2002). Most of the productions are directed by the head of the company, Árpád Schilling. He was responsible for their most recent, *Fekete ország* (Black Country.) (The title refers to a poem by the great twentieth century poet, Mihály Babits: "I dreamt of a black country, / where everything was black, / black not only outside but also inside, / black to the bone and to the marrow, / black, black, black.")

This production was motivated by the idea that from time to time the theatre should speak directly about current experiences. To a certain degree, this performance brings to mind the Peter Brook 1967 production about the Vietnam War, US, for the Royal Shakespeare Company in London. The intention of the play then was to try to establish everyone's personal responsibility in relation to an inconceivable event that was unfolding "independent of us". In an attempt to understand the Buddhist monks who burnt themselves in protest against the war, the actors set a butterfly on fire. Paradoxically, in the ensuing controversy the audience's outrage was directed not against the brutality of the war but against the burning of a butterfly. At the time Brook and his company concealed the fact (and would reveal it only later) that they weren't using live butterflies. The wave of public hypocrisy eventually died away, the war continued—naturally.

Members of the Krétakör Theatre add to their own multilayered social criticism of political and public life by providing a direct explanation of their intentions at the end of the play: in other words, they—rather sarcastically—take away the critic's livelihood. Just before the end of the play, the actor Tilo Werner, whose native language is German, comes forward and sums up the moral message and the aesthetic of the production in German. Just another one of the numerous alienating effects. First he delivers a high-brow critical analysis of the play (simultaneously translated into Hungarian), then withdraws everything he has said, describing the play as a hollow and self-centred box-office attraction. The entire production is a potpourri of similar statements and retractions: moral outrages under the veil of indifference, emotional outbursts concealed as irony, and explosive fits kept on a tight leash.

Fekete ország is a wonderful pamphlet containing virulent social criticism. It targets the idiotic public life and the infantile public discourse, which we are now having to endure. If somebody has no faith in his or her individual capacity to take social action, because the democratic institutions established for the purpose seem to be paralysed by deceit, hunger for power, servility, corruption and greed, then all one can do is to say "Yes, I see what your are doing, you cannot fool me!" Of course, this will change nothing, but at least one will feel slightly better.

An actress comes on stage and simulates oral sex with a clarinet at a leisurely pace, before finally breaking into a faltering delivery of Beethoven's *Ode to Joy:* we have orally satisfied the European Union and voided Beethoven's music; after this, as indeed after every scene, a sign comes up saying that in Great Britain, forty per cent

of the population was unable to name a single one of the new European Union member countries. We see an actor come on stage holding a glass of champagne and delivering a toast consisting of burps from start to finish, with as much meaning as any other toast would be likely to convey. Then three young men appear, followed by a man who tries to teach the boys to sing a devotional hymn; after a while he discretely goes off stage with one of the boys, then returns and carries on nonchalantly, while a Hungarian bishop announces that one pedophile is no pedophile. Posing as Myron's Discobolos, a naked actor produces a fake urine sample using the now famous Hungarian method, which earned the country notoriety at this year's Olympics. Two actors pretend to be machine-gun bullets in an illustration of a bank robbery, in which eight people were killed and the killers still have not been brought to justice. Revered as a fetish and sold at auction, Arnold Schwartzenegger's half finished lollipop figure comes on stage. Next to appear is the young man who earned notoriety by burning an Israeli flag at an anti-Semitic rally; his defence in court in reality was that a stranger had given him candy containing some drug in order to dope him; here he swallows it just as well since it was the Eucharistic host. A Holocaust-denier Neo-Nazi (modelled on a real person) comes on stage and orders couples to dance to the tune of Johann Strauss' waltz, *The Blue Danube.* (In November- December 1944 the Hungarian Nazis herded large numbers of Jews to the Danube quayside in Budapest, and shot them into the river.) Next, a woman wearing a pair of yellow kitchen gloves comes out, asking for the audience's help to have herself photographed in the company of the "imprisoned penises" of the Abu Graib prison.

