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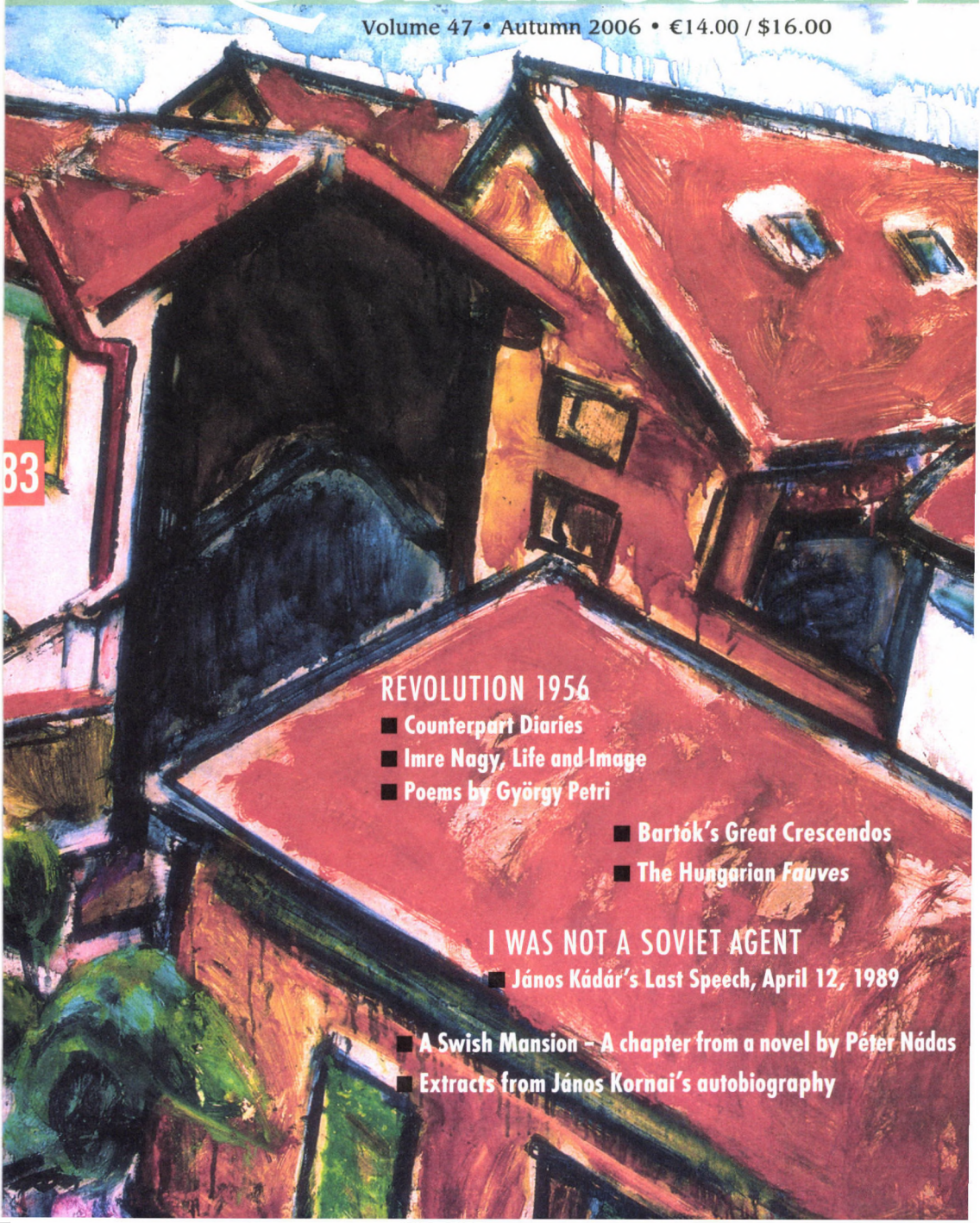

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MUSIC

THEATRE & FILM

Cover: *Sándor Galimberti:* St-Raphaël, *cca 1912, oil on canvas, 104x153 cm. Private collection.*
Back cover: *The Oktogon in Budapest in the early Sixties. Photograph by Sándor Mező, MTI.*

Péter Nádas

A Swish Mansion

A chapter from Volume I of the novel *Parallel Stories.*
Part 1

Many years before, some time in nineteen sixty-four, the year when light slowly began to be thrown on other obscure matters in distant Pfeilen, in the Hungarian capital the national holiday worked out particularly badly.

The meteorological report forecast that on the following day bright, warm, sunny and distinctly pleasant spring weather was to be expected. On these occasions, though, no one really knew what to count on, because coming up to official celebrations the reports were, as a rule, doctored. One that was either better or worse than what was expected would be drawn up, though sometimes they stayed with the genuine one, or only titivated it a little. True, there was some hope that it would not be so this time, for the preceding days really had been brighter and warmer than average; all the same, whether or not officials knew something well in advance, at dawn on March the fifteenth a stormy northerly wind was howling over the country, one of those three-day gales that ravaged the capital especially hard. The doctoring was carried out in the counter-propaganda section of the secret service, on the basis of the overall feedback from soundings of public opinion and the desiderata of the day, but that could only be submitted as a proposal to be endorsed or, for that matter, rejected by the responsible party officials at a session of the Politburo. On these occasions, the specially routed weather report was not issued from the Meteorological Institute but was taken by courier, as strictly confidential material, to newspaper offices, where the editor in chief had the job of replacing the genuine by the false report before they went to press.

The elements not uncommonly clash in March, to be sure, when the sun enters the sign of Aries and the vernal equinox draws near.

Péter Nádas

is a novelist, dramatist and essayist. He made his international breakthrough with A Book of Memories, *1997* (Emlékiratok könyve, *1986). His other works available in English include* The End of a Family Story *(1977) and* A Lovely Tale of Photography *(1995). His latest novel, the three-volume* Párhuzamos történetek *(Parallel Stories, 2005) is reviewed on pp. 151–58 of the Summer 2006 issue of* The Hungarian Quarterly.

The mercury in the thermometers suddenly dropped down eight degrees Centigrade; it all but froze again. Something terrible had happened at the site of the official ceremony, but as yet no one knew anything more definite about it. Swollen clouds raced across the sky, it grew light then dark, a fine rain whipped or drizzled down, tightly closed windows rattled in icy gusts of wind. Festive flags, two red ones flanking each one in the national colours, flapped soddenly over empty Budapest streets. Tiles kept dropping off roofs, rainwater gushed freely from broken gutters. Hardly any pedestrians were to be seen, because anyone forced to walk about in this filthy weather might easily be struck on the head by something. The streets turned into abandoned battlefields in the uproar. Heavy tree branches were strewn all over the place. People were scurrying along, sticking close to the foot of the buildings, their faces lashed with rain, water from leaks in the eaves pouring down their necks. There was a lengthy moment, though, when the din reached fever pitch, with the sounds of fire-brigade and riot-police vehicles blaring out at various widely separated points in the city. Sirens howling, they were speeding into the city centre.

A string of ambulances rushed along the dead Grand Boulevard.

Why won't someone pick it up, a female voice could be heard at much the same time as this from the back of the vast Grand Boulevard apartment.

She was shouting from the bathroom and, running low on youthful vigour as she was by now, having a hard time to make herself heard over the wind that was whistling in the light wells and around the chimney stacks of the apartment block's tile stoves and over the wailing of the ambulances. Pick it up, will you, for Pete's sake!

Even at this, no-one answered the telephone, although there were at least three others in the huge apartment, well-kept and appointed for middle-class comfort as it was, but now somewhat defying the march of time.

The sirens of the receding ambulances gradually dispersed in the wind.

From four rooms of the second-floor apartment one could look out onto the now glistening, now darkening slate-grey surface of the Oktogon junction, while two more rooms, including the servant's room opening off the kitchen, overlooked a courtyard that saw no light the whole year round. On one day around the middle of June, it is true, a slender strip of light would appear on the eggshell colour of the wall in one of the courtyard-facing rooms, and for days on end that strip of light not only always reappeared but grew longer and broader, arriving ever earlier and departing ever later, only to vanish almost unnoticed in the middle of August. Its disappearance assumed the status of an otherworldly signal that only a few people understood. Now, though, everything in that darkened courtyard thrummed and banged, whistled and cracked as if it were drumming on the roof tiles, plucking the wrought-iron guard-rails of the red marble outer corridors around the yard, and trumpeting into the depths. For good measure, at this hour of the morning, the time for lighting fires and doing the cleaning, the big, white, winged doors in the apartment were open, so that none

of them could claim, in all honesty, that they did not hear the ringing or the elderly lady's shouting from the bathtub.

The telephone had struck up three times in the most spacious of the rooms, referred to by the members of the household interchangeably as the lounge or the drawing room. The instrument had rung off twice, but the third time it did not let up. It rang persistently.

All three of them were banking on one of the others picking it up, because all three had personal reasons for not doing so.

A palely freckled woman in her early thirties, who was kneeling down in one of the rooms on the courtyard side and having a lot of trouble with lighting the stove, did not budge from her place any more than the other woman, a few years younger, who was sprawled among rumpled bedding on the broad double bed of the room next door and, in order not to hear anything, was desperately and tenaciously pressing a pillow to her head with a thin, bare, dark-skinned arm. Her presence there would not have been looked on too kindly, so she was inclined to answer the telephone only in an emergency. She felt she was an unauthorised person, an intruder, and rightly so, as that's how she was regarded, with her position becoming ever more unclarifiable.

She had nowhere to go to, or else she did not feel she had the strength to make the unavoidable decision.

The pale woman who was busy in front of the stove did not go, and not just because the kindling that kept flickering to life in the draught would perpetually go out with the next gust of wind, only for great clouds of smoke then to be blown back through the stove door, but mainly because she was sticking to the rules. When the residents of the house were at home, she was not supposed to appear in the innermost rooms, even during the morning cleaning hours, without being asked. Aware though she was that nobody was in the front room at present, she would still not go.

Let them pick it up, if they want, she told herself, twitching her rather skinny shoulders as she did, as if in reply to the elderly lady shouting from the bathroom.

She was really not rebellious by nature, and she had no reason to be dissatisfied with her position, but all the same she would sometimes quietly get her own back at them, and enjoy doing so. In point of fact, she was prompted to resort to this by what she felt was her young son's humiliating status, and a little bit by her own sense of self-esteem. They lived in the perennial gloom of the servant's room, and at the request of the members of the household she had been obliged to prohibit her child from stepping outside into the kitchen. That was the magic border of the space they had in which to move, the kitchen. The child grasped that, naturally, but how could he accept it. Then again, not only could she not control the furious border infringements, but the little boy's rebellions time and again revealed her own willing servility. It was very hard to find place for the two of them, and there were difficult times when it would seem they were having to pay too high a price for their security. The barely five years old, extremely lively

and, like her, wan little boy was not even allowed to play in the frowsty atmosphere of the dingy passageway known as the hall, though no one spent any time there outside meals.

Pointed remarks would be made, they would not tolerate it. You would do well, Ilona, to put that child back in the kitchen, the lady of the house would whine in that disagreeable high-pitched voice she had. I wouldn't like it if anything in here were to be smashed.

As it happened, that was the one place in the dwelling which revealed a great deal about the changing times and the tiresome force of circumstances. Originally, it had no other function than for people to gain access through it to the bathroom and toilet, the two bedrooms, the dining room and the kitchen, a sort of inside corridor, as it were, though a fair bit wider than that. Under an older dispensation for the household, this was where the big linen presses had to stand and where the ironing was done. For the last couple of years, however, an old sideboard of considerable size has stood in it, and this was where the matching large dining table with the severe chairs were moved. Not that they would ever, even by accident, have said that this was now the dining room. Need and expedience do not necessarily make for a life that is well-disposed, which was why they could not call it that. The window of the space, concealed silk drapes and darkened glass notwithstanding, looked out onto nothing more than a narrow light well, and even if the window was permanently closed, the air would at times be pervaded by a strong stench of drains or else by the no less intrusive smells of strange kitchens, to say nothing of the embarrassing noises emanating from strange lavatories and strange bathrooms. When eating, they could at best pretend they did not notice such things, not hear, let's say, someone on the first floor groaning, straining and breaking wind while they conversed about cultural subjects and wolfed down with relish beefsteaks that had been cooked to a turn. There was even one occasion when they were seated at supper and someone on the third floor, in a fury, tossed a still smoking, red-hot, burnt milk-pan into the light well, and unfortunately the pan had hit the wall, bounced off it, smashed through the darkened glass of the double window, and landed at their feet.

For minutes on end no one at the table could get a word out.

They were not helped over these unpleasantnesses stemming from need by the oriental carpet covering the floor, or having a dinner-service that, for the most part, was all in order, or two quite outstanding pictures hanging on the wall. Not much of these latter could be seen, incidentally. They were old, smoke-begrimed pictures in heavy gilt frames, and generally speaking only a single naked wall lamp gave light in the passageway. It burned day and night, lest anyone should trip up on an accidentally rucked-up carpet or bump into an unthinkingly displaced severe chair. The many-branched gilded baroque candelabrum with its intricate foliated scrolls, which hung from the ceiling like a heavy, shapeless shadow that was capable of myriad transformations, was switched on only at times when meals were taken together.

The telephone's ringing penetrated this far, but now there was no one around in there. On the larger picture one could just make out the outlines of a battle scene, glossy chestnut hindquarters of rearing English thoroughbreds, a Hungarian standard falling from the cornet's hand, semi-naked human bodies trampled under hooves. From the recessed gilt frame of the second picture vaguely emerged the glazed pink countenance of a young man, József Lehr by name, a captain in the 1848 Home Army, who looked out with dreamy eyes through the chink of the slightly parted striped silk drapes into the eternal gloom of the light well. Splashes and quick, brisk squelches of soap could be heard from the bathroom.

The one person who could have picked up the telephone without further ado, though, a barely eighteen years old, gracefully tall young man, his figure erect almost to poker-stiffness, was simply not in a position to do so. He could see and take stock of everything, he heard the ringing of the telephone very well, yet for a long time he was not entirely present anywhere. And anyway there were a great many things he did not do that he could have done, preoccupied as he was with far more important matters. It was as if he had to survey in advance the whole of his life to come, then, from this imaginary perspective, weigh up what he should and should not do.

Who would be capable of taking such a huge responsibility on their shoulders; it paralysed him.

Those around him noticed, at most, his fleeting absent-mindedness, not the threat to his mind. He had received an impeccable upbringing, so that when he spoke with someone he would smile assiduously, pay unflagging attention, not intrusively, but showing interest and asking questions, which generally suffices for people to find someone truly charming. Even his relatives did not notice the unpredictability of his behaviour, considering him a little odd, but essentially a decent boy.

He was now standing by one of the front windows, and as he watched something, every now and then he would press his groin gently against the windowsill. He was keeping something under surveillance; he had virtually latched his gaze onto something that no one else but he could see, though it was more just his unnatural posture, the stiff little half-turn of his body, which revealed that. When he happened to lean forward and felt the pressure of the sill on his groin, then he was almost brushing his temple against the glass. At the same time, he was obliged to hunch up his shoulder into his neck so as not to press with it on the windowpane. No one would have been able to work out what he was up to. If he had just stood at the window, not watching anything in particular, then he would have had to be looking at the holiday emptiness of the junction's square, with a yellow tram threading its way across every now and then, or at the branches of the wind-rocked trees, glistening barely as they beat against one another, or perhaps at the enormous sky, on which whitely crackling rifts opened up and chased one another yet the rain-laden, but nonetheless lightly scudding clouds never amassed.

The spectacle had some kind of unpredictable rhythm.

A sudden deluge did not necessarily hammer on the windowpanes when the heavens darkened. Up above the clouds must have been moving more swiftly than the rain was able to sweep down from them, as a result of which it seemed to be gushing out of the whitely crackling rifts.

He saw that too, though he didn't look at it, just as he looked at things that he couldn't have seen at all. One could not even say that he was thinking about something. He was not thinking. He was responding with his body to the pulse of the gusts of wind, and thereby involuntarily setting to this rhythm everything that ran through his mind as a thought or indefinable sensation. As if the elements had taken control within him too, as they did within the whole city that day. His brow darkened and brightened; he alighted upon arguments and shortly afterwards cast those same arguments aside; sensations streamed over him then just as suddenly dried up; he became despondent only to find hope. He had no explanation for the simultaneous multiplicity. Out of this painful deficiency a mental confusion yawned at him—his own. Not a feature on his face became distorted, however; on the contrary, his demeanour was rendered frighteningly detached by self-discipline.

There was someone in him, another, who had no individuality but who accompanied his every movement and thought. Whatever he missed, whatever he did or whatever he intended to do, this other observed indifferently, expressed no opinion, gave not an inch either. If the torment was great, then this other registered on his features as an impartial air. Waiting for the moment to act, interfering in nothing. As if mutely declaring that every moral commandment or ethical consideration was secondary, for action, even renunciation, took precedence over everything. Yet by the tense, craning way that he held his head, the almost sullenly pursed upper lip, he nevertheless gave away that he was not staring indifferently but wanted something, or was unable not to want something, he saw something, was maniacally keeping his eye on something, could not let it go. That something was across the square, down there at the mouth of the Grand Boulevard, on the far side. It would sometimes be covered by a passing tram. Maybe at the bus stop. When a bus stopped, as if he had to look beyond it, he would stand even more on tiptoe. Maybe someone ought to be coming, that's what he was waiting for, and that's why he could not abandon his watch-post.

While he was waiting for this, or perhaps something quite different, and enjoying the rhythmical pushes of the hard windowsill against his groin, the young woman on the bed in the room overlooking the back courtyard stirred after all. A twinge of impatience or protest, possibly an excitation of a sensitive body, seemed to sweep over her bare arm. Her smooth, darkish skin twitched antagonistically, the muscles of her arm jerked uncoordinatedly. In reality, this was the final throb of sleep, attended by the unwanted awakening.

She had been left alone in bed already early that morning, the departed person being betrayed by the thrown-back eiderdown and a few scattered items of clothing; there were dark socks in front of the bed, a pyjama bottom somewhat

further away, and a pair of white underpants on the carpet, a discarded shirt and the top of the cream pyjamas in a more distant armchair. Since he had gone, the young woman had forced herself to sleep, because she wanted to forget the night, dozing off only to awaken again with a start. Not because of the morning noises, or the persistent ringing. It was as if she were crossing a choppy river in a flat landscape on a ferry, and the ferry were putting in with her, first on one, then the other bank. It seems she really was dreaming, dreaming of crossing. She dreamed of banks between which there was no difference, no bushes or trees, not one tree, just carts, barging cattle and people pouring out of the endless plains in the clouds of dust they were kicking up. The final images of that dream still had a hold, for a while, on the surface of her wakefulness. It was not a river, however, but a vast stream, the surface of its dully glittering, sand-choked water almost convex. One could not see across from one bank to the other. Only I ought to see, she thought, half-awake, recalling the bank that had been left, but it's impossible, impossible. At the same time, she did not know what exactly she ought to see. Words, the meaning of which she did not grasp even when awake, rattled emptily through her head.

As if to take a look from under it, she slightly lifted the pillow off and at the same time also raised her head. Rather than for nonsensical words, why wasn't she listening out for whether someone was at last going to pick up the telephone; or perhaps she ought to go, after all. Through moving, she suddenly caught a smell that was at once foreign and familiar. What was happening around her, come to that? She was gratified to establish that no one was picking it up, notwithstanding the elderly lady's distant insistence. She neither. Nothing to do with her. After all, Kristóf was there, in one of the rooms on the street side. She now made a mental tour of the whole apartment; whenever she woke up she would proceed with her alert senses from room to room, as if she were scanning the status and mental stock of those presently in it, and there was indeed something crudely animal in that activity.

Over time, in any case, she had developed a soft spot for the young man called Kristóf.

She spied on him in her imagination, went after him with her senses; she wanted to know what he did and when.

Kristóf had the next-door room on the courtyard side, and she, somewhat apprehensively, had to suppose that he might well know more about them than propriety would see fit.

They did not always have control over the louder sounds, given that shared joy was the sole thing that bound them together. She would not willingly have admitted to herself, for sure, that bit by bit she was going off Ágost and becoming attracted to Kristóf, if only on account of their similarity. Not only did she follow him about in her imagination, but there were times when she would aim directly at him the sounds that Ágost was eliciting from her. She would come a little bit for him. She would come a bit more loudly than was necessary in order that Kristóf, in the room next door, should share it. Equally, though, she could not be sure that

she had accomplished her goal. Keep on ringing, why don't you, just keep on ringing. Someone was constantly talking in her head. She was not even sure whether she might not have dreamed the insistent female voice. She captured Kristóf in her despairing imagination, but in her dreams and her waking life she was terrified of the lady shouting in the bathroom.

The fire was burning, veritably roaring, in the tile stove, and she stared into the flickering light from the bed.

As if it were the first time she had seen fire. Everything on this bank that she had been obliged to abandon for the sake of the other, more familiar one had been foreign, distant. She marvelled, she did not know from where the hell the dream had popped up, since she had never seen a river as wide as that in her life. I couldn't have seen, didn't see, anything like it; it was as big as the Ganges or the Mississippi. Her voice was echoing from her own voice. It was long past the time when she ought to have got up. Her pillow reeked of the apartment's foreign smell, to which she could never accustom herself; that, however, was giving her a push—out. It was not so much the warmth of the bed that held her as that the day ahead of her seemed to have no prospects. All her days had no prospects. The ferry plying between the two banks probably denoted that she really had no home anywhere, never had and never would have one.

Her mother, of whom all that had survived was her name, Borbála Mózes, had abandoned her when she was just a few days old at the Nagykőrös Maternity Home, where the new-born baby had been recorded in the register of births as Gyöngyvér, or Guinevere, and under her mother's family name. She was unable to find out who her father was, which of the parents she resembled, or whether she resembled anyone at all. Her hated Christian name had possibly been bestowed by her mother. She grimly and relentlessly loathed her unknown girl-mother on account of that name. She had been raised first in church and then state institutions, by foster parents, then in halls of residence at middle school and finally high school. Those words, with their obscure significance, had probably been rattling around in her head because her brow was almost throbbing in pain. On the other hand, it was between the two friendly banks of the stream that the pain had dispersed, along with her disagreeable feelings, in the smell of the water, and eased up in the landscape. The early-morning sun rays had gleamed through the fine haze; it had been summer, a summer that with eyes open she did not remember, a brief, soft, early bit of happiness that, after so many years, still compensated for the torture of the headaches. Sometimes she secretly drank heavily. What had clouded the former happiness was, at most, that they had been obliged to wait for other passengers, whereas she always wanted to go, get across, quickly. Her hunger and thirst were insatiable, like someone who was always waiting for the other bank.

Now, though, she really could not procrastinate; she ought to be getting up. Her bladder was full to bursting anyway, giving sharp little twinges in her abdomen to signal the urgency.

A half-dark that was pleasantly urging her to linger ruled in the room; she pressed her thighs together. Despite the late hour, no one had opened the light-excluding shutters on the windows as yet. The only light was what was coming in through the wide-open door and the long, flickering shades of the reddish flames on the walls.

She was staring at the flames, but not seeing what she was looking at, because she was stretching out further, groping with the feelers of her imagination, but in vain: she was unable to ascertain what she was remembering with her dream. It's a memory, it's a memory of mine after all, she kept saying to herself, meanwhile almost, but not quite, catching it. Before seeking escape from the clattering of the words by irritably turning over onto her other side, in order that the pain should disperse, vanish in the land at last, she clung instinctively to wakefulness; it was perhaps not an empty dream, but the sympathy of the other for which she longed.

Ilona, sweetie, she called out into the other room in a slightly mournful singing tone, it wouldn't hurt to open the sodding window. If it goes on smoking like that for much longer, it'll choke me.

The plaintive tone did not do much to temper the brutality of the statement, of course. She did not want a lot, but she was constantly going further than necessary and was therefore often dissatisfied with herself. She had the impression that sometimes she would be too accommodating towards others, at other times too forceful, pushy, aggressive, like someone who can't strike a happy medium. It wasn't as though she lacked yardsticks, but she could draw on several standards that were none too compatible with one another, and these frequently telescoped together to make her emphases and behaviour offensive.

The other woman did not reply for quite some time. Not that she was offended, but she would now recoil from the smoke that was billowing back, now lean forward so as to blow on and bring life to the dying flames with her bare breath. Lighting six tile stoves every day, and keeping them steadily stoked up, was no mean task even when a furious storm was not raging.

Since daybreak I've had such a dreadful migraine, could be heard from the other room, my head's almost splitting. I've no idea what's causing it. Maybe the wind.

For moments on end, the moan that passed for an apology floated forlornly in the air between the two rooms.

The domestic, Ilona Bondor as she was known by her full name, understood and, to some degree, sympathised with the younger woman's plight, and she felt no need to make a special point of spelling out what could give rise to a migraine at daybreak.

She'd been at the bottle again in secret, or else Ágost had once again failed to satisfy her.

Though it may not have been the way the other wanted from her, she genuinely felt for Guinevere. There was something touchingly gawky, clumsy, about her irregular, oval face, her profuse, pale freckles, almost confluent below the blue

shadows under her eyes and on her nose, about her always carefully curled reddish hair and her narrow shoulders. She put one in mind of an undeveloped, slightly rachitic young girl, even though she was not in the least immature or unsure. She was more assertive than was expected of her, or would have been taken in good part, on the basis of her outward appearance. She was well aware of who she could count on for what. This time, too, she only looked up when the tiny flame on the kindling had finally taken hold on the sticks.

I think it would be best for all concerned if Gwennie were to do us the favour of crawling out of bed, she called back over her shoulder. She might even be so good as to pick up the 'phone. I seem to remember Gwennie telling me yesterday that she would be getting up early today. She wanted to go to the swimming baths before she has her singing lesson, because she said that she wanted to make full use of her days off. Which is all very well, but how's it going to work if she stays in bed. That's not nice, now, is it? Surely Gwennie doesn't suppose that it's going to make her migraine go away. Well, it won't. She'd do better to get up straight away and get some fresh air.

She had a penetrating voice, and she addressed the other in this strange manner as if talking about a third person.

The other woman, though, found nothing to object to. Like Ilona, who hailed from an ethnic Slovak village close to Buda, she herself had only been living in the capital for a few years. On the occasions when, now in the kitchen, now leaning against a door post, they would quietly tell one another what was on their minds, neither of them paid particular attention to how the other one spoke, or what she said, and it must have caused an outsider no small amusement to hear this encounter of two distant dialects. Whereas Guinevere articulated the long, half close *'urh*-like' sound of her œ's with an open throat, Ilona pronounced the *'aahs'* of her acute á's with rounded lips, and in addition both used expressions that neither the other nor a person brought up in the metropolis could make head or tail of. Their provinciality had a covert undercurrent that sometimes drew them together, but sometimes made them jealous and set them against one another; they paid attention to different things, judged things in different ways, and thus whatever might happen to them, they nevertheless understood one another better than those around understood them, or they understood others. Nor was there any mystery about why Ilona Bondor chose to speak about Guinevere Mózes as if she were talking about a third person. By doing so she craftily avoided having to use the formal third-person forms of polite speech that the difference in schooling would have required of her in addressing the younger girl.

It would go away a lot faster if Gwennie were to go for a swim.

Don't talk such nonsense. The reason I didn't go was because swimming always makes it worse.

All the same, it would be better if Gwennie were to be prepared for me not just to open the window; I'll open it for Gwennie, right away, but I'll have to make a start on the cleaning as well. I can't start anywhere else, because the mistress isn't

yet out of the bathroom. Once she gets out then Gwennie can go in. That'll be about the size of it, I reckon.

Now it was this statement that was left hanging in the air. As far as the day's cleaning went, she really did have nowhere else that she could start. Ilona would make a start either in the most distant of the front rooms or the innermost room on the courtyard side; that was her fundamental rule, that was how it had to be. No answer came back, not even a stirring which would have suggested that that Gwennie was at last crawling out of bed. The telephone, on the other hand, suddenly fell silent again.

For a fair while nothing else could be heard than the wind playing in the cavities and cracks, drains and apertures of the imposing block of flats.

No one was to be seen on the outside corridors or in the yard; the broad landings of the stairwell also remained deserted.

At that time of day, though, one would not have expected anyone to come other than the Swabian woman bringing milk from Budakeszi, or the Slovak woman with eggs from Pilisszentkereszt, or just possibly the postman. They had all stayed away on account of the appalling weather. Ilona had taken her young son to the nursery early in the morning; she could not have him under her feet all day long. There was just one child in the building who went to junior school, and at this hour nearly everyone would be at work.

A dreadful night in October 'Fifty-six was the last time there had been a crowd of people there, complete strangers, because the tank gunfire had driven them in there off the Grand Boulevard. When the heavily limping, hunchbacked and bald janitor had opened up the heavy oak gate and eventually took a look outside, the wind was already howling along an empty thoroughfare. Since then, all those leaving the house, even at the cost of considerable effort, would carefully close the door behind them, as indeed a clumsy notice reminded them to do. For all that, the once truly elegant carriage-drive had the effect of a diabolical wind tunnel into which Satan himself was drawing up with a great howl. The lids of the rubbish bins were rattling, shuddering, hammering. There was a more banal explanation for the infernal racket. The two panes of glass that fitted into the arch of the gateway had been blown in by a blast on that October night and, despite the janitor's stubborn efforts, it had proved impossible to procure heavy, shatterproof glass like that anywhere in the city.

The no more than eighty-year-old, strikingly well-proportioned building counted more as a curiosity in that neighbourhood inasmuch as it had weathered the shocks of the past decades almost intact. It was not only luck that it had to thank for that. Even at the time it was built it had been, perhaps, the least conspicuous building in the area. It was constructed as a block of luxury apartments, like all of its more ostentatious neighbours, but through its modest dimensions it was more reminiscent of a private mansion. No building in the entire Sixth District of Terézváros was more solid than this. Fortunately, there had been no hits on it, and since the unobtrusive decorations of its puritanical façade were

made of choice materials, even bomb blasts had inflicted no damage. The residence had been built by a restless, quarrelsome man, himself from the provinces, or at least someone whose mind did not work on a city scale. His building thus stood out in contrast to the rest, which turned out to be to its advantage. People who should know judged that the almost totally unadorned building could be classified as a transition between classicism and eclecticism, and it therefore represented, at all events, a missing and extremely important link in Budapest's architecture, even though, owing to an unfortunate chain of circumstances, the architect subsequently had hardly any of his own designs constructed, and this deficiency had therefore left a profound mark on the way the city looks.

He was the sort of man about whom it was said that he was of bad character, though there were more than a few things in which he proved to have outstanding talents. Maybe he was never able to make up his mind whether to battle and play the eccentric or, on the contrary, to go along with the vulgar, dull-witted norm. In point of fact, he struggled with himself for the whole of his long life, always finding of course an object that benignly covered up the crude rampaging of his insane egoism. He would subordinate himself to anyone as if guided by a spirit of pure self-sacrifice, sometimes even fawning nauseatingly, and then there were other times when he played the self-willed grandee, unconstrained by all others. The name of the architect was Samu Demén.

He came into the world in the town of Jászberény, a few years after Hungary's defeat in the War of Independence, as the only son of a well-off Jewish grain merchant, and he was considered an exceptionally clever child. After six older sisters, he was the last in the line; also still living with them was the paternal grandma and two great-aunts on the mother's side, both what one would call poor relatives, so the pampering amidst which he grew up, among all these women, is hard to imagine. And that is to say nothing of the girls and women among the domestic staff, or Misses Le Vau and Papanek, the French and German governesses. The family had a sure financial base, while its prestige grew ever more solid, even though Jászberény was rather dogged in managing to keep Jewish newcomers at a distance. By the time the son had reached adolescence, most of the daughters had been married off, the majority outside the town; taking advantage of the possibilities offered by new legislation, their father took extensive lands on lease and managed them with a firm but also lucky hand. In doing so he provoked the wrath and envy of many in the small town; but others saw profit in this general boom, though even among them there were few who could reconcile themselves to the idea that land, too, could now belong to the Jews.

At all events, the boy was left to follow his own curious fancy, without restrictions or external pressure, when it came to choosing a path in life. He studied architecture, first in Berlin, then in Vienna, travelled for several months around Greece, and spent a whole year on a study trip to Italy. On the logic of his studies, he ought to have gone from there to England, but since he had been unable to acquire a decent grasp of any foreign language, and that was a constant source of

insecurity and anxiety, for the last two years of his course he moved back to the Technical University in Pest, taking his degree under Alajos Hauszmann, then near the peak of his renown and influence as the doyen of Hungarian architects. The professor thought highly of the conspicuously flashily dressed young man, and it could not be said that he did not assist him, but all the same he did not belong to the charmed circle of his favoured students, because they, for all the professor's ingenuity, would not tolerate him amongst them. His manner was intolerable, his emotionalism and irascibility were at least unusual in the eyes of the others; his thick, ineradicable dialect, or his painful stammering, along with his bad habit of constantly mixing up the genders of nouns when the conversation switched to German, but most of all the loud voice in which he constantly spoke many found off-putting or intensely wearying.

If he showed up at one of the coffee-houses, rowdy enough at the best of times, at the Eagle in New World Street or the Hunting Horn, where he read the foreign papers, or the Coffee Rooms, where he associated with all kinds of suspicious figures in some highly murky political affair, or every so often, on account of a scandalous affair that linked him to a lady belonging to the highest circles, at the luxuriously appointed Queen of England, then he would instantly attract and, for long moments on end, hold the attention of those present with his dashing figure and stylish clothes. Those who knew him would drop flattering or maybe pointed remarks; those who didn't know him would feel a need to find out who he was.

A waiter at the door would attentively take his walking stick, in keeping with police regulations, while he would peel off his tight buckskin gloves with just as much ceremony, finger by finger, as he ran his eyes abstractedly and haughtily about him. He might have been taken for a famous artist from abroad, or a foreign aristocrat, as though to say by that that he was a flashy person who did not come from, and did not belong within, our ranks. He would doff his top hat and hand that over with the gloves, then the waiter would lead him to his table or to the company that happened to be expecting him.

His steps were always sure, his movements smooth and supple; he passed fastidiously between the tables like a noble wild beast.

The spell might last until, having settled on a seat, or leaning forward from the depths of an armchair, he began to speak. Everything about him was delicately wrought, long, oblong, bony, but not fleshless, like the fingers on this hands. At the same time, somehow wild and unmanageable, like the straight, glossily black hair that veritably tumbled out from beneath his headwear. Just as unruly were his eyebrows, the wayward hairs of which joined on the slightly yellowish, ivory-coloured skin over the bridge of his nose, and his almost disagreeably thick lips, the upper rim of which was bordered by a trim pencil line of moustache. Through his sheer presence, the self-confident and pampered smile that would play at the corners of his mouth, his movements, the colour of his skin, his dark gaze, now scanning nervously around, now lingering at length, he could win his way close to almost anybody's heart. And within just as little time, those embarrassing lures

were dashed for those concerned by their not being given to know on precisely what footing they stood with him.

He had been born under the sign of Aquarius, and Nature fatefully dealt out to him the full repertory of his constellation but, sadly, nothing else. He was a man for spectacle, understanding everything that had anything to do with it, knowing how much it owed to harmony and how much to disharmony, and he was well acquainted with the units of measure for symmetry and asymmetry, having a partiality for symmetry, but not insisting on it, being against any monotony of proportions. These endowments did not work within him like an engineer's acquired knowledge but affected him viscerally, feeding off gut reactions. Not that he was unskilled; there was no one more able than him to take all these aspects into account in the mathematical sense of the word. He could also handle colours, forms, materials and rhythmicity of line, instinctively sensing the interdependence and reciprocity of these components; but wherever the sovereign domain of the visual came to an end he could be counted a lost person.

To be totally tin-eared is surely just as exceptional an endowment as perfect pitch. It wasn't that he was unable to distinguish a waltz from a mazurka, though there were times when he couldn't do that either, but that sort of thing can be overlooked; however, he proved pathologically insensitive to auditory dimensions of any kind, and that may have been why he had no ability to listen to others or to monitor what he said himself, if it came to that.

He didn't have friends, only admirers and enemies. Samu Demén did not pick up the fine stresses and shades of emphasis and sense. He did not even hear anybody out and was unable to argue, plunging straight in by running down, breaking in on or fuming at anybody, interrupting the conversations of others, sometimes actually talking over what other people were saying. He felt in his element when he was able to deliver free-flowing monologues. The stateliness of his movements caused few to forget that he chomped when eating. A handsome body in which there was probably never silence, nor any wish for silence.

Some people simply avoided him.

He was aware of all this, of course, but once he had left the family home he could not understand why everything that happened to him ended up with him being on his own.

There was no hint of disagreeable extremes in his buildings. He did not design from the outside inward but from the inside outward. As if he saw the courtyard before the façade, or a single room first then co-ordinated everything else to its proportions, but never the other way round. He was convinced, indeed it became an obsession, that an apartment block or living space was felicitous when its ground plan, like that of a Greek temple, was an elongated rectangle but its individual rooms, by contrast, were almost regular squares. What he sought from a space was that it should remain interior, tender and intimate; it should not extinguish a person's desires, but nor should it nourish his pretensions, make him conceited. The height of the rooms conformed to the scale of the ground plan.

From this it followed that not only could he not design inordinately large rooms, since he would not have wished to have a nonsensical internal height, but also that he had to dimension all the main rooms to pretty much the same size, and they could not be a great deal bigger than the ancillary rooms.

The things he designed would have been comfortable, familiar, restful, solid and bright, yet that happened to be not fully reconcilable with the spirit of the age, which was why he was unable to realise them; for the most part, they remained on the drawing board. His ideas did not turn him against his colleagues; at worst they would just laugh on seeing his plans: Samu Demén can design nice little manor-houses, they would say, but he has no notion at all of what an urban apartment block should look like. No, his plans scared off potential clients first and foremost. The internal proportions of the mansion blocks designed by his fine colleagues really were different. While the more public rooms on the street-side faces of dwellings—the salons, studies, smoking rooms and dining rooms—grew ever taller and larger, all the spaces on the courtyard side became ever narrower, with dark corridors, closets, cubby-holes and alcoves, and the internal height of these spaces was inevitably daunting. Apartments on the courtyard side did not manage to retain even that much proportion; there everything was crammed together, abutting each other. Main rooms off the kitchen, which in turn gave onto windowless alcoves and cubby-holes, sleeping cubicles, shared lavatories on the landings of the stairwells at the rear—in short, the impenetrable and impure thick of the city.

In stark contrast to all that, he made such lavish use of space that he could not fit more than two apartments onto a single floor, which of course discouraged builders who were stunned by land prices or, indeed, looking to speculate on them. Then, just when he ought to have been arguing his point politely and shrewdly, everyone could see that he was almost exploding with anger.

Do understand, if you please, insofar as you draw a line through the upper apex of the tympanum parallel with the crepidoma, and you join these, very well, I can see you don't follow, no doubt you haven't seen a Greek temple; so anyway, then you get an almost regular square—that's the nub of it. Let us note, if you please, that this is the classical proportion. An almost regular square, though it is tending towards a horizontal rectangle. I take it out even further than that, but do please understand, I can only take it out as far as can be tolerated, optically speaking. I won't go any further, trust me, I simply won't. If we were to stick another storey on this building, if you please, two storeys, three, as you wish, then that would be to stand the world on its head.

Now, look at this, please, do you see: you get a bare quadratic prism, it prods the sky up. That, if you please, I won't do, not with me, you won't, I don't accept that sort of thing.

Truly, only a Doric colonnade and a large tympanum were missing from the façade of his building for his bantering colleagues to be able to see in it some kind of old-fashioned, antiquating formation. Yet those were not the only elements he

did not employ, for he also did not use those showy ornaments cribbed from the Renaissance and Baroque that they were so fond of and for which clients were so happy to pay.

He could not get his head round it. Why people would pay for nonsense like that when, for the same money, they could pay for a comfortable and balanced space.

Every single room on all three floors, on both the street and courtyard sides, was given two symmetrically placed windows, which by means of lamellar mouldings of Sóskút sandstone received only just as much emphasis on the façade as human eyes get from eyebrows and lashes: one of them high up, as on classical buildings, a hood-mould well above the window apertures, if only so that the rain should not beat directly on the windowpanes; the other as a support for the windowsills, like a corbel. He patterned the mouldings, consisting of three narrow lamellas, on the Ionic stylobate, and he ran a thicker rule of this moulding not only above the ground-floor shops, but also beneath the strongly raised roof, as well as a kind of accentuated cornice, so as to close the friezes that so to say prefigured the vertical articulation of the façade.

Of course, the principles, drolleries and strictures affirmed against him by his contemporaries were not completely groundless. Because he smuggled back the classical not merely with these almost unnoticeably restrained allusions, but above all with the vertical profiles of the brick facing. But even he was unable to hide the tension between structural needs and the internal proportions that were achieved, and here the unabashed decoration so characteristic of that period made an appearance.

In October of 'Fifty-six, several senseless bursts of machine-gun fire swept across this symbolic colonnade.

The repeatedly fired bricks withstood the bullet impacts fairly well, though it was possible to trace the arc of the shots. Here they had knocked a lump out, there broken off the edge of a brick, and in yet another place burrowed into the soft stucco work. The stuccoed surfaces were coloured a cheerful, sun-kissed yellow, and back then the reddish-brown mouldings of the brick facing had practically floated between the buoyant windowsills. Nowadays not even a vestige of colour or floating remained; the subdued details of the building's façade had been washed to grey by flying dust and grime, whereas the daily renewed calcifications of pigeon shit ran down in long, white streaks from the mouldings, friezes and cornices. ❧

(To be continued)

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

György Petri

Poems

Translated by George Szirtes

An Unknown Eastern European Poet Writing in 1955

Ismeretlen kelet-európai költő verse 1955-ből

It's fading
like the two flags that
year by year we'd fix in brackets
over the gate on state holidays,
the world is fading, losing colour.

Where are the holidays now?

Under thick dust,
silent in the hot
attic an entire
world lies dismantled.

The marches have vanished.

György Petri (1943–2000)
studied Hungarian and philosophy, became a journalist and published his first volume of poems in 1960. His harsh, disenchanted voice and the often vulgar language of his poems soon became intolerable to the regime, which he openly and fiercely criticised. He was silenced in 1975 and could resume publishing only in 1989; he managed, however, to publish in samizdat and abroad. Two volumes of his poems appeared in English, both translated by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri: Night Song of the Personal Shadow, *Bloodaxe, 1991, and* Eternal Monday. New and Selected Poems, *Bloodaxe, 1999.*

A harsh bellowing has overtaken them,
the wind has blown them away.
Poets no longer declaim their celebratory verses,
the wind is writing its own,

its recitation a whirl of dust in tremulous heat
above a paved square.