All this would still not add up to a theatrical production. What makes it a theatrical production is its presentation. It is the distance between the horrible or ridiculous content and the elegance and ease of delivery that does it. Wearing black formal clothes, the actors move smoothly and elegantly on stage, as if it was the catwalk of a fashion show. The thirteen actors move in and out the thirteen doors of each of the three high walls surrounding the stage with casual dignity. Whether singly or in couples, they move with the air of nonchalant superiority appropriate to a guest at home in an upper-class function or to an actor providing an oratorical declamation. The sterile, floodlit space conveys the coldness of a laboratory, yet the highly fitted door handles and the frieze decoration on the walls suggest a kindergarten, where adults play their horrible and infantile games. The actors use their bodies and their voices as instruments: through them the situation is illustrated. Instead of acting out a situation, they reduce it to a skeleton. In the course of the play, there is a concert of swearing in the dark, which throws light on the essential contrast between proper behaviour and boorishness. (Here is another *Hungaricum* for you: allegedly, of all the languages, Hungarian and Greek are best suited for swearing.) All through the performance, we are bombarded with news flashes projected onto a large screen, just as we are showered with them in our daily lives. The steady stream of news continues even after we have left the theatre.

The other première of the Krétakör Theatre is even weirder than the one just discussed. The writer, poet and translator János Térey wrote a dramatic trilogy *A Nibelung-lakópark* (The Nibelung Gated Housing), the last piece of which is called *Hagen, avagy a gyűlöletbeszéd* (Hagen, or Hate Speech). The latter has inspired the film director Kornél Mundruczó, whose unusual movies set against the back-

ground of various subcultures have been awarded numerous prizes at various international film festivals. A formidable master of artistic forms, Térey is a first-class poet: he has written a novel in verse, called *Paulus;* he has also translated Pushkin's *Boris Godunov.* Of the third part of his trilogy, he has this to say: "The libretto of Richard Wagner's *The Twilight of the Gods* served as my starting point; also, in a broader sense I relied on the 'apocalypse-story' presented in *The Song of the Nibelung* and *The Poetic Edda,* which were further developed and rewritten by Wagner himself. This literary remake places the characters of the opera in a modern-day environment. Siegfried, Brünnhilde, Hagen, Gunther and the others reappear in the milieu of a consumer society in the age of globalisation, all cast in the roles of powerful actors in the business world, the stock exchange, the media, the beauty industry, contemporary culture and, last but not least, organized crime. We find the Norns spinning the golden thread of people's fate in a television newsroom. The sacrificial altar stones of the Rhineland are used as rustic decorations in a rock garden. The location itself is called Worms, but this is not identical with the Rhineland town, where the castle of the Burgundian king, Gunther, is still on show: this particular metropolis with a population of several millions is more reminiscent of Frankfurt, Cologne or Berlin, or even perhaps Budapest or New York."

The stage is set as the headquarters of the gigantic multinational Walsungwerke and Gibichung Et Nibelung: a brand new building made of granite, glass and steel, looking slightly sterile yet teeming with life, complete with boardrooms, executive offices, luxury apartments and a rock garden for the apartment complex. In the first part of the prologue, Siegfried, disguised as Gunther—actually, he was merely under the influence of narcotics—breaks into Brünnhilde's flat to take back the magic ring he had previously given to her as a present. (It is the same magic ring that invests its owner with complete power over the world according to the myth.) In the rest of the play, the white-collar criminal Hagen (a former investment advisor rising to the rank of deputy director, he finally sinks into a life of crime as a "terror dwarf") will replace Siegfried, the all too perfect business genius under Wotan's influence, in the role of the central character. Wotan's instructions are executed by this hyper-active monster, whose efforts to destroy the infrastructure of the world are really directed against himself. His counter-part in the play is Brünnhilde, who has the power to see into the future and who can grasp the spider's web of intrigues woven by Hagen in order to gain world power. For a brief period she can avert the final catastrophe: in the scandalous wedding scene of the second act she defies the protocol and joins Gutrune in a lesbian marriage. In images of apocalyptic destruction, the third act narrates Hagen's vengeance: a package contaminated with anthrax is sent to the Park; someone with a chainsaw has a go at the ash tree standing in the middle of the rock garden—which is, naturally, identical with the Tree of the World of Nordic mythology; there is a virus attack against the database of Siegfried's company; a bomb explodes in a beer garden packed full of people; a package containing nerve gas is found in a metro station... "The drama's starting block is September 11, 2001. A tragedy analogous to the one in New York takes place in the third part of the trilogy, when the skyscraper owned by Worms' leading company collapses; and the ring rescued from the ashes of the cataclysm is finally returned to its original owner, the Rhine maidens", Térey writes.

The opus described as a drama in verse has an impressive "poetic structure": it has a tone that is at the same time elevated and blasphemous, refined and vulgar, poetic and rude. A large number of literary quotes are interwoven in the text. The vision behind the words is both monumental and ironic. The play should be performed in an elegant bourgeois theatre seating several hundreds, in order to guarantee the effect that the provocative productions of Wagner operas in Bayreuth have achieved. However, this Krétakör production was staged in a very special location: in an underground Second World War hospital (known as the rock hospital) in the cave complex under Buda Castle. It is still furnished with the original equipment, the likes of which you will only see in museums today. In this way, the Krétakör production engages in a reflexive relationship with the original script. The *hoch-Deutsch* and the high-tech are reflected through the mirrors of underground theatre and the museum pieces. Instead of the upper-class milieu of the extremely wealthy, we plunge into the underground tunnels. The CEO's office at Walsungwerke, the Art Nouveau luxury apartment, the rock garden of the Rhinepark, the observatory of the Notung Tower, as well as the studios of Norna Network and the Rhine maidens' fashion salon Ragnaröck Models, have all been moved to the mould-covered cellars of an underground wartime hospital. The location is at the same time real and ghastly. We literally follow the story by passing through clammy corridors, rundown kitchens, washrooms, surgical theatres and hospital wards (in the latter we watch from iron-framed beds). Impersonating an SS officer, the incredibly nice Tilo Werner acts as our bilingual Virgil: he is ushering us all the way, now prodding us to move on and the next minute arranging us in lines; at the end of the play he even bursts into the Hungarian national anthem (then he tells us off for not standing up, throwing in an ironic remark about our inordinate love of country). This adds to the alienating effects of the play: on the one hand, the spirit of the location turns the performance into a survival show (we are in a theatre that, on the analogy of Harry Kupfer's Chernobyl-*Ring* in Bayreuth, reconstructs the events in an underground shelter); on the other hand, it would not even let us indulge in the pamphlet-illusion that we are actually watching a modern version of a timeless world myth, studded with the envied and hated extravagances of the bourgeois capitalist multi-megastars in a hyper-tech and super-luxury milieu. The actors of the Krétakör Theatre are different: instead of illustrating, they create; instead of shedding their skin in a "role", they recharge themselves using their energies, their imagination, their physique and their acting technique. From the opening scene to the frenetic parody of the lesbian wedding, and from the Anthrax party to the end, the play unfolds not on stage but in the actor's body: he is both the cabriolet and the "edge of the blade" of the skyscraper, the metropolitan traffic jam and the underground railway, the terrorist attack and the explosion. A long series of physical atrocities takes place, from murder through the violation of a dead body to both anal and oral sex—unrestrained vulgarity executed with unrestrained stylisation. The indirectness, or even artlessness, of the actors maintains an ironic distance between the act of the portrayal and its subject. The four-hour-long play has turned out to be one of the shortest and one of the most absorbing performances I have ever had the pleasure of attending. ❧

Erzsébet Bori

Succession of Generations

Csaba Bereczki: *Bolondok éneke* (Song of Fools) • Attila Janisch: *Másnap* (After the Day Before) • Szabolcs Hajdu: *Tamara* • Benedek Fliegauf: *Dealer*

Anyone from a small country set on making films will find themselves in a tricky position. Film making, incomparably more costly than writing novels or music, produces the greatest number of aborted plans, unshot screenplays and careers failed owing to external circumstances. We like to consider ourselves a nation of filmmakers, but a closer examination shows that we have very few directors who have been able to come up with an organic oeuvre.

Often making even a first film comes up against insurmountable obstacles. An example is Csaba Bereczki, one of those who received their diplomas in the wake of the changeover. A major crisis had set in Hungarian filmmaking; with no chance of making anything, they disappeared from the scene or simply watched as others, the old guard and the then emerging young, went about their work. Bereczki bided his time, working in France, and in 2002 was finally able to make his first film, *Song of Fools,* in a French co-production, presenting it at last year's Hungarian Film Week. (The tribulations, however, still hadn't come to an end: for various legal and financial complications the film stayed in its cans for another two years.)