Extraordinary to think we once loved women here.

Over an age of glowing furnaces,
and taut ropes at full stretch
the uncertain present
hangs like the dust
that sinks beneath it.

Over buildings half abandoned:
those imperial fantasies.

I no longer believe
in what I once believed.
But am daily reminded
that I was a believer once.

Nor do I excuse anyone.

Our terrible loneliness
blisters in the heat of the sun
like rust on rails.

(1971)

Collapse

Összeomlás

No, there was no explosion
merely a collapse.
The thing with the mincer in its bowels,
the thing that cheated others by cheating itself,
that terrified by its sheer appearance,
collapsed without a peep.

May we still think—
corroded from the start by doubt,
giving up the very right to doubt,
an idiot watchman of stale bathwater,
of the water
in which sat a baby—
may he think of liberation?

Can he imagine something like this, he
who has seen it silently fall apart,
sliding apart more readily
than bodies after sex,
more readily than our flesh that sometime
must fall from our bones?

Without a peep it broke up, simply fell to pieces,
nails sliding through a gently rotting plank,
bricks decomposing like marl or potash,
yielding their dry porous substance
slipping from loose cement,
at which time what point in resisting—
beating the ground with ratatat of guns, with mortars,
a ridiculous ascendancy
beating the vacant air
like rain, like rain, like rain.

No, there was no explosion, merely a collapse.
Only it took ages, simply ages
for the swirling of thick damp dust
to form a deposit.
Or is there nothing but the swirling?
The swelling milling damp of it?

The dissolving of a constructed world.

(1971)

On the Twenty-fourth Anniversary of the Little October Revolution

A Kis Októberi Forradalom 24. évfordulójára

They fiddled a little with the state of the world
uncle Imre, uncle Pista's lot.
They were strung up, left to cool their heels.
Uncles Mátyás and Ernő
cleared off to Moscow (let's not even mention the others.)
Thence followed the dispensation of Father Jack. *
'We shall live forever!'
They estimate
the number of corpses
including locals and intruders
between three and thirty-thousand,
It's hard to be sure
so long after the event.,
Reality doesn't reckon with itself.
Does it count itself out? Does it get even?
Unified, indivisible,
it hasn't even learned to count
and flunked out in fourth grade.
Here are two numbers for you:
56
68
You can add them, subtract them,
divide them, multiply them.
Your studies, your unnumbered foul
doctrines are bankrupt.

(1981)

* ■ Uncle Imre is Imre Nagy, the Revolution's Prime Minister, executed in June 1958. Uncle Pista is probably István Bibó, the great political theorist, who was a member of the Nagy Government and spent years in prison for it. Uncles Mátyás and Ernő are Mátyás Rákosi, the No. 1 Stalinist leader, and Ernő Gerő, the No. 2 till October 1956. Father Jack is János Kádár.

Christmas 1956

Karácsony 1956

At one particular moment on the twenty-second
(at a quarter to seven in the morning) I, an ominous child
between Joseph S and Jesus,
am thirteen. This is the last
of the festive Christmases. We have plenty
to eat: "the economy of shortage" has parted for granny
like the Red Sea and she has walked through it
complete with dry feet and a turkey. And there were gifts, for me
that is, I having the monopoly of them, my only
cousin being a girl and what's more only four years old,
while I was the only male scion of the family
(at the time at least). Wine-soup, fish—we've got the lot,
considering that is we have just emerged from the shelter
where G.F. kept waving a tommy-gun without
a magazine ("Go somewhere else, Gabby," they said,
"do you want the Russians round our necks?")
Gabby (they'll wait till lilac time to hang him)
comes in to wish us the best of the season,
there's no midnight mass on account of the curfew,
I concentrate on my present, the game of Monopoly,
my auntie having picked it up privately, the toy shops
offering little choice for now. Auntie is effectively
saying goodbye. She is preparing to emigrate
via Yugoslavia, but when it comes to it they fail to meet her
at the border so she's obliged to die at home
of cancer of the spine some eleven years later.
Nobody knows how to play Monopoly,
I am turning the dial on the pre-war Orion radio
picking up London, listening in to America,
just as my mother did in nineteen forty-four
only louder, now you can do it, meaning you can do it for now.
The Christmas tree decorations I can number by heart
affect me much as a woman will many years later,
a woman I loved for many years.
In the morning, barefooted, I flick through the Monopoly cards
breathing in the scent of pine and candles,
bring in a plateful of brawn from the corridor in the yard,
grandmother is cooking already, twisting a lemon,
cuts me a slice of bread with the brawn as I squat on the stool

in pyjamas. A holiday smell, the smell of sleep.
Grandad is coughing in what was once a maid's room,
one terrific loud fit pitches his accountant body
thin as a toothpick out from under the duvet,
my mother wakes up now, the kitchen fills up,
the whole family's there, and I'm like an observer
dropped in the wrong place,
tiny, a stranger, chilled through.

(1985)

On Imre Nagy

Nagy Imréről

You were drab like all those other suited
and spectacled leaders, without any special
resonance in your voice, suddenly not knowing

what to say to the huge waiting crowd. The suddenness
was what surprised you. An old man in a pince-nez,
you disappointed me,
I wasn't to know

the concrete yard where the prosecutor
probably rattled off your sentence, nor of
the coarse mark of the rope, the final humiliation.

Who could have spoken, who could tell what speech might be made
from that balcony? Opportunities once got shot of
don't come round again. Imprisonment
and death can't sharpen the edge of the lost moment

once it is nicked. What we can do is remember
the reluctant, humiliated, hesitant figure,
the man who nevertheless
soaked up the fury,
the illusion, the blind hope of the country

when the city woke
to find itself shot to pieces.

(1985)

October

Október

The time when the dung-fire of hatred blazes most fiercely,
the time when pissed-on slag
smokes surreptitiously by the boiler
—the dead! the dead!
The time when people spill-stray across the street, rise up,
perceive some possibility glittering
like a stolen earring: they don't know it's theirs.
The time when you're gone, then would I gladly nibble at your breasts.

(1985)

Concerning Cemetery Plot 301

A 301-es parcelláról

Let's not change anything!
Should we leave them interned with carcasses from the zoo?
Yes. Why, is that not exactly what happened?
Is death by hanging kinder than being put to sleep?
I do not forget (I am not threatening anyone
in saying that: it's just the way I am:
I can't forget).
In any case what more could I want
had I been—ha ha—hanged
and returned to the spot like Pushkin's Stone Guest?
If only they would leave me alone.
I shit on reverence. They should have
exercised more piety while they were alive
(by leaving them alive). It's too late now.

There's no effective remedy for death:
no restitution for widows, for orphans,
for whole nations. I'm not interested
in the belated tears of assistant executioners.
My eyes are dry. I need them for looking.

Not that there's too much
to gaze at but everything looks sharper
this time of the evening:
a woman's body, a branch,
the light down on your face. There's
nothing I'm after. Just looking.

(1990)

What Right Have I to Be Here

Hogy jövök ahhoz

I am not in Ady's vanguard of the dead, *I merely bring up the rear*
vaguely dawdling, treading a path that is not a road,
fearful, circumspect, like my uncle at twenty in the Easter mud
when Hungarian gendarmes escorted him to his death
on the scaffold, and one solicitously exhorted my grandmother:
Come along, my good woman, still time to say goodbye to your son.
Granny fainted away. Gellért meanwhile carefully trod round the puddles:
mire of the time would not stick to his dangling feet.
My Serbian Jewish Hungarian Communist uncle took care
of his patent-leather shoes, prizing them above anything and everything.
Should I set out down the Ulica Gellert Perlova in Subotica
I'd be lurching all over the place: where have I come from that I should come to be her
What is my sense of being here compared to his having been*?*
Truly, the dead may be more alive than the living.
Truly, Imre Nagy died so we might be honest in our time
and that's why he makes for a deadly-serious light rhyme.
Right now we are famished for honesty here,
hatred, cowardice, the most brazen hand-washing,
arse-licking, the rabbit gets to shed blood
and even the mouse fancies living flesh to chew on. We're beasts again,
and the hunters are out for us. Let it not be like this.
Remember the last photograph of him: a man as thin
as a skeleton, who even between two prison guards, given the right
to a few last words not only did not ask for mercy but questioned
the legality of the court and appealed to history, to the workers movement,
and chose on our behalf, instead of life with dishonour
a modest, human, dignified, honourable death.

(1993)

October Capriccio

Októberi capriccio

Whoever believes in anything is an idiot.
Or colour blind to the spectrum of reality.
It's so obvious: each truth is a half-truth, a third, or a quarter?
Most likely an infinitesimally tiny decimal.
I could say this in a joky fashion
Go fuck yourself π*... But I won't say it*
as I'm not in the mood for joking.

It is October the twenty-third.
For now and for ever.
I was 13 then,
happily splashing in
the medium of happening.
I lived for ten days.
Since then? Nothing.
Kádár Apró Dögei
(three ministers: Kádár's Little Puppies)
Little change.
One idiot succeeded
by another. No problem, of course,
"on the economic front", and Euro-jobbies
etc, etc.
Immeasurable now the time before me.
All "but" and "noway" and "nohow".
Not, nohow. Rotten gallows. Landscape.

I won't be turning the hourglass again.
(1991)

1956

It is the 4th November I shall be celebrating.
That's *when the system broke down. As Talleyrand*
said: you can do a lot with bayonets
but you can't sit down on them.
But once there are only bayonets
with no intervening space, sitting becomes possible again,
and then, as the Slovaks say: secko jedno,
meaning the game is up.
I'm not laying wreaths, I'm not giving
interviews. I am in close personal *contact*
with Imre Nagy, despite the fact
that I never once met him. More's the pity.
I could have learned a lot from him.
A rich sensibility, wisdom,
and most important of all: that yes it is possible
to engage in politics and retain your honour.
The Soviet invasion did not tell us
anything substantial. It only confirmed what
we knew already, that people are generally cowards,
quite worthless. Or rather, they want to live.
And that, after all, is forgivable.
(1999)

Gábor Murányi

Counterpart Diaries

[János Kovács]: *Magyar Forradalom 1956. Napló* (Hungarian Revolution 1956. Diary). Facsimile edition in numbered copies. Budapest, Tamás Kieselbach, 200 pp. • Gyula Csics: *Magyar Forradalom 1956. Napló* (Hungarian Revolution 1956. Diary), Budapest, 1956-os Intézet, 222 pp.

In 2006 Hungary is remembering one of the decisive events in its history, the October of fifty years ago: the 1956 Revolution. Hope lasted just two weeks, though years, decades, of events and experiences were compressed into those 13 days, kneading Hungarians—at least temporarily—into a genuine unity. Some still chose to place their trust in a truer form of communism, others hoped for civil, democratic institutions that had never existed in the country, while others nurtured a fierce anti-communism—nearly everyone lived in some sort of euphoria, nurturing the hope that starting tomorrow things would be different. The days of oppression would be over.

During Kádár's long rule there were two absolute taboos: to question the "temporary stationing" of Soviet troops in Hungary or the official designation of 1956 as a counter-revolution. It was the overturning of those two taboos that prepared the way for the 1989–90 transition to democracy. With that turning-point, the dam burst on three and a half decades of pent-up silence. Survivors trying to come to terms with this legacy create myths and demolish them—including distinguished academic works, memoirs and albums of photographs—but the biggest sensation has been the publication, by separate publishing houses, of reproductions of parallel diaries kept at the time by two boys who were close friends.

The story, or rather, part of it, was related by one of the diarists, Gyula Csics, in the previous issue of this journal as an introduction to a translation of selections from his diary. (Part 2 follows this article.) In this Csics writes that he believed his friend's diary had been lost.

On Tuesday, 23 October, 1956, two young boys who lived in a tenement in the very heart of Budapest—14-year-old János Kovács and 12-year-old Gyula Csics—decided that they would record the events of the day in diary form (more specifically,

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Gábor Murányi
is a journalist on the staff of the weekly HVG *and the author of several books on press history.*

in separate diaries). On the first page of a 200-page hard-cover notebook that was originally a book-keeping ledger, Jancsi set down his title, "Hungarian Revolution 1956", and beneath that drew the Kossuth coat of arms, used during the 1848–49 War of Independence against the Habsburgs, which Hungarians promptly adopted as their own symbol on the first day of the 1956 uprising. Also added to the title page was the opening line of the national anthem by Ferenc Kölcsey: *"Bless the Magyars, Lord we pray...,"* which was not exactly in favour in the Rákosi era. The younger Gyula then copied this into his spiral-bound notebook as the opening for his diary too. From that point on, for the better part of half a year, the two friends kept up a nearly daily account for themselves (and, it now turns out, for posterity) of all the things that had happened to them, sometimes together, sometimes separately. Given that they were constantly reading over what the other had written, it's little wonder that they quoted one another, or to be more accurate, made references to entries that the other had made, and also argued with one another.

Such records can be held together by the naïveté, the complete lack of interest in the 'big picture', the pure logic and lack of logic of a child's way of thinking, the ability to be amazed, the childish maturity—as has been shown by Anna Frank's *Diary* of life in Nazi-occupied Holland in the 1940s. Much the same can be said of Jancsi and Gyula's dual chronicle of 1956. What do these two intelligent, open-minded boys see, feel and understand of the events around them? And "around them" should be understood in the literal sense, for the six-storey tenement building in which they lived is just a block away from one of the locations of the fighting on the very first day, the editorial office of the Communist Party's daily newspaper, *Szabad Nép,* and only a few blocks from Hungarian Radio, or from Corvin Close, which was to become famous as one of the toughest pockets of resistance in the insurgency.

The boys went to school on the first full day of the Revolution (Wednesday, 24 October), being questioned on their homework and doing their homework, as per usual. In the afternoon they tried to get chewing gum at the nearby newsagent, and 'as usual' it didn't have any in stock, but then the possibility of a terrific new game flashed through their minds: they could collect handbills. That was no simple matter, as they found time after time that the leaflets scattered in the streets were snatched up by other people before their very eyes; in the end, though, they laid their hands on a few and used them, together with their own elaborate drawings, as pasted inserts. These were texts of a tone quite unfamiliar to them: "We demand the instant withdrawal of any Soviet troops that remain in Hungary!" On one of these handbills there appeared the name of Imre Nagy, previously unknown to the boys, who was being urged to form a government. The boys did not have much time to digest these leaflets, dizzying and often frankly shocking for the grown-ups as they were, encouraging them to take resolute action, for they were swept along by the crowds that were packing the streets. Admittedly, it did not take long for them to become frightened by the shouting in the streets, so it was in the safety of their homes that they heard the subsequent

shooting. At first they did not know what the strange noise could be: "It was like something big falling on the ground," Jancsi described the rattle of the guns (and as there is no teacher quite like real life, within a week he could infallibly identify the type of gun from its sound alone).

The course of the Revolution ground remorselessly on, and these diaries do not add anything to the known chronology of events. What is of interest is what they lived through from a child's point of view; how they faced up to new developments and rumours, and when the truth dawned upon them. The story of 1956 and the ensuing months is something their accounts bear witness to with greater authenticity than any historical evaluation.

Their reaction to the aftermath is particularly interesting, given that after the armed insurgency had been crushed, the political apparatus that the Soviet tanks installed in power, with Kádár at its head, was initially feeble and at a loss. While an unprecedented tide of humanity fled Hungary to the West—around 200,000 in just a few weeks—the majority that decided to stay may have acknowledged, with the sober realisation that life has to go on, that they had lost the fight, but they were not (as yet) going to yield on their Revolution's key ideals and demands. One can gain surprisingly accurate assessments of this stoical yet optimistic mood from the two diaries. During the few miraculous days, the two boys matured into adults capable of seeing and expressing what they saw; they became adults who were above compromise and who did not forgive compromise in others. That maturation in itself is noteworthy, elevating (and regrettable).

Let us take 7 November 1956 as just one example (the date when the Hungarians were forced to celebrate the anniversary of the October Revolution of 1917). Both diarists, who go into some detail about the operations of the Soviet invaders, enter it under the title "The most horrible day of the siege". Jancsi starts his entry with the observation that "The shooting was not particularly noticeable in the morning" but then goes on to record that just an hour or two later it was as if all hell had been let loose. Whereupon he, to the constant chatter of machine-gun fire, reads for hours on end in his family's second-floor apartment, flat on his belly behind the shield of a sofa. And what does he read? One of the classics of children's literature: *Egri csillagok* (Stars of Eger), set in sixteenth-century Hungary at the time of the Turkish wars. Siege outside and also a siege inside his head, given that Géza Gárdonyi wrote his book as a memorial to the heroic defence a handful of Hungarians mounted successfully against massively superior Turkish forces besieging Eger Castle in 1552. Whereas in the book the garrison fought with sabres, the hopelessly uneven struggle against Russian tanks was being waged in the streets of Pest with single-shot rifles and Molotov cocktails.

Gyula Csics's entry tells of other events, explaining: "Today would have been my twelfth birthday celebration." These words imply that there was no celebration because the shooting was still going on. He also records that when the Russian tanks fell back (to regroup, perhaps), the insurgents in Blaha Lujza Square

obtained a football from the nearby Corvin department store and played a quick game in the brief respite until the Russians pressed back into the attack and they again snatched up their weapons and returned to the fighting, perhaps to their deaths. The boys "asked" for the ball from one of the local residents, who had himself asked the players to give it to him (perhaps we should see this as compensation for the missing birthday).

23 November 1956 was a month to the day after the Revolution had broken out and, incidentally, the day on which Imre Nagy and his associates, who had taken refuge in the Yugoslav Embassy when the Russian army resumed its attack, were tricked into leaving that safe haven and, as the first stage on a road that was to lead to their execution, were carried off to Romania. It was also the day on which, in a demonstration of passive resistance, the inhabitants of Budapest staged a silent protest by keeping off the streets between two and three o'clock in the afternoon, and the rumour was spread that anyone in the streets was a Kádár supporter.

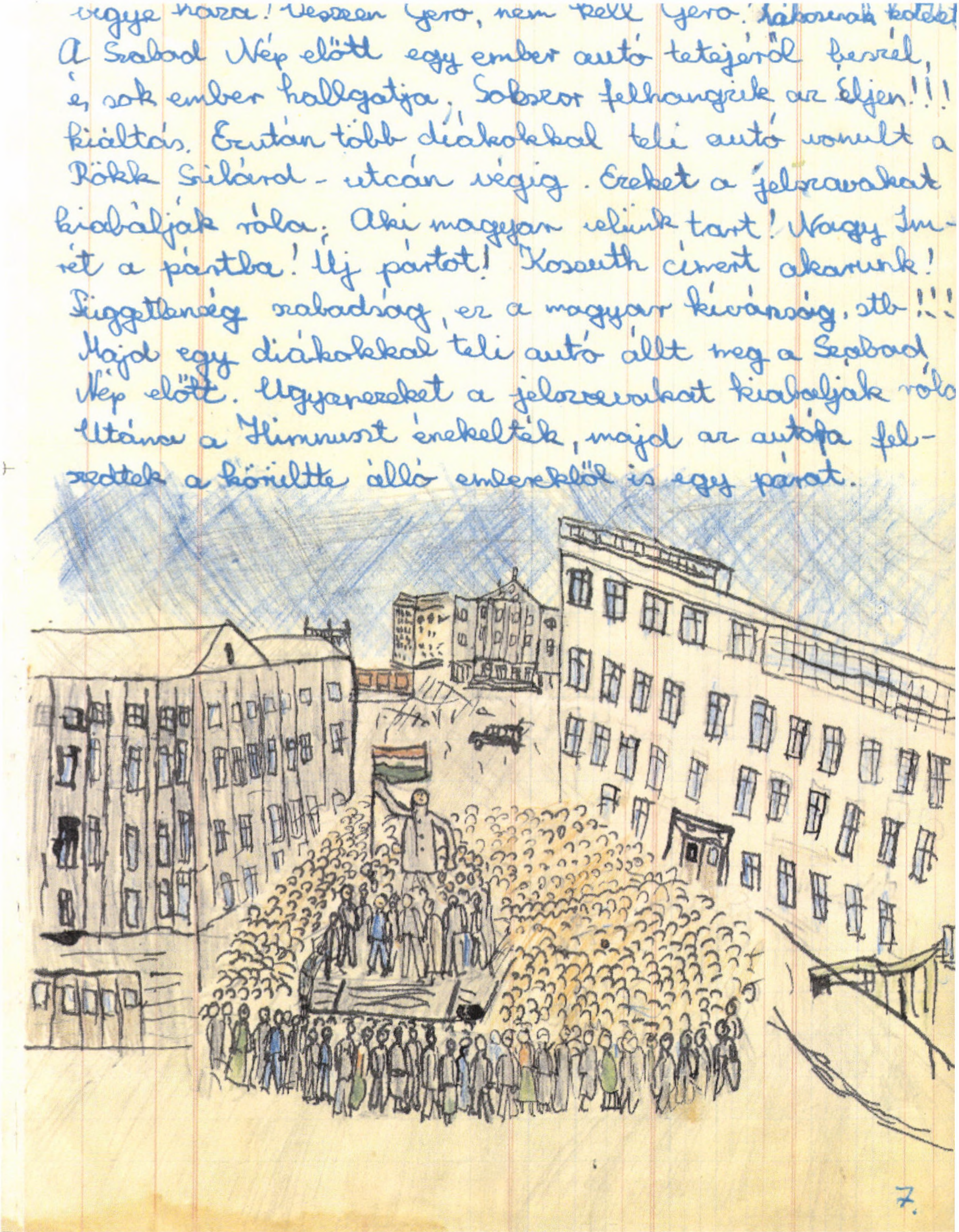
That day was notable for the two boys for quite a different reason. It was the first snowfall of the winter, and with two girls of much the same age in their building, they embarked on a snowball fight. "It was just one-thirty," Jancsi explains somewhat apologetically to signal that he was no Kádár supporter and wished to avoid giving even the appearance of being one. Male patriotism also manifested in the fact that the boys were all for "bags I the side of the Hungarians", leaving the girls with the role of the Russians; and as befits folk tales, those fighting for the cause of justice won, as Jancsi boasts in his diary. A month later Jancsi undertakes another exploit. On one of their regular walks, which now covered an ever-wider area, he notices that the new régime is swinging into vigorous propaganda action, and so he too decides to act: "I snowballed every poster that bore the slogan 'Long live the Kádár government!'"

Anyone who supposes that this is just role-play by two boys would be truly mistaken. One only has to read the entry that Jancsi made on 23 January 1957, two months after the outbreak of the revolt. His account is quoted verbatim by Gyula Csics. He relates that by the time Jancsi got to school, a classmate had chalked the by then prohibited Kossuth coat of arms on the blackboard, signing off with the stirring "Glory to the heroic Hungarian martyrs of the October 23rd Revolution!" Some small candles sent from Switzerland were placed in the classroom window and the class bowed heads in their memory—and not just the class but their maths teacher as well. It was clear that although she could hardly fail to notice the blazingly obvious, she did not dare make any comment and kept her voice down, thereby signalling that she shared the sentiments. Everything was done "in a hush". A genuine mini-drama is revealed, for Jancsi records how each of their teachers reacted: who was brave, and who was not, for some of them admit frankly that they were scared that the kids would cause trouble for their teachers, while another teacher cited biblical parables in recognition of the pupils' right "to remember fallen heroes". He added though "that's enough of this, let's take down those candles!" as greater trouble may come of it. And that was true beyond any doubt.

In early 1957, as a taste of the retribution to come, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party's summary courts, the "people's tribunals", imposed a number of death sentences to signal severe consequences for less modest "manifestations inimical to the state". If these two diaries, for instance, had fallen into the hands of the vigilant authorities—perhaps through a house search—there is no question the boys' fates would have taken a different course. Luck was on their side, however. 15 March is the anniversary of the outbreak of the 1848 Hungarian Revolution. On that day in 1957 they broke a solemn promise they had made to keep up the diaries until Soviet troops left Hungary: they broke off the chronicles, consigning the notebooks to their desk drawers at home, or to the depths of the cellar, where they lay undisturbed for over four decades until the moment when, near-miraculously, they were independently but simultaneously resurrected.

During the Kádár era, the two boyhood friends drifted apart, their lives taking quite different courses. Gyula Csics became a librarian in the provincial town of Tatabánya, but he still secretly preserved his old diary, with its elaborate, stunning drawings and pasted-in leaflets. In the years after the change of régime, he would find himself taking this out and leafing through it more and more often. Then, about two years ago, he went to a lecture given in Tatabánya by János M. Rainer, who heads the Institute for the History of the 1956 Revolution. At the end of the lecture, Gyula Csics showed his diary to the historian, who was so excited that he not only persuaded the diarist to allow his chronicle to be published in a facsimile edition, but also convinced him to be the subject of a documentary film. The film crew spent two years trying to track down the other diary, the one Jancsi had kept, but they drew a blank. They managed to find Gyula's old friend, but several years earlier he had suffered a major stroke and was by then in an old people's home. (He is still living there to this day, though it is next-to-impossible to communicate with him.) The contents of his home had been dispersed when he had moved out. So the Diary had most likely disappeared—that was the assumption Gyula Csics made when he recounted his story in the previous issue of the *Hungarian Quarterly*.

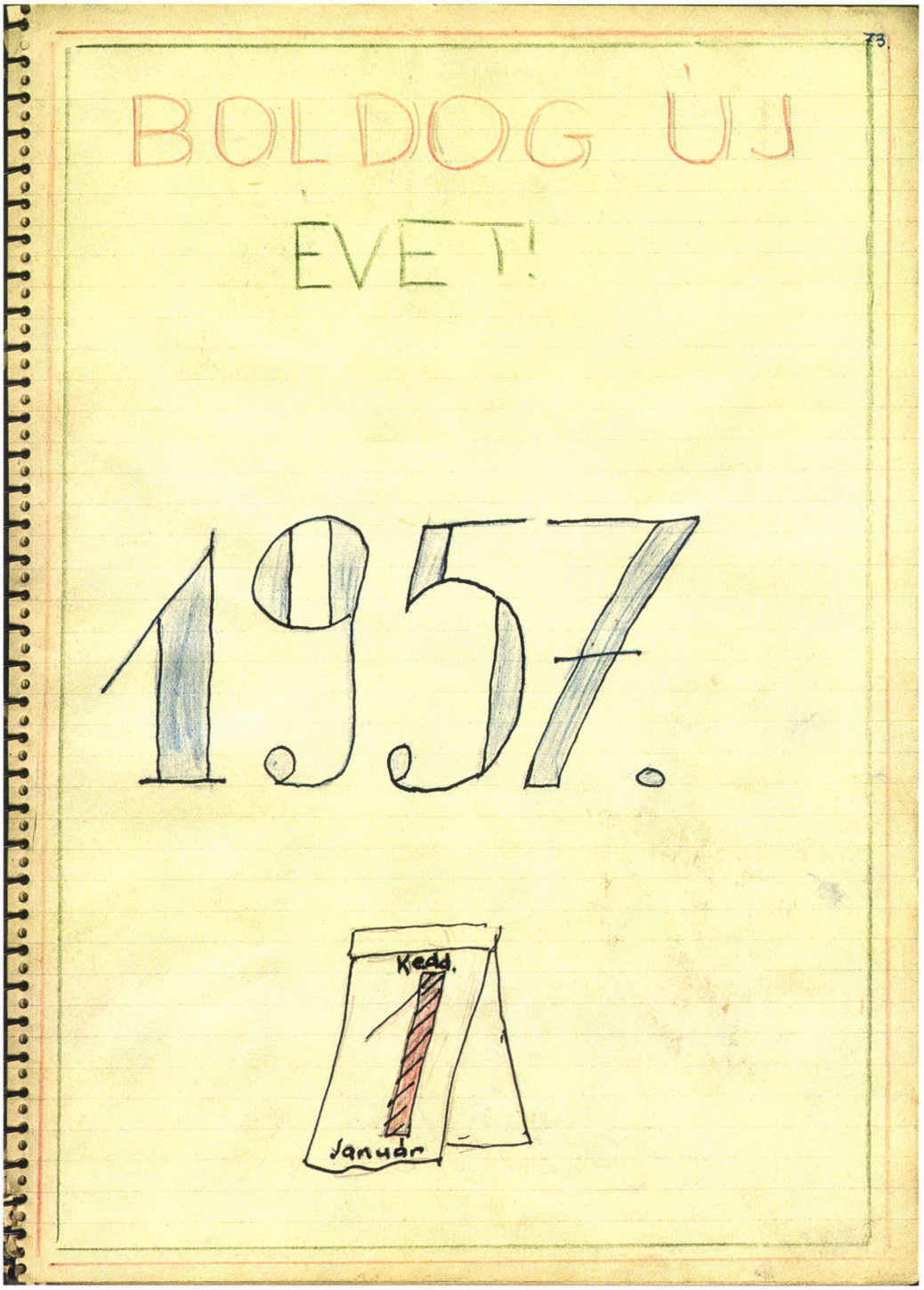
Except that something else had happened in the meantime. On one of his regular trawls of the flea markets, some time in 2004, the art historian Tamás Molnos happened to fish out from the bottom of a pile of papers a hard-bound notebook that had originally been a book-keeping ledger. The cover bore the title "Hungarian Revolution 1956. Diary"; it was clearly in a child's hand and stuffed with many drawings and handbills. He bought it on the spot, then showed it to the well-known Budapest gallery owner Tamás Kieselbach, who in turn did not waste much time before pronouncing the Diary an "unknown art object" and taking steps to have it reproduced. The bibliophile facsimile edition preserves the depredations of the past, such as the rips, the mould stains and other damage, which, as the Foreword noted, was by "an as yet completely unknown author". By one of those coincidences that life abounds in, the two diaries rolled off the printing presses on virtually the same day, and each found its counterpart on the day of the book launches. ❧



vegye haza! Vesszen Gerő, nem kell Gerő! Rákosinak kötelet
A Szabad Nép előtt egy ember autó tetejéről beszél,
és sok ember hallgatja. Sokszor felhangzik az Éljen!!!
kiáltás. Ezután több diákokkal teli autó vonult a
Rökk Szilárd-utcán végig. Ezeket a jelszavakat
kiabálják róla: Aki magyar velünk tart! Nagy Im-
rét a pártba! Új pártot! Kossuth címert akarunk!
Függetlenség szabadság, ez a magyar kívánság, stb!!!
Majd egy diákokkal teli autó állt meg a Szabad
Nép előtt. Ugyanezeket a jelszavakat kiabálják róla
Utána a Himnuszt énekelték, majd az autóra fel-
szedtek a körülötte álló emberektől is egy párat.

7.

Page 7 from the Diary of János Kovács.


73.
BOLDOG ÚJ
ÉVET!
1957.
Kedd.
1
Január

Gyula Csics

Hungarian Revolution 1956

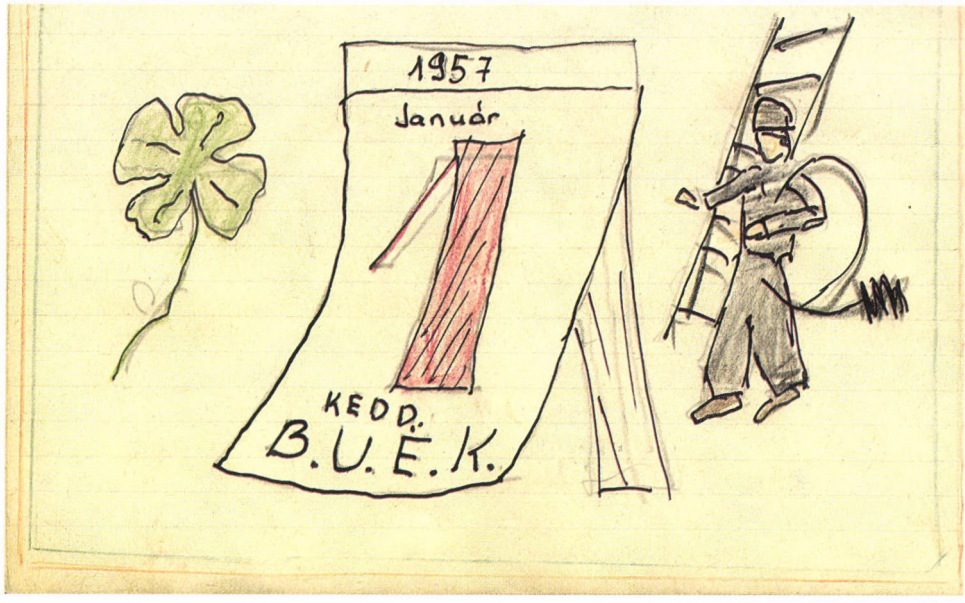
(Part 2)

Happy New Year 1957

Tuesday, January 1, 1957

NEW YEAR'S DAY

On account of going to bed late last night, I slept until 11. I got up, had a late breakfast and went to Marci's. Marci and I went sledding. We thought yesterday's freezing rain made the run icy, but it didn't. The bumpy run was really bad, but the two beside it were pretty good. Lots of times I went down standing on the runners. One time Marci really yanked the sled, I fell flat, and Marci went down alone. After that we went to the Sipos's hill. We decided to go to the cinema in the afternoon. I'd just finished eating and getting dressed when Marci came by. Off we went to the cinema. The film didn't begin until 3.30. That was the Mexican film The Girl from Mexico. *I came home in the dark. The road was really slippery. In the evening I wrote my diary.*

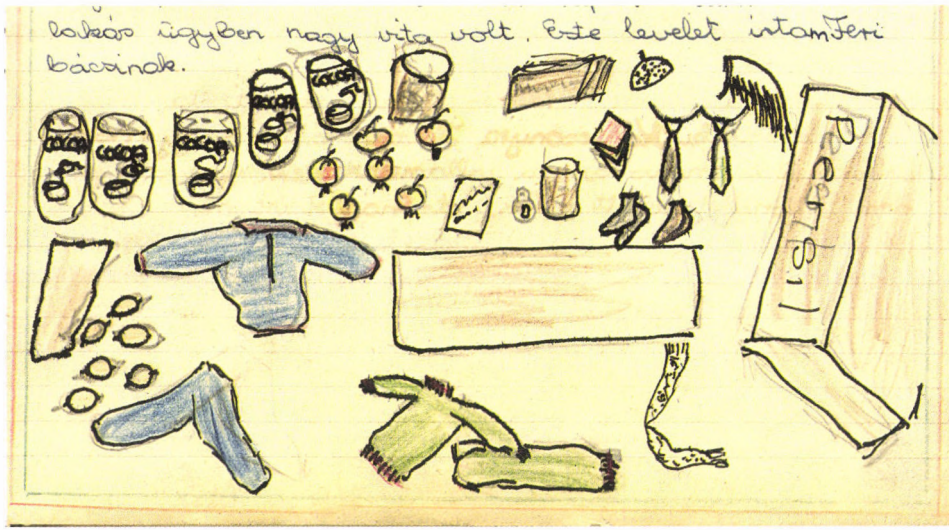


Wednesday, January 2, 1957

A PARCEL FROM AUSTRIA

In the morning we, Mum and I, left early from Grandma's. Yesterday a family defected[1] *from the building where Gyula's family lives, and we wanted to move into that apartment, which is why Mum and I went in the morning to report at the police station. When we got home, Kata said we had got a big parcel. This is what the parcel contained:*

2 track suits
2 caps
1 scarf
2 ties
1 petticoat
3 handkerchiefs
2 pairs of socks
6 oranges
18 liqueur chocolates
3 bars of Milch *chocolate (milk chocolate)*
6 packs of cocoa
1 kg rice
1 kg apples



Everything was of the highest quality, but unfortunately the track suits they sent to us were too small. Then I went to violin class. In the afternoon I wrote my diary. In the evening there was a big row about the apartment business. I wrote a letter to Uncle Feri.

Thursday, January 3, 1957

FIRST GERMAN LESSON OF THE YEAR

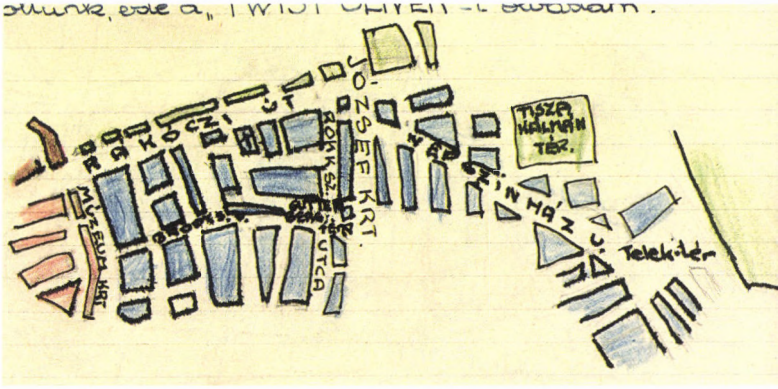
In the morning I read Oliver Twist. *When I got up, Mum was already gone. She must be at the council offices, I thought. I got dressed. Then I prepared a fire in the*

cooking store and went down to get fuel. I was just about to post the letter when Mum came home. She said the apartment is a lost cause. Then I went to post the letter. I saw that the overhead cables for the 6 tram were being put back up along the Great Boulevard. I went over to the grocery store and I did my German homework. Jancsi came by, to get going to German.

Friday, January 4, 1957

A WALK AROUND THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

In the morning I read Oliver Twist. *Afterward I wanted to make a coal-conveyor with the Technokid,*[2] *but I didn't finish it, because Mum said we're going to Teleki Square. I invited Jancsi to come along. When we got out to the Great Boulevard, we saw that the 6 tram was running. We could hardly get across the boulevard, because the traffic was thick. Lots of cars and motorbikes were lined up to cross Rákóczi Avenue. We went all the way down Népszínház Street to Teleki Square. The 28 tram was also running all the way to the boulevard. At Teleki Square we went off from Mum and looked around the flea market.*



There were all sorts of things there, but not a single thing I needed. Afterward I showed Jancsi how the buildings on Dobozi Street are all shot up, then we returned along Népszínház Street. There I said to Jancsi that we should go along Rákóczi Avenue and come home along Bródy Sándor Street. That's just what we did. There was lots of mud around there, because the snow was melting. Traffic lights were already there at the intersection of the Great Boulevard and Rákóczi Avenue. When we got to the Radio studios we saw that they were still being guarded by tanks, but that they were being repaired. Later we went up to see Korach for my book, because he lives in Bródy Sándor Street. Then we came home and in the evening I read Oliver Twist.

1 ■ The new Kádár regime could not adequately watch the country's borders. By May 1957 some 200,000 had fled and, from refugee camps in Austria, they dispersed to all corners of the globe, wherever they were welcomed.

2 ■ Technokid: a Hungarian-manufactured version of the kits that were called Meccano sets in the U.K. and Erector sets in the U.S.A. The contemporary equivalent is Lego.

Saturday, January 5, 1957

KHRUSHCHEV AND MALENKOV COME TO HUNGARY

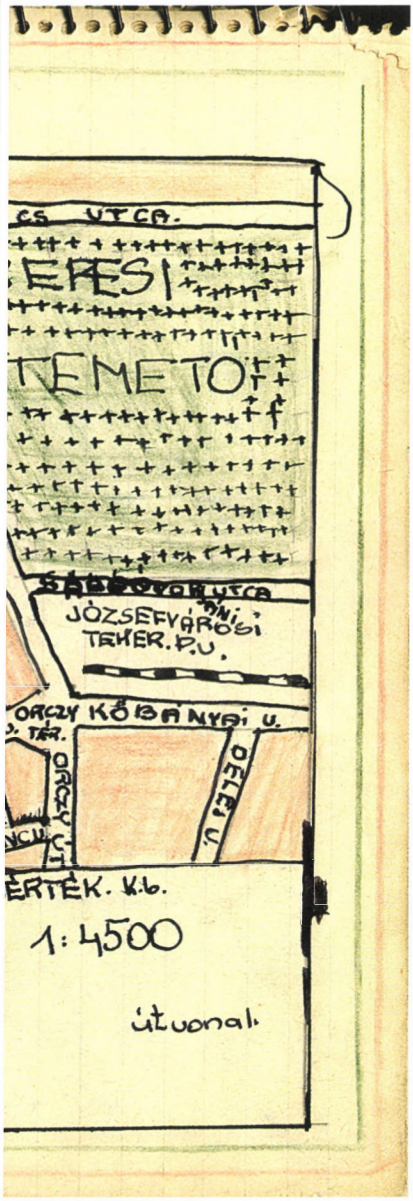
In the morning I was still in bed and reading Oliver Twist *when Jancsi came over. I got out of bed, and Jancsi said let's take a walk today, too. It was all right by me. Right away we planned the walk on my map, and this is how it looked:*

After this I went to my violin lesson. The lesson went on longer than usual, and because I had to go over to Grandma's place,[3] *I didn't go for a walk with Jancsi. Then I went to Grandma's. There I played cards with Maja until Dad told me to come and help because we're going to kill the pigs. I held the pan for the blood. At night Uncle Mirinszki came by, and he said that the radio had announced that Khrushchev and Malenkov had been here.*[4] *Later I read* Oliver Twist.

Sunday, January 6, 1957

PIG-KILLING

In the morning I woke up early, because today we killed another two pigs. Today I held the pan again. I drew water and looked after the fire. Later on, Béla and I went to the Cselényis' place for sawdust. When we got home, we went to the railyard for water because the water from our well isn't good for cooking. Béla said we should go sledding. And we did go, to the training area. At first we went to the new run, but that wasn't any good, and so we had to go on the old one. That was long enough. We went pretty well, but the sled kept swerving, and we always slowed down when guiding it. We fell a couple of times too. Béla went home and I helped Dad. In the afternoon Jóska came over for his book, and he said I should go over. On the way we had a snowball fight with Marci. I was making the snowballs with my gloved hands, and Jóska was throwing. At Jóska's we looked over his postcards. Jóska said that on December 2 he spoke to a Russian. In the afternoon I played cards with Maja. Uncle Mirinszki came in the evening. I was sick, I felt queasy, and so I didn't even have any black pudding.



3 ■ "Grandma's place" was in the suburb Rákosmező. As Gyula Csics describes it in his essay in *HQ* 183 (pp. 63-39), there were fruit trees around the house, a kitchen garden, a patch of lucerne for the pigs, and Grandma kept poultry in the courtyard and sometimes rabbits. There were always a few pigs at the house and they killed one or two every year, under the direction of Gyula Csics's father.