Song of Fools is set in a Romanian mental asylum. The protagonist Zoltán Frimont, born of a French father and Transylvanian-Hungarian mother, is travelling round Romania, working with *Medicins sans Frontières.* Hinting at mysterious motives, he breaks up with his wife and walks off into a lake in his overcoat. Designated an attempted suicide, Zoltán is confined for an indeterminate period of time (and by no means against his will) to the mental asylum. Gradually becoming more and more at home in this ethnically, linguistically and mentally diverse company, he forms relationships, has a love affair with an Italian woman and finds a paternal friend in Holman the poet, the oldest of the inmates.

After initially thinking we recognise this ward number six, we get many indications of both the bleak outer world and of the way those within are at the mercy of the institution. Although allusions are made to the Ceausescu era (in all likelihood the story is set sometime in the 1980s), these later prove to be misleading

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Erzsébet Bori
is the regular film critic of this journal.

or of no interest. Yet the mental asylum as a model for the world when not applied to a specific social scene remains blank in a universal sense.

Instead of describing what we arrive at (to thine own self be true) in this clichéd way, let's call it a model story. Our French-Transylvanian hero could easily have problems of identity, instead, however, he only has a secret which is intended to be his fate and his personality; however this does not come off and throws the film askew: the supporting figures become more exciting than the hero himself, in particular Holman, the film's best-elaborated central figure. It is wonderful how the poet falls in love with a walnut tree and "marries" it. Bereczki is one of the few directors who, not following pop-cultural or even western art movie models, gives evidence of a thorough and profound knowledge of the films of our region of Eastern Europe.

Attila Janisch, Bereczky's senior, was labelled as a significant director with only two full-length feature films behind him *(Shadow on the Snow* 1991, *Long Twilight* 1996). His third work, *After the Day Before,* aroused great expectations. This cross between a psychological thriller and a director's film begins with a stranger arriving in an unknown region. He claims that, he's inherited a farm which he's come to look for. The following day he bluntly declares that it's an impossible place because no one says or knows anything. Or do they? It's as if people were familiar with the Traveller; their chance remarks often hint at knowing more about him than he does himself. They are aware of the point of the journey of unknown destiny and that the stake at risk is higher than finding a—possibly non-existent—farm. With obscure insinuations and significant gestures the locals shepherd and guide the hero along the road while he stumbles around something that he finds irresistibly attractive and repellent at the same time.

The same pictures, locations, figures, objects and motives recur again and again in a film constructed in the form of an *impromptu*—the long sequence of scenes without music before the main titles—and the three movements of sky, dust and road. The recapitulation takes place in the form of repeated variations: set in a new context, from a different point of view or arranged in a different order. The core of the apparently separate and diverging themes, at once the logic and organizing force of the cinematic narrative, is progressively revealed and disclosed within the process of these repeats and recapitulations. All recollections and reminiscences lead to the same sequence of locations and episodes, going round them in increasingly tight circles. From the concentric circles or rather points (viewpoints) marked along a spiral track we look onto the central settings and events. We accompany the hero along this course of getting closer and gaining enlightenment.

The strength of *After the Day Before* lies in the spectacle and atmosphere created from visual elements, memorable images, characteristic camera movement, unexpected cuts, the interplay of pieces of dialogue and music. The strongest distinction is its radical arrangement of space and time. Producing visuals, charged every second with meaning and significance, presupposes extraordinary concentration and intensive teamwork. Janisch and his stable team (András Forgách script, Gábor Medvigy cameraman, Attila F. Kovács production designer) perfected the film's narrative structure, visuals and style in the course of joint work.