4 ■ Georgy Maksimilianovich Malenkov (1902–1988), Soviet Prime Minister (1953–55), expelled from the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party in 1957 and from the Party in 1961.

Monday, January 7, 1957

BACK TO SCHOOL

I was up by 8. At 10 we left for home. On the tram I heard two jokes. They went like this:

"What's the difference between Latabár[5] and Kádár[6]?"

"Latabár is clever and acts the fool, Kádár is a fool but tries to be clever."

Two drunks are singing: "Péter Maléter, Pál Maléter,[7] Kádár's government says see you later."

Just when we got home, Jancsi was headed to school. He said he'd already had the German class, because they got out of school at 2.40. That really surprised me. Then I checked to see when I have to go to school. I should have been there by 11, but now it was already 11.30. After that I took the black pudding up to Aunt Bözsi. Until 3 in the afternoon I worked with the Technokid. Mum went to get bread, and she said there was a queue again. I made a coal-conveyor with the Technokid. At night Auntie Tengler, who used to live in our building, dropped in. She talked about all sorts of things that happened, and she said their apartment got two direct hits. In the evening I wrote my diary.

Tuesday, January 8, 1957

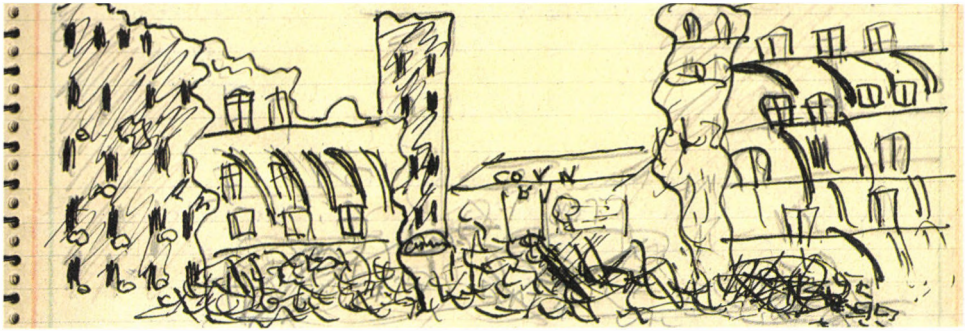
A WALK ALONG AND AROUND ÜLLŐI ROAD

When I got up in the morning I went over to Jancsi's to ask him if we'd do the walk we had planned for Saturday. Jancsi said all right. We went along Rökk Szilárd Street to Békés Street. On Békés Street Jancsi stopped by at a classmate's place to

5 ■ Comedian and dancer, Kálmán Latabár (1902–1970) came from a famous show business family and was one of Hungary's biggest stars of the 1950s and 1960s.

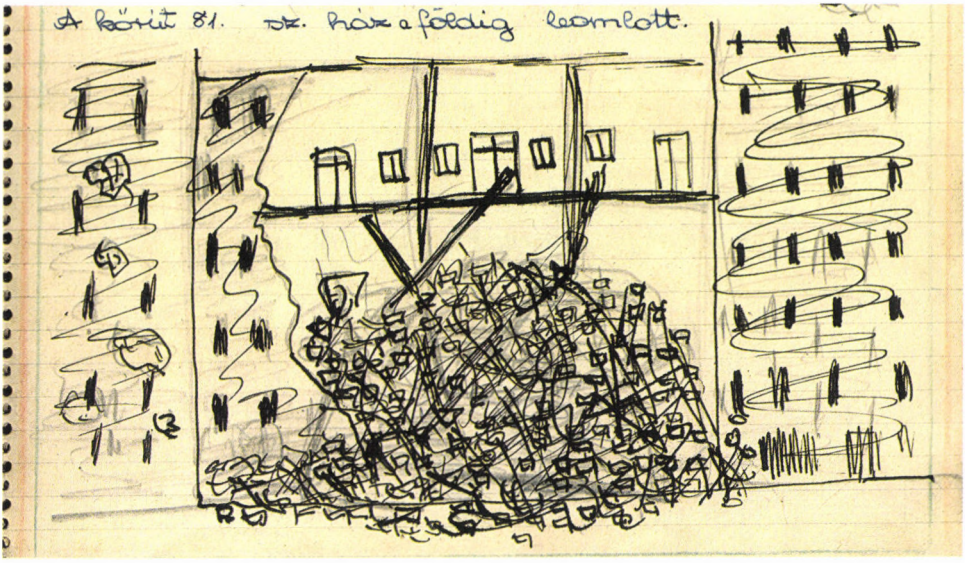
6 ■ János Kádár (1912–1989), active in the Communist movement from 1931 and imprisoned several times during the Horthy years. In 1951, he was arrested and sentenced to life on trumped-up charges, but was rehabilitated in 1954. In 1956, he was included again in the Party leadership, went to Moscow on November 1st, where he was handpicked by the Soviet leadership as Hungary's new leader. As such, on his return with the Soviet intervention forces, he formed the "Revolutionary Government of Workers and Peasants" and became one of the founders of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP), the new version of the Party, of which he remained leader until 1988. He launched a bloody campaign of retaliations and bore heavy responsibility for the terror that followed 1956, which from the 1960s on gave way to the 'soft dictatorship'. By the 1970s, Kádár's regime had gained acceptance in the West. The 1960s and 1970s saw an improvement in Hungary's living standards, but the accumulating external debt that financed this brought Hungary into a profound monetary crisis.

7 ■ Pál Maléter (1917–1958), a senior Hungarian army officer who went over to the side of the revolutionaries. He agreed to a cease-fire with the rebel fighters in one of the centres of the fighting, the neighbourhood around the Kilián Barracks, and took control of the whole neighbourhood. Imre Nagy appointed him Minister of Defence in his cabinet. In November 1956, the Russians, pretending to start negotiations, seized him. He was sentenced to death and executed for his part in the Revolution. He was rehabilitated in 1989. The drunks changed the words of a line from *The Csárdás Princess* by Emmerich Kalman.

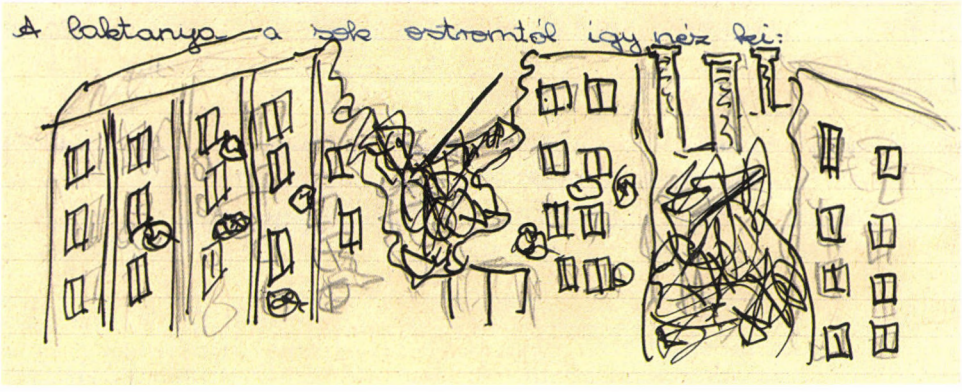


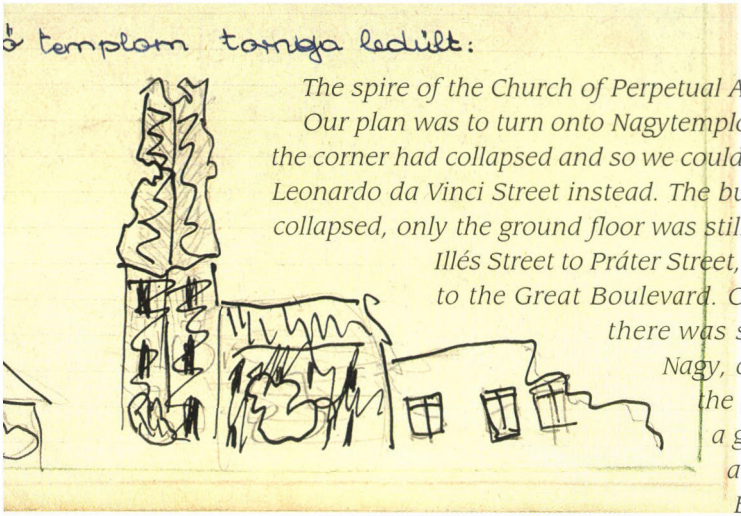
tell him he had to go back to school. After that we went to Üllői Road along the Great Boulevard, talking all the way. We saw that the building on the corner of Nap Street had collapsed. Corvin Close looks like the drawing above.

The apartment building at number 81 on the Great Boulevard was flattened. Half



of the building across from the Kilián Barracks had collapsed. Under siege for so much time, the barracks looks like this:





The spire of the Church of Perpetual Adoration has collapsed. Our plan was to turn onto Nagytemplom Street, but the building on the corner had collapsed and so we couldn't turn there, we turned onto Leonardo da Vinci Street instead. The building at 35 Tömő Street had collapsed, only the ground floor was still in one piece. We went along Illés Street to Práter Street, then went down Práter Street to the Great Boulevard. On a wall along Práter Street there was still "No deals! In with Imre Nagy, out with the Russians!" From the corner of Práter Street I took a good long look at the building at the corner of the Great Boulevard and Üllői Road, so I could draw it. Afterwards we came home along the boulevard and Rökk Szilárd Street and on the way, at the corner of Baross Street, we bought a copy of Life & Science *(see Box[8]), because Jancsi said it tells you what had burned up at the National Museum. 11 to 2 p.m. I was in school. I found out that Miss Vali had gone to Paris. In the afternoon I bought an* Evening News. *In the evening I wrote my diary. Gyula came home and said that the Russians had dug emplacements for anti-aircraft guns in the training area and the cemetery.*

Wednesday, January 9, 1957

THE 6 TRAM NOW GOES ALL THE WAY TO CSEPREGI STREET

In the morning I read a lot of Oliver Twist, *so I can finish it by the 14th. I had to get to school by 11. Once there, I found out that Béry had defected, and Molnár and Szücs had moved somewhere else. The first lesson was Hungarian. Mr Moór taught the lesson in place of Miss Vali. At noon we almost went home, because Mr Moór thought we had started at 8. When I got out of school I went to my violin lesson. On the way home I noticed that the 6 tram was already going all the way to Csepregi Street. On the way, I bought an* Evening News *and a* Life & Science *from the news stand. And on the way, I stopped by the Spark and bought a book,* Stepsiblings. *I saw that new wood poles were being put up in place of the old iron ones. In the afternoon I drew my map.*

8 ■ The "Box" was where the diarist collected the bric-à-brac associated with the Revolution which he could not paste into the diary on account of their size.

Thursday, January 10, 1957

EDEN RESIGNS—TRAMS RUNNING ON RÁKÓCZI AVENUE

In the morning I was still in bed when Jancsi came over and told me to get going, because we have to go to German. We saw that trams were running on Rákóczi Avenue, not only the 67, 44 and 45 but the 68 as well, which until then had only been going between Mogyoródi Road to Bosnyák Square. Along the way Jancsi said that Eden, the British Foreign Secretary [sic] *had resigned, saying he was ill. After German I went to school. In school we had two Hungarian and physics lessons plus drawing. When I got home, Mum and I went to the Hauer confectionery, because Maja wanted to eat chestnut purée. From there I saw that the Diamond House was being torn down. In the evening I was at Jancsi's. There we experimented, e.g. we made invisible ink. I read* Oliver Twist.

Friday, January 11, 1957

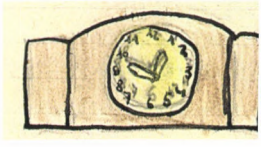
NEWER TROUBLES

In the morning I got up earlier. I did my homework and went over to Jancsi's. He was just getting dressed. After that we came over to our place and we showed Mum the invisible ink we made yesterday. I was at school from 11 to 2. After that I played the violin, then went over to Jancsi's. He asked me for the Indian ink, so he could highlight his map. Then Gyula came by and said that an older man at the tyre lot said there was trouble at the factories on Csepel Island and at Ganz and Mávag. Auntie Paulheim was at our place, and she said that their apartment had been hit, because the telephone exchange and the post office were close by. At night Uncle Rada came over, and he said that some kids on Calvary Square had put their books in a heap and set fire to them and shouted, "Long as the Russians sit tight, Hungarian students won't study a mite!" At night I read Oliver Twist.

Saturday, January 12, 1957

THE SCHOOL GETS COAL

In the morning I got up early and wrote my diary. At 10 Mum and I went to the watch store to see if they had a ding-dong clock. They did, so we bought a nice one. I went to school for 11. After 2, I went from there to my violin lesson. In school they said that from Monday there would be the normal timetable. On the way to my violin lesson I saw a truck in front of the school, and coal was being shovelled from it. In the evening I went to Grandma's, and there I read Oliver Twist.



Monday, January 14, 1957

NORMAL TIMETABLE AGAIN

From 9.30 to 10, I was at my German lesson. When I got home, I did my homework, then I used Indian ink to highlight the drawings I made in my diary. I went to school for 12.30. From today we were going to have classes again on the old schedule, the same one as before October 23. In maths, I got top marks for my answer. We went home at 4. I went to see if there were any papers left. There weren't any. Then I went over to Jancsi's. We planned tomorrow's walk. Towards evening I wrote my diary, and then at 5.15 Jancsi and I went to the Corvin. We went in by the Rökk Szilárd Street entrance, since that was open. First we went up to the stationery department on the second floor, because Jancsi bought a bottle of Indian ink. We went down to the second floor, to the book department to see if there were any good books. In the evening the man who lives in Miskolc came over to Jancsi's family. He said that Russian tanks were sent there as well, to shoot at the people. The first tank didn't fire, so the officer in the third tank got out and asked the first tank why it wasn't shooting. Someone in the first tank said, because we don't have any ammo. The officer ordered him to shoot, but he didn't, so the officer shot him dead. Then a soldier got out of the second tank, shot dead the officer and then himself. Until 9 in the evening I wrote my diary.

Tuesday, January 15, 1957

SNOW AGAIN

Today I got up earlier than usual. I began to play the violin. Jancsi came over at 9 and said he can't go for a walk today, because he has a bad cold. I hardly finished playing the violin when Gyula came by and said that a woman in our building jumped off the fifth floor. She killed herself because her flat had been searched the night before, on account of them smuggling people. That's what Gyula said. He went out into the entrance hall and all of a sudden he heard it, wham-bam. He thought to himself, now what the heck are they doing in this damn building so early. He headed downstairs and saw that people were standing about by the door to the courtyard but no one dared go into the courtyard. He and Uncle Erős, the two of them went into the courtyard and saw Auntie Schillinger lying there on the pavement, dead as a doorknob. First she fell on the railing, then she fell down from there. All morning I highlighted the drawings in my diary. I went to school for 1 o'clock. By the evening there were 5 centimetres of snow. In the evening I wrote my diary. I went to bed at 10.30. The Evening News *also reported the suicide, but turned it inside out.*

Wednesday, January 16, 1957

SLEDDING AT GRANDMA'S PLACE

In the morning Gyula woke me up at 6, telling me to hurry up and get dressed, because we're taking the pig-swill out to Grandma's by sled. When we got out to the street, the scene was really beautiful. Everything was covered by snow. The lights were on only in some places. Cars were going about, honking. The shot-up city was waking up. We took the 28 tram as far as Szlávy Street. From there we took the swill by sled. Gyula pulled the sled, and I went alongside him holding the cans so they wouldn't fall off. At first I was standing on the runners of the sled, but then Gyula let me sit on it. At Grandma's, Franci had already cleared the snow, but the freshly fallen snow had to be swept away. I got down to doing that while Gyula fed the pigs. On the way back Gyula pulled the sled only as far as the Tobacco Factory, because a horse-drawn tip-cart that carried slag in the summer was coming this way, so he tied the sled onto it. We had to wait a long time at the tram stop, because most of the 28 trams have closing doors, and you can't board with cans. We got home at 10. At home I wrote in my diary. I went to school by 12.30. Toward evening I read Robur the Conqueror. *My violin lesson was at 5.30. The evening papers reported that the trams were running on Üllői Road and on the Great Boulevard.*

Thursday, January 17, 1957 and Friday, January 18, 1957

A LITTLE RECKONING
CHOU EN-LAI IN BUDAPEST

So far 167,000 refugees went to Austria from Hungary. Radio Free Europe is broadcasting messages from them. Mostly they're sending messages to code names. The most interesting code names: Turkish Pasha, Ace of Diamonds, Black Cat. People are also saying that the Hungarian comedian László Kabos has defected, too, and his message went like this: "Russians go home, and anyone hearing this should pass it on!"[9] *Of the 167,000 refugees, 96,000 have already been sent on elsewhere.*

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In the morning I went to my 9 o'clock German lesson. There, I bought a book Duelling Hungarians *from Kolonics. On the way home I did a bit of sliding on Semmelweis Square. At home I read* Robur the Conqueror, *then I went to buy a paper. The paper also reported Chou En-lai's speech (see Box). I went to school by 12.30. At night I read from* Robur the Conqueror.

9 ■ Messages from refugees always ended with the words "Anyone hearing this should pass it on!".

Saturday, January 19, 1957 and Sunday, January 20, 1957

FIRST TIME ICE-SKATING THIS YEAR

Jancsi came over in the morning when I got up. Then I went to my 11.30 violin lesson. By the time I got home it was almost 12.30. I packed my things in a big hurry. The last three periods in school were free. We got out at 5. I went home and I wanted to go in, but I couldn't find the key. I must have left it on the table when I was in a hurry. Mum had given me the key before my violin lesson, because Mum went with Maja to Grandma's. And so I climbed in through the window. The key was there on the table. I grabbed my bag and went off in a rush to Grandma's. A 28 tram went right by my nose, then three went to the depot. I got on the fourth, but wouldn't you know, it broke down at Fiume Street. It was 5.30 by the time I finally arrived. There I played with Maja. At night the radio announced that József Dudás[10] *had been executed.*

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In the morning, when I woke up, it was really cold—the thermometer read -16. I began shaping the road of the snow-city we were building to make it into a slide. Maja went over to Ági's. I called to her to come and help, but she took a long time coming. Along with Ági the three of us began making an ice rink, but pretty soon we got tired of lugging water. In the garden, it froze up at some places. We began skating there, that was Maja's idea. I never had skates on my feet before in my life, so at first I kept falling left and right, but I got the hang of it all the same. Afterwards we went sledding at the Sipos's. One time I rode down on my knees, and after falling off the sled I stood up. At home I did my homework and I put my stamps together row by row.

Monday, January 21, 1957

WE GET CHOCOLATE FROM SWITZERLAND—MISS VALI RETURNS

In the morning I woke up to the ringing of the alarm clock, just like that, at 6.30. At 7, I got out of bed, dressed in a hurry and heated some water. I was amazed at how high the gas was, because nowadays it's usually just ½ cm, maybe 1 cm high. I finished my maths homework and cleaned out the stove, then I got it ready, so when Mum and them get back, all they'll have to do was to light the fire. Before leaving for school I

10 ■ József Dudás (1912–1957) was a contradictory figure, one whose role was bound up with personal ambition. He established his own armed band, published a newspaper and sought to create a national political organisation, a rival government. He lacked support, however, and his short-lived political career ended at the hands of his own partisans. On the pretext of negotiations, the Russians seized him on November 21, 1956, and a military tribunal sentenced him to death. He was executed on January 19, 1957.

scrubbed the kitchen floor, because it was all muddy. Then I went to school. Before the first lesson we made lots of noise, and so our singing teacher came in, and she said that anyone who speaks or stirs isn't getting a parcel from Switzerland. At that, the whole class sat up straight, hands behind their backs. Before long a box was brought in. The box looked like the one we got sent from Austria. Everyone got one bar of chocolate. During our ten-minute break lots of kids tore open their chocolate and even sold it. Before history class we were told that Miss Vali was back from France. After teaching, she came in, too. Marci had a really nice label on his chocolate, so I asked him for it. At home I found out that my chocolate has a slip of paper in it (see Box). Jancsi and I had German from 3 to 4. We noticed that there were lots of soldiers and police on the street. In the evening I wrote my diary.

Tuesday, January 22, 1957

VINCENT DAY

At 8 in the morning I went to school. The first lesson was Hungarian. Miss Vali was the teacher. She told us lots of stories. One of the things she said was that French children go to school by 8.15 and are there until 11.15. When they get home, they do their homework, and there's certainly lots of it, and then they have lunch and go back by 1.15 and stay till 4.15. When they get home, they get right down to studying, which sometimes lasts till 10. Teachers there don't explain homework in school. Instead the children have to solve it by themselves, at home. She also said that the French don't eat soup, and they eat their meat almost raw. At the butchers they don't sell meat like here, but instead they get it by the parcel, wrapped in a thin coating of fat. At home the women put a little oil on that and cook it for 12 hours. In gym class we boxed. I sparred with Vámos. Today Vámos brought in the label from his chocolate in exchange for a stamp. At night Uncle Pali came over to greet Dad, since today is Dad's name day, Vincent Day. In the evening I wrote my diary. I got 1 banana and 2 figs from Miss Vali. At night we ate that. Really delicious.

Wednesday, January 23, 1957

GLORY TO THE HEROIC HUNGARIAN MARTYRS OF THE OCTOBER 23 REVOLUTION!

I went to school by 8 a.m. Nothing special happened there. At 12.45 we came home, because we had assembly. I wanted to ask Jancsi for the diary, but he wasn't home, and so I went to get a paper, and I bought a Life & Science. *Jancsi came over when I got home. This is what he said (quoting from his diary): "Above the blackboard there was one big candle and four little candles from Switzerland, in all 6 candles were burning in the windows. X. Y. had drawn 2 Kossuth coats of arms on the blackboard and this is what he wrote: 'Glory to the heroic Hungarian martyrs of the October 23 Revolution!' In the maths class we received the teacher in dead silence, our classmate assigned to announce absences that week did so in a hush, and even the teacher kept her voice down. During the class only the big candle was burning, but during the ten-minute break we lit all the candles. Another teacher, Mr Zavagyák, didn't take so kindly to this. At the start of the physics class he came up and said: 'Take down the candles, I don't want you all to cause trouble for your teachers!' But we not only didn't take them down, we also put three tiny candles on top of the cupboard, but by the time the form-master, Mr Molnár, came in, two of them had already guttered away. In that dead silence, with 12 candles burning, we received Mr Molnár. But on stepping in, Molnár said, 'It's quite proper that the class should remember fallen heroes, but now that's enough of this, let's take down those candles!' At first we didn't respond. Later he told Péter Szabó to take down the candles. At which he took down the little candles. As for the big candle, Péter made as if he couldn't reach it. The teacher then called on Fürstner, the tallest boy, who, after a bit of fiddling around, took it down. After that Mr Molnár spoke a lot about the class, saying this isn't real patriotism, etc. Meanwhile he brought up Jesus, too, and told biblical stories." In the afternoon I had my violin lesson. In the evening I wrote my diary.*

Thursday, January 24, 1957

A STROLL IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF HORVÁTH M. SQUARE

In the morning I was at school from 8 to 12. Mum wasn't home when I got home, so I went over to Jancsi's. It was almost 1 p.m. when Mum got home. So I quickly did my German homework, then Jancsi and I went to our German lesson. On the way home, in a bookstore, I bought a book I'd long been looking for, Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle. *After that, Miki said let's have a snowball fight. When I got home Mum sent me to take some black pudding to Uncle Zselyonka. I invited Jancsi to come along. From Rákóczi Square we went on Bacsó Béla Street. The Maria*

Theresa church had three holes where it was hit. I brought the black pudding to 74 Baross Street, and I got a nice big tip. Soldiers are guarding the József telephone exchange. The Ságvári memorial was shot down, but the old coat of arms was still there. The district council headquarters had 17 holes. A whole bunch of kids were skating at the Meteor rink. Afterwards we came home. Jancsi said that the lighting of candles yesterday had been reported. In the afternoon I did my homework, then Öcsi and I went sledding. In the evening I wrote my diary.

Friday, January 25, 1957

3 OXFORD STUDENTS ARRESTED

In the morning I was in school from 8 to 12. When I got home, I did the drawings in my diary. Then Gyula said we have to take the swill out to Grandma's. On the way back I bought the Evening News *and* People's Freedom. People's Freedom *reported that the building at 85 Rákóczi Avenue would be fixed up with covered arcades.*[11]

At night I found out that some students had laid a wreath at the Bem statue, despite the fact that Russian tanks were surrounding it. That was the day before yesterday.

Monday, January 28, 1957

A WALK IN AND AROUND CITY PARK

In the morning I was in bed when Jancsi rang the doorbell. He said we had to get to German by 8.15. He left right away, and I got dressed really quickly and ran to the lesson. On the way home Jancsi and I decided to do that long-planned walk. At 10 we headed off on the walk. We went down Rákóczi Avenue to Rottenbiller Street, then turned into Garay Street. At Nefelejcs Street the trolley cables are being put up. When we got to Garay Square, we went through the market, and then followed Sajó Street to Dózsa György Boulevard. There we saw a number of Russian vehicles go by. They were all covered with canvas. After that we went over snowy roads to Stefánia Avenue. From there we could see the base of the Stalin statue. Only a little bit of his boot remained. We went by the front of the Art Gallery and before long we were at the ice rink. Lots of people were skating there, and the Blue Danube waltz was being played. We crossed the lake in City Park and arrived in front of Vajdahunyad Castle:

11 ■ The damage to ground-floor stores on one of Budapest's main thoroughfares, Rákóczi Avenue, was so severe that a decision was made to forgo restoring its street side to its former condition and to use the space instead to broaden the pavement.

One of its smaller towers was burnt off (marked with an x on the picture). The big tower had a few big holes from being hit (marked with an o on the picture). We went inside the castle. The main entrance of the Agricultural Exhibition was closed, and so we walked all the way around the castle, but not a single one of its entrances was open, and so we crossed the bridge and went out to Heroes' Square. There we saw that there are several new statues on the Millennium Memorial (statues of Kossuth and Bocskai). Afterwards we went onto Hungarian Youth Avenue, which used to be Stalin Avenue. There we saw that the marble street signs left over from its Stalin Avenue days, those that had the road's name on it, had been gouged out on every corner. In their place the street signs said "Hungarian Youth Avenue". Standing there, I said to Jancsi that the prettiest part of Budapest is City Park, and no doubt that's why they put the Stalin statue here. By the time we got to the Circus along the avenue it had already gone 1.30, and so we began to hurry. There are antennas on top of the building at number 62 as it surely belongs to the one at number 60, which is where Rákosi and his bunch took political prisoners.[12]

Lots of people were standing in front of 39 Andrássy Avenue, the former Paris Department Store. Since looking at it was part of our plan, we stood in the queue. After two minutes we got inside. It was a shame to rearrange this beautiful department store for books, because it was really pretty inside. At the Opera House, Jancsi thought that to get home on time, we should turn into Dalszínház Street, then into Kazár Street. At Dohány Street, Jancsi and I separated and went home. I was at school from 1 o'clock to 4.30.

Tuesday, January 29, 1957

I GET THE SWISS GIRL'S ADDRESS

Around noon I went over to the Zselyonkas. I took some brawn. I saw that the school on Bacsó Béla Street is being fixed up because it had been hit by a mortar shell. On the way home I noticed that on Rákóczi Square someone had written on a kiosk, "Kossuth coat of arms, Hungarian homeland. Russkies go home! Long as the russkies sit tight, Hungarian students won't study a mite!" From 12.30 to 4.30 I was in school. Miss Vali gave me the Swiss girl's address. In the evening I wrote my diary.

12 ■ The building at 60 Andrássy Street was the headquarters of the political police until 1956. It was where those who were deemed enemies of the regime were taken. A huge complex of jail cells and interrogation rooms was established in its cellar. Today the building is a museum, aptly named The House of Terror.

Wednesday, January 30, 1957

WE DON'T NEED THIS GOVERNMENT EITHER

In school the boys said there won't be any Religious Instruction, and instead of German we'd study Russian. At night I found out that three weeks earlier someone let loose a bunch of dogs on the street. They hung slips of paper around the dogs' necks that read, "We don't need this government, either!" I also heard this one: A man is riding the tram. He shouts, "Long live Kádár!" No one says a thing. The man repeats, "Long live Kádár!" Still not a peep out of anyone. At this the man says, "Hell, isn't there even one real Hungarian on this tram who would kick my arse for me?" Lots of jokes have been going around: The Chinese circus is in Hungary. Khrushchev brings his wild animals, Kádár brings his carrion, and the UN brings afternoon story-time. Khrushchev is sitting at his desk and suddenly his messenger rushes in: "The workers have risen up in Hungary!" "Ah, what do I care?!" replies Khrushchev. The messenger comes in again: "The people of Hungary have risen up!" "Ah, just leave me alone!" The messenger comes one last time: "The youth of Hungary have risen up!" "Whoops, 2,000 tanks and artillery, on the double!" In the evening I wrote my diary.

Thursday, January 31, 1957

THE UN CONVENES IN GENEVA

In the morning I got up, and Jancsi and I went to German. On the way home I saw the Life & Science *1957 calendar and Cooper's* The Last of the Mohicans. *I went in and bought both. Jancsi also wanted to buy the calendar, but he didn't have enough money, not even when I gave him 4 forints. We went home, then Jancsi and I headed off to get the calendar at the Spark bookshop. Jancsi bought one, then we went to the day-and-night grocery. There was a big poster on its wall: Support the security forces![13]*

There was a soldier on the poster. There was a flyer at the entrance to the grocery. This is what it said:

Calendar of events:

October 23–25: Imre Nagy for prime minister!

October 25–28: UN forces have entered Hungary! Nothing to fear!

13 ■ The larger part of both the police and the military had supported the Revolution, and lack of a reliable domestic security service was one of the chief problems faced by the Soviet supported Kádár regime. The new regime tried to get around this by creating a new organisation. Its members, who were under the direct control of the Communist party, were initially recruited from the former state security service and from party functionaries.

October 28–November 1: Imre Nagy's no good, where is Ferenc Nagy?[14]
Let Mindszenty go!
November 1–4: Mindszenty for prime minister!
November 4–10: Fight to the end!
November 10–25: Don't go to work! We'll support you through aid!

I tore a flyer off the Spark. In the afternoon I was in school. I heard that the UN is meeting in Geneva, because if the Americans give the Russians 800,000,000,000 (800 billion) dollars, then the Russians will leave Hungary. In the evening I wrote my diary, then I read the book From the Earth to the Moon.

Friday, February 1, 1957

BULGANIN AND KHRUSHCHEV INVITED TO FINLAND

News: The Kádár government convened on Thursday. The government took decisions to improve the flood-control organisation and its effectiveness. It also announced that it's forbidden to go to Austria. Anyone who does is committing an illegal border crossing. The punishment is complete seizure of property. The illegal paper Free People *first appeared 15 years ago today. The Arlberg and the Balt-Orient expresses are once again running across our country. Curfew extended to midnight. There have been many accidents on the icy roads, pavements should be sprinkled with salt, sand and ashes. Bulganin and Khrushchev to visit Finland in the spring. The Czech delegation has travelled home from Moscow.*

Sport: Eight countries, including Hungary, have made it to the European ice-skating championship in Vienna. The Hungarian national team has been invited to play football in Milan.

Saturday, February 2, 1957

TITO IS NOT GOING TO AMERICA FOR THE TIME BEING

In the morning I got up early so I could take the meat over to the Zselyonkas. On the way home I bought volume II of the booklet called Counter-Revolutionary Lawlessness During Hungary's October Events *(see Box). When I got home, I did my homework. Mother gave me the key to the flat, because she's going over to Grandma's early. From 1.30 to 4.30 I was in school. Afterwards I went to*

14 ■ Ferenc Nagy (1903–1979) was a founding member and general secretary of Hungary's Independent Smallholders' Party, and later the party chairman. In 1946 he became prime minister. Opposing the steps to establish a proletarian dictatorship, he was eventually accused by Mátyás Rákosi of conspiring against the republic. At the start of 1947 he resigned his post and emigrated to the United States. He was expelled from his party and deprived of his Hungarian citizenship.

Grandma's. On the way I bought a paper and a Women's News, *which is being published again. At home I read the counter-revolutionary booklet.*

News: January's productivity in the mining sector: 108.1%. Many dissidents want to return to Hungary. Janitors are to get a pay rise. 600 new apartments will be built by October. The executive committee has approved a plan to build 4–5-storey residential buildings in place of the cottages that are to be torn down. The intersections of Rákóczi Avenue and Üllői Road with the Great Boulevard will be rebuilt with arcades, after all. The International Red Cross will continue supporting Hungary until summer. Official news from Belgrade: President Tito isn't going to America for the time being.

Monday, February 4, 1957

THE MATTHIAS CHURCH WILL BE BEAUTIFUL AGAIN

In the morning I was at school from 8 to 12. Children from large families got cocoa from the Swedish Red Cross. From 1 to 2, my German lesson. On the way home I bought The Three Musketeers. *Then I went to get a paper. I bought an* Evening News. *On the way home I came through the Corvin. I bought Cooper's* The Deerslayer. *In the afternoon I did my homework. At night I made a contract with Dad so that he'll give me 1 forint every day. In the evening I wrote my diary. János Kádár gave a speech at 8.*

News: János Kádár announces in a speech that religious education is to cease, because it damages the emotional well-being of children. He said that rabble-rousers first stirred up the university students and the workers, then the women, and now they're after the schoolchildren. So parents should watch out for their kids.

Tuesday, February 5, 1957

SWEDES VISIT OUR SCHOOL

In the morning I was at school from 8 to 12. Before the ten-minute break Miss Karola came to our class. She said that those due for cocoa should come down in an orderly manner, because the Swedish Red Cross is here. Today they only got milk. In the afternoon I did my homework. Jancsi and I went for a paper. We bought a People's Freedom, *an* Evening News *and also a* Hungarian Youth. *News: Adenauer to visit Austria and Iran. Huge winds wreak havoc in Ireland. Lotto to begin. Hungary acquires a Swedish invention for 1.5 million dollars, building to be speeded up.*

Wednesday, February 6, 1957

THE CORVIN CATCHES FIRE

In the morning I was in school from 8 to 12. When I got home, I wrote my diary. Later Jancsi and I went out for a paper. We both took bottles to return to the day-and-night shop. On the way home we bought the papers: we bought 2 copies of Evening News, *2 of* Life & Science *and one* People's Will. *When I got home, I wrote my diary. Pista was here, too. He looked at my library. He even bought the stamp album. I went down with him to the bus stop. There they were selling books of raffle tickets, I wanted to buy one, but then I didn't after all. I came home. I was just about to look at my timetable to see if I had any lesson today when Maja ran in. She shouted "The Corvin's on fire!" I ran right out to the street. There was a huge crowd, and a whole cloud of smoke was pouring from some of the Corvin's windows:*

[Space had been left for a drawing but at this point the diarist seems to have lost heart and produced no further drawing for his journal.]

I ran over to Jancsi's and told him. It was exactly 4.30 at their place. So the Corvin caught fire around 4.22. Jancsi and I ran right out to the street. Lots of people were saying that the fire was biggest by the main entrance. Jancsi and I decided to take a look at that, too. We went as far as the Spark. We couldn't go any further, on account of the police holding back the crowd. The smoke was getting thick, you could hardly see. We went through the passageway out to the Great Boulevard and from there to Blaha Lujza Square. We could see all that thick smoke pouring out of a window above the main entrance. There were 6 fire engines, an ambulance that had just got there, and three Russian jeeps. The firemen weren't extinguishing anything but standing on the roof over the entrance and throwing down the goods:

[Space provided for a drawing.]

Thursday, February 7, 1957

A WALK IN THE BURNT-OUT CORVIN

In the morning I was at school from 8 to 12. We had a class assembly as well, and so I got back late. Jancsi and I left for German right away. After the lesson Jancsi and I went into the Corvin to survey the damage. Inside the department store there was still a burnt smell. There wasn't much damage on the second floor (women's ready-to-wear). There was more damage on the third floor. The furnishings department was all burnt. If the fire had lasted 15 minutes longer, the whole third floor would have gone up in flames, because the furniture is on one side of the furnishings department and the shoe department is on the other side. The burnt area was cordoned off. In the afternoon I did my homework.

News: Debate has begun at the session of the Supreme Soviet. Chou En-lai has

completed his tour and returned to China. West German–Czechoslovak trade agreement signed in Bonn. Vinegar shortage to end. The old Hungarian film Fairy-Tale Car *was screened again today for the first time. A thousand of the damaged apartments are habitable again. On Tuesday morning the American submarine Nautilus reached its 20,000-mile mark under the sea. So Verne's novel has come true 87 years after it was written. So far the submarine has burned 2,800,000 litres of fuel. The Foreign Ministry has delivered a note to the British Legation in Budapest concerning the expulsion of Colonel Cowley.*[15]

Monday, February 11, 1957

FIVE BRITISH MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT SEND A LETTER TO PRAVDA

At 6.30 a.m. I got up and got dressed. At 7 I left for the 67 bus stop. I didn't have to wait for long before it came. I got off at Baross Square. There was a huge crowd on the 7, so I got on the 46 instead. When I got home, I did my German homework. From 8.15 to 9.15 I was at my German lesson. When I came home, I did my homework, then wrote in my diary. From 12.30 to 4.15 in the afternoon I was in school. At night I wrote in my diary.

News: Five British MPs wrote to Pravda, *and the paper replied. The letter concerned the events in Hungary. See tomorrow's* People's Freedom *for the complete text. The Amusement Park will open on the first Sunday in March. The 72, 73 and 76 trolley buses are due to begin running in two weeks. A new trolley is planned to take over from the 15 tram. On Saturday and Sunday 19 people were hospitalised due to alcohol poisoning. György Marosán gave a speech and announced that Russian would again be compulsory in schools.*

Supplement: At night we went with Gyula and others to their place, because Gyula said that a lady is emigrating to Palestine and selling a whole bunch of things. We wanted to buy a writing desk, but her price was too high.

Tuesday, February 12, 1957

RED STARS BEING PUT BACK UP

In the morning I read From the Earth to the Moon. *I got out of bed at 10. I did my lessons, and meanwhile Gyula arrived. He said that the red star is back up on the Danubia factory and the red flag is flying at the Autotaxi. Since the weather was*

15 ■ Colonel Cowley took up his post as the British military attaché in Budapest in autumn 1956 during Pál Maléter's brief stint as Minister of Defence. Accused of spying, he was expelled from the country.

good, we then took a little walk. Jancsi said the Soviet memorials the rebels tore down are being put back up. He also said that there are red flags even on the memorial on Gellért Square. We came home along Rákóczi Avenue. On the way we looked to see if the Day-and-Night was buying back bottles. They were, but there were lots of people queuing. From 12.30 to 4.15 in the afternoon I was at school. In the evening I sent the postal order, I bought Jancsi a Hungarian Youth *and an* Evening News*, and I bought myself an* Evening News *and a* People's Freedom*, plus a pretzel and a book of raffle tickets. The lady who teaches us botany has gone.*

News: Our country's store of underground water is being appraised. Judgement is due today in the case of stockpiling weapons in the village of Pomáz. According to a weapons expert, the cache represented more firepower than a reinforced army company. I heard that during the Revolution, the rebels had entered the Museum of Military History and taken the light automatic weapons and machine guns that had been used during the time of the 1919 Republic of Councils.

Wednesday, February 13, 1957

I slept straight through until 9, not waking up at all. Once I got up, I did my homework, then went to my violin lesson. I was in school from 12.30 to 5. In the evening I got a paper and wrote my diary.

News: Soviet memorandum to the three Western powers: The four great powers should issue a joint proclamation on peace in the Near and Middle East. They should assume mutual obligations. Every disagreement should be solved solely through diplomatic channels. Engineers, technicians and foremen are to get a raise. The original manuscripts of 8 poems by Petőfi have been found. e.g., the original title of "Plan Up in Smoke" was "Futile Plan". The UN has to debate the Eisenhower plan. There are still 600,000 Hungarian refugees in Austria. The court has ruled in the Pomáz weapons cache case: the driver János Vadász has been found innocent; Zsigmond Bóna, András Rudas, Géza Héder, Sándor Katona and János Szutter have been sentenced to death. The court has forwarded the petitions for clemency by Rudas, Héder and Szutter to the Presidential Council. The sentence has been carried out on Zsigmond Bóna and Sándor Katona.[16] *Spring migratory birds are arriving in droves. A village has been submerged by the rising water table. A car ran into the wall of a building. Revised finding: a tossed-away cigarette butt caused the fire at the Corvin Department Store. Budapest was 'liberated' 12 years ago today.*

16 ■ In the period of reprisals, summary courts heard many cases as a deterrence, including the Pomáz weapons case. Many disproportionately harsh sentences were issued without any investigation to speak of.

Monday, February 18, 1957 and Tuesday, February 19, 1957

MEDICAL INTERN ILONA TÓTH AND HER ASSOCIATES IN COURT

In the morning I was at school from 8 to 12. As before, we had a substitute teacher in geography class. We were told that a new teacher would come tomorrow in place of Miss Draskovits. When I got home, I did my German homework, and was at German from 1 to 2. We played "What is the ship bringing?" In the afternoon I did my homework, in the evening I wrote my diary.

News: The trial of medical intern Ilona Tóth and her associates began this morning.[17] *Chief defendants: Ilona Tóth, Miklós Gyöngyösi and Ferenc Gönczi... The first ship has passed through the Suez Canal. A new cave system, ten kilometres long, has been discovered at Aggtelek. The Federation of Hungarian Young Pioneers is being re-established. There will be a new uniform, too. More and more Hungarians in Yugoslavia are reporting to return home. A student accidentally shot and killed himself with a concealed sub-machine gun.*

****

In the morning I was at school. The new teacher we were told about yesterday arrived. In the afternoon I did my homework. I wrote my diary.

News: Hungarian statesmen have sent a telegram greeting the anniversary of the Hungarian–Soviet Co-operation and Mutual Assistance Treaty. The Pest County Communists have held a conference. The UN's political committee has begun debating Cyprus. Arturo Toscanini has been buried. Vasas have won again.

Wednesday, February 20, 1957

FLOOD IN THE VICINITY OF SZOLNOK

In the morning I was at school. Nothing special happened. In the afternoon I did my homework. Jancsi showed me the interesting, clever class timetable he made, and I made one, too. I had my violin lesson. In the evening I wrote my diary.