We cannot conceal the fact that *After the Day Before* is elitist art intended for the few. A piece by a reputably monomaniac director moving within a single topic: the

altered state of consciousness of someone in extreme circumstances. In retrospective his three feature films, *Shadow on the Snow, Long Twilight* and *After the Day Before,* form a trilogy. In different ways and to a different extent all three are films of "consciousness" that try to approach and map out the altered state of human consciousness by discovering and creating the language and cinematic expression most suitable for their portrayal. It's as if Janisch had been preparing for this task in his previous diploma and short films. A direct relation of *After the Day Before* is the thirty-minute long *The Other Bank* (1983) which refers more openly to the source of its inspiration, Robbe-Grillet's *The Voyeur. Shadow on the Snow* is the story of an accidentally "discovered sin" and its acceptance. The heroine of *Long Twilight* sets off to meet her own death; the stations of her journey are the stages of the acceptance and "mastery" of her death. The traveller of *After the Day Before* is seeking his heritage in the unknown land. Instead of the farm, however, of which he only has a faded, blurred photograph, his heritage is the sin he commits (has to commit). In reality his heritage is the murderous compulsion his knowledge of which is even more obscure and uncertain than the picture of the Gruber Farm. The brutal impulse, the committing of the crime, has neither rhyme nor reason—this is what is called the demon within, for want of anything better. And this is why *After the Day Before* doesn't even attempt to depict the hero in the traditional manner, placing him within a social context or psychologically motivating him. The detachment from a specific time or place is served by the emphatic timelessness and undetermined character of the inanimate world. Reminiscent of surrealist paintings, the dream sequences in which the traveller sees himself are the images of a state of semi-awareness, fleeing from the controlling force of consciousness. Arranging his recollections according to a distinctive logic, together with the sensations recalled during visits to the sites the following day, these dreams lead to recognition and confrontation of oneself and one's sin. The day after the day before is the day following the committing of the crime: the day when one (almost literally) awakes to one's sin.

Szabolcs Hajdu and Benedek Fliegauf can consider themselves incomparably more fortunate than their older colleagues. Hajdu was still a student when he made a name for himself with his diploma films (*Necropolis* 1997; *Tinymarapagoda* 1998) and went on with his first full-length feature film *Sticky Matters* (2000) to convincingly justify his original outlook and exceptional visual sense. His new film, *Tamara,* is an organic continuation of his previous one, both with regard to its theme and genre (this doesn't mean that *Tamara* is the second part of *Sticky Matters*).

At its centre stands a love quadrangle. A well-known photo reporter, Demeter Játékos, plunged in depression and a creative crisis, lives on a farm with his wife, Bori, surrounded by no small amount of livestock. One day Krisztián, the scatterbrain younger brother who also lives with them, brings home a beautiful and strange girl from the city, which upsets the local state of affairs. Wanting to help out of genuine love and anxiousness, everyone presumes they know what the other feels or wants, and the crossing of the four sets of good but contrary intentions produces great storms and a lot of misunderstanding. This is a romantic comedy and in this case a director's film in the most absolute sense of the term. For this simple-sounding story appears on the screen in a most peculiar world and visually in an equally peculiar narrative. The story of the human

beings is related by animals—the pig painted red, the dog blue, the hen green and the horse white—in double Dutch which is translated into subtitles. Nothing surprising in this if we consider that the story is centred round the affairs of the heart—a field where humans are regarded as very much illiterate.

Szabolcs Hajdu turns his back on every trend and topic dominating contemporary European cinema with such disarming courage that it almost seems like rebellion. *Tamara* can be seen as a warning to cast a vague glance at the total chaos residing within us for which we even lack words before trying to solve the so-called fundamental world issues.

While the buoyancy of *Tamara* raises the audience's spirits, the depressing burden of *Dealer* drags them into the depths. Benedek Fliegauf has made a tough film with a seriousness with which only young people can take life (and themselves). The début of the director, younger even than Szabolcs Hajdu, went smoothly—which doesn't often happen in the film world. Calling attention to himself in 2000 with his short *Talking Heads,* followed by two other successful works (*Hypnos* 2001 and *Is There Life Before Death?,* recording the world famous psychiatrist András Feldmár's lectures), Fliegauf went on to make *Forest* (2003), which was received favourably by the critics and earned him some international recognition. With this tail-wind Fleigauf needed less than a year to come up with his second full-length feature film. *Dealer* genuinely examines vital issues through questions raised by the most diverse fates. For this the director has chosen a simple and brilliant framework: a day in the life of a drug-dealer in the course of which the human condition is revealed through intensified, dramatic episodes.