News: Huge coal deposits found in the Mátra and the Bükk hills. The trial of Ilona Tóth and her associates continues. Ilona Tóth confesses. A car caught fire on the Great Boulevard. Polish government to be established by the beginning of next week. Police uncover a large-scale human-smuggling operation. The escape of groups of people was organised in the clinic of a Budapest woman dentist. No flooding on the Danube. Internal waters have flooded 26,000 acres in the vicinity of Szolnok.

17 ■ Ilona Tóth (1932–1957) was an emblematic figure of the Revolution and the subsequent period of reprisals. A medical intern, she volunteered with the rescue service and in hospitals to treat the wounded. After the initial fighting was over she was active in the political resistance. She was sentenced to death and executed.

Friday, February 22, 1957 and Saturday, February 23, 1957

TEXTBOOKS WITH ERRONEOUS POLITICS TO BE REPLACED

In the morning I was at school. In the afternoon I did my homework. At 4.30 Jancsi and I set off to his father's at the Statistics Office. From the Margaret Bridge we could see that the star had not been shot off the top of the House of Parliament. In the cultural hall of the Statistics Office we watched an Italian film called Hello, Here's Gabriella. *Jancsi and I got home by 8.*

News: The textbooks of the Rákosi-Gerő clique[18] *will be replaced on account of their erroneous political content. Teachers' salaries to be raised. The famous French singer Luciane Boyer arrived this morning in Budapest. The fire on 6th February caused 46,000 forints worth of damage in the Corvin. Today Gyöngyösi, that is Piri, confessed in the Ilona Tóth trial.*

****

From 8 to 12.30 I was at school. I had to take a score and also blue paper to my violin teacher. Jancsi and I went for a walk, in the direction of places I could buy the previously mentioned things. The cupola of the building at 47 József Boulevard has been altered. Jancsi said so, too. I already noticed before that it's different, because that's the way I go to violin class. During the Revolution a blast tore the tiles off the tower, and not only were the tiles not put back but the tower was torn right off and redone like this:

[Space provided for a drawing.]

At night we went to Grandma's.

News: At present 3,700 Hungarian children are on holiday in Germany.

Monday, February 25

In the morning I came home alone in 10 minutes by bus from Grandma's. I did my German homework, then I went to my German lesson. In the morning I did my school homework. On the way home from German I bought The Three Musketeers. *I went to school for 12.30. Mr Zavagyák came in during the first period and read a proclamation that went something like this: "The Minister of Education has decreed that pupils in all schools must continue studying the language they began with in September"—and so we're progressing little by little back to the conditions before October 23. When I got home from school, Dad and I went to Uncle Géza's place. I noticed that the street signs for "Captain Steinmetz Road"*[19] *had been removed in*

18 ■ Mátyás Rákosi (1892–1971) and Ernő Gerő (1898–1980), the most hated leaders of the pre-1956 Communist regime.

19 ■ Captain Steinmetz of the Soviet Army was killed in 1944 on the southeast outskirts of Budapest while bearing a truce flag. Officially a martyr and victim of fascist perfidy, it would appear more than likely that he owed his death to friendly fire.

several places. When we were at their place, we wished both the older Géza and little Géza well on their name day. We had supper and we talked. Auntie Marika told me not to keep a diary, because that could lead to trouble. I got lots of postcards, and we came home in the rain.

No news.

Tuesday, February 26, 1957

GRANDMA ARRIVES

In the morning I got up along with Maja, because I had to be at the Eastern Railway Station by 8, because that's when Grandma was arriving from Austria. I was already on the tram at 5 minutes before 8. From the tram I could see that the building at 81 Rákóczi Avenue, which had been bombed, was getting a new façade. When we got to the station, the train was already in. And before long we found Grandma. We hugged, because we hadn't seen each other for more than 4 months. (Grandma went to Austria before the Revolution, on October 14. The Revolution broke out and she was only able to return now.) She brought 4 parcels. She said the track suits are being sent separately. Then we got on the 67 bus, and we talked all the way home. Grandma told lots of stories. At home we opened the parcels. She brought oranges, a skirt, dates, chewing gum, bananas, raisins, tea, soap, walnuts, poppy seeds, boot polish, razor blades, honey, chocolate, sugar, etc. I took some gum right away and chewed it. Before long we came home, because I still had to do homework. That's what I did in the morning, then in the afternoon I was at school.

News: This year's coal production plan is 19.5 billion. Nehru's aeroplane caught fire and had to make an emergency landing. Today in court Ilona Tóth and Gönczi were made to confront each other. Czechoslovakia is extending us financial assistance.

Wednesday, February 27, 1957 and Thursday, February 28, 1957

THE GOVERNMENT IS EXPANDED

In the morning I did my homework, then I had my violin lesson. In the afternoon I was at school.

News: They're still debating the street-side arcades... 8 youths have come before court for planning an armed uprising. They were found with 3 pistols, 4 machine guns, 5 hand grenades and ammo. More British mines have refused to employ Hungarian refugees. The defendants in the Ilona Tóth case are laying the blame on each other. Yves Montand is arriving in Budapest on March 9. The construction of swimming centres has begun. The India talks[20] began on Sunday.

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20 ■ European Common Market talks concerning the inclusion of member states' colonies.

From 8.30 to 10, I was at my German lesson. Later in the morning I did my homework. In the afternoon I was at school. At night I bought People's Freedom, *which included the pictures of a few government ministers.*

News: The Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party MSZMP convened the day before yesterday; see today's People's Freedom. *The new television station will begin broadcasting in early November. Another case has come before a summary court of people who were planning for MUK*[21]*, this time 7 of them. Yesterday six Honvéd football players returned home from South America: Bozsik, Bányai, Rákóczi, Dudás, Faragó and Törőcsik. Fradi drew 3:3 with the Prague team Dinamo Slavia. The government has been expanded with new members.*

Friday, March 1, 1957 and Saturday, March 2, 1957

A LITTLE CONVERSATION

In the morning I did my homework. In the afternoon I was at school. In the evening Jancsi and I talked: I said Kádár hates the Russians, too, and if they were to leave the country, he too would talk like Imre Nagy. Jancsi said that in his speech that appeared in the October 26th issue of Free People *and in a November 3rd handbill Kádár spoke of a counter-revolution. We also talked about the building of the former Paris department store and about the arcades.*

Monday, March 4, 1957, Tuesday, March 5, 1957, Wednesday, March 6, 1957

Nothing special happened.

Thursday, March 7, 1957

Jancsi and I bought a hand-press.

Friday–Thursday, March 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13, 1957

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY—END-OF-TERM REPORT—LOTS OF *PEOPLE'S FREEDOM* LEFT EVERY DAY

In the morning I was at school. In the afternoon I did my homework.

21 ■ MUK was the acronym of "We'll Start Anew in March!" *(Márciusban újra kezdjük!)*

News: Éva Szörényi[22] *got a job with a Canadian film company. Magda Fábián, who is just two years older than me, or 15 years old, and lived in the building next door, has defected. She went to Canada and got married. Today was International Women's Day. We bought a bouquet of flowers for Miss Vali. On the occasion of women's day the Central Committee issued a proclamation to Hungarian women. It was published in* Women's Magazine. *I lost mine, but Jancsi has one.*

****

Today we got our end-of-term reports. Mine wasn't the best.

****

I was at Grandma's. Otherwise nothing special happened.

****

We were at German in the morning. On the way home we saw that several thousand copies of People's Freedom *are left over every day.*

****

Nothing worth mentioning happened today.

****

In school we got ready for March 15. At night Dad said that while he was on the 67 tram he saw state security men marching up Thököly Avenue.

****

In the morning only the red flag was put out at our school, but at noon it was replaced. We held the ceremony today. We noticed that the Kossuth coats of arms had disappeared from the classrooms. Everyone had a red, white and green rosette pinned to them, but mourning-bands and Kossuth coats of arms weren't allowed.

Friday, March 15, 1957

NATIONAL DAY

Today people went to work on "National Day", but we didn't go to school. In the afternoon we went to the Young Pioneer Department Store. We saw this poster:

[Space provided for a poster.]

On the way home I bought two books, The Big Game *and* The Resurrection of Hannibal. ❧

(and here the Diary ends)

Translated by Paul Olchvary

22 ■ Hungarian actress Éva Szörényi (1917–), a member of Budapest's National Theatre company, left for Austria in 1956 and settled in the United States in 1957. She did much to foster a sense of national identity among Hungarians in America and to nurture the memory of the 1956 Revolution.

János M. Rainer

Imre Nagy, Life and Image

Imre Nagy, along with János Kádár and Vice-Admiral Miklós Horthy, arguably counts as one of Hungary's best-known twentieth-century political figures. For all that, many elements of his life and career remain little known. Outside Hungary he is usually only mentioned in relation to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and the state reburial of his remains that took place on June 16th, 1989, one of the defining moments of the country's change of régime. I shall attempt here a potted biography of Imre Nagy before going on to assess his historical image, and more particularly, how historians outside Hungary have viewed him over the past fifty years. That international evaluation, by and large, was not guided by any research or public discourse in Hungary, though Hungarian-born émigré writers have played a major role in it. The aim of the selection presented here is to outline the various trends that are discernible.

Imre Nagy was born in the southwest Hungarian town of Kaposvár on June 7th, 1896 into a family of poor peasants and clerical assistants. He completed primary school and four years of secondary school, leaving home at the age of 15 to be apprenticed as a machine fitter in Budapest. He was called up for military service in 1915, and in July of the following year became a Russian prisoner of war. He spent the rest of the war in a POW camp beside Lake Baikal, then on release volunteered for the Red Army and took part in the Russian Civil War. He joined the Bolshevik Party in February 1920 and returned to Hungary in March 1921.

Back in Kaposvár he worked as a clerk for an insurance company and was active in the local Social Democratic Party organisation. In 1925, he was expelled by that party and became a founding member of the Socialist Workers' Party of Hungary (a cover organisation for the illegal Communists). He was arrested in early 1927, then released after two months. A year later, in the spring of 1928, he

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János M. Rainer

heads the Institute for the History of the 1956 Revolution. His publications include pioneering statistical accounts of the reprisals following the 1956 Revolution (in samizdat 1986–89) and a book on the 1953–59 debates in literary periodicals. The first volume of his biography of Imre Nagy was published, in Hungarian, in 1996 by Századvég, *Budapest.*

moved to Vienna, and during the rest of that year and in 1929 he spent two spells working illegally in Budapest as the head of the Communist Party's rural section. He was sent to Moscow as a delegate to the Second Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in early 1930 and stayed there for the next 15 years. He worked at the Comintern's International Institute for Agricultural Sciences, at the Central Statistical Office of the Soviet Union and as an editor of Hungarian-language broadcasts transmitted by Kossuth Radio from Moscow.

Nagy finally got back to his native land as a leading member of the Hungarian Communist Party in December 1944. As Minister of Agriculture in the Provisional National Government, he is associated with bringing in the radical land reform proclaimed in March 1945. He sat as representative in the Provisional National Assembly, convoked first in Debrecen and later (from April 1945) in Budapest, then in the National Assembly following the general elections of late 1945. He was briefly Minister of the Interior, from November 1945 to February 1946 (being succeeded by László Rajk), after which he functioned as a Communist Party Secretary and, between 1947 and 1949, as President of the National Assembly.

During this period, Nagy found himself in conflict with the Party leadership on several matters, foremost among which was his disagreement with the policy of rapid compulsory agricultural collectivisation. He was required to undertake self-criticism in September 1949 but was nevertheless removed from leading party jobs, spending a year as a lecturer at the University of Agricultural Sciences at Gödöllő. From the summer of 1950, however, he was recalled to become head of the Administrative Department of the Hungarian Workers' Party and again became a member of the government in December of that year as Minister of Food and later as Minister for Crop Deliveries. In 1951 he was reinstated as a member of the Political Committee, in 1952 he became Deputy Prime Minister.

After Stalin's death, the new leadership in the Soviet Union picked on Imre Nagy as their man to carry out their policy of correcting the abuses that had occurred during the cult of personality years in Hungary. As Prime Minister from July 1953 to April 1955, he attempted, above and beyond that, to start a wider reform of the economy and political life. Intrigues by Hungary's Stalinist former Prime Minister, Mátyás Rákosi, who remained Party head, led to the Russians changing their minds about Nagy and removing him from office. In December 1955, he was expelled from the Party, but he refused to perform the obligatory ritual of exercising self-criticism. Instead he became a leading member of an opposition group within the Party, which, critical of Stalinist methods, supported the policies with which his own administration had been associated.

On October 13th, 1956, Nagy was readmitted into the Party. On October 23rd demonstrating crowds of students and workers in Budapest demanded, among other things, his reappointment as Prime Minister. At dawn on the following day, at the request of the Party leadership, he agreed to accept the position. On October 28th he declared a cease-fire and intervened to secure the withdrawal of

Soviet troops, then on October 30th announced the country's return to a multi-party system. In response to renewed Soviet aggression, the government declared Hungary's neutrality and withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact.

The renewed assault on Budapest by Soviet troops at dawn on November 4th prompted Imre Nagy and other members of the government to seek refuge in the Yugoslav Embassy. Having been persuaded to leave by the offer of safe conduct from the newly installed Kádár government, Nagy and his associates were seized by the KGB (with Hungarian connivance) and deported to Snagov in Romania, a lakeside resort for high Party functionaries 40 km north of Bucharest. Following an agreement between the Kádár leadership and the Russian Politburo, Nagy and his associates were formally arrested on April 14th, 1957, and transferred to Budapest, where they were tried in secret. The charges and eventual death sentences had, of course, also been decided well in advance, in the summer of 1957, but the trial was repeatedly postponed because the Soviet leadership had increasing trouble reconciling it with wider political considerations. In February 1958, Moscow even toyed with the idea of clemency, but Kádár doggedly held out for the death sentences.

All through this process, Imre Nagy rejected the charges of crimes against the state that were brought against him and was even unwilling to offer a defence. He was sentenced to death on June 15th, 1958, and made no plea for clemency. The sentence was carried out at dawn the next day in the courtyard of the National Prison in Budapest. Nagy was buried in an unmarked grave in the courtyard; in 1961 the corpse was transferred to Lot 301 in an isolated corner of the Kerepesi Cemetery in Budapest. The state reburial and posthumous legal rehabilitation of Imre Nagy and his associates, on June 16th, 1989, became the supreme symbolic event of Hungary's transition to a democratic system.

International opinion concerning Imre Nagy while the Revolution was in progress and in its immediate aftermath was far from unambiguous. It suffices to quote the words of a strikingly well-informed American journalist. Despite being part of a "personal letter", they were cited by Melvin Lasky in his White Book. As its subtitle notes, it is *The Story of the October Uprising as Recorded in Documents, Dispatches, Eye-Witness Accounts, and World-Wide Reactions.* Simon Bourgin wrote from Budapest on July 5th, 1956:

> although Nagy has a certain stubborn popularity with some of the people who associated with him personally and with the public who remember that brief, short-lived breathing period that he gave them, I wonder whether he is popular in general. His regime ended on a very negative note... It is quite generally agreed that the Russians will never place enough confidence in him to permit him to come back as Prime Minister.[1]

1 ■ Melvin J. Lasky, ed., *A White Book. The Hungarian Revolution.* London: Secker & Warburg, 1957, p. 32. Bourgin's reports from Hungary were republished during the 90s: see Simon Bourgin, "The Well of Discontent. Part 1. Briefing Radio Free Europe, 1956," *The Hungarian Quarterly* 1996 (vol. 37, no. 142): pp. 3–23.

In an article in its October 27th, 1956 issue *The Economist* of London stated:

> But the statesmen of the West will have to face the question, when the dust has settled, whether a more genuinely national communist government, even if propped by Soviet power, is not preferable to a mere puppet of Moscow. And if their answer is yes, they may well have to encourage such men as Mr Gomulka—or even Mr Nagy—on their road to a limited independence, by helping them in their economic difficulties.[2]

Meanwhile there was a fairly widespread legend that Imre Nagy had been forced to make his initial public statements at gunpoint.[3] This was also about the time one of the appraisals seeing the light of day, from the pen of the noted

Sándor Bojár, /

Prime Minister Imre Nagy addresses the nation on Radio Kossuth, October 28, 1956.

Kremlinologist Raymond Garthoff, claimed that every step Nagy made had to be cleared first with the Soviet leadership.[4]

Gordon Shepherd, correspondent for *The Daily Telegraph* of London, was of the opinion at the end of October that the population of Budapest regarded Nagy's intentions "as honest as those of any discredited Communist in present day Hungary can be."[5]

2 ■ Lasky, *op. cit.*, p. 94.
3 ■ A colourful version of this from George Mikes, *The Hungarian Revolution,* London, 1957 is quoted by Lasky, *op. cit.*, pp. 78–79.
4 ■ Raymond L. Garthoff, "The Tragedy of Hungary", *Problems of Communism,* January–February, 1957.
5 ■ Quoted by Lasky, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

The conclusion that "Imre Nagy and/or the revolution went too far" also got underway early on. Isaac Deutscher, writing for the November 15th, 1956 issue of *The Reporter* of New York, suggested that the reason why the Soviet army had not intervened more aggressively and immediately after October 23rd, and indeed agreed to withdraw its forces from the Hungarian capital, was because the 'liberals' in the Presidium

> hoped that this would enable Nagy to establish a national Communist regime that would, like Gomulka's regime, still remain aligned with the Soviet bloc. This hope was dashed two or three days later, when the disintegration of Hungarian Communism became evident and Nagy denounced the Warsaw Pact.[6]

After Nagy's execution in 1958 the Hungarian Party leadership made an effort to influence international public opinion.[7] A White Book: *The Counter-Revolutionary Conspiracy of Imre Nagy and His Accomplices,* containing a selection of documents and transcripts of the investigation and hearing, was published not just in Hungarian but also in the main world languages. This was clearly aimed at underpinning the assertions made in the communiqué that was issued when the sentence was announced. The accused were split into two groups. As they would have had a tough job cutting and pasting statements made by Nagy in such a way as to suggest he had exercised self-criticism, he was assigned the role of the incorrigible denier, who impugned and quarrelled with his associates, who had obviously been so cowardly as to flee from accepting any responsibility. In contrast, his associates and the witnesses arrested with them were assigned the role of those who admitted responsibility and were making remorseful confessions. The volume was produced with all the standard manipulative tricks, such as ripping quotations out of context, keeping quiet about awkward details or contrary opinions, and outright forgery of texts and non-existent conversations. On reading the English version, even a British Communist lawyer like D. N. Pritt felt moved to advise the Party centre in Budapest that the publication's wording was "unduly trenchant". Though he (Pritt) quite liked that, the same could not necessarily be said for intended readers, and it might provoke lawsuits for slander.[8]

Assembled principally by Tibor Méray and Péter Kende, two of Nagy's supporters who escaped to the West after 1956 and likewise published in several languages, *The Truth about the Nagy Affair* literally dissected the communiqué

6 ■ Quoted by Lasky, *op. cit.,* p. 185.

7 ■ In a December 1956 resolution, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party listed the oppositionist activities of Imre Nagy and his group as just one (out of four) of the causes of the 1956 "counter-revolution". Admittedly, another resolution in February 1957 declared that Nagy had "betrayed" the cause of the international Communist movement, but after that the ex-premier's name was hardly mentioned at all in public till his execution.

8 ■ D. N. Pritt, confidential remarks about the publication *The Counter-Revolutionary Conspiracy of Imre Nagy and His Accomplices,* September 10th, 1958. Hungarian National Archive, nks., 288. f. 22/1958. fcs. 6. ő.e. 337–347.

issued after Nagy had been sentenced, along with the above White Book, demonstrating that every single word was based on lies and distortions.[9] The democratic Hungarian émigré community in the West also published a manuscript that Nagy had written in 1955–56 and which had been smuggled to the West.[10] The first proper biographies and historical portraits to appear, which are still trustworthy to the present day, emerged from among the intellectuals and scholars grouped around the literary magazine *Irodalmi Újság* (published initially in London and later in Paris), and also the Imre Nagy Institute for Political Research, which functioned in Brussels from 1958 to 1963. These were the books *Nagy Imre élete és halála* (The Life and Death of Imre Nagy) by Tibor Méray and *Reformátor vagy forradalmár volt-e Nagy Imre* (Imre Nagy—Reformer or Revolutionary?) by Miklós Molnár and László Nagy. The translated versions of the books have broadly shaped the terms of academic and political discourse about the figure of Imre Nagy and the 1956 Hungarian Revolution to the present day.

Méray's book[11] remains to this day probably the most commonly cited of all works about 1956 and Nagy. The primary reason for its success is the way it superbly combines a chronological account, based on the available contemporary sources, with the author's own experiences of the events he records. Méray was able to draw extensively on the close personal relationship he developed with Nagy as a newspaper reporter and a sensitive, deeply committed writer. Furthermore, he started writing the book before Nagy had been sentenced. The way Nagy is presented is essentially as a man who, during the days of revolt, managed to implement the program he had been working for all his life as a Communist politician and who, unlike many of his comrades, felt a special responsibility for the Hungarian people. Rich in detail, it is a portrait imbued with a profound respect, and indeed love, for its subject.

Similar, though somewhat keeping its distance in the line it took towards Nagy, was the short biography by Miklós Molnár and László Nagy. Whereas Méray supplied the colourful sequence of events as a backdrop, they aimed to show where Nagy fitted within the structure of the Hungarian version of the Soviet régime. Thus, Molnár and Nagy wrote more about the path that led up to 23 October—a subject that Méray left to a later book that he co-authored with Tamás Aczél. They raise more issues too, but in the end they come to much the same conclusion as Méray: "If his life was a question mark—his death was the

9 ■ *The Truth about the Nagy Affair. Facts, Documents, Comments.* London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1959.

10 ■ See Imre Nagy, *On Communism. In Defence of the New Course* (London, 1957). In this Nagy was responding to criticisms that had been made both of the policies he had pursued as Prime Minister in 1953–54 and of him personally. In several separate pieces written in early 1956 he set out his own criticisms of Stalinism and outlined his own fundamental political beliefs.

11 ■ Known particularly in the English edition: Tibor Méray, *Thirteen Days that Shook the Kremlin.* Transl. by Howard L. Katzander. New York, Praeger, 1959.

answer... We feel that this man with a turbulent life deserves the grand words: 'a hero in his death'."[12]

Alongside these two influential interpretations, which laid a primary emphasis on the human and moral dimensions of their subject, were also a number of analyses which, while not questioning the moral example Nagy had set, took as their starting-point the political failure of the Hungarian Revolution, and hence of the Prime Minister. One of the earliest examples of this sort was an essay by Jean-Paul Sartre, in whose opinion Nagy, albeit not by choice, ceased to be a Communist:

> In fact he is a sincere Communist whom the course of events is in process of de-Communizing. A Communist chief, indeed, relies on a structured Party, which, in theory at least, assures links with the masses. But the Party has gone up in smoke... That's the whole tough luck of this good and sincere man: subjectively he remains faithful to his Party; objectively, everything happens as if he resigned from it... a de-Communized Nagy in fact, didn't represent the Party either in the eyes of the Russians or in those of the insurgents.[13]

A much-favoured transposition of that idea is the parallel drawn between Nagy and Gomulka. Raymond Aron, unlike Sartre, considered Nagy a Communist, but he took a similar line on the reason for his failure:

> Imre Nagy was a Marxist-Leninist even at the time when events placed him at the helm of the revolution. He could have played the role Gomulka played in Poland: he could have given a revolution of national-liberal inspiration an appearance acceptable to the Soviet Union and found a compromise between the aspirations of the Hungarian people and the international situation. The main reason for his failure where Gomulka succeeded, and his inability to prevent Russian intervention, was the weakness, the falling apart of the Hungarian Communist Party... Imre Nagy, in turn, presided over a [illegible] which was incapable of either directing or curbing the revolution.[14]

The figure of Imre Nagy as a faithful Communist—in the light of his tragic death or his political failure—seems to have been fading by the mid-60s. Ferenc Váli compared him with the great heretics in history:

> who similarly placed their trust in institutions rather than in the leaders of these institutions, in observance of strict legality, irrespective of the nature of the men who might decide their fate... What is most characteristic about Imre Nagy is that he managed to combine his faith in his conception of Socialism with genuine Hungarian patriotism... Nagy, despite his Moscow training, remained essentially Hungarian.[15]

12 ■ Miklós Molnár & László Nagy, *Imre Nagy, réformateur ou révolutionnaire?* (Publications de l'Institut Universitaire de Hautes Études Internationales no. 3). Geneva & Paris, Ambilly, 1959, p. 145.
13 ■ Jean-Paul Sartre, "The Ghost of Stalin", in: Béla K. Király, Barbara Lotze & Nándor F. Dreisziger, eds., *The First War Between Socialist States: The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and its Impact.* New York, Brooklyn College Press, 1984, p. 116.
14 ■ Raymond Aron, "The Meaning of Destiny", in: Tamas Aczel, ed., *Ten Years After. The Hungarian Revolution in the Perspective of History.* New York, Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1966, pp. 24–25.
15 ■ In: Tamas Aczel, ed., *Ten Years After...*, pp. 198–199.

In another of the clutch of essays written to mark the tenth anniversary, Miklós Molnár was thinking along similar lines when he wrote that, even if it was for only a brief period, Nagy successfully integrated a revisionist reform policy and the national democratic objectives of the Revolution. He did, however, close his thoughts with a reference to the cold realities of the present:

> Imre Nagy's historical role and his life have come to an end. His ideological work [...] was too pragmatic, his career too short and fractured, his concepts too humane and schoolmasterishly intellectual for his spiritual heritage to serve a new epoch as a point of departure under new conditions.[16]

In the wake of events in Paris and Prague in 1968, the figure of Nagy again became a focus of interest, but from a completely new angle. The New Left was not interested in the moralist and humanist or the nationally inspired, anti-totalitarian politician, so much as looking for a prototype (that is, where they were not denying him that role). István Borsody went so far as to call him "a martyr for Eurocommunism":

> It is nothing less than amazing (as amazing as the case of some of the Soviet dissidents) that a communist who spent a good part of his life in the Soviet Union should be able to create such a synthesis of revolutionary communism and civilized Europeanism as Imre Nagy did. This civilized Europeanism, and not just the Magyar patriotism which Hungarian followers admire in him, accounts for the remarkable ease with which the communist Nagy could assume the leadership of a national revolution against the communist regime imposed by force on Hungary by the Soviet Union.[17]

Ágnes Heller and Ferenc Fehér also called Nagy "the first Eurocommunist" or (elsewhere) "the first Eurosocialist". The crisis that unfolded in Hungary over 1953–56, they write, "became a representative drama of the inner disintegration of Bolshevism, of which Nagy was a representative figure... who through his inner torments, through that struggle between anxieties that is indeed dependent upon great moral qualities, had transcended Bolshevism."[18] In their book they attempted to sketch the portrait of a "new radical political militant", chief among whose qualities were post- (or perhaps rather anti-) Machiavellianism, the statesman who possesses "the craft of forging consensus" (though they did not mean political consensus in the liberal sense of the term, but a new type, the basis of which was rebellion against the dictatorship of necessity), and an anti-authoritarian personality (neither conservative, nor charismatic) rebelling against the regime and capable of giving everything a national dimension.[19]

16 ■ Miklós Molnár, "The Heritage of Imre Nagy", in: Tamas Aczel, ed., *Ten Years After...*, p. 172.
17 ■ Stephen Borsody, "Imre Nagy and Eurocommunism", in: Béla K. Király and Paul Jónás, eds., *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 in Retrospect.* Boulder: East European Monographs, 1978, p. 129.
18 ■ Ferenc Fehér and Ágnes Heller, *Hungary 1956 Revisited. The Message of a Revolution a Quarter of a Century After.* London, George Allen and Unwin, 1983, p. 118.
19 ■ Ibid., pp. 126–30.

Heller and Fehér's view, of course, was not shared unreservedly by everyone, even within their own ideological camp. Cornelius Castoriadis, for instance, strongly condemned Nagy the politician for being unable to "find in himself the clarity of mind and the resolve to speak out loudly against Russian deception, with which he was so well acquainted. Instead, he muddled through and tried to seek help... from the United Nations!" Castoriadis regards this as so wrong-headed and ridiculous that he goes so far, admittedly only in a footnote, as to refer to Nagy's personal tragedy as "irrelevant".[20] Bill Lomax had already taken a similarly critical line is his book about the Revolution a few years earlier. In his view, Nagy "was more of a social moralist than a radical politician, and it is this characteristic that makes his ideas so difficult to classify or systematize... his central and tragic weakness—the lack of any clearly thought-out ideological standpoint beyond his commitment to the vague values of humanism and decency."[21] Lomax did not regard Nagy as even a reform Communist:

> Unlike the more extreme Stalinists who clearly sought to use the bureaucracy as a means for implementing their own ends, and unlike other reformist communists who sought to moderate the role of the bureaucracy, Nagy very rarely, and perhaps never consciously, rose above the level of the functionary within the machine, albeit a very decent and reasonable functionary.

Lomax saw that lack of ideological weight or definition as the cause of the failure of 1956, which he described as being a personal failure:

> When the revolution broke out, he was to find himself without any means of orientation in a world which had already broken in practice the bonds within which he was still held captive by the limits of his own thought.[22]

During the 80s, historians of the Revolution were distancing themselves from ideological platforms. Approaches that emphasised Nagy's human qualities again gained ground, or perhaps it would be truer to say that they had never really been eclipsed. The main centre of interest, though, was how the 1956 Revolution was to be assessed in a historical perspective, and especially what place it occupied in the history of the Soviet régime—initially in terms of the system's changelessness, then from 1985 in terms of its unexpected changeability.

This was true primarily of late Kremlinology, with its focus on decision-making and political institutions and structures. George Schöpflin, for example, analysed the part that Nagy and others played in 1956 from the point of view of the "leadership options". The Prime Minister's ideas and values, having been a subject of so much earlier writing, were not discussed by him; Nagy was examined in the light of his relationships with various Hungarian and Soviet power factors

20 n Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Hungarian Source", *Telos,* Fall 1976 (vol. 29): pp. 4–5.
21 ■ Bill Lomax, *Hungary 1956,* London, Allison & Busby, 1976, p. 52.
22 ■ Ibid., pp. 53–54.

and how he was seen by them.[23] He was still an important player, but more as an explanatory element within the broader approaches. That is why Condoleezza Rice and Michael Fry observe what has since become a commonplace in both academic and journalistic accounts:

> Nagy had violated the accepted canons of satellite behavior, going much further than even moderates [in the Kremlin] could possibly allow. The situation in Hungary now presented a quadruple threat: to the Communist Party dominance, to the reliability of the army, to the stability of the Eastern bloc, and to the Soviet security system.[24]

The syntheses that were produced in the late 80s clearly exhibited the part Nagy had played in the reform experiment of 1953, which were the roots of his policy during the revolutionary days, and at the same time firmly underscored the individuality and charisma of his person. For his young reform-minded supporters, wrote Charles Gati in 1986, "Nagy was both a genuine father figure and the last hope for socialism with a human face." During the Revolution he filled the same role on a national scale: "he became the last hope for freedom and independence for all Hungarians."[25] However, adds Gati, "it is one of the paradoxes of political life in Eastern Europe that, until the last days of this short-lived revolution, Nagy was also the man Moscow counted on, and could count on, to save its cause in Hungary." That dichotomy was resolved by the second Russian invasion, in response to which Nagy decided to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact: "From the loyal Muscovite he had been all his life, this is when Nagy became a Hungarian revolutionary."[26]

The biography of Nagy by Peter Unwin, one-time British Ambassador to Budapest, was published in 1991 but still basically reflects the picture that had been developed during the previous decade. Whereas émigré Hungarians from Méray to Gati had laid particular stress on the influence that oppositionist intellectuals exercised on Nagy in 1955–56, Unwin saw him more as a "lonely hero" and in reaching his final conclusions, he was swayed most of all by the still very fresh idea of an end to the story of the Soviet era:

> ... three things emerged to stand to his credit in the book of history. The first was the service he did to himself when he stood firm against the forces which came to reimpose alien authority upon his country... The second was the service he gave to the Communist world... he had shown Communism a way out of the wilderness into which Stalinism had taken it. But Nagy's greatest service was not to himself or to his party but to his country. He did not make the revolution. But he made it possible... Nagy and the Revolution went down to defeat, but they gave Hungary back its self-respect.[27]

23 ■ George Schöpflin, "Leadership Options and the Hungarian Revolution", in: Béla K. Király, Barbara Lotze & Nándor F. Dreisziger, eds., *The First War Between Socialist States: The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and its Impact.* New York, Brooklyn College Press, 1984, pp. 535–48 (esp. pp. 543–45).
24 ■ Condoleezza Rice and Michael Fry, "The Hungarian Crisis of 1956: The Soviet Decision", in: Jonathan R. Adelman, ed., *Superpowers and Revolutions,* New York & Westport, Conn,, Praeger, 1986, pp. 193–4.
25 ■ Charles Gati, *Hungary and the Soviet Bloc.* Durham, Duke University Press, 1986, p. 126.
26 ■ Ibid., pp. 127–128.
27 ■ Peter Unwin, *Voice in the Wilderness: Imre Nagy and the Hungarian Revolution.* London, Macdonald, 1991, pp. 187–9.

From the turning point of 1989–91, assessments of Nagy and the events of 1956 were shaped in terms of a new chapter in the international discourse about the history of the Cold War. The archival revolution resulted, to some degree, in a dwindling of the significance of the Hungarian Revolution, including Nagy's role, within the grand narratives that now preoccupied scholars, especially in the United States.[28] In many respects, analyses of the crises that broke out in Eastern Europe during the mid-50s went back to the conclusions of earlier Kremlinologists. Even in the early 90s, someone like Henry Kissinger took the view that it was Imre Nagy's declaration of Hungarian neutrality that provoked Soviet intervention. While paying due respects to Nagy's martyrdom, indeed calling him "the living symbol of truth" when he deals with the final days of the revolt, Kissinger still notes that:

> Nagy, a lifelong member of the communist cadre, could not have failed to understand the import of the Soviet warnings, or of the changes he was himself fostering. Yet, by this time, Nagy, caught between the fury of his people and the implacability of his communist allies, was riding a tide he could neither control nor direct.[29]

The Malin minutes—the surviving records, often enigmatically fragmentary, of the debates within the Presidium of the Communist Party of the USSR during the autumn of 1956[30]—have confirmed something that Méray and Molnár already saw clearly in the late 50s. The reason for declaring Hungarian neutrality and unilaterally withdrawing from the Warsaw Pact was because Nagy tried to use these as tactics to delay the impending renewed Soviet intervention, which had already been decided upon the previous day in Moscow. In this way, the more serious appraisals that draw on the newly available documentation—at least in regard to Nagy's role in its events—have returned to starting point.

The nature of Nagy's communism, his apostasy and revisionism, is something that has concerned at best a rather limited circle of scholars since the early 80s. In 1989, however, a new development stimulated a new look at this seemingly tedious and insignificant biographical aspect. Documents came to light that revealed contacts Nagy had with Soviet state security organs during the 30s[31]—and this at a time that more or less coincided with Hungary's latest

28 ■ One example is John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know. Rethinking Cold War History.* Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997, pp. 210–211 & 235–236. A multifaceted perspective on the changed views is provided by László Borhi, "1956 helye a nemzetközi szakirodalomban" (The Place of 1956 in the International Scholarly Literature) in: *Évkönyv* 2002. Budapest, 1956-os Intézet, pp. 225–232.

29 ■ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy.* New York, Simon & Schuster, 1994, pp. 556–561.

30 ■ Mark Kramer, "New Evidence on Soviet Decision-Making and the 1956 Polish and Hungarian Crises", *Cold War International History Project Bulletin,* 8–9 (Winter 1996–97): pp. 358–384.

31 ■ According to the documents, Nagy was a secret informer for the Soviet political police from 1933 to early 1940 (but possibly for even longer), using the cover name 'Volodya' on written reports about his colleagues and the Hungarian political émigré community in Moscow. Johanna Granville, "Imre Nagy, aka 'Volodya'—a Dent in the Martyr's Halo?", *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 5 (Spring 1995): pp. 34–37, and Valerij Muszatov, "What Was Imre Nagy?" *New Times International* 20 (1993): pp. 13–15.

major historical moment. As Sándor Horváth pointed out in a recent essay about how Hungarian historians have treated 1956 since the change in régime, the essence of their rewriting of the Nagy story had been his immortalisation as a martyr.[32] This can be interpreted likewise as a return to the narratives of the late 50s, which saw Imre Nagy's extraordinariness as lying in his ethical stance. The state security link itself, of course, fitted a series of current trends, including a new wave of revelations during the 90s about the Stalinist régime, with the reopening of files on all manner of historical crimes, and a widespread public interest in the history of the secret services, still the subject of continued mystification as it was. At the time (1989), of course, the revelation also had a delegitimising character and purpose, since it lay in the interests of orthodox Communists in the Soviet Union and Hungary to discredit Imre Nagy, the posthumous protagonist of Hungary's democratic transformation. The motif was incorporated into writing about 1956 and Nagy as a new element that outgrew its Hungarian specifics.[33] Authoritative figures in general did not ascribe any great importance to this, however. In Russia during the early 90s there was quite a lot written about Nagy as the informer "Volodya"; still, Aleksandr Stikalin, author of the first Russian scholarly monograph about the Hungarian Revolution, concluded: "although they are important for building up a complete picture of Nagy's personality, in my view these documents in themselves provide no grounds for re-evaluating his role in Hungarian society and politics in the mid-50s or in the 1956 Revolution."[34] The ethical significance of Nagy's martyrdom, and the strength it manifested in 1989, was captured by Timothy Garton Ash in his closing address to an international conference that was held ten years ago in Budapest. In this he noted, "It is undeniable that the largest symbolical event in the Hungarian Refolution of 1989 [Garton Ash is deliberately conflating the later reforms with the 1956 Revolution] was the ceremonial reburial of Imre Nagy on 16 June, the anniversary of his execution in 1958."[35] He made this even more explicit in a reference to the parallel with Gomulka that has attended writing about Nagy from the very start: "My attention was taken by something that Jan Nowak [one of the speakers at the conference] mentioned in passing: 'Why did Gomulka succeed where Nagy failed?' The question is whether Gomulka actually succeeded in attaining anything. Let us just look at what happened to him, and what became of the

32 ■ Sándor Horváth, "1956 történetírása a rendszerváltás óta (Writing about the History of 1956 since the Change in Régime)," in: *Évkönyv 2002,* Budapest, 1956-os Intézet, pp. 215–224.

33 ■ Johanna C. Granville, *The First Domino. International Decision Making during the Hungarian Crisis of 1956,* College Station, Texas A&M University Press, 2004, pp. 19–24 & 71–74.

34 ■ Aleksandr Stikalin: *Prervannaya revolutsiya. Vengerskii krizis 1956 goda i polityka Moskvi.* Moscow: Novy Khronograf, 2003, p. 23.

35 ■ Timothy Garton Ash, "Forty Years On. Introductory Essay", in: *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents.* Compiled, edited and introduced by Csaba Békés, Malcolm Byrne & János M. Rainer. Budapest & New York, Central European University Press, 2002, p. xxiv. Garton Ash's paper was originally published in *The New York Review of Books* vol. 43, no. 18 (14 November 1996).

hopes placed in him and the Polish reforms. Has Gomulka been accorded a ceremonial reburial?"[36]

Just as historians in the 90s in many respects went back to verdicts that had been reached by their predecessors, in the new millennium they may be going back to even older disputes. At least that is something one gathers about a new book by Charles Gati which is due to appear shortly in English, Hungarian and other languages.[37] In a lecture that he gave to herald this, Gati asserts that "the revolution was lacking in effective leadership. There is no sign that Imre Nagy or his colleagues advised the young and inexperienced insurgents to take a quick look at a map, to check the location of the Soviet Union and show a measure of self-restraint. There is no doubting the leaders' fine intentions and patriotism, and their task was truly hopeless, but it is no longer necessary, 50 years later, to gloss over their poor performance." He adds: "if Imre Nagy and his government had controlled and not merely reacted to events, then they might have been able to achieve a limited pluralism in exchange for support for Soviet foreign policy."[38]

Gati clearly intends to start a controversy, and he will most likely succeed in doing so. All I would like to do here is to stress that this pointed assertion is no more than a restatement of one of the basic issues for the international assessment of Nagy, one already expressed while the Revolution was still in progress—that is, what *Realpolitik* was to be (or could be) followed in the revolutionary situation, or in other words, what was actually achieved politically speaking.

There are not too many comparable issues in the almost five decades of considering the life of Imre Nagy. In point of fact, there are just two. One is the problem of the (Communist) politician as opposed to the moral man: was it possible as a politician to choose what was right from a human point or view, and how was Nagy able to do this at decisive moments? The other concerns the legacy of Nagy's political thinking, which the New Left and Eurocommunism once sought to set up as one of its traditions and models. *Realpolitik* has been recurringly argued over, and will continue to be argued over, but a consensus has prevailed with regard to Nagy's ethical position ever since the time of Nagy's death. The meaning of that death has not been questioned by anything that may have been discovered about Nagy's life. The events of 1989 defined, or rather redefined, and fixed that consensus for a long time to come. As for his political thinking—which was most important for him personally—the various models for a transition to a Soviet-type socialism, its openness to reform, even models for socialism itself, all that now seems to be a memory of what is now finally a closed chapter, of interest today only as a museum exhibit. ❧

36 ■ Timothy Garton Ash: "Zárszó" (Closing Address), in: *Évkönyv 1996/1997.* Budapest, 1956-os Intézet, p. 311.

37 ■ Charles Gati: *Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt.* Woodrow Wilson Center Press & Stanford University Press. See an excerpt from Chapter 1: "Fifty Years After", in *The Hungarian Quarterly,* 2006, pp. 132–146.

38 ■ Charles Gati, "Mit tett (és mit nem tett) Amerika 1956-ban?" [What Did America Do (and Not Do) in 1956?], *História,* no. 4, suppl. (2006): p. i.

Krisztina Tóth

Freed

(Short story)

We shall be in flight for thirteen hours. I unpack the red blanket and earphones that have been set out on the seat. Meanwhile, the Japanese gentleman next to me is also settling in; with practised fluency, he kicks off his shoes and sets the linen eye-shield in place. He wriggles around a bit more but is then off in the Land of Nod. I start reading David Scott's guidebook: "Japan is an exorbitant country, but standards of provision everywhere are so high that even when staying at the most modest of hotels, eating in restaurants that the Japanese frequent on a daily basis and travelling solely by public transport, one will receive nothing less than impeccable service." Perhaps not. I close the book and take a look at what films are on offer, flicking back and forth though the menu. The sleeping foreign body right beside me makes me a trifle uneasy: it's as though I were lying in a marriage bed and my temporary husband were signalling with his tiny snores that he is not best pleased that I am watching the night-time TV channel. Outside it is growing ever darker; we are leaving behind the layer of fluffy cloud that from here, inside, looks like an endless, solid snow-cover.

I keep switching and finally plump for *The Island.* Scarlett Johansson, in white overall, races around a futuristic interior space, then we see a swimming pool, with perfect young bodies lounging by its sides. Why not *Lost in Translation* for preference, it crosses my mind; that would have been much more apt for this flight. I recall Bill Murray and the clips that he has forgotten to take off the back of his jacket, which makes me laugh out loud, whereupon my neighbour stirs, grimaces, then composes his face.

I envy him. I try to get to sleep, my head turned towards the window, my temple resting on the edge of the seat. I stroll on the fluffy, grey snow-cover; I am moving away from the aircraft, rather as if I were emulating a moon landing. There are lights flashing far off: perhaps the illuminated windows of a space city towards

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which the winking little blue lights of the dream walk are drawn. I repeatedly kick off from the candyfloss terrain and fly, letting my weightless body be carried on outstretched wings by the air currents. The pilot's voice rouses me: we have reached our final flying altitude, the outside temperature is –74°C. My feet are freezing, whatever I do to rearrange the blanket around them. I plug the earphone back and again begin to watch the film. We step into an enormous room in which bodies are lying in rows that stretch further than the eye can see. They seem to be sleeping at attention, with open eyes, their impassive faces staring at a screen floating directly above them. Clones, untouched bodies without any history, serially manufactured humanoid vessels who are storing away the multitude of images that tumble in through their pupils: their future memories. The sleeping pill I took is useless, I am unable to find my way back to the dream I was in before. I lie supine on the tipped-back seat and play at being a clone myself, a body without future or past, that a moving vehicle is hurling towards the unknown through a black emptiness. I don't think, I have no feelings or pains, I forget about the rolled-up pullover under the nape of my neck and the man snuffling beside me, and gradually, by taking deep breaths, I manage to find my way back to that padded inner path.

It is hard coming to: the blanket has slipped, my feet have gone totally numb. I need to collect my belongings. There's a long queue in the corridor at Narita airport. I search for my passport, now there are just two in front of me. I put it in the travel guide, next to the foreign currency and the tickets. I now have to unpack everything onto the ground; a hairbrush drops out and I can see now that I have taken with me the earphones from the plane. Never mind. A woman with a low brow is sitting behind the glass. She glances at the passport, then into my face, right between the eyes: a minute area in my brain glows warmer as a signal of how far her gaze penetrates. A fraction of a second, an immeasurably tiny scrap of time is enough for the seismograph that functions in my guts, at the lowest level of my consciousness, to switch on and for a slow, cramping sensation, originating in the gastric region, to signal that something is going to happen. Precisely what, I don't know, and it doesn't even matter: the same thing that has happened a hundred thousand, a million times over. I know the final words as if one were hesitantly rehearsing the same few lines of a role that has been done to death it is so familiar, each time taking another run at saying it in varying circumstances, in the well or badly fitting costumes of one's periodically changing fate.

"Step out of the line."

"Come with me."

"Put that down."

"Go over there."

I am now sitting, since who knows how long, in a completely transparent room with walls of wire glass. An armed female droid is standing before the door. She won't answer my question, won't open the door and doesn't even turn round in

response to my occasional knocking. I need to pee, I'm hungry, my head is aching, I don't know the hotel's address and I want to get the woman on sentry duty at the door to ring the embassy, to have returned my handbag to me, to inform the Japanese man who has been delegated to welcome me and may still be waiting, and I would like to secure an apology from them and get the whole implausible, dream-like misunderstanding cleared up. I don't know how much time can have passed: my mobile phone is in my hand luggage.

"Please. Please! Please!!"

My rattling is to no avail, the armed silhouette does not budge. Someone outside walks past, and I try to rattle to him too, but he doesn't so much as glance at me. It suddenly occurs to me that I ought simply to squat in the middle and have a pee. Or maybe ease my bowels. Or both—yes, that's it, take a shit and have a pee. But I lack the courage. I get up, then awkwardly stretch myself out at full length on the curved plexiglass bench as a way of demonstrating that this tired, imprisoned body, straining as it is from having to retain its urine, has no wish to sit and wait in a disciplined fashion. The bench is uncomfortable; my side is aching. The female droid, who seemingly has eyes in the back of her head, immediately wheels round and enters.

"Wake up, please. Sit on the bench."

I, meanwhile, spot two other people being escorted towards the glass room.

As soon as the door has closed behind them, they introduce themselves. They also don't know why they have been brought here, but they don't seem particularly bothered or surprised by it either. They tell me it's one-thirty, which means I have been sitting here for more than two hours. The Portuguese woman starts nibbling on something from out of a bag in her pocket, and between bites lobs short, pithy English sentences over at us. I nod coolly back as I sense that it would exhaust the last scraps of my dignity to allow myself to utter a word, for then I shall only be indignant and gripe away, possibly even cry; yes, that was what I feared most of all—that I would burst into tears before these two strangers. They have not taken the bag from the man from Cameroon: he produces a book and starts to read. All of a sudden, he stands out among us, invested by a transparent carapace of freedom, like a glass cube within a glass cube. Every now and then, he looks up, glances at his watch, then reimmerses himself in his book. Having finished her bread roll, the Portuguese woman is now reapplying her lipstick. I start blurting out daft sentences, stuff about how my work is to do with literature, and I've come for a conference. I can hear myself speaking in bad English, and I'm ashamed, but I go on all the same: "I am a tourist, I write poems. I am invited... to a... congress... to a literary congress." The Portuguese woman gives a sympathetic smile. My bladder is aching.

After three and a quarter hours have passed, in comes the droid and asks me to accompany her. She escorts me to a table upon which stands my zipped-up hand baggage. They don't open it, they ask nothing and they explain nothing, just hand over my passport.

"Enjoy your time in Japan!"

I hunt around with my eyes for a toilet. Two of them, with suspicious alacrity, poke a finger in the direction of the far corner of the immense hall. I have a feeling that it may be too late, that I've already peed myself and maybe just don't realise the back of my skirt is showing a dark urine patch.

I now have to retrieve my suitcase, via my baggage slip, from the luggage office. "Yes, yes. We have it." I set off for the exit. My gait is alarmingly easy; maybe I'm not even here. Maybe it's a dream, after all. Almost certainly, in fact: the hunger's gone, the pain's gone, time has gone—there is no clock in sight on the gleaming marble walls. I drift around, *lost in translation.* I am asked to step aside by a customs officer at the checkpoint. He hauls my suitcase aside then signals to the armed guard waiting further off. They indicate that I should follow them. We now trudge the entire length of the sodding airport, and it gradually dawns on me that we are heading straight for the point where they let me through barely ten minutes ago.

Indeed: the two previous uniformed figures are still standing there at the table. They nod, lift up my suitcase and lean over it as if they were physicians having an exploratory look at a bloated stomach. I am suddenly struck by what seems a brilliant idea. I turn politely, with a wan, phoney smile, towards one of the dark-uniformed figures—the one who had handed back my passport:

"Excuse me, sir, does anyone here speak French?"

The other glances from behind the opened lid and for a flash of a second the colourfully writhing innards are on view; he looks at me and politely replies in perfect French:

"Non, Madame, je suis désolé. Ici personne ne parle français."

He achieves what he was after. All of a sudden, before I know it, I dissolve in tears. I don't have a handkerchief. I notice that my nose is running, and I can't wipe it. I watch them as they pull the stiffeners out, one by one, from my bras. Crush the effervescent vitamin C tablets on the table. Slit open the artificial silk lining all round inside of the suitcase. As they paw, sniff, pry, frisk, pluck, tug, scratch, scrabble, and generally turn things inside-out. Over. It will soon be over; this is now the end of the scene. My mascara is smeared, my nose is running. That was it. But no, hang on: I still have a brief two-line role. One of them discovers in an outside pocket a bag containing red plastic hair rollers. He takes them out and looks cluelessly at me. I can't imagine why the hell I brought them, what I was thinking at home when I was packing, but it does me good to get my own back for the crying, the tears I shed in front of them. I daintily pick up a roller and demonstrate to him, almost gleefully, that he can slide it onto his willie, like this, very carefully—that's what it's for. It seems the droids haven't been constructed with an in-built joke sensor unit; the uniformed man's expression remains impassive, but he takes out all the little cylinders from the bag and peeks into each of them, one by one. But then they bring this, to an end, too, and the previous farewell is repeated:

"Enjoy your time in Japan!"

I shouldn't have come to this country. I have no business here. Here I am again, heading for the customs gate, hauling after me the suitcase now it has been eviscerated, tortured and stitched together again, its maw full of tamped-down clothes and books with spines sore from being pried apart.

I step out into the sunshine; it has gone noon and the traffic in the street is roaring so loudly it's as if I have stepped out from the silence of a crypt into the swifter, pulsating world of the living. Standing opposite the exit is the man delegated to welcome me, implausibly holding up a sign the size of a transparency on which my name is blazoned.

They are waiting, ergo I am. He bows deeply and beams at me. He has been standing there, on the pavement, for four and a half hours, and by now he is probably not going to be able to straighten his right arm again today and put it down by his side. He asks if there was a problem.

I shake my head: no, nothing serious, but it moves so smoothly on my neck that I opt to quit the waggling and just grin like an imbecile. One of my vertebrae is missing, I now notice.

"I'd like to change some money," I say quietly.

"Of course."

We stroll over to a distant tiny window set in the wall, where one has to ring a bell.

A woman with a low brow appears and asks for my ID. I slot the passport through the tiny window, then start to rummage in my handbag. David Scott's guidebook is in there ("Japan is an exorbitant country, but standards of provision everywhere are so high that even when staying at the most modest of hotels, eating in restaurants that the Japanese frequent on a daily basis and travelling solely by public transport, one will receive nothing less than impeccable service.") The return ticket is there in the guidebook and, of course, there is that opened packet of paper handkerchiefs—how come I couldn't find that beforehand. Well, never mind. I take out the envelope labelled currency, in which there are three hundred euros—money put aside from past journeys.

From three years ago, when we were still in love and we went to Italy. At the sight of the envelope, I am reminded of the whole trip to Italy, reminded of the person I loved, with whom we invented the most amorous game of my life, reminded of the dozen slips of paper spread out on the hotel table that we turned over one by one, one wish for each night.

It's been three years since all that occurred, and how quickly it has passed; most of the slips stayed face down. Confused images bubble up within me of the arguments, the shouting by the dark and misty bank of the Arno, and the last evening of bitter altercation that went on into daybreak. I fill in the form: three hundred euros, yes, in denominations of one hundred. I tear up the envelope. In the envelope are lurking slips of paper instead of money: home-made bank notes of our uncashed love that have been withdrawn from circulation. On the first, which in the end, for some reason, I don't push in the tiny window in front of the low-browed woman, is written

Lick my bellybutton!

A new beginning... We're driving into town; I'm looking at the tiny houses by the roadside; every now and then I nod off for a few minutes. From every airport there is a sleep-inducing multilane highway that links the no-man's-land of outer suburbs like this with the throbbing centre and is bordered by poky, densely-packed, single-story buildings with clothes hanging out to dry, mysterious windows, the ornaments of alien lives. With a weary look, I photograph their strange roofs, the tiny bamboo-shuttered windows.

We quickly reach the hotel. The huge tower block is entirely surrounded by similar shafts; I am immediately lost. While my escort and the receptionist busy themselves with checking me in, I buy a sandwich at the buffet bar: I simply don't have the strength to take a place in the restaurant.

I am given one of the rooms on the nineteenth floor; my sound-insulated and unopenable window looks out onto an identical building. I stare at the buttons set into the wall and dubiously press one of them. The electric shutter descends and the room is plunged into darkness. My name appears on the TV screen in greeting. I'm glad, too, since it means that at least it's not pitch-black. I press another button: music strikes up. I come to my senses and insert the door card into its place; now I can at least switch the lights on. With brightness back again, I confidently press the previous button again, but instead of the shutters rising some soft atmospheric lighting built into the wall comes on. All right then, one more time, on the row below. The shutter slips up with a hum. Got it now, no sweat: I can make light and dark, though the order is down to chance. So, how about the temperature. There are two buttons; I touch one of them twice, then kick off my shoes and stretch out on the bed.

I wake up to find I'm absolutely freezing. It is bitingly cold in the room, while outside is an evening darkness shot through with lights. My hands are implausibly stiff; I must have set the air conditioning to roughly freezing point. I have a quick wash under the shower, which runs alternately hot-and-cold in accordance with some recondite logic, then go down to reception, though not before doing a bit of racing between the four lifts because the one I am just about to step into is always going up.

Behind the desk, down on the ground floor, a man wearing spectacles bows courteously and wants to take the magnetic card off me at all costs, but I'm not willing to yield it to him. He smiles resolutely.

"I'm sorry, I don't know how the air conditioner works. I did... something wrong... and... it turned too cold in the room." I rub my arms to make it even clearer what the problem is. The bespectacled man instantly asks someone to take his place and accompanies me up to my room. As soon as we enter, he starts to grin unabashedly, evidently I'm not the first tourist to have deep-frozen herself. He pushes the button in the wall twice, then bowing profusely backs out, whereas I, instead of seeing to my suitcase, start to put some order into the newly rediscovered slips of paper.

As though I had come all this way to do that. I had dimly felt for weeks and months that I would be troubled by this feeling; that it would pop up in the most

unexpected, most preposterous situations; that one cannot just ditch a relationship; that I was going to have work to do if the still present, haunting, unconcluded period that I had put behind me was to become past history.

Looking in broad outline at the twelve requests, I would have to conclude that while my lover's sentences, with one exception, expressed very concrete wishes, my messages intimated more in the way of an unspecified, unfulfillable lack: as if I had imposed on him no lesser a task than filling in all the cracks that had opened up on the fabric of my existence. After the fact, sitting on a double bed on the far side of the world, I suddenly understand why he had always talked about exchangeability, why he believed that his personality was actually being lost in the circle of insane love that was drawing in his being. It dawns on me that this intensity of passion actually depersonalizes; that the person from whom everything is wanted is, in the end, capable of giving nothing, because he is no longer capable of knowing whether it is really he who is reflected on the swirling surface of another soul's.

Stay with me forever.

What garbage. It was me who wrote it, of course. I slump back, as if I couldn't take any more, then sit up and divide the slips into two parts. *May it never be this good with anyone else* is placed at the very top—that is at least as lunatic as mine: more a curse than a wish, more desperation than desire. Two piles of six paper strips are placed face down on the bed. It can't be an accident that these chits have accompanied me here. I turn them back over again, one by one. I need to find a place for these words that were once committed to writing—a final resting place.

The next morning, I stand before the gate to a nearby Shinto shrine. In my hand is a map of the city, in my pocket the slips. First of all, I want to place the most ardent of my ex-lover's notes—that's what I have set as my task for this morning. I am at a loss as I look around. The request is outspoken and passionate, yet also charmingly clumsy when written down. I intend a special, ever so secret place for it. A warm, safe, permanent nook. I stroll into the shrine's park. Its entrance is guarded by two lions; the right-hand one with its mouth agape, symbolising life, the other's shut, the lion of death. I mooch around in the park, watching the locals. They come in, rinse their hands, enter the shrine, their every gesture reflecting some industrious haste: maybe they really have only popped in for a couple of minutes. I am just in the process of photoing the golden-hued leaves of a gingko tree when a flock of white pigeons takes roost among the boughs. Pigeons! I ponder at length on how it might be possible to entrust the most ardent of my slips of paper to a white pigeon in such a way that a surprised monk might take delivery of a now invalid message written in a foreign tongue. That's daft: a simpler way has to be found. The solution suddenly hits me. I shall tuck it away in the mouth of the lion symbolising life, so that tomorrow it may breathe fire and startle those who pass by with its redly blazing eyes. I have already set off back when I suddenly stop short. Over the way, I see a multitude of white paper scraps fluttering on lengths of twine stretched between poles. It's as if those were

relatives of my chits shivering there on the line—lily-white strips as yet unwritten upon. The purity of being without desire. I step across there and, without thinking, string up one of my sentences: *Stroke my breasts.*

I sense that what I am doing is, in some sense, improper; at the same time I am clear about the cultic connotations of my action, so I don't allow the doubts that are simmering in my consciousness to get a word in.

On the way out, I look back once and take my leave of the desire from three years ago. The minutely printed slip of paper is lost among its unmarked fellows; maybe I would no longer even be able to find it if I suddenly wished to take it down. I arrive back at the entrance. From here, close-up, the stone lion looks an exceedingly tough nut. Its splendid, big, open mouth is at a height of at least six foot six, so I'm going to have to clamber up somehow in order to be able to place my paper slip in it. I start awkwardly taking photos and meanwhile spy out whether there are any suitable protrusions on it. An unusual number of passers-by are crowding on the street; it's lunchtime and growing numbers of office workers are emerging from the surrounding buildings.

I have been photographing the lion so long that it is starting to become conspicuous, or so I imagine. If someone asks, I'll say that I just want to see if it has a tongue. After all, there are stupid tourists everywhere. I make a habit of being interested specifically in lions' tongues—that in itself is surely not yet a crime. I picture to myself a Japanese tourist working his way up onto one of the Chain Bridge's stone lions back in Budapest, but then I realize that this isn't quite the same thing, it's more like wanting to take a look inside the head of a statue of the Virgin Mary. I suddenly make my mind up, stow the camera in my pocket and start to climb. No one pays any heed, and I'm standing face to face with the dragon-like physiognomy before it occurs to me that, clinging on with my two hands like this, I'm not going to be able to get out the envelope, and even if I were, I would at best only be able to pull out the most ardent of the slips of paper with my lips, which—let me see—would not intrinsically run counter to the spirit of the wish that is to be placed there, but does seem impossible to accomplish in practice. But then I am a great idiot. I shin down, get the slip of paper ready and clamber back up. Down below, a little girl comes to a standstill and, holding her mother's hand, gazes up at me. She is obviously now going to be told that one shouldn't do that sort of thing, but I can't turn back: I've almost attained my goal, stretch a little bit further and I'm touching the smooth in-curved tongue with my finger. It's in, done! I jump down and smile reassuringly at the little girl, even though my knees are hurting: I shouldn't have pushed off from that height. The mother drags her away while I suddenly feel very tired. I leave the lion with the sentence's tangy, burning foreignness: I hope it savours it. A nice piece of work that was, quick work, grieving work.

The next day, in the morning, I make a pilgrimage out to the Asakusa Kannon temple. By the main entrance are two statues standing in kiosks, barbed wire in front of them. I decide on the statue of Lightning and shove one of the strips at its

feet: *Kiss all along my spine*. I subsequently regret that choice, as Lightning would have deserved another sentence, but then I summon up the sensation, summon up how it was when he slowly kissed all along my spine and latch on that the paper lying between the feet of Lightning and Thunder is in a good place, after all.

I need to buy a present for my child; I would do better to have a look around today. I travel aimlessly and wearily on the subway, then at Takebashi station I suddenly flick in front of a train one of the balled-up strips that I took out at the temple. I act quickly, like a suicide: *May it never be this good with anyone else* is already vanishing under the train as it pulls in. A diminutive old lady gives me a dirty look as we board: she takes me for a tourist litter-lout.

A few stops further on and I then look in on the toy department of a gigantic store. I pass in front of a phalanx of battery-driven, remote-controlled robots: shooting, flashing, gesticulating. My shoes have blistered my feet; I need to buy some sticking-plasters. I don't see any sensible present and wander ever more listlessly among the horrific figures. There's a line of money-boxes ranged on a shelf across the way.

Suddenly I have marvellous inspiration. I toy with the idea of a Japanese boy who is turning thirteen and on his birthday goes into his room to break open his money-box. Why thirteen, I don't know, but for some reason I insist on this touch, and it doesn't so much as cross my mind that the money-box might equally be a girl's. But then, I never had a money-box myself; saving was somehow something that boys did—for a bike or roller-skates, that sort of thing. A thirteen-year-old boy will find my slip of paper, I am absurdly sure of that.

Stepping over to the money-boxes, I picture how, at a ceremonial hour of that remote day, a strange strip of paper, inscribed in a foreign language, will turn up among the money that is to be counted: *Talk about your secret desires*.

A piebald pottery cow is what I plump for. I furtively look around, as if I were perpetrating some illicit act, slip the chit in, then steal out of the toy department. It occurs to me later on that the security men may well be perplexed on viewing the CCTV recordings and will never know what the limping European female was up to.

I need to go back to the hotel to change shoes and think my action plan over. I have seven slips of paper left, but tomorrow will be the midpoint of my stay here, a dividing-line, a watershed. I turn the saddest of the sentences over in my mind: that will be tomorrow's task, I shall have to bury that somewhere in order to be able finally to lay it to rest within myself as well.

At the hotel, I carefully split up what has to be done and plan the further localities, making allowance for impromptu opportunities as well. The sentence *Caress me with your hair* touches me. It is a little bit like my own wishes, a gentle loving sigh from another evening. I decide to release it to the winds, assuming there will be any, for up till now the air, warmed by equable, languid sunlight, has been still.

The next morning, I am already up from the breakfast table by eight-thirty. I wait for the Americans, ordering taxis with much hand-waving, to clear out of the way, and then inquire in a muted voice at reception:

"Sorry, does the wind blow here? I mean... is here any... wind?"

The same bespectacled man is on duty as on the first day. He is surprised by the question at first, but then looks up and identifies with a smile: the woman with the temperature problems. He clearly believes I must have an immune deficiency or asthma or something of the kind: so many people have allergies nowadays. Carefully enunciating, he replies with a smile:

"We have a nice day. So the weather is pleasant today. I can assure you that the wind is not blowing today."

Well, that leaves the sad paper-slip for today. The saddest. And the bath one, but that'll be a doddle. I'll make my way first to the riverbank, then go by foot to the bridge leading to the Imperial Palace. I would like to get closer to the water but there are barriers everywhere that keep it apart from the banks. It's a somewhat banal option, but I want simply to toss the *Let's take a bath together* note into water. The paper is too light. I ought to tie it to something, but I have neither twine nor an elastic hair band on me. I finally search for a stick in some bushes and step on one. That's the thing! One end is split, so I can use that to nip my bit of paper, and then I lob it as vigorously as I can into the seemingly stationary river. It doesn't float off in any direction, just rotates with immense slowness on the water's surface before coming to a complete stop.

How hard it is to be freed of desires.

I turn my back on the barrier and stroll back past the bushes that fringe the main road. The crows in this part of the world are odd: the plumage on the tops of their heads is short, which makes them all look like they've been given a crew cut. They hop along curiously beside me. I am becoming more and more excited, my heart beating fast in anticipation of the task in store. Finally, I drag it out no further but squat down by a crater that has formed around one of the trees and start to grub in the soil. Though I make use of a twig, the ground is compact and I have trouble digging a shallow hole. Joggers in trainers and wearing headphones are running past me; this seems to be a regular path for them. I suddenly have the feeling that someone is watching me: a man walking his dog is staring, even stooping his upper body over and gazing, head cocked to one side, at the grubbing. I have a feeling he wants to help; no doubt he thinks I have lost something. I look up with a sweet smile to signal that everything's fine, would they just carry on, as they are disturbing me in my mourning. When they finally set off and I glance at their backs, I notice the man is wearing exactly the same blue pully as his pooch. It suddenly flashes through my mind that the doggie quite likely wanted to see to its business, that this is perhaps its favourite spot and I have plonked myself down right here. I walk round the tree and am reassured not to see a dog turd anywhere, after which I make a pile of pebbles over the buried paper-slip.

I've done it. I walk off. From a few yards away one can barely notice the little mound under which rests the saddest of my paper-slips: *I want to bear you a child.*

Late that evening I take a seat in a cramped restaurant in a shopping centre. The trays of the noisy youngsters who dined before me are being taken away while

I listlessly cast my eyes over the beautifully formed bowls and little dishes. I am the sole late-night customer; I can see the staff in the corridor, leaving the kitchen one by one. All the same, the service shows no trace of hurrying me up; the dishes that I ordered at random are brought out cordially and in a steady rhythm. When I've finished, I place one of the wishes on the tray as a quite special tip. This is my lover's second most impassioned sentence, though it may well be that others would settle on a different order and would not rank tonight's behind the lion one. It also runs through my mind that Hungarians are to be found everywhere, that my fellow-countrymen are quite capable of turning up in the most surprising and unlikely places in the world, and I imagine an enraged employee coming back to the table and slapping down the message on that tray. But no, that's absurd: the person who brought the food most certainly cannot understand the words written on that strip of paper; indeed, judging from the chest size, would be hard put to accomplish the lubricious task. I am musing on this when the tray is unexpectedly taken away. All my worries were unnecessary. The young lad gives the slip of paper, nor indeed me, nary a second glance. I am left with enough money for two more days and four sentences.

It is not quite as easy to get to the volcano of Mount Fuji as I had supposed. In the morning, the lady down at reception explains how many times I have to transfer lines on the subway before I reach the railway station. In four hours, she says, you can get quite close to the mountain. But I don't want to get close, I want to get there. Maybe that's the trouble, this wanting it all. It would be enough to get close to things, but no, for me nothing but the volcano, the crater, will do.

I thereby always spoil everything. By the time she has finished marking all the stations on a photocopied sheet I have lost heart. It may be that *Stay with me forever* can only be put to rest in the volcano's soil, but if I am unable to go right to the mountain, then why set off at all. I thank her politely for the sheet of paper, bow and turn out of the lobby like someone who is setting off for Fuji right away: I wouldn't like the lady to feel let down. On reaching the bustling street, however, I turn and head instead for a nearby playground.

A mother is teaching her little boy how to walk; the child is tottering happily, with unsteady gait, towards her, and the stocky woman keeps reiterating a short word over and over again. I watch them for a long time, scan the benches and the toy castle. To be truthful, I am searching for a spot for the *Dance for me* note, but nothing springs to mind. That afternoon, I discover a strange carved panda statue in the garden of a small Buddhist shrine. The wooden statue is hollow at the back, having been gouged out, a bit like a bathtub. *Lick my bellybutton,* rolled up like a cigarette, finds its way into the panda's mouth. Not the most dazzling solution, even I will admit, but then acceptable for all that. The wish was fairly startling by the way: what on earth could have got into me that evening in Italy, given that my belly has been ticklish all my life long? I have no idea how pandas feel about it, but I would never have found an ideal spot for this sentence. *Dance for me* finally ends up in a tree cavity—a message to the motionless bough, sender unknown.

The next day I spend at the Tokyo National Museum and that evening am lounging exhausted on the bed, flicking through channels on the TV. I am tired; the place of the rapidly shifting scenes is continually being taken by scenes from my past life, while from time to time I am haunted by the statuettes seen earlier that day, until at last I gradually drift off to the sound of a newsreader gabbling in English. I placed the envelope, still containing two slips of paper, face down on the upholstered shelf over the head of the bed, next to the paper handkerchiefs and my guidebook: "Japan is an exorbitant country, but standards of provision everywhere are so high that even when staying at the most modest of hotels, eating in restaurants that the Japanese frequent on a daily basis and travelling solely by public transport, one will receive nothing less than impeccable service."

I fall asleep with my clothes still on; I wriggle out of my jeans only at daybreak.

I wake up in the morning to see, with astonishment, that the envelope is not in its place. I have just a quarter of an hour left to get breakfast, so I elect to dress hurriedly and dash down to the dining room: I'll track it down after ten o'clock. On getting back to my room, I change the battery in my camera and then I probe all around the bed. While I'm doing that, a cleaning lady knocks on the door, her arms full of clean towels. It is hard to deflect her from her aim, but after I have demonstrated that I would like to sleep she departs with head nodding.

The envelope is nowhere to be seen; it has simply disappeared. All at once, I notice that there is a gap between the wall and the little shelf: it has slipped in there, and head-down at that. I try to haul the bed away but the shelf and the upholstered ledge are in one piece, and I would have to rip it out of the wall. Most probably that is where the wires to the built-in lights run, those are what the velvet-covered panel is hiding. The envelope will now stay there, and inside it the two slips of paper, perhaps to be found by an electrician one day when he comes to renovate it or repair a short circuit. *Stay with me forever. Caress me with your hair.* Come to think of it, it's not such a bad place, there, behind the bed. Two Japanese electricians will shrug their shoulders on seeing my envelope; indeed, they may even hand it in at reception, or maybe a cleaning woman will attempt to detach a piece of paper that has been sucked into the screaming vacuum cleaner's head.

There is no way of knowing when all this will take place. Whether the crumpled envelope, with the foreign sentences that have no meaning for them, comes into their hands in the distant future, even years from now, or next week. I shall just have to wait. That is when the mourning will be at an end. I shall sense the moment when the very last sentence fades within me, like the anger that I felt at the airport. The pain will subside, the mortification, and only the white space of the wishes will throw light on it, like the shrine's unwritten scraps of paper.

On my last day it is pouring with rain. The wind gets up as well, but to what purpose now, as I've already done what I have to do, accomplished my coincidental mission. While struggling with an umbrella that has been blown inside-out on my way to the subway station, I wonder whether anything might have been left for the rain.

What comes to mind is the depression around the tree and the message that must slowly be turning to pulp under the pile of stones. It's better this way; the rain was well-timed—the wind, too.

That evening I get back to my room soaked through and absolutely whacked. I undress and, shivering with cold, slip under the bedcover but am unable to warm up. I press a button: I would like to turn the heating on for at least a short while before I go to sleep.

On the morning of departure I wake up to find myself gasping for air. It is stifling, unbearably hot, and outdoors there is implausibly bright sunshine. I don't know when I must have climbed down from the bed: I am lying on my back, my kimono open, on the cold floor.

I am a clone. Wounds, pains, a timeless empty body, a perfect copy of my historyless self. Someone from up above, from the twentieth floor, is projecting on the ceiling, into my wide-open eyes, scenes of my life to date, my future memories. ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

Ilona Sármány-Parsons

Challenging the Canon

Magyar vadak Párizstól Nagybányáig 1904–1914 (Hungarian *Fauves* from Paris to Nagybánya 1904–1914). An Exhibition in the Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest, 22 March–20 August 2006. Catalogues in Hungarian and in English edited by Krisztina Passuth and György Szűcs. Hungarian National Gallery, 333 pp. and 246 pp., respectively.

The chances are that recent exhibitions at the Hungarian National Gallery will ultimately change the Hungarian canon through the re-evaluation of well-known masters, together with the discovery, or rediscovery, of others who had been suppressed or simply off the radar screen for at least half a century.[1]

It will certainly require several years, perhaps decades, before the rest of the world acknowledges that Hungary too has produced remarkable artists whose works are worthy of recognition and deserve to be collected—even in Paris, London and New York, traditionally the most important and wealthiest of the world's art centres. The present writer is cautiously optimistic that this will eventually be achieved, despite the many obstacles still to be overcome.[2] Investors tend to pursue a taste that has been sanctioned by expert opinion, and more investment means more shows and greater public awareness. Nor is it entirely a matter of money. The now widespread interest in Scandinavian and Finnish art has pushed up prices; that process began when some visionary curators began to put the finest Scandinavian masters on show (e.g. the exhibition "Northern Light," New York, 1982).

Before the First World War, Europe was more cohesive culturally than it is now; it is ironic that there seems to have been a greater mobility and genuine exchange in the fine arts than exists under twentieth-century globalisation. Exchanges may have been limited by factors such as relative wealth and social class, but around

1 ■ The exhibitions which contributed to this process were: Nagybánya 1996; Rippl-Rónai 1998; Mattis Teutsch 2001; Mednyánszky 2004; Munkácsy 2005.

2 ■ Exhibitions of avant-garde twentieth-century Hungarian painting are documented by two important catalogues: *Standing in the Tempest: Painters of the Hungarian avant-garde 1908–1930.* Ed. by S. A. Mansbach. Santa Barbara, Museum of Art, The MIT Press, 1991; *Central European Avant-Gardes: exchange and transformation, 1910–1930.* Ed. by Timothy O. Benson. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The MIT Press, 2002.

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1900, wonderfully rich shows, involving Gauguin, Van Gogh and Cézanne, were circulating between Paris, Vienna, Budapest and Prague, something which would be impossible to organize in the same way now.[3]

One obstacle faced by Central European art (other than Viennese) in its struggle for greater recognition has been the iron curtain that still firmly exists in the mindset of the art institutes of the West and of the North-Atlantic countries. Typically, when galleries or museums in former Socialist countries (apparently still newcomers in Europe's very patchy memory) wish to exhibit important works by great names such as Matisse or Cézanne in order to demonstrate their impact on their own domestic art scenes, the core countries of old Europe are reluctant to cooperate. Important works don't usually travel further than Vienna unless current political developments demand some exceptional gesture in terms of cultural representation; nor do works from what is obviously regarded as the cultural periphery of Europe figure in their own blockbuster shows. The few recent successful international shows in Central Europe for which French, American and German museums have lent some famous works have, alas, been the exceptions that prove the rule: one-off political gestures and subjected to strict financial limits.

Such financial limits are the most frustrating aspect of modern exhibition-making, since the costs of insurance and transport make it nearly impossible for a former Socialist country, struggling with a shrinking cultural budget, to initiate an internationally important exhibition in which the great names of European modernity or the past few centuries are included. Despite all the above-mentioned disadvantages and obstacles the possibility of alterations to the European canon has at least been posed by exhibitions that have focused on the great Hungarian masters and on half-forgotten Hungarian schools of painting.[4] While the wider Hungarian public has rediscovered its enthusiasm for painting over the past few years, response from abroad still leaves much to be desired, perhaps understandably, given the paucity of information available. Whether it be the result of philistinism, commercial interest, cultural chauvinism, or a combination of all these, one cannot ignore this reality.

The present exhibition is organized around a thematic grouping of the items (306 in all, among them 20 French works that include 15 paintings, together with 2 small bronze sculptures and a series of graphics—from the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest—by Matisse.)[5] It begins with a pictorial reflection of Budapest and Paris, interspersed (in the inner corridor of the show area) with early studies

3 ■ See Ilona Sármány-Parsons: "Der Einfluss der französischen Postimpressionisten in Wien und Budapest." *Mitteilungen der Österreichischen Galerie,* Jg. 34/35, Nr. 78/79. 1990/91 Wien, 1992.

4 ■ For example, besides the shows mentioned above, the "Arcadia" Exhibition in the Hungarian National Gallery in Budapest in 2002 has redrawn the map of Hungarian painting in the 1920s.

5 ■ It is regrettable that the show does not include those works and that stylistic period of Matisse which had a profound influence on the Hungarians among whom two painters, Vilmos Perlrott Csaba and Géza Bornemisza, were definitely his students.

(mainly nudes) produced by apprentice Hungarian artists in the studios and private academies of Paris. Early self-portraits (Róbert Berény, Vilmos Perlrott Csaba) introduce the viewer to the main artists in the show.

The sections that follow focus on two Hungarian art colonies—Nagybánya[6] (today Baia Mare, in Romania), at the foothills of the North-East Carpathians), and Károly Kernstok's estate in Nyergesújfalu, a village at the Danube Bend. The Nagybánya works, here represented by the so-called 'Neo' group, are mainly landscapes, often painted from unexpected angles (thus, from church spires and towers) and exhibiting bright, vibrant colours. The other most remarkable genre is that of the Arcadia compositions, figurative scenes with nudes reposing in the bosom of nature. The themes and compositions in this section testify to Cézanne's influence—an aspect rather ignored in the current show, although the catalogue authors make sporadic reference to it. In the last rooms, the organizers have placed some outstanding later works by younger painters, for example József Nemes Lampérth. His style integrated various influences, including Cubism and German Expressionism: a unique new synthesis of modernism before the outbreak of the First World War.

Most of the items, by 34 artists, date from the period between about 1903 and 1914. They are mostly small-scale, typical of what youngish artists produced at the beginning of their careers. Another common factor is that the palettes of these painters are bright, intense and cheerful, the overall effect being one of harshness and a certain violence. The drawings and sketches (mostly nudes from studio models) are separately exhibited on the third floor of the National Gallery, a rather desolate space to which graphics are traditionally expelled.

The principal curator and initiator of the exhibition is Professor Krisztina Passuth, from Budapest's Eötvös Loránd University, who wrote about some of these artists already in 1967, in her first book.[7] She and co-curator Gergő Barki and her team—Péter Molnos, Attila Rum and Zoltán Rockenbauer—have given us the fruits of their extensive research in the Catalogues, together with György Szűcs, who curated the show on the part of the Hungarian National Gallery.

The show had a broad public appeal in Budapest, although full appreciation of a considerable number of the items inevitably assumes a degree of background knowledge of the relevant artistic trends. After all, the professional viewer was aware that the exhibits document a period when young artists were trying to find

6 ■ Nagybánya was the first Hungarian painter's colony, founded in 1896 by a handful of painters returning for the summer from Munich, an outpost of Hungarian painters at that time. The founding generation represented a decorative colouristic naturalism, close to contemporary Post-Impressionistic tendencies, but around 1905–6 their students revolted against their aesthetic and taste and embarked on more modern artistic trends. They were labelled as Neo-painters—an ironic reference to the then fashionable Neo-Impressionism. Most of these young beginners are among the most fascinating in this exhibition—Czóbel, Boromisza, Bornemisza, Ziffer, Tihanyi and Perlrott. See also György Szűcs: "The Hungarian Barbizon. István Réti and the Nagybánya Painters", *The Hungarian Quarterly*, Vol. 42, Winter 2001, No. 164, pp. 68–76.

7 ■ Krisztina Passuth: *A nyolcak festészete.* (The Eight and their Painting) Budapest, Corvina, 1967, 176 pp.

their way in the latest styles, while seeking to articulate an individual vision. The exhibition is not, therefore, composed only of masterpieces, although there are still several extremely fine works on display. Those who have seen exhibitions of the Hungarian National Gallery since 1996, from the centennial Nagybánya show onwards, and those who know the Gallery's permanent exhibition well, will experience (in spite of stylistic differences) a sense of organic continuity within the Hungarian painterly tradition. If a single binding factor in this tradition had to be picked out, it is the definite preference for vivid colouring encountered again and again within the broad stream of 'painterly' qualities.

The Catalogues

In many ways, this is an exhibition that reminds one of an experimental piece of chamber music; by the same token, the visitors who will gain most from it are those prepared to make the effort to work through the studies in the bulky catalogues (a French version is also planned). The Hungarian one is the more extensive, divided into four major sections. The first, "At Home and Abroad" (five studies, one by an American, one by a French and three by Hungarian scholars) discusses in great detail the history and the historiography of French *Fauvism,* the artists who adopted it and those Hungarian painters whose names and works are associated with the Parisian scene approximately between 1903 and 1914.

The first long study by Krisztina Passuth addresses the seemingly unimportant issue as to whether a handful of young Hungarian painters exhibiting in Paris in 1905–1910 may rightly be said to belong to the *Fauves* or not.[8] She makes a plausible case at least for Béla Czóbel, since he did exhibit in the famous Salon d'Automne exhibition in 1905 in which the canvases of Matisse, Vlaminck and Derain inspired the French left-wing art critic Vauxcelles to coin the word *Fauves*. By supplying a name—Wild Beasts—for a number of painters who had not previously constituted a group, he thereby "constructed a style" which, according to the current view, never possessed a coherent group of stylistic features.[9] Even today, despite the extensive literature about it, there is no consensus about the existence of a common *Fauve* style.

The label nevertheless became mandatory for a certain type of work, despite the fact that it only ever covered a handful of painters (Matisse, Vlaminck, Derain, Marquet, Dufy and, for a very short time, Braque are the most prominent names). All experimented with harsh colours in a roughly similar way, but they lasted barely two years as a recognisable grouping. The leading authority on the period,

8 ■ Krisztina Passuth: "Wild Beasts of Hungary Meet Fauves in France", pp. 11–36. If not otherwise indicated, references are to the English version of the Catalogue. Apart from this introductory study, Passuth has written three other articles, which also figure in the English version. She has also compiled the bibliographies of all the French artists and of some Hungarian artists for the Appendix, and the list of Hungarian painters at the exhibitions of the Salon d'Automne.

9 ■ This is a classic example of a discourse that 'constructs' something which might not have existed before and which also influences the future life of what it constructs.

Jack Flam, hesitates to apply the term *Fauvism* later than 1907, admitting thereby that the somewhat fragile notion was rapidly marginalized by Cubism and other contemporary fashions. On the other hand, Flam writes lyrically about the influence of *Fauvism* on perceptions of modernity and modernism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

> In a century dominated by geometrical, conceptual, and 'dehumanized' art, Fauvism has become a locus for a regretted humanism, a regretted individualism, and a regretted nostalgia for direct contact with nature. This, I think, is why *Fauvism* has retrospectively come to be such an important element of twentieth-century art. It stands for so many aspects of modern art that are supposed to have become passé but that nonetheless continue to exert great presence, and even to suggest a certain future potential. In a curious way, *Fauvism* stands both as the founding gesture of the independence of twentieth-century painting from traditional naturalism and as evidence of the potential viability of a new kind of naturalism.[10]

Flam challenges the existing consensus, which underlines the 'barbarian' characteristics of the style. He argues against overlooking the connection to the alternative twentieth-century painterly tradition, where the human figure and the subjectivity of the creator are never entirely absent. Flam identifies the most vital function of Matisse and his art in its role as a counterpoint to the conceptual and abstract traditions of modern painting from Cubism onwards.

Sophie Barthélémy offers a pioneering study on art criticism in the French press concerning work produced by Hungarians in Paris before 1914.[11] Perhaps for the first time in the annals of French art history, this study is frank in its description of the widespread xenophobia in French art criticism in Paris around 1900, something which throws an entirely new light on a number of contemporary sources (for example, those highly negative evaluations that are sprinkled with what would now be regarded as racist remarks). The article helps us to understand the very real difficulties foreign painters had to face in the 'capital of light'.

György Szűcs (the curator of the 1996 Nagybánya centennial exhibition) contextualizes in his article the role of the young Neo generation of painters in the painters' colony at Nagybánya,[12] while Attila Rum further examines the issue, raised earlier by Passuth, of whether these young Hungarian painters belonged to the *Fauves* or not.