The essence is not sociological deep-boring, nor investigation of the drug problem—not even moralising. In Fliegauf's film drug-trading is not a category of crime; crime and punishment appear in a metaphysical sense. However, we get no answer to the question as to who the anonymous dealer is: a hawker of souls or a false prophet? The benefactor of (certain members of) the human race? Or rather the scheduled supplier of our day-long or hour-long salvation. He does as he knows best and can't help the fact that salvation is only momentary and doesn't last for life.

The ability to create a (cinematic) language of their own suited to their concept of the world from visuals, music and elements of style is the virtue of both *Tamara* and *Dealer.* And entitles us to the greatest of hopes—and not only in connection with the future work of these two young directors. At last we have grounds for hope that the new generations will be able to embark on their film-making careers without too many hitches and get a chance to produce their own oeuvres within the Hungarian film industry. ❧

György Báron

The Old Man in Pince-Nez

Márta Mészáros: *A temetetlen halott* (The Unburied Dead).

"What we can do, though, is remember
the hurt, reluctant, hesitant man
who nonetheless soaked up
anger, delusion
and a whole nation's blind hope."
*György Petri**

When the Communist regime fell, we could be forgiven for thinking—if such matters entered our mind at all—that a whole series of landmark works about the 1956 Revolution would now see the light. The Revolution was, after all, a magnificent story, not unlike Greek tragedies. Under János Kádár's regime, anything even remotely relevant about the Revolution and the ensuing savage retribution was absolutely taboo. With this original sin casting its shadow over his regime, the tyrant and his lackeys never managed to expunge its memory, something like the futile attempts of Shakespeare's royal murderers to rid themselves of the bloody apparitions of their victims. Even the finale proved worthy of a Shakespeare's pen: the benign murderer died an incoherent senile old man on the very day that his victims were posthumously rehabilitated by the Hungarian Supreme Court.

Fifteen years later, it is a surprise to find that hardly any films have been produced about 1956, none that are good and a handful of bad ones. This is all the more surprising as Hungarian film-makers had done quite a bit to advance the cause prior to the regime change. They had gone all the way to the limits of the permissible and they had managed to push those limits further out. Yet the films they made during an era of censorship without mendacity or equivocation did not and could not have 1956 as their primary subject (suffice to mention István Szabó's *Father,* Ferenc Kósa's *Ten Thousand Suns,* Zoltán Fábri's *Twenty Hours,* all made in the 1960s). Or, they showed the uprising from the point of view of the private person, from below, as it were (Károly Makk's *Philemon and Baucis,* Pál Sándor's *Daniel Takes a Train,* or Péter Gárdos' *Whooping Cough,* from the 1970s and '80s, come to mind here). These film-makers found a way of speaking honestly in a dishonest time about something that could not be honestly discussed. Perhaps it was this concealment, this hiding-and-seeking, that lent their works sufficient form and aesthetic weight. Conversely, it may be the lack of any such pressures, the euphoria of taboos lifted,

* Translated by Clive Wilmer & George Gömöri

György Báron
is a film critic. He has published several books on cinema and teaches at the Academy of Drama and Film in Budapest.

that accounts for the failure of later films addressing this subject. There are probably more substantial reasons as well lurking beneath the surface: the intellectual surrender of the fifteen years that have passed since the advent of democracy, one of the most severe symptoms (if not the most severe symptom) of which is precisely the disintegration of the consensus about 1956 and the rampant greed displayed by various political groups as they appropriated its intellectual and moral legacy.

For all these reasons, there have been few movies about 1956 since the regime change of 1989, and all of them seem to reflect the troubled spirit of the times (I shall not discuss the indispensable documentaries on the subject, for the documentary genre can hardly be accused of not meeting its obligations in this respect). Ferenc Kósa's *The Other Person,* a cinematographic family novel shot during the last days of the *ancien régime,* was the first film with 1956 at its heart, the story of the son. Although a courageous work, neither distorting nor dodging the truth, it already foreshadows the danger that the great story is subordinated to the goal of legitimizing the powers that be. Two film dramas focusing on the Revolution—Károly Makk's *Hungarian Requiem* and András Sólyom's *Pannonian Fragment*—turned out to justify fears in this respect. It is hardly by chance that the weakest part of Márta Mészáros's remarkable *Diary* trilogy is its last instalment, made after the regime change and thus no longer subject to censorship. It is sad but true: the films made by Szabó, Fábri, Sándor and Makk under the Kádár regime give a more authentic, more interesting and more human picture of 1956 than those made around the time of the regime change and thereafter.