Section 2 of the English Catalogue, "From Paris to Nagybánya", contains eight studies, of which four focus on the Parisian art world: on the Bohemian scene revolving around venues like the legendary Café Dôme, on the various teaching Academies and private art schools, on the commercial galleries and, finally, on art patronage. The urban and cultural background is expounded; the ways of Parisian art life are explained; the milieu of the art students and how they went about an

10 ■ Jack Flam: "Fauvism, Cubism, and European Modernism", p. 45.
11 ■ Sophie Barthélémy: "Pan! Dans l'œil ...! The Paris Salons' Reception of the Hungarian Fauves in The Mirror of Contemporary French Critiques, 1904–1914", pp. 61–69.
12 ■ György Szűcs: "Dissonance or New Harmony? The Art of the Nagybánya 'Neos'", pp. 47–60.

artistic education are described; finally how patronage functioned through funding by wealthy connoisseurs like the American Steins or by the commercial avant-garde galleries like that of Berthe Weill, is examined.

Drawing on the detailed cultural-historical studies of the last two decades in which the art life of Paris has been mapped in great detail, Hungarian art historians locate young Hungarian artists of the day within the cultural spectrum of the city. Many such artists later disappeared from public consciousness and were dropped from the collective memory of the pioneers of the first 'isms'. With the outbreak of the First World War, they were obliged as enemy aliens to part overnight from the artistic hub of Montparnasse, with its Bohemian life and its international artistic community, leaving all their belongings and their works behind them.

All this has been known for some time, at least to Hungarian art historians, the most important sources being memoirs, interviews and the family correspondences, but the pictorial evidence for those legendary years was sparse. Now, with the re-emergence of many canvases, and the rediscovery of a wider spectrum of sources, we are beginning to see the artistic development of the period much more clearly. From what was previously fragmented information, a sophisticated chronology has emerged. Legends are confirmed or thrown into doubt and one important fact becomes indisputable: young Hungarian painters living in Paris after 1900 took an active part in exhibition life, tried hard to assert themselves individually on the art market and very early on embarked on remarkably bold painterly experiments.

In the English Catalogue three essays map up the contemporary art scene in Hungary focusing on Budapest, Nagybánya and Nyergesújfalu. Peter Molnos's elegant article[13] gives an excellent overview of the intellectual and art scene in Budapest in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Shifting the spotlight to the Hungarian provinces, György Szűcs contributes a second study on Nagybánya, in which he relates the colony to the social life of the provincial town drawing on memoirs and literary descriptions: he examines how the artists' social networks and their way of life had a major impact on their outlook and attitudes. Over several decades, generations of artists acquired their basic education as painters in this picturesque mining-town.[14] Their *Weltanschauung* was shaped by the local atmosphere, as were the motifs on their paintings, while their thematic preferences were determined by the models and standards worked out by the Nagybánya pioneers and their immediate successors. For more than half a century, Nagybánya shaped a major trend: *plein air* painting, involving fidelity to decorative naturalism and a nostalgia for balance and harmony in life.

Zoltán Rockenbauer was faced with a rather different task when writing about Nyergesújfalu[15]. He has reconstructed the story of an art colony which might not

13 ■ Péter Molnos: "Budapest, the 'Paris of the East' in the Hungarian Wilderness", pp. 101–117.
14 ■ György Szűcs: "Egy regionális centrum: Nagybánya" (A Regional Centre: Nagybánya), *Magyar vadak,* pp. 129–136.
15 ■ Zoltán Rockenbauer: "The Fauves by the Danube, or Could Nyergesújfalu Have Been Hungary's Coullioure?" pp. 125–131.

really have been a colony, merely an agreeable opportunity for a small circle of friends to engage in experimental work as guests on the small estate of one of their number, the charismatic intellectual Károly Kernstok. He, exceptionally in his generation, abandoned his well established academism in order to become a "revolutionary artist". The works the group produced were inspired by the garden and by local models and reflect a common artistic and intellectual quest for something which is both visually and spiritually new. Rockenbauer has reconstructed the details of their activity from rather meagre sources and has given us an account full of intuition and empathy. This entirely new research, moreover, led to the discovery of some lost works of Kernstok.

The Hungarian Catalogue's third section, "Themes and Genres" (not included in the English version), contains four studies that offer detailed iconographic and stylistic analyses of the leitmotifs in the paintings of the Hungarian *Fauves:* Gergely Barki on the nude (generally the female nude),[16] György Szűcs on landscapes and cityscapes[17] and Zoltán Rockenbauer on still lifes[18]. All of these studies offer fresh insights, focusing on the novelty of approach or originality of composition. Gyula Kemény, a professional restorer, offers refined and detailed analyses[19] from his specialist angle. His particular skill lies in his illumination of what the untutored eye might consider to be very small differences between the works of French and Hungarian artists. In a virtuoso display, by analysing the palette, the paint, the brush-strokes and the spacial solutions of the compositions, he demonstrates the truth of the old commonplace that the devil is in the detail.

Section 3 of the English Catalogue (Section 4 of the Hungarian) discusses three major painters: Béla Czóbel, Róbert Berény and Vilmos Perlrott Csaba,[20] who interpreted the visual world around them in very different ways. Each embraced multiple impulses from the vibrant and complex art life of Paris. It is not only their sensitivity and openness which is striking, but, most importantly, they all developed unique personal styles, differentiating them from their French and Hungarian contemporaries. It is regrettable that the editors did not include Ödön Márffy among the painters thought worthy of individual treatment. His early oeuvre is certainly of the same quality as those of the three painters examined here. Fortunately, he gets a longer treatment in the appendix of the Hungarian Catalogue, where a detailed biographical section offers a useful database for future research on all the artists whose works are on show, together with an extensive bibliography.

16 ■ Gergely Barki: "Párizstól a Paradicsomig. Utazás a Magyar Vadak aktja körül" (From Paris to Paradise. A Journey around the Nude of the Hungarian Fauves), *Magyar vadak*, ibid., pp. 145–158.
17 ■ György Szűcs: "Táj és természet, ember és város" (Landscape and Nature, Man and the City), ibid., pp. 159–172.
18 ■ Zoltán Rockenbauer: "A *fauve*-os hatások alakulása a modern magyar csendéletfestészetben (1905–1914)" (*Fauve* Influences and Modern Hungarian Still Lifes [1905–1914]), ibid., pp. 173–184.
19 ■ Gyula Kemény: "Francia nyomvonalak a Magyar Vadak és neósok fesztészetében. Egy restaurátor feljegyzései" (French Traces in Hungarian Fauve and 'Neo' Painting. A Restorer's Notes), ibid., pp. 185–200.
20 ■ Gergely Barki: "The Evolution of Czóbel's *Fauvism* in the Mirror of his Early Portraits," pp. 133–148; Gergely Barki: "Róbert Berény, the 'Apprenti' *Fauve*", pp. 149–166; Judit Boros: "The Synthetiser. Vilmos Perlrott Csaba's Painting", ibid., pp. 167–180.

The present exhibition includes 24 Hungarian and 10 French painters. The most important Hungarian names among them were Róbert Berény, Dezső Bornemisza, Tibor Boromisza, Dezső Czigány, Béla Czóbel, Valéria Dénes, Sándor Galimberti, Károly Kernstok, Ödön Márffy, Dezső Orbán, Bertalan Pór, Lajos Tihanyi, Csaba Perlrott Vilmos, József Nemes Lampérth and Sándor Ziffer, all belonging to the generation which, in the first decade of the twentieth century, experimented in a way that was truly in harmony with the spirit in Paris at that time. They can be roughly subdivided into two groups: those who were dubbed 'Neo' painters by contemporaries, and those who, some time later, went on to form The Eight with several other artists in 1909.[21] This division dovetails also with a loose chronology, for the aggressive rebellion against the aesthetics and style of the founding fathers of Nagybánya by the Neos emerged as early as 1906. Czóbel's 'shocking' canvases inspired other students in Nagybánya to paint with harsh, violent colours and to turn away from the gentle naturalism hitherto prevailing towards an expressive stylisation of forms. Doubtless the works of Gauguin, Van Gogh and Cézanne played a major role in this dramatic turn.

The great achievement of this exhibition is its mapping of the relationships between these two groupings and its revelation of the missing links between them, namely those experimental works that document mutual influences. With the help of the press (a fierce media battle developed for and against them), they immediately acquired considerable fame—or notoriety—among the intellectuals and art connoisseurs of the capital. This fame has never really lost its lustre in Hungary, since The Eight were also enthusiastically supported by the group who later belonged to the circle of Georg Lukács. They were the first artistic grouping in Hungarian culture who belonged to the radical intellectual Left, embracing a vision of a socialist utopia, which, for most of them, led on to support for the Communist Republic of Councils in 1919. Many of them had to seek refuge abroad after the Republic was overthrown and those who returned did so only much later.

Identifying artistically with modernism and the avant-garde, these radicals of middle-class origin were considered ideologically suspect during the first two decades of communism, insofar as they could not plausibly be regarded as forerunners of 'Socialist Realism.'[22] It was the imprimatur of Georg Lukács, especially in the last decade of his life, that brought about a re-appraisal of the artistic output of these painter friends of his youth. As a result, from the 1960s onwards, it was generally accepted that The Eight were an integral part of the canon of Hungarian

21 ■ The Eight were Róbert Berény, Dezső Czigány, Béla Czóbel, Károly Kernstok, Ödön Márffy, Dezső Orbán, Bertalan Pór and Lajos Tihanyi.

22 ■ A few of them nevertheless had abandoned their modernity and became professors at the Budapest Academy of Fine Arts after the Communist takeover in 1948, thereafter propagating Socialist Realism in its most orthodox form. One was Bertalan Pór, a lesser light among them.

The Main Square in Nagybánya around 1900.

painting, and in 1967 the first, and so far the only, short book on the group by Krisztina Passuth[23] was published. The illustrations were mostly in black and white and focused on their loose alliance formed in 1909 and their three exhibitions in Budapest after 1910.

The fate of their other contemporaries was somewhat different: experimenters of artistic genius as they were, painters like Vilmos Perlrott Csaba, Sándor Ziffer, Valéria Dénes and Sándor Galimberti (the latter two died in 1915) did not engage in the political and ideological conflicts of their age. The memory of them slowly faded, especially of those who remained in Nagybánya even after the town became a part of Romania. For nearly half a century they have been all but forgotten.

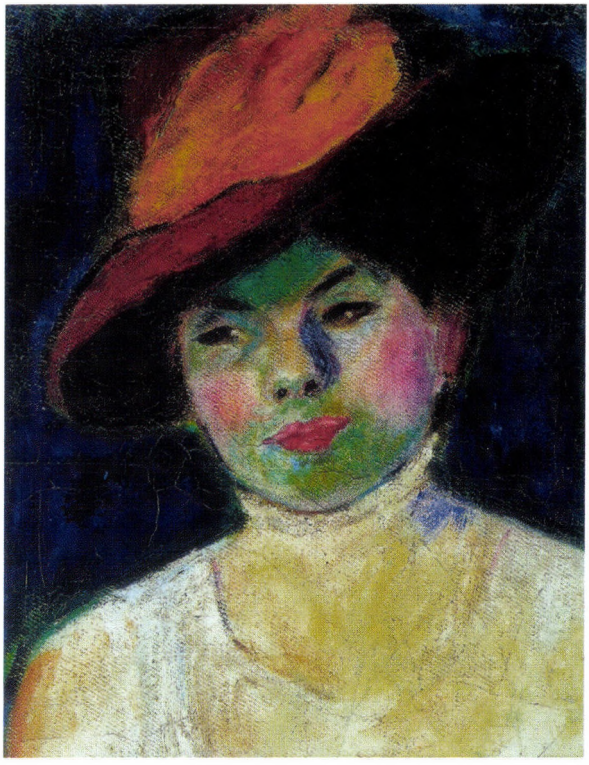
Among the bonuses arising from the by now almost two decades of changes in the social and political climate of a country so long under ideological control have been a slow revival of middle-class interest in art, concomitant with the rebirth of the art market through art dealing and collecting. An astonishing quantity of hidden (supposedly lost) works emerged from the storerooms of provincial museums, tiny flats, the attics of villas and other forgotten corners. Hardly anybody could have expected that so many paintings by Hungarian masters had survived the devastations of twentieth-century history, during which Hungary suffered substantial loss of human life and a massive destruction of its material wealth. (It is not generally known abroad that only a tragically small percentage of the *objets d'art* which the country had possessed in 1939 could be traced in 1989. Apart from the havoc wrought by the war, the forty-five years of Russian occupation and the policies of Soviet-type regimes further reduced the artistic heritage of the country to about 1.8 per cent of that existing in 1939.)[24]

Nobody can reconstruct the visual impression of those canvases which have not been seen since the First World War. In a few cases, shabby black-and-white prints have survived of them, but that is the best we have. In the case of those Hungarian painters who are the sensations of this exhibition, it is not only the last fifty years that have obscured their works. As noted above, given that they were enemy aliens in France in 1914, they had to flee Paris, leaving most of their works

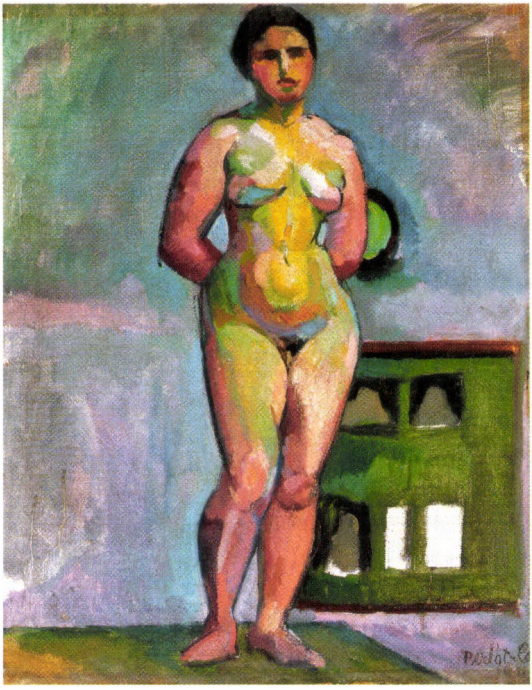
23 ■ See Note 7.

24 ■ See: László Mravik: *"Sacco di Budapest" Depredation of Hungary. 1938–1949.* Budapest, MNG, 1998; László Mravik: "Hungary's Pillaged Art Heritage. Part 2." *The Hungarian Quarterly.* Vol. 39, Summer 1998, No. 5, pp. 53–78.

Dezső Czigány: *Actress (Actress in Yellow Hat)*, cca 1907, oil on canvas, 53,4 x 39,8 cm. Rippl-Rónai Museum, Kaposvár.

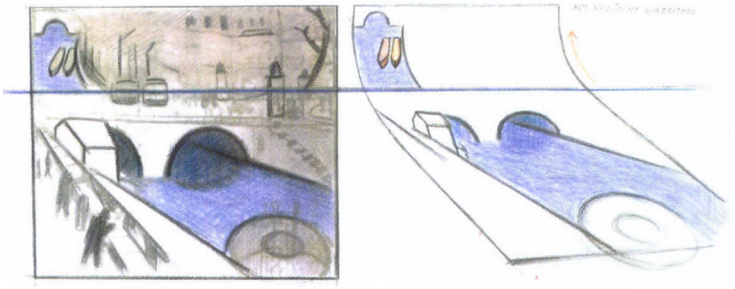


Dezső Czigány: *Portrait of Two Women*, 1909, oil on cardboard, 79.8 x 61.6 cm. Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs.



Vilmos Perlrott Csaba: *Female Nude,* 1910, oil on canvas, cardboard, 52 x 41 cm. Rippl-Rónai Museum, Kaposvár.

Vilmos Perlrott Csaba: *School of Painters,* 1907, oil on canvas, 66 x 80 cm. Hungarian Embassy, Berlin.

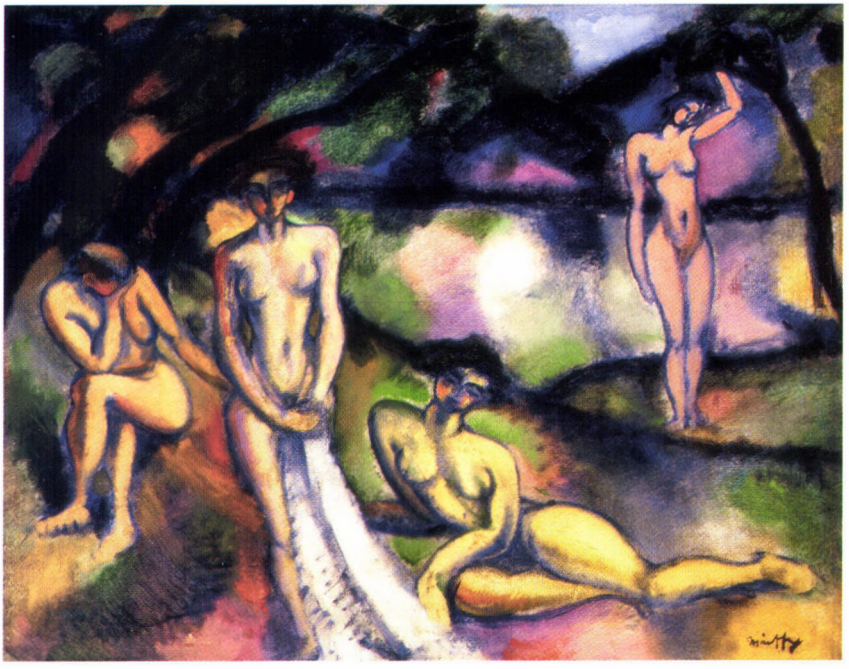


Raising the background
to a perpendicular in
Pont Saint-Michel
by Lajos Tihanyi.
Drawing by Gyula Kemény.

Lajos Tihanyi: *Pont Saint-Michel,* 1908,
oil on canvas, 55 x 65 cm. Private collection.

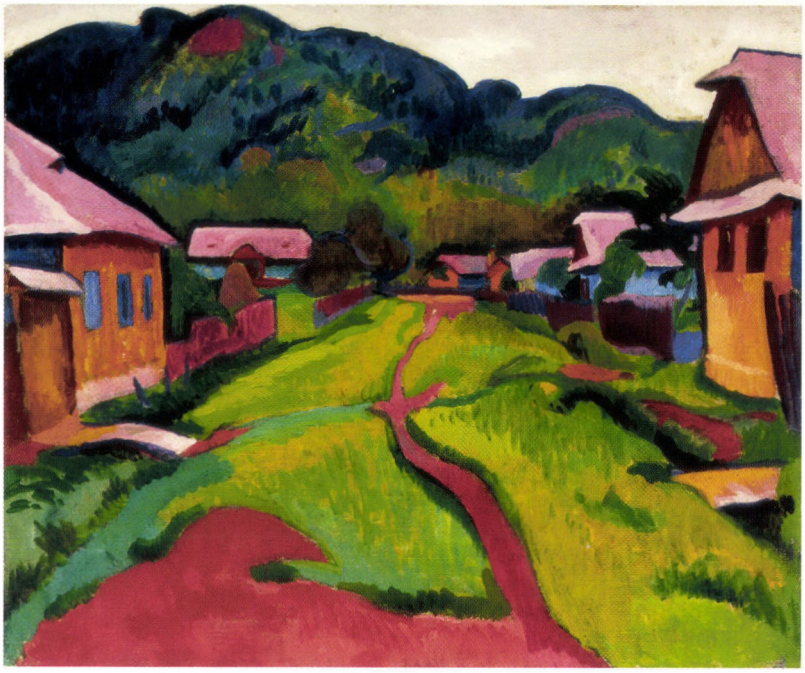
Róbert Berény: *Portrait of György Bölöni,* 1906, oil on canvas, 70 x 46 cm. Private collection.

Ödön Márffy: *Boy and Girl on Green Bench,* 1908, oil on canvas, 95 x 115 cm. Private collection.



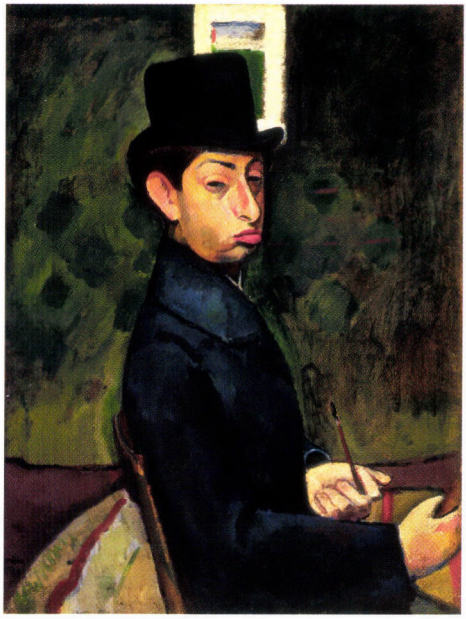
Ödön Márffy: *Female Bathers (Composition with Nudes),* 1909, oil on canvas, 78 x 96.5 cm. Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs.

Vilmos Perlrott Csaba: *Boys Bathing,* cca. 1911, oil on canvas, 77.5 x 91 cm. Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs.

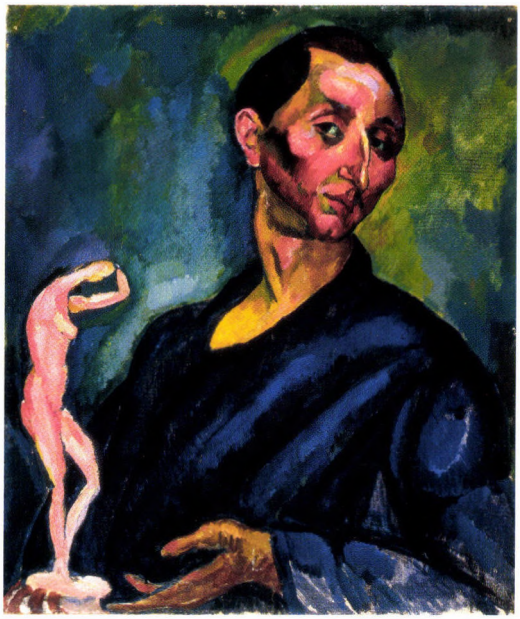


Géza Bornemisza: *Veresvíz Street in Nagybánya,*
cca. 1910, oil on canvas, 55 x 67 cm. Private collection.

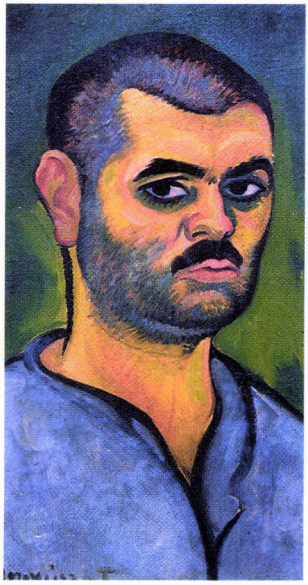
Sándor Ziffer: *Red Gate,* 1908, oil on canvas, 55.5 x 65 cm.
Private collection.



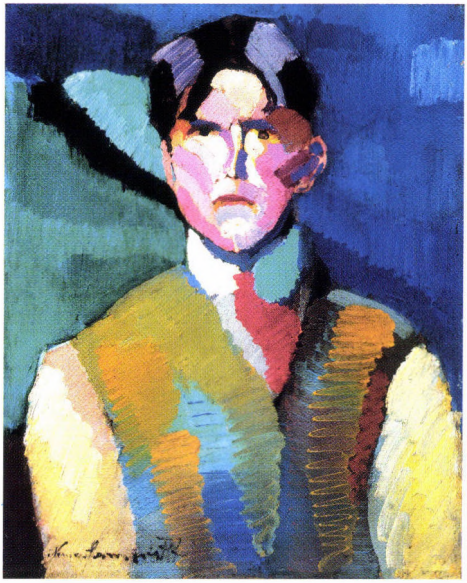
Róbert Berény: *Self-portrait in Top Hat,*
1907, oil on canvas, 79 x 60 cm.
Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs.



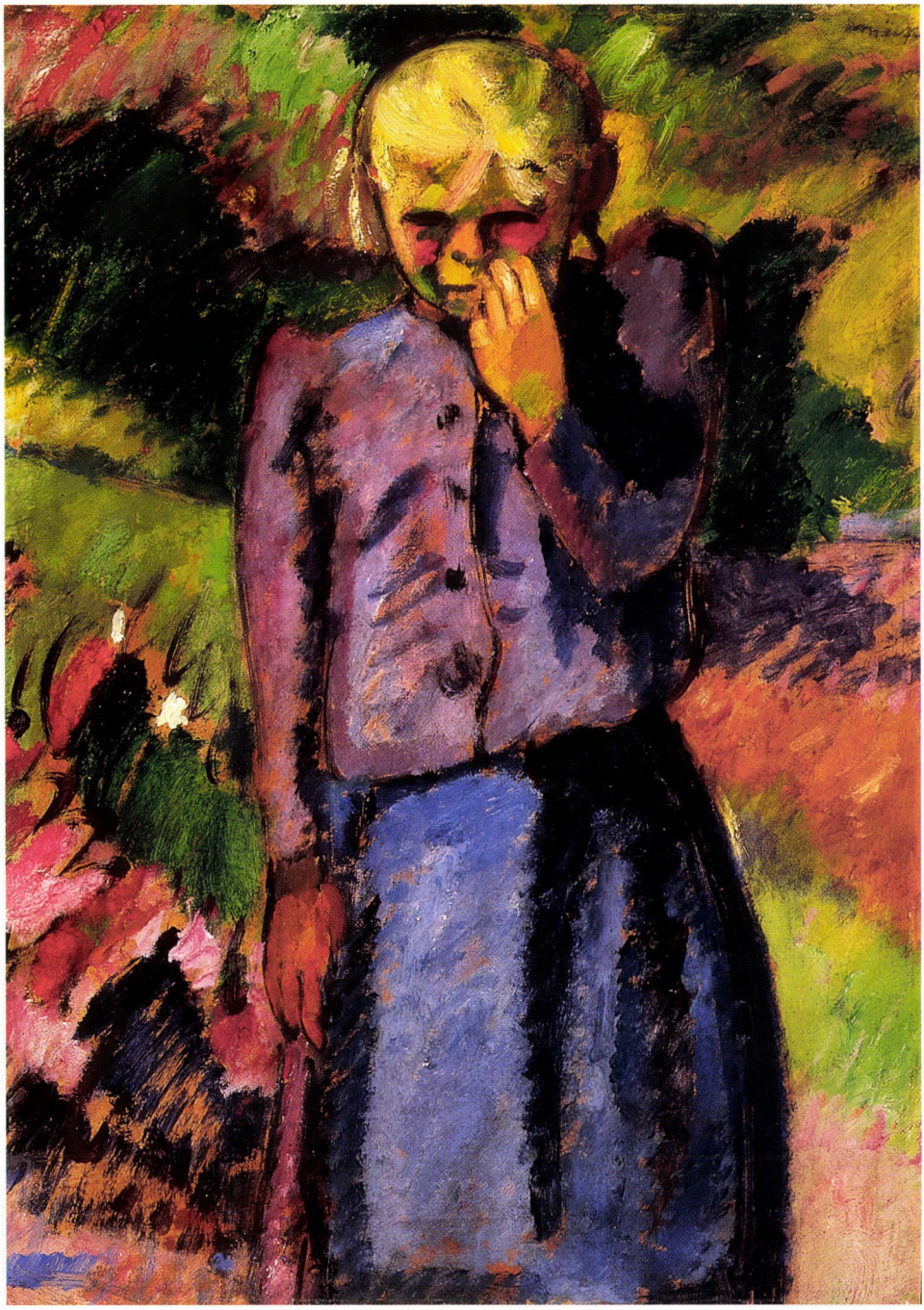
Vilmos Perlrott Csaba: *Self-portrait with Statue,*
cca. 1910, oil on canvas, 76.5 x 64 cm.
Tamás Kieselbach Collection.



Tibor Boromisza: *Self-portrait,* 1910,
oil on cardboard, 50 x 26 cm,
Municipal Gallery, Székesfehérvár.



József Nemes Lampérth: *Self-portrait,*
1911, oil on canvas, 75 x 60 cm.
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.



Ödön Márffy: *Girl form Nyerges (Peasant Girl from Nyerges)*,
1908, oil on cardboard, 88.5 x 62 cm.
Private collection.

behind. The majority of them were to perish over the next few years. Paintings, whose existence we know of only from contemporary critics may re-emerge after nearly a century of obscurity, but one cannot be optimistic.

This exhibition was partly made possible because a few pioneering commercial art galleries made it their task to reconstruct the Hungarian artistic heritage from the early 1990s on by painstakingly locating important paintings, often rescuing them from total oblivion. At first, they focused on the works of the half-forgotten second generation of Nagybánya painters. Notably the MissionArt Gallery's two founders, the art historians László Jurecskó and Zsolt Kishonty, organized a pioneering Nagybánya show in Miskolc,[25] and it was also they who published the first documentary volumes on several oeuvres which had not previously been recorded (Tibor Boromisza, Oszkár Nagy, Gizella Dömötör, Hugo Mund).

The rehabilitation of the Neo group of Nagybánya required a turn in Hungarian art historiography, for which MissionArt provided crucial documentation. By supplying a rich database and freshly published primary sources,[26] MissionArt Gallery enabled a new generation of art historians to re-integrate many forgotten artists into the national canon. The official canon, fixed by four decades of shifting ideological control began to fall apart rapidly when other commercial galleries followed suit. Among them were the two most important auction houses, Tamás Kieselbach's Gallery and Judit Virág's Mű-Terem Gallery. These two houses restored the turn-of-the-century practice of promoting art exhibitions independently of the 'established' institutional system. They searched for hidden treasures in neglected provincial and private art collections; and they even managed to coax back to Hungary some lost masterpieces from the descendants of emigrant families. For those who missed the exhibitions and regular auctions where these works were shown, there are the two huge volumes published by Tamás Kieselbach[27] and the publications of the Mű-Terem Gallery,[28] available for study. Between them they offer an alternative overview of modern Hungarian painting since the 1890s, and their challenge of the canon has provoked the long overdue discussion about a number of issues thus raised.

25 ■ László Jurecskó–Zsolt Kishonthy (eds.). Nagybánya—Nagybányai festészet a neósok fellépésétől 1944-ig (Nagybánya Painting at Nagybánya from the Start of the 'Neo's' until 1944). Miskolc, MissionArt Galéria 1992.

26 ■ *Nagybánya Könyvek* (Nagybánya Books). Eight volumes, among them an excellent scholarly documentation compiled by Árpád Timár of the critical writings published in the Hungarian press between 1896–1909 on the Nagybánya art colony and on its artists, *A nagybányai művészet és művésztelep a magyar sajtóban 1896–1909* (The Artist's Colony of Nagybánya and Its Art in the Hungarian Press 1896–1909). Miskolc, MissionArt Galéria, 1997. See also Edith András–Mária Bernáth (eds.): Válogatás a nagybányai művészek leveleiből. 1893–1944. (Selected Letters by Nagybánya Painters) Nagybánya könyvek 8. Miskolc, MissionArt Galéria, 1997.

27 ■ Tamás Kieselbach (ed.): *Modern Hungarian Painting I.* Budapest, Kieselbach, 2004 and *Modern Hungarian Painting II. 1919–1964.* Budapest, Kieselbach, 2005.

28 ■ *The Hidden Treasures of Hungarian Painting—Selection from Hungarian Private Collections* I. Budapest, Mű-Terem, 2004. Second volume 2005.

Amidst discussions and debates, the trend of rediscovery continues. Just a week before the National Gallery opened its *Vadak* show, the Kieselbach Gallery was exhibiting a so far unkown private collection of Kernstok's and Berény's paintings, highlighting a missing link in the oeuvre of a painter who was the doyen (though not necessarily the most brilliant) of the Eight. Hopefully some of these works will also appear in a major public show to follow on chronologically from the present one.

The aim of the exhibition of Hungarian *Fauves* was threefold: firstly to reconstruct the exact chronology of the artists who belonged to the generation of 1905—the radical avant-garde. Secondly, to discover the intricate connections between the French *Fauves* and the young Hungarians studying and working in Paris between 1903 and 1914 and to reconstruct how they networked within the Parisian art scene. And, finally, to discern the stylistic cohesion, along with clear distinctions, between these individual artists.

Róbert Berény in his Paris studio, cca. 1906–1907. Photograph by Margit Vészi. Private collection.

The scholars who set about this threefold task have had to tread carefully and find the right words in order to clarify whether this handful of young painters, particularly Béla Czóbel, Ödön Márffy and Róbert Berény, may be labelled as genuine *Fauves* or not, whether they can be meaningfully placed in the international canon of the Parisian avant-garde. The exhibition—and the Catalogues—demonstrate that young Hungarian painters were not only present at the birth of modernity when *Fauve* tendencies were taking shape in Paris, but also that these painters (first and foremost Czóbel) were recognised and accepted as allies by their French colleagues and some critics; furthermore, they played an active part in elaborating and disseminating radical modernity, which many surveys still identify as having begun with the *Fauves*.

If this conclusion seems rather a footling issue for the layman, those acquainted with the workings of art history and with the thinly veiled snobbery that underlies decision-making over international exhibitions will recognize that these are important issues for a small country—one whose painting more or less dis-

appeared from the European cultural consciousness for more than fifty years. Indeed, with the exception of a handful of exiles, not a single Hungarian painter has found a place in the international canon![29]

The canon is important because it determines the status of an individual artist's work when it comes to the global competition in staging appealing cultural events. Obviously, too, it influences the reciprocity (or lack of it) in exhibition loans and also has implications which may lie outside aesthetic considerations but are far from negligible. Art has a vital role in the image that any country wishes to project, even (or perhaps especially) in these days of economic and political globalization. Apart from its music, Hungarian culture remains in the realm of that fascinatingly 'ethnic' world that is thought of as lying at the periphery of Europe. A visit to the Hungarian National Gallery is frequently missing even from the program of up-market cultural tours. Those drawing them up may consider the Museum of Fine Arts a safer bet, on account of its Grecos and Goyas, or the 'Esterházy' Madonna by Raphael. Hardly anybody comes to Budapest to discover Hungarian painting for its own sake; and yet, in terms of sophistication, it can reasonably claim a distinctive and distinguished national school of modern painting.

The Hungarian National Gallery's exhibition was at least five years in the making and is scheduled to be seen in France in the Musée d'Art moderne in Céret between June and October 2008. From there it will be transferred to the Musée départemental in Le Cateau-Cambrésis, Matisse's birthplace, (October 2008–February 2009) then, probably, to the Musée des Beaux Arts in Dijon. The perseverance of Krisztina Passuth (who herself lived in Paris for two decades and knows only too well the attitude of her Western European counterparts towards the national schools of painting in Central Europe), likewise the persistence of numerous Hungarian art historians and dealers (who want at least to make Hungarian painting known, if it cannot yet be properly appreciated), cannot be too highly esteemed. All are engaged in the search for a *lingua franca* that will open up a dialogue with their Western (in this case French) colleagues. This is why so many of the studies in the present Catalogues wrestle with the issue as to whether a handful of young Hungarian painters exhibiting in Paris in 1905–1910 belonged to the *Fauves* or not. In fact, all are fascinating painters in their own right, offering differing individual syntheses of the various 'isms.' Most importantly, they created a specifically Hungarian version of radical modernity, one which is always boldly colourful, never totally abstract, but is imbued by true artistic passion within its self-contained world, and produced paintings that are a joy to see. Can there be a more exacting test of enduring relevance and quality? ❧

29 ■ László Moholy-Nagy, Marcel Breuer and Victor Vasarely are the universally accepted names, all others are marginal, even if they found a niche in the post-1945 international art market (e.g. Simon Hantai, Tibor Csernus etc.). Although from the 1970s onwards a few Hungarian art historians tried to bring the works of the Hungarian Activists and Constructivists (especially Kassák) into the limelight, only a few professionals know about them and acknowledge their historical position, whereas Russian Constructivists, even minor figures, are well known internationally.

Tibor Hajdu

The Confession of János Kádár

We are publishing a translation of the text of Kádár János's last speech, taken from the minutes of the meeting of the Central Committee (CC) of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP) as the Communist Party of Hungary was then known. The ailing János Kádár addressed the CC three months before his death on 12 April, 1989.[1]

It is no easy matter to understand the text in its original Hungarian, let alone translate it into another language. Nevertheless, for anyone with an interest in Kádár's role in the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, it repays the trouble of puzzling out what he might have meant since, other than in broad generalities, he never spoke about this subject—not even to close associates or his official biographer. He felt obliged to speak up, not so much by his conscience, but by an anxiety that amounted to a persecution mania, a need to place his own version on record before he died and was made the defenceless scapegoat for a course of events that was not of his choosing. Anxiety, often raised to the point of madness, is the common destiny of dictators in the twilight of their rule. Precisely because they have suppressed freedom of speech, they have no way of knowing what fate will await them should they be toppled. It is conceivable that a Stalin or his Hungarian clone Rákosi, a Horthy or a Franco would not have clung so tenaciously to power if they had been able to hope that their enemies would show them any mercy. This is a mental condition that has become familiar to us thanks to Shakespeare's plays or Mussorgsky's operatic portrayal of Boris Godunov. Kádár's last soliloquy is in the same line.

Kádár's anxiety, or the guilty conscience that he was seeking to quieten, centred on a number of specific issues—that is blazingly evident even seen through all the

1 ■ The best of all the publications about Kádár's post-1956 career are two books by Tibor Huszár: *Kádár János politikai életrajza.* 2. kötet. 1957. november–1959. június (A Political Biography of János Kádár, vol. 2, November 1957–June 1959), Budapest: Szabad Tér and Kossuth Kiadó, 2003, and *Kádár — A hatalom évei 1956–1989* (Kádár: The Years of Power, 1956–1989), Budapest, Corvina, 2006.

Tibor Hajdu's *books include* A magyarországi Tanácsköztársaság *(The Hungarian Soviet Republic, 1969) and a biography (1987). He also edited the correspondence (1990–91, 2002) of Count Mihály Károlyi.*

tortured phraseology of his dissolving mind. He makes no apologies for the one-party system of the Communist dictatorship, of which he remained an out-and-out supporter to the end; nor for what he considered the justified persecution of his country's pre-1945 ruling class; nor for the role of Russian lieutenant that he accepted in a historical situation that was predetermined.

Although he was no longer capable of distinguishing between what he wished to say and incidental matters (his own and his wife's illness, an interview about his career that he had been asked to give with the approval of his successor as Party General Secretary, Károly Grósz), the leitmotif of the confused text is to exculpate himself from his part in the events of the 1956 Revolution. This was an obsessive preoccupation by that stage of his life, but it acquired added force through the fact that the CC had agreed at its previous session of 20–21 February—after heated debate, but without consulting Kádár—that the events of 1956 should no longer be officially categorised as a 'counter-revolution' but as a 'popular uprising'—which may not have been quite the same as a full-blown revolution, but was considerably closer to that.

Hungarian public opinion was never able to accept the characterisation of the events of 1956 as a counter-revolution, but that was the term that was grimly clung to as late as 1989 by Kádár and all the others who held responsibility for the bloody reprisals—first and foremost, obviously, because otherwise they would have been obliged to view their own roles in a much darker light. If the popular unrest was not a counter-revolution, then by what right had they bloodily put it down? Might they not be held to account for that as the Soviet bloc collapsed?

Kádár was renowned for being the Soviet-satellite leader who strove most consistently over a long period of time, within the bounds of what was possible, to loosen the grip of Moscow—in order to win greater room to manoeuvre and to cultivate links with the West. After Brezhnev's death in 1982, one might have expected him to try to reduce that dependence even further. However, the opposite happened. The seventy-year-old Kádár was plainly alarmed by the premonitory signs of the Soviet bloc's collapse and a reordering of the international balance of power. Illness was a further contributory factor—or rather, it would be truer to say that fear and illness exacerbated one another. Though he did not speak about it, he became increasingly apprehensive about the possibility that he might have to answer for the fate of Imre Nagy and his associates, for the years of terror and political purges that prevailed in Hungary after 1956.[2]

2 ■ It is estimated that around 22,000 sentences for alleged offences relating to the Revolution were passed by Hungarian courts between 1959 and 1967. The majority of these were for long terms (years) of imprisonment. Many were sentences of death, 229 of which were actually carried out. In addition, something to the order of 13,000 individuals were held in internment camps without trial by any court, and that, of course, says nothing about the consequences for family members. During the few weeks that Hungary's border to the West was open, anywhere between 220,000 and 250,000 people are thought to have left the country.

Even during his final years, Kádár was unwilling to countenance the idea of revising the official line of referring to the events as a counter-revolution, though it has to be said that he also did not contemplate imposing any retaliatory measures on people who increasingly came forward in public with demands of that kind. He was just as unwilling to respond even to Gorbachev's reforms after 1985, which was why at the HSWP's extraordinary national conference in late May 1988, the more flexible in the Hungarian Party leadership apparatus successfully conspired to remove Kádár from his position, replacing him with Károly Grósz as General Secretary. True, Kádár was elected Party Chairman, but this was a post that had not existed before and was really a ceremonial title. The new leaders avoided any association with him, including discussion of any plans or actions, even though that was what he was expecting. In effect, then, they sought to isolate Kádár while Imre Pozsgay, one of the defining reformers in the new Party leadership, was placed in charge of a sort of program committee, one subcommittee which was to work out how the Party's historical path was to be reassessed.

The aim from the outset was to rescind the characterisation of 1956 as a counter-revolution. The preliminaries, however, progressed slowly—or rather, stagnated—due to worries as to how Kádár and his supporters—even Grósz—might react. In the end, Imre Pozsgay, in a surprise move while Grósz was paying a visit to Switzerland, chose to make the decision public before it had been submitted for CC ratification. (The lengthy report that formed the basis of this proposal was drafted by Iván T. Berend, then President of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and also a CC member.)

Kádár was still in the CC chair at the start of the meeting on 20–21 February 1989, where the proposal was eventually accepted after a heated discussion; however, there was no way of knowing if he actually understood what the debate was about. All the same, clearly, the fact that the Revolution was being rehabilitated and the possible implications were troubling his murky consciousness.

Around then, András Kanyó, a staff reporter on the party newspaper *Népszabadság* and an old acquaintance of Kádár's, had asked him for an interview, with Grósz's knowledge. It is unlikely that there was any political objective behind this, except perhaps to give Kádár something to do. His unquiet mind, however, jumped to conclusions; and being the last person who would accept that his person and an interview with him no longer possessed any political significance, he may well have seen it as preparing the way for an impending impeachment. One sign of that was his forbidding the use of a tape recorder and asking that he be allowed to give written replies to the questions, as if he were seeking to spin the process by all available means.

Meanwhile, two days before the next scheduled CC meeting, on 12 April, Kádár asked Grósz if he could take part. It seems that what may have been bothering him was a recollection that, in the past, the CC had been in the habit of discussing the 'crimes' of disgraced former members in their absence—László Rajk, Géza

Losonczy, Imre Nagy and, indeed, Kádár himself come to mind— thus prejudging the sentence that would be passed on them by the invariably pliant judiciary. Kádár was palpably striving in what he said to defend himself personally against the imagined charges. Grósz, who for his part did not have the slightest intention of initiating proceedings against Kádár, either at that meeting or later, tried to dissuade him from putting in an appearance, as it was perfectly obvious that his health and mind were deteriorating rapidly. The more he tried to talk him out of attending, however, the more Kádár insisted on being there, so that in the end, Grósz felt he could not forbid him. Kádár's personal physician, Professor György Rétsági, also advised him against being present, and especially against speaking, but no doubt those repeated pleas were also misconstrued.

Let us therefore turn to analysing the address that Kádár gave, bearing in mind that, by then, the tape recording of all CC sessions was long established practice. In the spring of 1989, the range of charges that could be levelled openly in Hungary, and against which Kádár sensed a need to defend himself, included:

1) his role in the suppression of the 1956 Revolution, in the subsequent reprisals and, above all, in the execution of Imre Nagy and his Communist associates;

2) the extent of his collaboration in these acts with the Soviet occupying power, his support for intervention, his flight from Budapest to the Soviet Union on 1 November 1956, and the betrayal of Imre Nagy and other cabinet ministers (on these charges, his tactic would be to shift as much of the blame as he could onto Nagy's shoulders);

3) in his own words: *"...the main charge against me was that I was a Soviet agent. But I was not a Soviet agent, and I say this as responsibly as I possibly can— what is more, I can prove it to you."* His emphasis on something that may seem just a fine point of detail today was clearly very important to him;

4) his role as Minister of the Interior, during 1948–1950, in the various show trials of that era—that of László Rajk, in the first place. His text is laced with attempts to excuse himself, and in doing so, he takes the very strange line that he was unaware of the true nature of the trials until as late as 1961.

The bulk of the confused, poorly phrased and incomplete statements can be interpreted, albeit only with some difficulty, in the light of the above considerations.

Let me reiterate: no Hungarian politician was seeking to cause trouble for Kádár or call him to account; all that leading opposition and government politicians wished for was to rid themselves of his presence as quickly and smoothly as possible. (One feature of Hungary's 'soft' transition was that even after the 1989–90 change of régime, no legal charges were proferred against, let alone sentences passed on, leading political or police figures of the post-1956 period.) Kádár was not summoned to appear before the CC; quite the contrary, when he himself presented his demand that he be allowed to defend himself at the CC meeting against the charges that were tormenting him, his short-term successor Károly Grósz tried to talk him out of it. The CC had more urgent matters

to deal with than what was preying on the mind of a sick old man, and it was only because they felt obliged by good manners that they heard him out.

The deposed dictator repeats in his extreme anxiety. *"They can shoot me for all I care." "I wouldn't even care if somebody blew my brains out."* Yet he is equally dismayed by the thought that no one is paying any attention to him as if he were irrelevant, as if he did not exist—he who for 33 years had been used to being the most important person in Hungary. As he complains in his speech, no one sought his advice and not only Grósz, but Grósz's secretary (Major) was unwilling to speak to him. He wished to stand in the spotlight one more time, at a meeting of the CC, in front of all those people who had hung on his every word for decades on end and were now ignoring him. Going against his doctor's orders, this is vital for him—the only thing that is. *"I have become a scapegoat in the biblical sense,"* he says, as though even that function were better than nothing.

As yet, there is no consensus on Kádár's place in history. Some people consider him to be the outstanding figure in twentieth-century Hungarian public life. Even more attribute to him a superhuman role in the negative sense—as if he had invited the Russians into Hungary or detained them there, as if he had blocked the forces of progress during the 70s and 80s. For my own part, I take neither of those views; because, long though he was in power, Kádár did not initiate any new direction in Hungary's history; he brought no original concept into play. At first, during the Stalinist era, as one of the administrators of the policies laid down by the Party's General Secretary, Mátyás Rákosi, and later, after the fall of both Rákosi and Nagy, he sought to do no more than steer a middle course between the two, one that Moscow could accept. He, too, was Moscow's lieutenant at a time when the Soviet Union made a number of dramatic policy turns that he was invariably obliged to follow—and the truth is that, between 1945 and 1989, no one else who might have wielded power in Hungary would have been able to act differently. He did agree to shoulder that task, and whatever the considerable successes that can be pointed to, this limits his significance. Rather than a truly 'great man', he was more the right man at the right time.

Kádár himself is quite up-front about his lack of conspicuous personal qualities. *"I am a simple man, I had little schooling,"* he characterises himself with debatable modesty, which in itself may be one of the traits that qualified him as the right man. The fact is he never really wanted to acquire any learning to make up for what he had missed out on in his youth, and the Soviet leaders with whom he mostly had to deal—Khrushchev and Brezhnev, in particular—were no better educated, so it may well have been advantageous to be seen as having a similar background. There is one place in the soliloquy where he admits that, after a while, he understood what was being said to him in Russian. (It was received knowledge that he had never lived outside Hungary and spoke no foreign languages.) Nevertheless, he thought it better to pretend that he needed the services of an interpreter. The "simple man" image helped at home as well. It is curious how—even long past the time when Hungary and, indeed, Communist officials themselves were heartily sick

of ostentatiously highbrow Party intellectuals like Rákosi, Jewish and non-Jewish alike—the public at large was won over by this reticent, slow-talking Hungarian working man, simple even in his appearance, yet known to be fond of hunting and playing cards, even to be partial to the odd discreet dram of brandy—along with his even simpler wife. People just like us, as it were.

That very temperateness saved him from unnecessary excesses; indeed, there were times when, in the interests of avoiding excesses, he would cautiously stand up even to the Russians if need be. Still, the "slave to compromise", as he styled himself, more often found ways of driving a bargain. He had people put away, but no more than he considered absolutely unavoidable; and, the last years apart, his sleep was not troubled by any spectres. He felt he had done what had to be done. In the end, it was not an awakened conscience that plagued him, but fear of being made to answer for his actions. Kádár was never able to accept the re-evaluation of those actions. Indeed, he basically rejected it, was unwilling to condemn the role he himself had played, and had no regrets about it, seeking only to explain why he did what he did (unlike András Hegedűs, the Prime Minister between April 1955 and October 1956, who later exercised self-criticism to the extent that by the late 60s, he had turned himself into a leading reform-minded academic sociologist).

Thus, it is uncertain what Kádár meant by more than once saying *"Bocsánatot kérek"*—a turn of phrase that can be alternately translated as "Excuse me", "I beg your pardon", but even as "I apologise" or "please, forgive me." There are those who argue that using this simple phrase was Kádár's way of expressing, repeatedly in the text, a wish to seek forgiveness for his role in putting down the 1956 Revolution. For my part, I believe that the context and the way he says these words on the tape recording indicate that he only wanted to underline what he was saying or to get attention.

In my view, if there is any trace of self-criticism in the text, that is his assertion that he personally did not label the events as a counter-revolution (which is a vast untruth). *"The only thing I said was that they opened the door to counter-revolution."* This is a point to which he returns: *"I can't help it if such questions arise after thirty-two years and so many Party congresses and conferences later. Please note, though, that no one has ever pronounced judgment whether it was called a counter-revolution or a popular uprising. When I gave my statement back then, I said quite clearly, a peaceful student demonstration, and then an uprising. I didn't characterise the events as some kind of counter-revolution. And I was referring both to the participants and the sequence of events. Otherwise no one will understand why I spoke the way I did".* And, he argues, *"when unarmed people... were murdered as in a pogrom... these people were killed well before Imre Nagy and his associates."* It is clear that in saying this, he blames the latter for the isolated lynchings of security policemen and others that occurred during the upheaval.

That is not to say that the reprisals, including the executions, did not weigh heavily on his mind. It is striking that wherever possible, he does not refer by name

to Imre Nagy (see the chilly phrase *"the man who has since deceased"*) or to the others (such as Losonczy and Pál Maléter) who were murdered or hanged with him. He also avoids naming Tito and uses a very roundabout allusion to Petru Groza, the Romanian post-Second World War Prime Minister: *"the first prime minister was a man with his home in Transylvania, where he founded a Romanian political party, and it would have been inconceivable for this man to persecute Hungarians..."*. He likewise does not use names in talking about Ceauşescu or Dalibor Soldatić, the Yugoslav ambassador to Budapest in 1956—who was charged by his government first to grant the request by Imre Nagy and other members of his government to be given asylum in the embassy; and subsequently, to allow them to be abducted by Soviet troops. These are evidently all names that awaken painful memories. The thought of Romania in particular—the country to which Nagy and the others were deported on 22 November 1956—invariably reminds him of something else, such as the Babeş-Bolyai University of Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca) *"that they promised"*—setting him off on all manner of digressions about his international successes, from the understandings he reached with Mrs Thatcher to the signing of the Final Accords of the Helsinki Agreement.

Behind these ramblings are a quite different promise, one to which he eventually turns: *"these two men's request was that they be free to depart and return to their homes."* Here he is presumably referring to Imre Nagy and Géza Losonczy, although there were also others in the group who were promised a safe-conduct to their homes if they would leave the Yugoslav Embassy. This was evidently especially troublesome for Kádár, because it involved an outright lie. He must surely have been aware that Nagy and the others in his entourage would be whisked away from the embassy entrance, and he certainly knew that he was in no position to give any guarantees about their being returned to their homes. All he had asked in return was that Nagy and his associates *"issue a statement... you know very well what this means for people to whom the legality of government is important... affirming that the legality of the Party is most important"*—or, in other words, requiring them to recognise the legality of the Kádár administration. Nagy, however, would not agree to do that, any more than he had been willing to make a written request for Russian military assistance on 30 October. A way round this problem was hit on by András Hegedűs, Nagy's predecessor as Prime Minister, who declared that if that was all that was at stake, then he would sign an antedated letter.

This is why Kádár says, *"I see him* [viz. Hegedűs] *as a saintly man, whatever he writes, for he assumed all the responsibility back then. Because he knew, too, that the Soviet government, whether he was on Soviet soil or wherever, insisted on the prime minister's signature on the request for intervention."* In 1968, when Hegedűs signed a written protest condemning the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact forces, Kádár treated this saintly man differently from Nagy. He expelled him from the Party and had him dismissed from his post as Director of the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences—that's all. After all, *"he assumed all the responsibility back then"*, he remarks. Quite.

On the matter of his flight to the Soviet Union on 1 November 1956 (along with Ferenc Münnich and others who subsequently became members of the Kádár administration), Kádár emphasises that he had felt obliged to take that course: *"the four men in public positions who broke with Imre Nagy's government practically had to flee."* By saying this, he is possibly rejecting the then widespread account of events whereby he was forcibly removed from Hungary by Münnich and the Russians, which means he is accepting that he switched sides, though he suggests that events after they landed took a different course from what he had anticipated. Thus, he was obliged to sign a declaration and was a de facto prisoner until he got back to Szolnok, *"when I was again free to move about"... "My life and many other people's lives depended on my saying what I had to say,"* and that was why he promised what he did. The ensuing confused explanation concerns the declaration, as edited by Erzsébet Andics, which appeared in the *Szabad Nép* newspaper printed at Szolnok. Thus, he does not deny his defection, nor that he made the journey to Moscow.

What he denies most vehemently, though, is that he was ever a Soviet agent in any shape or form. Had he been, then he would have known about the show trials in Moscow and elsewhere much earlier, as he argues later on. It is conceivable that Kádár also wants to make clear that he did not belong to Hungary's Muscovite Communists—Imre Nagy among them—who returned to the country after the war and were so tightly sequestered from 'home-grown' fellow Communists that they never discussed Stalin's show trials prior to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, in February 1956, where Khrushchev attacked the Stalinist cult of personality. It is even conceivable that the name of the game only began to dawn on Kádár in 1948–49, when he was actively engaged in laying the groundwork for László Rajk's trial in October 1949.[3] However, it is rather far-fetched to expect people to believe that he was unaware of the leaked contents of Khrushchev's 'secret' speech in 1956 (when these were being spread by American leaflets dropped from the air) and that it was only after the 22nd Party Congress (in 1961) that he came to know the truth about the show trials. Khrushchev had already said plenty in 1956; but even in 1961, there were still many things that he kept quiet about, including the fate of Communists who had fled to the Soviet Union from Hungary and elsewhere before the war. As Kádár notes: *"I hope I'll live to see the day when Soviet leaders will indulge in a little self-criticism in this matter."*

3 ■ Kádár was Rajk's successor as Minister of the Interior during 1948–1950. After Kádár's appointment, the State Security Office (ÁVH and later ÁVÓ) was removed from the Ministry of the Interior's jurisdiction as it laid the groundwork for the Rajk trial, with Kádár only becoming involved at the time of the actual arrests (in May 1949). Hence he would not have been aware of many of the details or the methods that were adopted, and he may only have learned something while the case was in progress. Since he did not belong to the inner circle of the KGB's network of Hungarian agents, Kádár would in some respects have remained an outsider even during the trial itself; however, he did attend some of Rajk's interrogation, was given certain information about the case, and on two occasions he used that information to provide progress reports on preparations for the trial to meetings of the CC.

With this clumsy, pathetic misrepresentation, Kádár is seeking to mix up the chronology of events. The idea that he only started to stumble upon, as late as 1948, what he had become involved in as Minister of the Interior is just about plausible. There are eyewitness accounts of how sick he was while being obliged to watch the executions of Rajk and his fellow 'conspirators'. Still, even if that were true, he must have grasped what was going on, and how non-existent the legal basis for these trials was, when he himself was arrested in 1951.

What makes the post-1956 reprisals particularly gruesome is the fact that Khrushchev had denounced the flimsy basis of the Soviet show trials in February 1956, only months before the Revolution; so not only was this common knowledge, it was also a subject of discussion for years afterwards, which is no doubt why the successive Soviet Party Congresses of 1956, 1959 and 1961 became jumbled up in Kádár's increasingly disordered mind. The lessons from the Moscow show trials were drawn by Khrushchev and his colleagues in 1956. After that date, no leading Soviet politician was made to face execution. Yet, they still pushed Kádár, bequeathing the crime to him as it were, since the Kremlin played no formal part in the Hungarian executions. To that extent, Kádár truly was made a scapegoat.

The Rajk affair figures to a far lesser extent in Kádár's discourse—and thus, in his apprehensions and soul-searching—than does the trial of Imre Nagy and his associates. The arrests and sentencing of such people as Cardinal Mindszenty and other non-Communists during his term as Minister of the Interior do not receive so much as a mention. In order to understand the peculiar logic of these omissions, we have to try to see things from the point of view of the ailing Kádár.

That he played a leading part in the post-1956 retribution is obvious, and there is no point in his trying to deny it. At best, he can only seek to spread the blame to Khrushchev, Tito and Nagy himself, who he maintains could have extricated himself by agreeing to resign—unlikely though that seems. Kádár's role in the Rajk trial stank. It was important; still, it was not decisive, as the trial would have gone ahead without him. He had no say in the sentencing—he acted under the orders of, indeed was hoodwinked by, Rákosi and others. Rajk's rehabilitation—and his funeral on 6 October 1956, attended by 200,000 people—had enormous impact on the events to come. Since that time, however, while Kádár was in power, no discussion or publication of the details of the case were permitted and very little information was available, not just to the general public, but even to the historians and political scientists who dealt with the era. I personally, for instance, was aware that Kádár had participated in the interrogation of Rajk, and I was even familiar with the transcript of the destroyed tape recording with charges that Rajk 'confessed' to;[4] yet, I did not know that Kádár had reported on Rajk's 'crimes' to the CC leadership at a point in time when no formal charges had been laid, let

4 ■ See "The Party Did Everything for You. The Interrogation of László Rajk, 7 June 1949". Published with an introduction by Tibor Hajdu. *The Hungarian Quarterly,* Spring 1996, No. 141, pp. 83–99.

alone any court judgement reached. (These two reports, like much else that is held in state archives, are accessible, but have not been published to the present day.) In the case of Imre Nagy, by contrast, even if not all the details were known, the gist was public knowledge.

There is a psychological circumstance that should be noted. What counts before the court is the criminal act. Any injury that may have been inflicted on the accused counts, at best, as a secondary motive; and his fate after committing the crime is strictly irrelevant. Those who commit political misdemeanours may be judged by other standards if they personally happen to incur a similar fate subsequently. In most cases, those who also became victims of a Communist régime, expected to have expiated any earlier crimes of their own. From 1951 to 1954, Kádár was himself imprisoned as a victim of false charges; while his wife also faced persecution, being dismissed from her job and, as he does not fail to mention in this last speech, forced to undertake poorly paid manual labour. His point of view, then, is that having himself become a victim in 1951, that annuls his own previous transgressions. Though a court would not accept that as a defence, it was how a great many people still thought at that time—including, for example, individuals who had committed atrocities on the side of the Germans during the Second World War and later became Gulag inmates under the Communist regime. Nowadays, of course, no one would seriously argue that enduring a punishment acquits one of any crimes committed, least of all subsequently—in Kádár's case, his actions after 1954.

It is worth having another look at the stress placed on *"I was not a Soviet agent."* A Western reader might imagine there is no big moral gap between being minister of the interior in a Communist régime and being a Soviet agent. Apparently, it was not as simple as that. To the present day, we have no idea who exactly were the KGB's agents in Hungary— or anywhere else, for that matter. One can make guesses based on circumstantial evidence, but suspicions do not add up to evidence. The available facts suggest that the succession of Hungarian Communist Party members who became ministers of the interior after 1945—Imre Nagy, Rajk, Kádár and Sándor Zöld—were not Soviet agents. (One strong factor supporting this is the fact that Rajk, Kádár and Zöld, the three young 'home-grown' Party members who were not exiled in Moscow—and thus, never initiated into the secrets of the Muscovite camp—all sooner or later ran into conflict with the KGB's men and became its victims. Rajk was executed, Kádár imprisoned, and Zöld committed suicide just before his own arrest.) We do not even know for sure—though it seems reasonable to assume—that people like Gábor Péter, the head of the ÁVH, or General Mihály Farkas, the Minister of Defence, were in the KGB. The fact is that during the decade following 1944, Hungary's leadership circles were rather like the village of Kafka's Castle, where a chambermaid who *belonged* to the Castle was a more important and influential figure than the land surveyor or innkeeper who did not *belong,* even though there was no outward

acknowledgement of that affiliation. One witness has related to me that Hungarian police chief András Tömpe (who was also a Soviet Red Army colonel) once contradicted Farkas in a meeting, whereupon Politburo member József Révai, who happened to be leaving the room, whispered in his ear, "Tömpe, are you out of your mind to get into an argument with Farkas?" As a result, Gábor Péter, for example, was formally an underling of the Minister of the Interior, but in practice his superior. It was Rajk's tragedy that he did not learn this; whereas Kádár, for his part, did try to adapt to this situation—but maybe not enough.

What about the other matters that this confused train of thought tries to draw together? All dictators would like to be able to nominate their successor. János Kádár did that insofar as he accepted Károly Grósz and managed to get him accepted by Gorbachev, who was unwilling to have traffic with any other self-appointed candidate. The Communists of Kádár's own generation had died out by then, and he presumably felt that, among the younger ones, Grósz most resembled himself. Therefore, he accorded him great respect, being disappointed only that Grósz did not seek his advice, which he duly trots out. Preserve Party unity, don't allow multiple platforms to be established and rule with a strong fist. He, Kádár, will follow the same line: as a disciplined Party member, he would accept whoever was elected by secret ballot.

Kádár has ill-defined fears about how far the changes were going to go (*"Can we still use the word 'Comrade' here?"* or "[are we] *allowed to say Lenin's name*"), but the momentous changes Hungary was undergoing in those months—the economic crisis, the by then inexorable need to introduce a multi-party system, preparations for the withdrawal of the Soviet occupation army—are not uppermost in his mind. As one might expect of a lonely, sick old man, his own fate is what lies at the forefront of his concerns.

By an irony of fate, János Kádár died on the same date—6 July 1989—when the Presidential Division of the Supreme Court began its retrial of the case of Imre Nagy and his associates. ❧

I Was Not a Soviet Agent

János Kádár's Address to the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, April 12, 1989

I apologize for having asked for the floor first; this will be somewhat longer than usual. Some of you may not have heard me in a while; you should be able to take it. There are pluses and minuses to making off-the-cuff comments; prepared speeches, however, also have their disadvantages.

Allow me to make this remark: I have an illness, very similar to my wife's—weight loss. Both she and I keep losing weight. Medical opinion on this is as follows: My wife has been walking with a cane for the past five years, and the reason for this, and why she keeps losing weight, is because she underwent major stomach surgery while I was in prison. She was asked then to repudiate me, and when she refused, they forbade her to use her husband's name. She worked in a dismal basement workshop stuffing teddy bears with other women who, like her, were no longer that young. Once they recognized me there. They kept staring, amazed that she could put up with *their* knowing when I was sent to jail under *our* political system. I have another request to make. My problem is... the reason I am so forgetful, though most often I know what I want... and I am losing weight, too. My weight—I wonder if any of you ever thought I was bloated or paunchy—for years my weight remained constant. This is not confidential medical information; I don't only weigh myself in the doctor's office... The trouble with me is that my brain is in overdrive most of the time, and that takes a lot of energy. I didn't lose weight from my stomach, though. I always admit to my doctor that ever since I've been in a state where I can't talk, yet I am up and about, I have to weigh my words very responsibly.

You'll hear me say strange things today. What is my responsibility? Not what I said but what a Westerner was saying in the presence of Soviet tanks. He said that the Danube flows too swiftly. Plus I must think ahead when I'll be well and not sick; when an internist, my attending physician, a supervisory specialist says so. Not even he can say, no one can say how long my illness will last. It will certainly last longer than I reckoned on—at a time when the motor nerve in my hand had become paralysed. Not the sensory nerve, the motor nerve—I didn't even know they were two different things. Should my fingers get burnt I would be able to feel it but I wouldn't be able to move my thumb and my index finger.

All my life, whenever possible, I have spoken freely, without notes. And if I had to compose an important letter—I have witnesses for this—then I wrote it myself. All this in spite of the fact that I am a simple man, I had little schooling—four years of prewar elementary school and four years of prewar middle school, which was a little better then, they took things a little more seriously. A child learned to read and write at least; none of these unending reforms so that every year you start with a whole new system. And I will tell you something else; now I can. I once sat down with a group of people where I was sure my hang-ups would not get the better of me. I don't remember how many people were there, but I will declare in the presence of the Secretary General that he is not responsible for what I am going to say now. I was labouring under a misapprehension, you see. A misapprehension. He was heedless enough to... I asked him not to, since I wasn't just speaking for myself, I was bound by rules of order and discipline. If a cartoon shows three different people, it means the Party is at a loss, the membership is at sea. Then even if one person stands up, party members look in three directions. There may be a middle figure too, who will come to believe that all three people speak with authority. That's where my responsibility comes in.[1]

Whatever you may say from now on, whatever that will be, I will not mind. They can shoot me for all I care. I am fully aware of my own responsibility now, and I will never name names;[2] will never suggest a name, except the person you will elect by secret ballot. And please let me have lots of water; I am nervous.

The trouble isn't only that many young people and other non-professionals will be sure to ask: what kind of sickness does he have if he is able to walk around? I believe all of you know—excuse me, not all of you, only those who have remained members of the Central Committee—the difference between the way I spoke before and after my operation. The doctor says my problem is that I am weighed down by my own sense of responsibility, for there is such a thing, of course. Now that you, Comrade Grósz, as the new Secretary General, were elected by secret ballot, *you* are not obliged to mention anyone by name from among the people who attended the meeting at which all those present, I don't know how many exactly, kept saying to me: "You are the Chairman of the Party, after all". And they droned on that he won't speak up and why won't he—he *is* the Chairman.

I knew why and therefore said—everyone who is to be interviewed has the right to make such a request—that if the interviewer didn't first put his questions in writing, or if the interviewee didn't agree with the questions posed, then he could refuse by saying "I won't give an interview". The other thing is that according to the new Hungarian way everything has to be documented.[3] I am different now from

1 ■ Kádár felt anxious about Party unity and also the authority of Károly Grósz, his successor. "Three different people" refers to Grósz and two reformists, Imre Pozsgay and Rezső Nyers, who were co-opted by the leadership. The latter two made no secret of their own opinions when they issued statements—something that was natural at the time, but would have been inconceivable under Kádár.

2 ■ "I will never name names"—he will not have his say in the election of his successor or the new Party leadership.

what I was before. My illness has a lot to do with it; because I am racking my brains trying to give answers which would necessarily have to include that somebody like Comrade Péter or Comrade Grósz was there, in addition to others who may feel they are implicated—it's difficult to avoid this. Frankly, I can't think of anyone to whom I feel answerable right now.

My obsession stems from the following: If there is a recording device on the table and a picture is taken of that device, then I can't very well use a similar but hidden device. I don't want to use another word for it, because it's ugly, a jargon term.

Comrade Grósz is extremely considerate. And I think—this, too, can be documented, though not here: medical confidentiality in this case is binding, nobody can violate it, not even the doctors' superiors or the patient—I think therefore that I make my statements quite responsibly in order to satisfy even high-ranking men with no obligations to Hungary or her system of alliances.

Don't hold it against me that in my present condition I needed some notes; you may recall that after my operation I also needed them. I made no secret of this, and it is no reflection on the man who performed a very difficult operation—I want to be clear about this. He examined me around the beginning of

3 ■ The subject is the interview which he was asked to give and to which he keeps on referring, in and out of context. When speaking about his 1956 stay in the Transcarpathian Ukraine, on his way to Moscow, he gets back to the interview and reproaches those responsible for making secret documents available to the journalist.

Lajos Soós, MTI

János Kádár chairing a meeting of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party on February 20, 1989. At this heated meeting it was decided to rescind the description of 1956 as a 'counter-revolution'.

September and said that he could do it with local rather than full anesthesia, he was ready—when could I have the time for it? I just stared ahead and said and I would like to apologize to that doctor now, who practically invented hand surgery. I said then that the only time it could be done was 15 November, realizing that his time was precious too, and it was my health that was at stake, after all. I would be the one taking the risk, as it turned out later. He noted the date. I asked him how he was going to do it. To which he answered, it's going to be similar to the operation I had on my palm. After a nine-day stay in the hospital and other checkups, begging your pardon, I appeared here, at a Central Committee session. I had to open the session; there were rules about that, the Secretary General has to open the session. So I said 15 November. But what happened in the meantime, processes nobody knows, nobody could predict, not even the man who invented hand surgery. The doctor said not to worry: it's possible to drain all the blood from the arm. You have no idea what strides have been made in microsurgery, he said. That was true, I had no idea; it's not something I pay attention to.

But then, I don't want to guess too wildly, around three weeks before the operation was to take place, the motor nerves in my hand got paralysed. I had no way of knowing of course how long microsurgery involving one's hand would take when the motor nerves had become paralysed, no one could know, not even the professor who invented this form of surgery could know what went on inside. I should have made sure to let the Party leadership know that nerve paralysis had already set in; but I didn't say a word. I don't have to name any names, though, I told anyone willing to listen that I couldn't move the thumb and finger; the motor nerves in these two were shot.

What was I to do? I was at fault here. Why? Because I undertook to be here on 7 November. I had to show solidarity with the newly nominated power centre, as the Political Committee and the Presidential Council. I wanted them to know this even in my paralysed condition. I said the same to the person who had asked for the interview—I don't think this is much of a secret any more. Important people vouched for him, it doesn't matter who, I won't name anyone, I'll just say he was said to be an absolutely reliable individual. I ask, what does that mean, what made him absolutely reliable? He said he fought with a gun against the counter-revolutionaries in '56. Good God, I thought to myself, what if they do him in for conducting an interview with me.

But, as I said, I never dictate speeches which I intend to be informal, and I could cite plenty of examples to support this. I wouldn't even dare to name those who represented non-party people at which party congress. I wouldn't dare, because I wouldn't want these people to get it in the neck for what they may have said about positions taken by the Party at the time. I told the person who asked for the interview that I couldn't give him a date yet; that would have made it seem urgent. He said, in a few weeks perhaps, and again I can't help but withhold his name. I told him that I can't say for sure until after the surgery. And after the operation I did tell anyone willing to listen that that's what an operation like this was all about, it took a certain amount of time. But I decided—though I don't know to whom and why my presence

was important—because I had become a scapegoat in the biblical sense. They elected me Chairman of the Party and now they think that I am still protecting the Party and the system. By speaking first, I make sure that no one but I bear the responsibility, because *I* committed a grave error. I said that if I can still write down my name clearly, and can still make marginal notes, then, I said to everyone, I will request, regardless of what some people might say, I will request that I should somehow be able to participate in active work.

But the fact is that I could no longer participate in active work. Whom could I still talk to? I could not fault Comrade Major, the Central Committee's spokesman, because he is terribly busy. They *had* to talk to me about the current situation—though I did say that I was ready to consult with department heads and secretaries if they are interested in taking advantage of that certain experience that I still had. But everyone is obliged by the decisions made by his own organisation, rather than listen to my opinion and experience! Although I *am* older than everyone else.

I should like to ask you now: I showed the doctor that there are other problems besides the paralysis. The nerves began to degenerate, the motor nerves; the paralysis lasted such a long time, atrophy set in, muscle atrophy. Anyone who is interested can try to do this himself: if you go like this, whether you're fat or skinny, there is a bulge; when I do it with my hand, it forms a hollow, the muscle does. It means it hasn't been functioning well for a long time, and God only knows when it will be right again.

Attila Kovács, MTI

A break at the May 21, 1988 national conference of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. János Kádár carries his wife's handbag as he leads her down the stairs.

Comrade Grósz has said in an interview or somewhere—I don't remember where—that the names of some people, more than a few, have been brought up, it's time for him to speak up. Other names are of no consequence, so I wouldn't have to mention them either, but I myself was on the top of the list, he said. But I am on sick leave now, and as long as I am on sick leave, I can't do anything anyway.

Imagine if you please that my wife is taking this muscle-developing preparation, which I mustn't take, but for her it's good—it's actually a child's nutrition supplement—but I am not allowed to take it, she said. And the doctor confirmed it: I am not allowed to take it because my problem is somewhat different. Day and night my brain turns over feverishly and that alone requires a lot of energy. Going over all the things I am responsible for. Believe me, the one-time members of the Central Committee were familiar with all my ailments, and I wouldn't want to make irresponsible statements. Usually I can come up with the right quotes for the press, but here, my main talking points I have to put down on paper. But now you must hear me out—I've heard it said that on 1 May I could possibly because I *can* walk, you understand—take part in the May Day celebrations, as in the old days, if only because I'll be in that area anyway. And to economize a little, my lunch need not be delivered to my home. Even though everyone has told me—doctors, everyone—that they'd be only too glad to call on me at home if I needed anything, I turned them down.

Now please note the doctor's opinion; it's very important. I was the first to speak before the Finns, who didn't organize a regular press conference, they were the first in line. I then proceeded to receive the British lady Prime Minister, whose visit, as you know, was the first in a so-called Communist country. I am familiar with Comrade Hegedűs's views; yes, I am. Historically speaking, he engaged in self-criticism for signing the letter, which the man who has since deceased didn't even acknowledge for about two days.

But then, please tell me what I should do, My most important objective by far at that time was to get to Szolnok in safety. Whichever way I could! Regardless of who I was surrounded by, I just had to get there. Plus I had other duties and responsibilities. I assumed responsibility, I really did, for the safety of those who sought refuge at the embassy. But I was as naïve as can be; I assumed the responsibility because I thought that my request that two of those people[4] issue a statement so that officials of high rank should not be able to harp on legalisms—that this request would be met. Now then, historically, I, too, see everything differently. But if,

4 ■ Imre Nagy and Géza Losonczy (1917–1957). The latter was a journalist who edited the Party newspaper after 1945 and rose to become a deputy minister before being imprisoned on trumped-up charges of "nationalist conspiracy" in 1951. He was rehabilitated in 1954 and, alongside Imre Nagy, rose to become a leading oppositionist within the Party. As a member of Nagy's cabinet, he accompanied the Prime Minister in taking refuge in the Yugoslav Embassy whence—in the face of promises made by Kádár and the Yugoslav Ambassador—they were spirited away to Romania, along with the other asylum seekers, including György Lukács, Ferenc Donáth, Miklós Vásárhelyi, Zoltán Vas, Mrs László Rajk and Gábor Tánczos. Losonczy did not live to be arraigned in the Nagy trial, as he died in prison under circumstances that remain unclear to the present day. Obviously he, too, would have received a death sentence.

complying with their request, I undertake an obligation, in writing, and I do not ask for objection from anyone, to see to it that they are safe, and being that these two men's request was that they be free to depart and return to their homes, I couldn't meet their request. Because... I never reread my old writings when I make a speech; if I did, I would be swayed by those earlier things. Believe it or not, I ignored even what was in that statement. Unfortunately, all the statement consisted of was one simple, declarative sentence. Afterward, that one sentence had all kinds of consequences.

You know very well what this means for people to whom the legality of a government is important. While you were voting for this by secret ballot, affirming that the legality of the Party is most important—well, if it wasn't a counter-revolution, then I don't know who can justifiably refer to that legality. I don't know who can. I read very carefully what I had written, and I hadn't called a single holder of power counter-revolutionary. Not even *him.* The only thing I said was that they opened the gates to counter-revolution. What should I do then? That's what this is called, a counter-revolution. I can't call it anything else! And I can't document it either, because the Yugoslav Ambassador told me—because he had never once mentioned the name that appears in the memoirs; he referred only to the capital of the country from which he received authorization to try to persuade these two persons. And he tried, too. He told me later: I've tried for three days straight to make them change their minds, without any success. And to tell you the truth I was happy when the Polish Ambassador called on me.[5] Otherwise how on earth am I going to prove all this? I knew they were of a different opinion, but I found out only later. When I had time to read newspapers and listen to the radio, which was later.

You judge for yourself, in secret if you like, and then tell me what you think of this subtle but correct distinction in terminology, which, once I was no longer hampered by safety considerations, I even welcomed. The Ambassador kept referring to orders by his Party and government, to make it easier to bargain in that place which enjoyed diplomatic immunity.

You can approve any evaluation of my conduct that you like. But I know that when I was again free to move about, there were two newspapers published in Szolnok.[6] God only knows who edited those papers, that was not uppermost in my mind at that time. So I don't know who the editors were, but word got around that in these papers I could safely say what I had to. For it wasn't just my responsibility that was on the line; my life and many other people's lives depended on my saying what I had to say. Don't hold it against me that now I have to put it this way.

5 ■ Gomulka and the Polish leadership also tried to help in finding a solution to the situation in Budapest. They would have preferred a compromise between Moscow and Imre Nagy.

6 ■ When, after the November 4 Soviet military occupation of Budapest, Kádár returned to Hungary from Moscow, he spent a few days in Szolnok, 100 km east of Budapest, awaiting the completion of the pacification of the capital. *Szabad Nép* was the Party daily. During the Revolution the title was changed to *Népszabadság* to disassociate it from its past—the two are near synonyms and near homonyms (Free People and People's Freedom). The Stalinist Erzsébet Andics, brought back from Moscow with Kádár—against his will—restarted *Szabad Nép.* Kádár stopped publication after a few days and sent Erzsébet Andics back to Moscow. *Népszabadság* continued as the Party daily.

Supposedly, I can't even this much. One of the papers was edited by Friss, I think, and the other by Andics, though I would not swear to that. Both published the piece—the printing itself was rather primitive—and both papers were called *Szabad Nép*. It was also important who had control over the paper, for the main charge against me was that I was a Soviet agent. But I was not a Soviet agent, and I say this as responsibly as I possibly can; what is more, I can prove it to you.

The next charge was that I ended up in Soviet territory—how could that be? I still don't know how they let me go there in the first place. We call it the Sub-Carpathians; to the Soviets it is Carpathian Ukraine. Why did they let me enter it officially, and why provide with documents someone with whom I even got into an argument about where this place was. Of course he was younger than I.

What am I getting at? I believe I saw in a Szolnok paper—actually, in both there were articles with the same title: "An Informal Conversation". Such an odd title, appearing both on the 4th and the 6th. I never checked it out so I don't know which of the two papers carried it—I hope it was Friss's because I said something nasty about him; not crude but nasty.[7] "An Informal Conversation," and it was said that contact was established, and the statement on radio. But the four men in public positions who broke with Imre Nagy's government practically had to flee. And at this point I don't want to accept Comrade Hegedűs's account, for though he engaged in self-criticism recently, and reported to me—at the time he was still on Soviet soil, in the Soviet Union. He reported to me, and now I have a request to make. I will not cheat. Not in any sort of reminiscence. But of course the journalist is a little upset now, because he doesn't really know what happened then, or what is going on now, that I won't grant him an interview, although he had already taken a picture of something, for starters—a picture of the device into which you have to speak. Let's face it, there are interviews and there are reminiscences, and the two are not the same. But I can't say anything else, for if they claim that only reminiscences count, then I'd have to add that there are many different kinds of reminiscence. As they say, one only remembers the nice things in life. But if he says to me, he being Hegedűs, who reported to me that he would like to do scholarly work, then I see him as a saintly man, whatever he writes, for he assumed all the responsibility back then. Because he knew, too, that the Soviet government, whether he was on Soviet soil or wherever, insisted on the prime minister's signature on the request for intervention.

I too had to sign somewhere, God only knows where. But with me it's a more or less passive knowledge—if a brick fell on my head right now, I may just start speaking Russian, I've heard enough translations, so much, in fact, that I already thought that I understood kitchen Russian. Still, even when I went there on holiday, I was provided with an interpreter. If I didn't take somebody along from Hungary, there was a Soviet one. Some of them were also on vacation. I told one of the interpreters that he can only come with me if he spends half his time on vacation too. A Hungarian. No longer alive.

7 ■ For a few months, in the winter of 1956–7, *Népszabadság* was edited by István Friss. Friss also returned to Hungary from Moscow after November 4, and he also spent a few days in Szolnok, awaiting the pacification of Budapest.

But you tell me what I could do if the first question is already not one I have prepared an answer to. I cannot be proud of this, I cannot. When... surely everyone here knows the meaning of responsibility. It means hours and minutes during which you've got to act; and it's not just your life that's at stake but the lives of God knows how many other people. I can offer proof for this, too. Yes, I have the proof as to why they didn't intervene. I can't refer to the famous "Pula speech," but I can to other things.[8]

One of them is that the Romania of those years—this is why you need a historical approach and a good memory—was different from what it is today. Then, the first prime minister was a man with his home in Transylvania, where he founded a Romanian political party, and it would have been inconceivable for this man to persecute Hungarians because he got the votes of both Hungarians and Romanians living there at that time.

The next problem is that they promised. At that time the university[9] was named after two famous nineteenth-century figures: a Hungarian mathematical genius and a high-minded and very progressive Romanian philosopher. But from the nineteenth century. Now then, as I said before, whenever possible, I spoke without notes, and the daily correspondence, the letters I considered important—if someone, regardless of his occupation, asked for some favour from, say, the Metropolitan Council—these things I myself wrote down and the typist then transcribed them. Even in those cases I never dictated letters. Only when it came to official speeches.

For example, I ran into Professor Kodály. I think everybody knows that he was somebody in the whole world in music. I myself was naïve as can be, as he kindly put it, who believed and had faith in a world revolution. Because they never uttered the name of Lenin. And I was horrified: Does this mean that the leader of the October Socialist Revolution, for that's what he was—that his name cannot be spoken any more?

I had other troubles as well. For this passive self-defence of mine, I couldn't get together the necessary notes, because the thing with my arm lasted longer than anyone had thought; my whole arm had to be drained of blood. I don't want to go into the details; it would take a specialist to do that—he did actually give me a spinal anaesthetic. The inventor of the procedure said that such an operation without general anaesthesia, double anaesthesia would last only an hour.

8 ■ On November 11, Tito, in Pula, in a speech, attempted to justify Yugoslav policy, explaining why they sided with Kádár against Imre Nagy. His words allowed one to presume that they would not defend Imre Nagy and his associates, who had sought refuge in the Yugoslav Embassy. On the other hand, he referred to the Soviet intervention as a "necessary bad move". The Moscow *Pravda* reacted with indignation to these words.

9 ■ The university that was established in Kolozsvár-Cluj in 1872, with Hungarian as the language of tuition, became a Romanian university after the Treaty of Trianon, then reverted to Hungarian during the Second World War, following the second Vienna Award. After the war, the Groza administration established two universities, one Hungarian and one Romanian, symbolically named after two famous Transylvanian-born scientists: the Hungarian mathematician János Bolyai and the Romanian physician Victor Babeş (whom Kádár incorrectly calls a philosopher). Later, taking advantage of Hungary's weakened position, the Romanian government went against earlier promises by reducing the scope of autonomy for the country's Hungarian minority, combining the universities into one, the Babeş-Bolyai.

You will understand why I want to be done with the medical stuff. Was I upset that you're not allowed to say Lenin's name any more? I wanted to speak up somewhere but couldn't. I couldn't write notes. I told Comrade Grósz that I even get the names mixed up and don't hear the word *comrade* before certain names, and I keep referring to people who are long dead. But who in the world would have thought that people who had been in perfect health would be gone by now, when they are asking questions about them. It may be stupid, excuse me, to talk about what Comrade Grósz said, officially that I was ready even after the paralysis had set in to accept duties but without a deadline for this Party, this allocated or appointed Party, or weekly paper. No deadline, I said. The same way, the first time the apparatus or I don't know who was allowed to come to see me, then even in confidential conversation with just three of us present it was mentioned with whom I had the opportunity to talk. So that they should be able to take note of experience, which was not obligatory for anyone at any time.

So, if you'll allow me, I will refer to one other thing. There was a famous person, the so-called little old gentleman[10], who proudly came over to me at a government reception to tell me that he had the guts to return not all the way to the centre of Moscow—for those who had been convicted because of political or other activities were not allowed, even after their release, to enter the city—but at least near the city. He thought I would happily congratulate him. I told him, that is all very nice, but I hope I'll live to see the day when Soviet leaders will indulge in a little self-criticism in this matter.