Back then, however, we did not even have time to feel disappointed. Already, the new generation had arrived. Its cult movie, *Moscow Square,* takes place in the fateful summer of 1989, when Imre Nagy was reburied. It contains a single sentence about Nagy: "Who the fuck is Imre Nagy?" asks the protagonist, a boy at high school, turning to his grandmother as she incredulously stares at the television screen on June 16, the day that Nagy was ceremoniously reburied.

André Bazin writes that a politician's life can be represented in a film only "if his life becomes fully identical with History, if the biography itself becomes History." What is needed, in other words, is time and the perspective that it gives, allowing processes to take on a discreet shape so that virtue and guilt, the essential and the incidental might separate.

It is hard to tell whether that moment has arrived yet. In any event, Márta Mészáros' film, *The Unburied Dead* is the first post-1989 work on the Revolution and its martyred prime minister that merits critical attention. It is a celebratory film with all the virtues and drawbacks that entails. It can be recommended without hesitation to elementary school pupils, because it tells in a truthful manner what we already know but which nonetheless bears repeating for all those young people who may still ask, with the teenager in *Moscow Square,* "who the fuck is Imre Nagy?" The appropriate response is not outrage but rather: a clear answer. For a start, show them Mária Mészáros's movie. Once they have the basics covered, they can move on to the intermediate and to the advanced lessons—that is, they could move on to those lessons if someone had written them, but thus far noone has. In sum, *The Unburied Dead* is a celebratory film, and the very fact that it is not an instrument of political legitimation is a considerable feat, especially in a country where, both before and after 1989, even the 1848 revolution was subjected to cinematic treatment re-

flecting the mandatory party lines of the day. *The Unburied Dead* tells the truth without regard for day to day politics, even though it does not exactly plumb great depths in the process. Those familiar with the historical facts will not learn much that is new. Nonetheless, an unadorned, unequivocating narration of the story as it actually unfolded is something we should welcome.

The film does not so much tell the story of the Revolution, for the revolution is merely the background, the point of departure; it tells the story of Imre Nagy. It confronts us with the hero and martyr as a "common man," much as he is now portrayed in recent statues. The dramaturgy of the film dispenses with a detailed rendering of the historical events and of the moral-political conflicts that determined the course of Imre Nagy's life. Familiarity with the events (which are alluded to in passing) is simply assumed, whereas presenting the dilemmas would burst the confines of a film focused on the last one and half years of Nagy's life, between the crushing of the Revolution on November 4, 1956 and his execution. The preceding events are merely hinted at in the form of brief, intermittent summaries and flashbacks evoking crucial episodes from his life: World War I, captivity as a prisoner of war in Russia, and the last peaceful family gathering in a wine cellar in Somogy, the county where he was born. All these recollections appear as schematic allusions. We never learn how and why Nagy became a Communist; how he survived the darkest years of terror in the Soviet Union; how in the 1950s he became a reformist leader of the Hungarian Communist Party, who was first appointed to a high position and then, as the atmosphere became less permissive, reduced to the lower ranks; and how he became first the leader of reformist Communists circles and then, finally, the Prime Minister and the very symbol of the Revolution. It is with this last turning-point that the story really commences. To that extent, it is understandable that the film does not deal with the sharp turns and conflicts that had previously marked his extraordinary career.

More troubling is the ultimate failure of the film to examine why Imre Nagy, in captivity in Snagov in Romania, rejected Kádár's attempts at making a deal, why he chose imprisonment instead, and why he—unlike some of the other accused—refused to co-operate throughout the interrogations, consciously taking upon himself, it seems, the mantle and destiny of the martyr. All these things simply happen to him, but we are never witness to the moral struggles that led to these momentous decisions. It is one of the lamentable failings of Márta Mészáros' film that it voids one of the most dramatic figures in modern Hungarian history of drama. Neither historical facts nor the moving representation of the final tragedy can make up for this absence. To be sure, Nagy's drama unfolds inwardly, within the darkness of solitary confinement, where he has only the interrogator and the prison physician with whom to share his thoughts. Yet the film does not even attempt to circumvent these obvious dramaturgical difficulties. Flashbacks and the angry, often sullen gestures of the protagonist do little to compensate for this shortcoming.

"You were impersonal, too, like the other leaders, bespectacled, sober-suited," writes the poet György Petri (translated by Clive Wilmer & George Gömöri). Yet if we look at photographs from the time, the figure of Imre Nagy stands out from the uniformed ranks of apparatchiks. A pince-nez and a hat, an umbrella or a walking cane (none of the other leaders walked around with an umbrella in those days, given that

they always had bodyguards to hold one above their heads until they reached their cars): the very image of an orderly bourgeois, straight out of a novel by Krúdy or Mikszáth. Is it only in retrospect that we project upon him such a tenaciously bourgeois, grandfatherly posture? Jan Nowicki becomes one with his role in a rare feat of transformation as he shows how the portly figure of Nagy takes on a severe, gaunt appearance. Now and again, however, Nowicki's performance is marred by declamatory moments. Given the solitude of the scenes, the strong lighting and the close-ups, there is no need for any broad gesture, laborious facial expression, or histrionic rendition. More sensitive, more restrained, and therefore more credible performances are given by Jan Frycz, playing the interrogator, and György Cserhalmi, who plays the prison doctor. The latter has only a few minutes in the film, yet his struggling, broken figure epitomizes the weight of the moral-psychological conflict more successfully than the "old man in pince-nez" played by Nowicki, who seems to have stepped off the pages of a history textbook.

Seamlessly joining documentary and fiction, reality and play, Márta Mészáros's new film does have a pure and harmonious integrity. The director guides us gently from the present into the past, reaching the true fables of fiction via documentary images. With the same sensitivity and efficacy, in the finale she leads us back first into the reality of the recent past, and then into the present, the standpoint from which we watch with fascination as the drama of the Revolution is being distilled and stylized into history before our very eyes. ❧

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An extraordinary literary journey through the second half of the twentieth century

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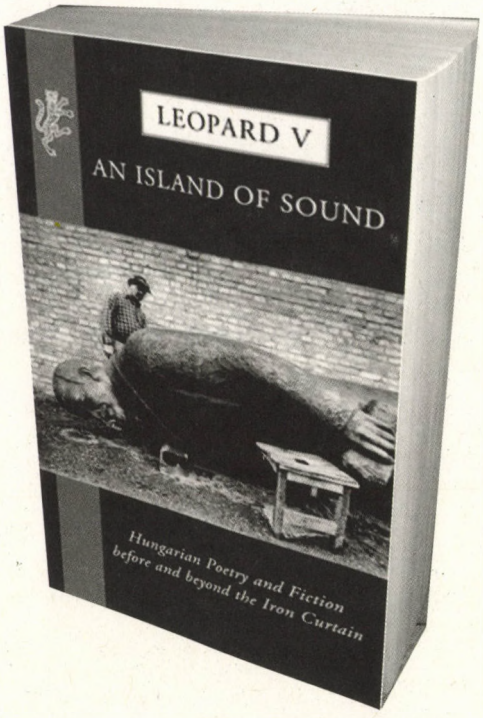

AN ISLAND OF SOUND

Hungarian Poetry and Fiction before and beyond the Iron Curtain

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Since 1926 the barber had worked in the heart of a tenement block with the longest through-passageway in Budapest. He had been the apprentice there but in time had inherited this mini gold mine. And a mini gold mine is what it was, yielding roughly as much gold as could be recovered at the end of each year from the leather aprons of the goldsmith apprentices in the neighbouring street. Scrap gold, as the masters were on the watch for ways even the tiniest filings might go astray. They soon caught on to the fact that sly apprentices would frequently brush back the unruly locks that fell over their brows, thus leaving substantial amounts of gold dust sticking to their sweaty hair.
Gold, though, is dead heavy, so the first thing those wastrels would do of an evening, on getting home, is wash their hair. They would bend over the wash basin and thoroughly rinse their hair then wait till all that lovely gold had settled to the bottom of the rusty tin basin. Well then! Before leaving the workplace the goldsmiths were required to wash not just hands but their hair as well. Well, it was scraps like these that Mr Szlatki made from his customers.

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