In short, then, the doctor told me that the one thing he will not allow me to do is speak if there is a recording device anywhere nearby, because I may stumble over words, fluff my lines, so, forgive me for saying it, but I don't know what I should do... How long have I been talking? I'll be finished soon. What I cannot endure is to remain passive and not be able to respond to things. I cannot stand that, so there! That is what's making me ill.

My own illness is different from my wife's. What is memory, anyway? And what do we mean by leaks? Because the news about those clamouring for free platforms had already been leaked, and there were pitched battles between people demanding such a freedom. And then the doctor told me that I should not risk an unrehearsed speech. A responsible first speech on a crucial subject should not be approached lightly, he said; otherwise he can't guarantee that he will go on certifying me as being healthy. The muscle has begun to atrophy. He said he wouldn't recommend it. (It was a confidential consultation, since only a physician can be present when frank medical views are discussed.) He wouldn't recommend it, so I told him, I'll do it at my own risk. Even if I make mistakes, I'll go for it, because I am a very old man and have so many ailments, I wouldn't even care if somebody blew my brains out... Excuse me.

I just want to say a few more words. Please note that if I ever were to write my memoirs, for sooner or later I will have to, I will only write the truth. I don't know if you

10 ■ The reference is to a short story by József Lengyel, himself a former inmate. He was one of the first in the Soviet Bloc to tell the world what went on in the Gulag.

remember the puppeteer Obraztsov. He once wrote a foreword to a book. I also take full responsibility for everything I did, for as he put it in that foreword, it all depends on what step you are on at a given moment. But I thought this was at the time I was leading a delegation to Moscow. It wasn't, although I have a witness for that event too. Obraztsov was an elderly man, older than I. It was at that Party Congress, the 22nd—my wife was there too—where we heard everything, including what the "cult of personality" was really all about. Things came to light at the 21st Congress, not political ones. But at the 22nd Congress—that dreadful toast of Khrushchev's lasted an hour and a half, in which he tried to explain why they were forced to resort to unlawful means and kill Beria. You know, that was part of it, don't you? And if I won't tell you why I had once believed the show trials, the so-called show trials to be imperialist fairy tales, then I'd have to say that the later stories would also have to be considered untrue. I first heard about them after the 20th Party Congress from Rákosi, who said almost the same thing that Khrushchev did, but Rákosi added that we here were past all that. By then we had had the Rajk affair. Which turned out to be a prearranged trial. That's what such things are called here. Now then, let's say: okay, I am an idiot, I'll go along with that, too. But then, the doctor says that every time I say something like this I should quickly take it back. I can't take it back—everyone tells me I am still here, alive, I should speak up. And if the doctor, who is responsible for the state of my health, now tells me that there is a hollow here in my hand, and it will take another half year at least for it to heal, then won't it sound ridiculous that I had got myself ready, mentally, way before the operation, yet nine days after the palm surgery, my hand is still in a cast. Then again, many people live like this. And even in that condition I could bring myself to open that Party session and tell everyone not to worry, all that was in the past, no longer relevant. Yet, now I can't bring myself to say it. I will look ridiculous, and so will everybody else.

Do you still remember that Party conference, to which I referred to before, and for which I still get ribbed? So there is no such thing as freedom of platforms? Pluralism? Freedom of platforms even within the Party? Someone saying he really doesn't understand why I don't speak out? What am I to do now...? Please don't be annoyed with me for speaking at such length; I told you this was going to be quite long. I still have to tell you who it was that first told me about those things. And say also why I felt that the term "cult of personality" didn't quite cover it. I mean, the things that came out at the 22nd Party Congress! At the 21st, when I was in the capital city Moscow myself, I no longer remember what kind of questions were on the agenda, agricultural ones maybe, but they were nothing like the issues raised at the next congress. It will also be clear why I couldn't possibly be a Soviet agent; because if I knew all that, I wouldn't have believed, as Party Secretary of Pest County, those horror stories that came down in the balloons.[11]

(Comrade Grósz: Should we take a break?)

No; I was going to make an even sillier suggestion, but now I won't. You people should decide whether or not they are historians, and as such, what kinds of

11 ■ Radio Free Europe spread the text of Khrushchev's secret speech with fliers, with the help of balloons.

documents they would rely on. And you should invite those who announced that they'd show you their private archives... Because I have offended a number of other people, too. For what I saw in the cruder of those two papers—the printing wasn't the same—what it said, actually, it was a learning experience to see the controversy this interview, these two parallel interviews, had caused, one done on the airplane, the other commenting on events who knows how. Because I said one and the same thing in that Szolnok newspaper. But the paper is not in my possession at the moment. And that stamp, which was used in responses to greetings from abroad, was always kept in its own holder, like a real seal; that's how it's kept clean. If someone sent me greetings, then—since, as I said before, I cannot write because of my hand—this became the authorised version of my signature. Many people received it. I authorized X and Y, and it turned out that the plate inside is made of metal, and a good thing it is. Still, I was under the impression that it broke. It was an old thing, long out of date, but the signature is still being sent out, and everybody knows that my secretary still uses it or says so, and then other assistants have to go along with it. It can't be pleasant or interesting for them now that I want to get a hold of this thing. Forgive me. Back to when I was County Party Secretary and called a meeting to tell party activists that the fliers were imperialist fabrications. Two weeks later I had to tell them that they were true.

On that certain 22nd Party Congress, it all came out into the open. I remember the things that were revealed made someone like György Marosán quite sick. What is behind it all?, he wondered. Then I was happy for once that I cannot read by scanning—first sentences always stick with me. What Khrushchev said, for instance, when he was made to resign. He thanked their sense of humanism. Though that was later. What he meant by that sentence was that they didn't want to go to Leningrad, because there they would have had to admit that what had happened to him was something like a rigged trial. And for this reason they didn't let him receive by himself the members of the press—Hungarian journalists, of all people, but only because they happened to be there. The entire Politbureau insisted on being present to make sure he didn't say anything about what had just happened to him. I think all of this can be documented. I can still see him expressing his thanks for everything, with everybody acting so dignified. He probably said that when they already agreed that it was going to be a closed meeting, but not that all the delegates would get copies of the proceedings. And if there were a hundred and twenty delegates there, they couldn't all be true Communists. Forgive me for saying this.

But the point I'm trying to make is that the doctor said I cannot hold forth anymore on important matters... When, before a three-day weekend, somebody wishes me happy holidays, I could scream, because we just sit at home, my wife and me; she cannot go anywhere, and neither can I. What sort of three-day holiday could we possibly have when she and I have the same problem?

Comrades! Can we still use the word 'Comrade' here? Because in Parliament you can't anymore. Please remember that if I should ever write my memoirs, I would stick to the principle summed up by that jocular fellow, the Russian puppeteer,

addressing his words to young people and saying that he embraced his whole past. I don't know if this corresponds to what I said in those articles in the journals *Kommunist* and *Magyarország*. I certainly don't want to cause trouble—after all, I've been a member of the Hungarian Communist Party for fifty-seven of its seventy-year-long existence. I could never *not* tell the truth, though I still don't want to be a troublemaker and want to keep serving the cause of unity. I don't know if anyone can pick my statements apart; all of them were made publicly, in Hungary. In this case I insisted that it was not only in Moscow that I dared to say this. What's more, at the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Hungarian Communist Party, I said the same thing in the Soviet Union, because obviously they asked me to.

Now I will really be brief. If you got tired listening to all this, rest assured: I did too. I risked a lot by coming out like this, and it's not the first time I do it. I will insist that a certain, not well-liked head of state[12] who behaves very badly will be referred to only by the geographical location of his country. And I will never call just anyone a comrade, that's how stubborn I can be. I can still tell who is a comrade and who isn't. But I don't like to say anything about any witness who testified for the prosecution, nor about an opposed witness, who happens not to be alive anymore. I can't help it if such questions arise after thirty-two years and so many Party congresses and conferences later. Please note, though, that no one has ever pronounced judgment on whether it was called a counter-revolution or a popular uprising. When I gave my statement back then, I said quite clearly: a peaceful student demonstration, and then an uprising. I didn't characterize the events as some kind of counter-revolution. And I was referring both to the participants and the sequence of events. Otherwise no one will understand why I spoke the way I did.

As for the other thing, that started on the 28th, when unarmed people, on the bases of their clothes or complexion, were murdered as in a pogrom. And these people were killed well before Imre Nagy and his associates. If I don't look back on this from a historical perspective, then I could safely say, but from a distance of thirty years, yes, I feel sorry for all of them. So if you notice me making a slip, or if I don't refer by name to a head of state who is not well-intentioned toward us, and if I won't call just anyone a comrade, you'll know... And that nagging word, bandied about for a long time, will never be found in my reminiscences. That is the only way I can give my name to it. Thank you very much.

As I lived my life, I will answer, in turn, the most burning questions—whatever seems pressing now and what torments me still. Answers to why I haven't spoken.

Thank you very much.

Károly Grósz: Thank you, Comrade Kádár (applause). Comrades, I suggest that we take a break.

Translated by Ivan Sanders

12 ■ Kádár is here trying to explain that Romania, in 1956, was nothing like the Ceauşescu regime, and that he therefore felt justified in trusting the Romanians. By this point, Kádár had noticeably tired. His thinking had become even more confused, his associations jumping more swiftly from the University in Cluj (Kolozsvár) to Zoltán Kodály and on to the state of his own health in a manner that is difficult to follow.

MEMOIR

György Litván

I Prefer the Drier Idiom

János Kornai: *A gondolat erejével. Rendhagyó önéletrajz*
(By Force of Thought: Irregular Memoirs of an Intellectual Journey)
Budapest, Osiris, 2005, 428 pp.

Two years ago, to the surprise of many who know him, Professor János Kornai set about writing his recently published memoirs. As the title suggests, his is an unorthodox autobiography. It is as if Kornai set out to write another scholarly work in which he weighs up his life as a whole, his career, his academic work and his role in public life. He does so at a distance and without omitting any essential strand, favourable to him or not. This is the sort of undertaking that demands a great deal: moral fortitude, the ability to look with detachment at oneself and take stock of the broad sweep of history and politics, a keen memory and, not least of all, the diligence to check, supplement and support one's claims—examining specialist literature, the press and documents in archives. Since János Kornai possesses these attributes in abundance and writes well, his book can be instantly recognised as an indispensable record of an era and a generation.

It is a record of a century replete with tragedies and reversals of fortune, a generation which came of age just after Hungary's liberation from the German occupation at the end of the Second World War. The prospects were options as diverse as an academic career, entering public life or emigration. It is a record, above all, of those who were born in Hungary in or around 1928. They included the outstanding historian Jenő Szücs, the economist Márton Tardos and the political scientist Péter Kende, Kornai's best friend, who left Hungary in 1956. I might also include myself, if the presumption will be excused, though I passed through the Werbőczy gimnázium in Buda two years behind János. At that time, we were no more than acquaintances, but a friendship took shape in subsequent years. The broadly parallel courses taken by our careers as well as a number of fateful encounters in and around 1956 brought us closer together. (Since we have never spoken much about it, I was all the more startled to learn from the book just

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György Litván,
who between 1991–1999 headed the Institute for the History of the 1956 Revolution, has published widely on modern Hungarian history, most recently A Twentieth-Century Prophet: Oscar Jászi *(CEU Press, 2005). Hungarian edition:* Jászi Oszkár *(Budapest, Osiris, 2003).*

how similar were the arguments with which we convinced ourselves of the necessity of joining the Communist Party and identifying with its ideology. In response to a well-meant comment from an official of the United States Embassy in Stockholm, that no doubt Kornai had been coerced into joining the Party, he had the self-respect to answer: "Far from it, I joined of my own free will. I joined because those were my convictions at that time." That reminds me of a very similar experience I had at the American Embassy in Paris.)

Kornai is frank in his account of the period from 1947 to 1955, that he spent as a party member working for the Party's daily newspaper, *Szabad Nép,* mainly as the editor responsible for the economics section—thus, in continual contact with men holding key posts in the economy and in the Party. He was privy to all the details, yet still did not have a grasp of the whole, despite his uncommon intelligence and sharp sense of logic. 'Sleepwalking' is the epithet that he bestows on this segment of his life.

Kornai is extraordinarily good-natured by temperament and he often projects that back onto the past, onto the circumstances that prevailed and those he encountered at the time. He somewhat glosses over reality, for instance, when he tells how, in 1943, pupils at the Werbőczy gimnázium classified as Jews, myself included, were lined up to be told that we would have no further connection with the Leventes (the paramilitary training corps in which membership was compulsory for boys of our age), but would be given other duties instead. As Kornai recollects, the Jewish and non-Jewish boys went through the same exercises, the only difference being the colour of their armbands: yellow or white. It was not quite like that. We Jewish boys were regularly marched off to nearby Sun Hill to clear undergrowth and cart away rubbish, as recorded by my classmate, György Timár, in a cycle of poems he later wrote under the title "A Diary of Terror". (This, of course, was but a prelude to the real horrors to come.) Likewise, Kornai seems to have been oblivious to the intrigues that were going on when he was working at *Szabad Nép*. We now know, from numerous accounts and memoirs, that with their tests of vigilance and their disciplinary reprimands several hard-line Stalinists cowed most of the younger staff members. One must also no doubt see it as a symptom of his sleepwalking state of mind that he devotes only a single short sentence to the Party school in Karolina Street in the summer of 1949. This dreadful four-month period happened to coincide with the arrest and show trial of László Rajk, the former Minister of the Interior, and we were bound to register how, after night-time visits by the secret police, a string of lecturers kept on disappearing. Others were simply removed from their posts at the school, and everyone was intimidated by the frenzied atmosphere of mistrust. Mild-mannered Kornai seems to have been happy that he could at last devote himself full-time to the study of economics. Indeed, that is his way of dealing with most of the unpleasant individuals whom he came across in the course of his career—if he mentions them at all—and in only a few cases, those he considers inexcusable, does he resort to harsher words.

The staggering experience that we shared, though in different circumstances, was the process of awakening from our blind faith in communism. For Kornai, as for many others, two factors gave a decisive nudge in this direction. First was the emergence of Imre Nagy as Prime Minister in 1953 and the proclamation of his program, its gist being that there were alternatives to the route that had been taken up till then by the temporarily weakened Party leader, Mátyás Rákosi. Second was the release from prison of the 'rehabilitated' victims of earlier waves of terror, with the stories they had to tell. It was during a summer holiday that Kornai learned from the admirable Sándor Haraszti, one of the few true pre-war Communists, then fresh out of prison, what had really been going on in inside circles—and in the country at large—during those years. By then, a growing number of intellectuals were debating and agonising over this painful, yet joyful and liberating process. In our minds, one idol after another was being toppled—first Mátyás Rákosi, then Stalin, and eventually even Lenin. I remember Miklós Vásárhelyi, later a key member of the Imre Nagy circle, imparting to me with a hoot of delight, "I've heard that Jancsi Kornai is now working on Marx's surplus value." At the time, as best I recall, I took this as being meant somewhat metaphorically, but I now see that on this, as on many other things, Vásárhelyi's information was spot on. Unlike most people, who simply moved on from Communist ideology and condemned all its works, Kornai literally set about re-examining the tenets of Marxist theory (just as he had first worked his way through *Das Kapital* in 1945) before rejecting it lock, stock and barrel.

First of all, though, he and his friends provoked their own dismissal from *Szabad Nép*. He was one of those who was present and vocal at a three-day meeting in October 1954, when the cream of the staff—Pál Lőcsei, Tibor Méray, Péter Kende, Sándor Fekete and Sándor Novobáczky—openly and severely criticised the paper's senior editors and the Party leadership itself, demanding that they be allowed to publish the truth about the situation in Hungary. This was the point at which Kornai moved to the Institute for Economics at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, where—a few breaks, short and long, aside—he was an active and guiding spirit for most of the five decades since.

When he left the Party paper, Kornai decided that he was not going to devote any attention to politics, but live exclusively for his economics research. By 1956, he had already put together a dissertation for his doctorate (or candidate's degree, as it was then called) with the title *Overcentralisation in Economic Administration,* which was published by Oxford University Press in 1959. I recall that his thesis defence, in September 1956, made quite a stir, drawing a large audience, and despite Kornai's demurrals, it caught the political undertone of the moment. Nor was Kornai able to stand completely aside from events during the days of Revolution that followed shortly after. When a group of his old friends from the *Szabad Nép* days—Miklós Gimes, Péter Kende, Pál Lőcsei, Sándor Fekete—decided to launch a new paper, he himself also pitched in for a day. That was not to be repeated when Gimes was looking for help in putting out an illegal news-

sheet, *Október huszonharmadika* (October Twenty-third), though he did lend a hand when Fekete asked for assistance in smuggling a pamphlet by 'Hungaricus' out of the country. As a result, Kornai found himself subjected to more than a few unpleasant grillings at the hands of the police and courts. This made him feel, on more than a few occasions and not without reason, that he was within a whisker of ending up in prison himself. In the end, he was lucky to avoid the fate that befell many of us. Prison would certainly have been no place for him.

Kornai is a man of remarkable consistency and he draws repeated attention to this in this book. This is a matter not just of character, but of intellectual rigour. I personally know of no one able to think through the likely course of events as methodically or thoroughly as he did and, on that basis, come to a decision regarding his own conduct. In 1955, he arrived at three important conclusions or resolutions. He opted as tenaciously for his academic discipline and research as against politics, and—the brief 'lapse' of 1956 excepted—he has held to that view ever since, being of the firm belief that he can be of more use to society and politics as a scholar. In regard to *The Economics of Shortage,* first published in 1980 and still one of his most important books, he writes that the calm and objective tone in which he pitched the book's message demolished the naïve idea that it would be sufficient to put a 'human face' on socialism for it to go on and fulfil its historical mission. Lenin claimed that socialism would triumph if it was able to secure superior productivity vis-à-vis capitalism. Anyone who has read *The Economics of Shortage* will have grasped that this triumphant ascendancy will never come about. Thus, Kornai never did actually abandon his interest in politics or his ambitions in the political sphere; he merely sought—and found—the optimal terrain for his own activities and sphere of influence.

Even so, for the greater part of his career, he often found himself in tricky situations, facing awkward conflicts of conscience. During the latter half of the Kádár era, he more than once held back from openly endorsing statements that were put out by opposition groups, even though he was in total agreement or sympathy. The reason was that he feared—and in the book he makes no bones about it—that this would queer his chances of researching and teaching abroad. (Following 1956, he was kicked out of the Institute for Economics and, for quite a few years thereafter, was obliged to make do with whatever work was passed his way by research units in the industrial sector. Neither then nor later was he able to secure a teaching post at the Budapest University of Economics.) He also guarded his independence and credibility against the lures dangled by various parties and governments following Hungary's democratic transformation in 1989–90. The only post he accepted was as a member of the board of the National Bank of Hungary, the National Bank's monetary committee, until a decree issued by the Orbán government made it clear that its days of delivering independent expert advice had come to an end. Kornai writes very candidly about these political and moral dilemmas, making it clear that he could not always be certain,

in any given case, that he had come to a correct decision based on his tried and tested basic principle—or when he might have overestimated the risks.

He was equally consistent in his radical break with Marxism. Once he had grasped the fundamental errors in Marx's theory, despite some valuable and usable ideas in it, Marxism in his eyes was not just diminished, it was totally written off. Back in the 1960s, the Left in Western Europe and the disciples of György Lukács in Hungary were professing to have found their real intellectual roots in the young Marx, with much talk of a rebirth of Marxism. This was the time when Kornai realised that genuine intellectual and academic independence could only be achieved by a complete break. It was partly through this, indeed, that he was able to secure a solid footing within his own profession. Largely on his own initiative (at a time when he was mostly cut off from contact with the wider world), he set about mastering the use of mathematical models and, with assistance from Tamás Lipták, a gifted mathematician, was able to employ these in his work. The use of mathematical models from then on was integral to his approach, distinguishing it even more sharply from the ideologically hidebound methods of the Marxists.

This, in turn, was linked with the third major decision that Kornai took in the wake of 1956, which was the need to break out of Hungary's cramped confines and find an international role in the discipline. However, he did not want to achieve this by defecting or leaving the country legally. Despite tempting offers from the universities of Cambridge in the UK and Princeton in the USA, he did not wish to turn his back permanently on Hungary. Being by now an internationally recognised expert on the socialist economic system, he felt his research would carry greater authority if he were to continue to publish the results from his homeland, rather than from the West. Equally, without ever having asked permission to do this under the regulations that pertained at the time, he published all his significant papers in English simultaneously with, and sometimes even before, the Hungarian version. Along with this, he was spending more and more time in the West, on both short and long stays.

While writing this autobiography, Kornai applied to the Historical Office to look at the police files that had been accumulated on him. From these, he established that foreign countries had been as keen as Hungary's own Ministry of the Interior to keep tabs on the contacts he made. When in London, he had regularly met a former colleague from his journalist days, who had funnelled reports to the British press. What emerged from the thick bunch of cuttings was that this person had maliciously divulged Kornai's plans in detail—including details of confidential conversations, such as his views on various British left-wing politicians of the day. Kornai even came across a particularly charming proposal from a Hungarian official in London to the effect that it would be worth recruiting him, Kornai, as an agent. Nevertheless, he also had the satisfaction of locating the refusal that he had given to the feelers that were later put out to him—on the grounds that he felt his political views rendered him completely unsuited for such a role. Kornai's memoirs

maintain a genteel discretion by naming neither of the gentlemen in question, nor any of the informers in Hungary who were known to him. While paying no attention to the controversies about police agents that have recently arisen, the book provides a cogent refutation of the egregious lie that the III/III Sub-division was the sole outfit that concerned itself with the surveillance of Hungarian citizens and that all other departments simply discharged 'patriotic' functions.

Kornai finally solved the problem of how to be an 'insider' on the 'outside' through professional integrity and sheer willpower. In 1983, he received an invitation to teach at Harvard. The university was willing to go along with his request that he spend only one term per year there, thereby enabling him to shuttle between Massachussets and Budapest. This was the pattern of his life for most of the next twenty years. He attracted students from around the world who were eager to learn what he had to say about the political economy of the socialist camp, and he acquired many loyal and helpful friends among his colleagues. Kornai has nice things to say about these contacts, but he is honest enough to admit that they do not compare in intensity or intimacy with the friendships that he made in Hungary in his younger days. Kornai displays touching loyalty to friends, and he has attentive, affectionate relations with colleagues, none of whom are forgotten here in this autobiography, any more than they are in life itself.

Kornai devotes a chapter ("At Home in Hungary and in the World") to unravelling what it is that ties him to his native land. He describes why he did not wish to emigrate—either after the crushing of the 1956 Revolution or later—and why he nevertheless finds Harvard and American academic life in general so attractive and comforting. "I am not given to pathos; I do not refer to the words of our second national anthem, 'here must you live and die.' I prefer the drier idiom of an economist and talk of requiring consistency of myself". He adds:

> My reasons are dominated by sentimental ties, but I must add that there were also other, professional considerations behind my decision not to emigrate. I had specialized in the socialist system and the post-socialist transition, subjects with which many people in the West dealt as well. What gave my work special authenticity was that everything from my first book to my last article was written by someone who had himself seen and exerienced what went on.*

Some interesting contrasts are drawn between everyday life in Cambridge, Massachussetts and Budapest, and between the lifestyles and thinking of the two countries. Kornai has never accepted the anti-Americanism that is fashionable nowadays. He has a high opinion of America's democratic traditions, of what he feels is the everyday fairness of its academic and scholarly life, as compared with Hungary, and of its general objectivity and optimism (as compared with Hungarian gloominess). The provincialism of this continent-sized country and the super-

* ■ János Kornai: *By Force of Thought. Irregular Memoirs of an Intellectual Journey.* Cambridge, Mass.–London, MIT Press, p. 311. (To be published at the end of 2006.)

ficiality of its human relationships are not so commendable but, as he notes, he feels there is a great loss of proportion when snobbish Hungarian intellectuals speak with haughty disdain about how primitive or uncultured Americans are.

Naturally, he has also travelled extensively on the conference and lecture circuits throughout the world, including the Soviet Union and China. It is symptomatic of the climate of the 1980s that when, at an international round-table conference in Moscow in the wake of the great international success achieved by *The Economics of Shortage,* he delivered a talk on the book's key tenet—which is that shortages were a system-specific defect of socialist-planned economies—he was subjected to a crude onslaught by Professor Khatchaturov, then president of the Economics Society of the USSR. At a time when widespread shortages of goods were still an everyday occurrence even in Moscow shops, Khatchaturov asserted that these were purely sporadic incidents caused by planning errors. Leonid Kantorovich, a distinguished Soviet mathematical economist, kept his mouth very pointedly shut; and Sir John Hicks, the Briton who chaired the conference, wound up the session without looking for an overall conclusion. These days, we tend to forget that dictatorship and the 'Yalta spirit' were still very much alive during the Eighties.

It was fairly widely known, even to outsiders, that the views held by János Kornai on the reform of Hungary's planned economy—and indeed, on the possibility of reforming socialist economies in general—diverged from those of most of his colleagues in Hungary. In short, he considered the socialist economy a fundamentally poor system. "Did I foresee the collapse of the system?", he asks himself. His answer, in short and then at some length, is that he did and he didn't (and here he is not referring solely, or even primarily, to Hungary). As the researcher into the socialist system with the most thorough knowledge of the subject, he saw it as his job to anticipate where the process was leading. He knows very well that in the 1980s, everyone was just guessing, but he reckons he was one of those who at least suspected that Hungary was heading, indeed racing, toward crisis. I can assure readers, however, that János was not content with mere suspicions. While walking in the Buda hills around the skiing slopes of Normafa one day during the mid-1980s, as a small group of us regularly did, he suddenly came to a halt and asked us where we predicted Hungary would be in one year and five years' time. Of course, none of us was able to stutter out anything meaningful, and the question may well have been posed a year or two before it became truly pertinent. That only served to distinguish the difference in thinking between János and ourselves.

I would be curious to know where he thinks Hungary will be one year or five years from now. ❧

János Kornai

By Force of Thought

Irregular Memoirs of an Intellectual Journey

Extracts

The Fifties: Waking up

Late in the summer of 1954, I was staying in a resort facility at Lake Balaton when I met Sándor Haraszti, who had just been released after several years in prison. He had been a Communist back in Horthy's time; and after 1945, he had become editor in chief of the Communist newspaper, *Szabadság* (Freedom). We would sometimes meet, and I had respectful feelings of friendship for him. He was the father-in-law of Géza Losonczy, who was to die tragically as a martyr of the 1956 Revolution. Losonczy had been one of the heads of the Party daily *Szabad Nép* when I started on the paper. Our acquaintance was superficial, but he was generally known as an old and respected Party member. Haraszti had been arrested in 1950 and Losonczy in 1951. It emerged later that Rákosi and his associates had wanted to include them in a public trial in which János Kádár would have been the main figure accused. That second public trial after Rajk's never took place, but the men were kept in prison until released by the advent of the New Course.

My meeting with Sándor Haraszti had undermined the moral foundations on which I had hitherto based my Communist convictions. The Party had lied in

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János Kornai

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saying that Haraszti was guilty, and I had believed the lie. If that trial had been based on a lie, then the others must have been as well. We were surrounded by lies and I, stupidly, had believed them without question. And, willy-nilly, I had been spreading some lies myself.

The change in my ideas began on a meta-rational, not a rational, plane. My *faith* in communism was shaken as I recognized the lies and brutality around me. The collapse was in the moral foundations of my worldview.

If that, to use a geological metaphor, was the deepest layer, there was another above it, in the rational range: the *epistemological* basis of Marxism. Marxism calls itself the theory of *scientific* socialism. It dissociates itself from unscientific versions of socialist ideas, branding them naïve and utopian. According to its own assertions, Marxism alone presents a scientific method for researching society and comprehending the body of knowledge about it.

I broke with Marxism because I became convinced that it lacked foundations in precisely this respect. I am aware that I am on shaky ground when I start expounding on scientific theory and methodology. There is no agreement among philosophers who specialize in the subject on what makes a statement 'scientific' or even on when the truth of a statement can be deemed to be confirmed. Nor is it the purpose of this intellectual autobiography to try to decide such matters. All I am trying to do is to present my personal history.

Up until 1955, in my eyes the closed character of the Marxian intellectual edifice and its transparent logical structure offered sufficient evidence for saying it was not only closed and logical, but *true* as well. When I started to internally revise this theoretical conviction, full of disillusionment and suspicion as I was, I began with increasing decisiveness to take another approach—to compare the theory with reality. Its importance was enhanced by my bitter experience of being deceived. How did the "theory of value" relate to real prices? How did the theory of "pauperization" square with historical tendencies in living standards? How did the "theory of capitalist crises" reflect the changes in business cycles in real life? How did the theory of "classes" and "class warfare" compare with the actual stratification of society and social conflicts? The problem was not just that the theories performed badly in all these comparisons, that the Marxist dogmas failed to match reality. The main trouble was that Marx himself and his later disciples did not feel the primary intellectual duty to apply the elementary criterion of scholarship: testing their ideas against reality. Marxism is not the only school in the social sciences to commit this original sin, but in 1955–1956 I was calling on Marxism to meet the fundamental requirement of science and compare theory with the real world.

I started to see why the allocation of resources works badly in a socialist system. The function of prices in such an economy is almost impossible to explain. Marx certainly never undertook to say in advance quite what has to be done in a socialist system, but it should at least have been shown in his writings what happens under capitalism. Simply posing the question sufficed to make it clear to

me that Marx had failed to provide the answer. His works contain frequent references to prices being set by "competition." But how? Volume 1 of *Capital* floats in the air. Its main contention, that work is the sole creator of value, epitomizes a proposition that cannot be tested or refuted—in other words that is non-scientific. Nor is there any way to derive by strict deduction from the main proposition in volume 1 the system of ideas in volume 3, where surplus value is "converted" into average profit proportionate to capital. Here some testable, refutable propositions appear but they perform poorly when confronted with reality. What was putatively the explanatory theory of profit explains very poorly what factors actually generate profit in capitalist reality. In a word, I concluded that Marx's theory of value was inapplicable to reality.

The other Marxist economic propositions have been deposited onto the layers discussed so far. Let us take just one as an example: the assertion about *pauperization of the working class.* It does not follow in a deductive way from any previous statement. If one accepts Marx's theory of value, the theories about average profit and production price and all other auxiliary propositions in *Capital,* it is equally consistent with them to say that the living standard of manual workers declines, stagnates or rises relatively (compared to that of the other groups) or absolutely (considering changes over the long term). As for empirical verification, history has sharply refuted the Marxist tenet about pauperization as a long-term trend. Statistics clearly confirm that the material consumption of working people in all countries operating under a capitalist system rose substantially within one or two centuries and their living conditions improved.

At some point, around the end of 1955, I gave up Marxism. I announced, first to myself, that I was not a Marxist any longer. I would not reject every one of the theory's methods or statements, but I would reject the '-ism' as such, the Marxian intellectual edifice. Sometimes among close friends I would describe my intellectual state by saying I had written off Marxism.*

"That is not by chance, Comrades," was the trite phase that often began a statement in those days. Those conversant with Marxian philosophy would say that Marx's works never reflected extreme fatalism or a belief that events were predestined. But in daily life under the socialist system, party secretaries and journalists, history teachers and planning office department heads liked to imply there was *no alternative.* The only thing to do was what the historic forces of progress dictated. And those dictates normally coincided with their instructions. There was no other option but to collectivize agriculture. The economic plan was drawn up in a single 'version' that every organization, though formally entitled to accept it or reject it, had to endorse. There was only one party, and that one had to be elected.

During the second half of the 1950s, the opposite idea came at me in many forms and from many sources: there *was* a choice.

* ■ I broke *radically* from Marxist theory and ideology. Yet I went on believing for quite a while that socialism could be reformed. Later, I gradually gave up being a 'naive reformer'.

About that time, I came across the existentialist philosophers. The first work I read was a short piece by Sartre. Then I studied others. My reading of these too (perhaps because that was what I wanted to read into them) was that if there is no God, people are free and obliged to choose. There are no desperate situations in which no choice remains and the responsibility for deciding can be avoided. For me, having had it drummed into me that "the Party will decide", it was vital to understand that I was responsible for my decisions and I could not blame circumstances.

By then, the model of rational choice had become the main conceptual framework of my thinking as an economist as well. A later chapter deals in detail with criticism of the theory. At this point, however, I want to emphasize one great virtue the model has. Its underlying structure suggests that there is a choice. When it is used for purposes of positive analysis, we must establish retrospectively, even against the facts, what possible but rejected alternatives we had in the past. When it is put to normative use, we must determine just what restrictions independent of ourselves are on our choices. There is freedom of choice within this restricted set of alternatives.

Let me try to sum up where I stood in my choices around 1959. Some people may switch to a new career in a single dramatic turn. It took me some years, from 1954 to 1959, to work out how I wanted to live in the future. My basic decisions had been taking shape through a series of conscious deliberations and improvisations, intertwined with each other. At every moment the room for potential choices was narrowed by pressures from the outside world. There was choice available in each moment. Nevertheless—in retrospect—it could be stated that by 1959 some of my basic decisions had already emerged. I emphasize five of them here.

1) I would break with the Communist Party.

2) I would not emigrate.

3) My vocation would be research, not politics. I would not indulge in heroic, illegal forms of struggle against the Communist system. I wanted to contribute to renewal through my scholarly activity.

4) I would break with Marxism.

5) I would learn the basics of modern economics. I wanted my studies and researches to be part of the Western profession of economics.

The Sixties: The economic application of mathematical methods

As I progressed with my studies, it became clear to me that I would have to study the application of mathematical methods if I wanted to do economic research that matched the standards of the period.

As part of the empirical work on the post-1957 transformation in the methods of economic administration in light industry, I began to be interested in the role of enterprise profits. Western writers considered it self-evident that the motivation of the decision-makers in a firm was linked to the firm's maximizing its profits.

Well, attempts were made in Hungary after 1957 to give a profit incentive to managers, and even to all workers in light industrial enterprises. Various bonuses were attached to profits, but in a curious way. Profit distributions depended on whether profitability (as a proportion of sales) had improved over a specific level. Managers were encouraged to maximize (in mathematical terms) not an *absolute sum*—the enterprise's profits—but a *quotient,* the ratio between profits and sales. Although many thought that the two kinds of incentive came to the same thing, I saw that they would have different economic effects.

I began to formulate in mathematical form the two types of maximum criteria and the programming tasks associated with them. I cobbled together a model, but I was not satisfied with it.

That is when I came to know Tamás Lipták. Our working relations became ever closer and were augmented by personal ties. It soon emerged that we shared political views as well. Let us not forget it was 1957. Members of the intelligentsia could not keep up an intimate friendship with anyone whom they had political cause to fear.

He was an implausibly thin young man (and remained thin later in life). He had a handsome face, a kind voice and a bright way of speaking that won people over in seconds. His appearance was far from an advantage to him, but women adored him.

Lipták had an exceptional talent for mathematics. Perhaps it is no exaggeration to say he had genius. Not only did he make use of his huge accumulated knowledge with absolute certainty, but he could bring up unexpectedly some theorem or method he had previously read, just when it was needed. He was an original, innovative thinker.

I learned much from Lipták, who was my private tutor in mathematics for several years. Rather than following a methodical course, he would bring up a subject that was apposite at that juncture. He would recommend reading matter and give me help in following it. Apart from the knowledge I gained with his assistance, I learned a lot from him about how to address a problem. He never tried to hide what abstract assumptions a model was based on or what simplifications of reality it employed. On the contrary, he wanted to present the simplifications in the model with maximum intellectual sincerity.

Let us turn to the economic issue that prompted me to seek out Lipták in 1957. It soon emerged that the problem was hard to handle mathematically if accuracy was insisted on, rather than simplifying matters until the complications caused by reality disappeared. We had to analyze a specific type of non-linear programming task. We went at it repeatedly. The chapters of the study were written in a dozen versions, each after protracted head-scratching and numerous joint sessions of many hours. Finally, a text of some 250 pages was ready and seemed acceptable to us both.

Then our work was broken off. Tamás was arrested. Sándor Fekete's *Hungaricus* pamphlet, whose journey abroad I had aided, was previously distributed in duplicated form in intellectual circles in Hungary. Tamás had helped by working the duplicator. We had not yet known each other when we both did our bit in that

action. Later, as we began our struggle on the scholarly and not the political front, this political past was something that we found we shared. Tamás's arrest did not come as a surprise to us.

He was well down on the list of the accused. He spent about a year in pre-trial detention and then in prison. Once, I wrote out a couple of mathematical problems having to do with our joint research and gave them to his wife, Manyi, to see if she could hand them over to Tamás, for him to think about in his cell. I did not think the problems themselves were urgent, but I thought they might help Tamás by diverting his attention from prison life.* Poor Tamás, far from thinking about mathematical or economics problems, attempted suicide. It was a catastrophic sign of depression, which would overcome him later. Luckily, his life was saved.

Tamás was still in prison when I was dismissed from the Institute of Economics. I sought help from the Ministry of Light Industry in publishing our book-length manuscript. The ministry was prepared to shoulder the printing costs, but insisted the name of the imprisoned Tamás Lipták could not appear on it. I sought the advice of Alfréd Rényi, Tamás's superior and fatherly friend, and agreed with him that the formula "With the cooperation of the Institute of Mathematics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences" should appear on the title page instead of Tamás's name. In the end, the study came out in 1959 as a book with a primitive appearance, using duplication.

Once Tamás was out of prison, we decided to publish our results in the West. We prepared an article of journal length in English.** Tamás was in his element. I had just started to get to know the style and formal requirements of mathematical and economics journals in the West, but Tamás had been reading them for some years. The content of the article was our joint intellectual product, but its mathematical precision and its Western structure and style were all to Tamás's credit.

At this time and for a long time afterward, no writer of a scientific or scholarly work was supposed to send it to the West without first obtaining permission. The usual procedure was for the researcher, who in most cases would be an employee

* ■ The idea was not completely stupid. It turned out later that some of the 1956 prisoners learned foreign languages and did translations or were writers and tried to compose literary works.

** ■ The Hungarian text was translated as "A Mathematical Investigation of Some Economic Effects of Profit Sharing in Socialist Firms," by (Baron) József Hatvany, whose earlier life deserves a whole novel, not just a footnote. A member of the extremely wealthy, celebrated Hatvany family, he was a nephew of Lajos Hatvany, one of those who had promoted the superlative poets Endre Ady and Attila József; his uncle gave generous support to these two literary giants and many other writers and was an enthusiastic organizing force in Hungarian literature.

József Hatvany had read physics at Cambridge and learned to speak and write English like a native. He had become a Communist in England, and after the war, he felt obliged to return to socialist Hungary, only to be imprisoned as an ostensible British spy. For what else, it was argued, could have induced this enthusiastic young Communist to leave the comforts of academic life in England and a rich, noble family to return home? He was among those released in 1954, but imprisoned again after 1956. After his second release, he earned his living as a translator for a time, seeking worthwhile work that would interest him, as well as earn him money. That is how I came to ask him to translate several works of mine. Hatvany later went back to academic life and became one of the intellectual forces behind computer technology research in Hungary, gaining international fame and appreciation in that field.

of a research institute or a university, to present the article to his or her official superior. It would then be passed to that person's superior. If it was politically problematic, it would be sent to the Party headquarters as well.* The decision would then be made at one level or another whether it could be submitted for publication in the West.

Lipták and I decided not to apply for any such permit. We simply put the article in an envelope and mailed it. Those who had been accused, among other things, of sending the work of Sándor Fekete abroad illegally were still in prison at the time. Both Lipták and I had been embroiled in that affair. Even if the article we were now sending was free of politics, we were doing something illegal. We both felt it was important not to submit ourselves to a prescribed official procedure. For me, the move was a precedent that I followed thereafter with all my publications abroad. I did not ask for my superiors' permission but simply sent the work straight to a journal or publisher. In this, I did something different from many colleagues in Hungary and other socialist countries, who later complained they had not received authorization to publish abroad. I followed the example of Hašek's Good Soldier Švejk under the Austro-Hungarian Empire: do not ask, for if you do, the answer is going to be no.

We submitted our article to *Econometrica,* the leading journal of mathematical economics. Several years later, I heard that it had come into the hands of Edmond Malinvaud, the journal's French co-editor, who immediately accepted it without changing a word or a comma.** It appeared in January 1962.

The article dealt with a very specific problem, since it analyzed incentives that were used exclusively for firms in Hungary. It underlined that we were examining a *socialist* economy. Even posing the question was an intellectual challenge:

■ The incentive is not determined in advance. Rather than arising naturally or spontaneously out of property relations or institutional conditions, it is decided on a case-by–case basis. This approach was in fact a forerunner of a later line of research—the major body of literature on incentives and the relation between principal and agent.

■ The prices are not determined in advance either. Rather than their being set by the market, there is central price control. The article analyses the rich system of relations between enterprise incentives and prices on the one hand and quantity and composition of production on the other. Which incentive leads to production that is under or over capacity? In which direction does it push the range of output?

I often used to hear Eastern European economists say that they have not published in Western journals because the editors were not interested in their

* ■ As I write in 2004 and 2005 a book containing politically sensitive statements is going through the publication process in China. The first publisher to accept it found the work problematic and sent it to Chinese Party headquarters for approval. Publication was not permitted the first time. A second publisher has taken up the task, and permission has been refused again.

** ■ Much later, when I became familiar with the editing and reviewing practices of leading Western journals—such as rejecting most manuscripts and sending others back for repeated revision—I appreciated better what a tribute that immediate acceptance without changes had been.

economy. My experience was the opposite, with that study in *Econometrica* and with my later publications. They attracted interest *precisely because* they had been written by an author living in a socialist country and were reporting on a world distant from that of the editors—but in their idiom, the language of modern economics.

A blighted attempt at a 'fabricated trial'

As I write this, I have at hand a photocopy of a letter written to me on October 14, 1964, by John Michael Montias, an American economics professor at Yale University. He was planning to come to Hungary on a scholarship and requested some advice on his work. He also mentioned that he had begun to learn Hungarian.

The letter had a short history behind it. I first learned about Montias's work from his writings, and then I met him in person in Budapest in 1963, where he was taking part in a conference on mathematical economics. Montias attracted the attention of all the participants at the conference when he volunteered to do a simultaneous translation from Russian into English of a presentation by Leonid Kantorovich. He also interpreted the ensuing debate in both directions. We afterward met once more in Venice in 1965 at a conference of Western and Eastern economists specialising in the study of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

I found the letter addressed to me not in my own collection of letters but in the secret service archives. An American professor's personal letter to me had been opened and photocopied in Budapest, then sealed again and delivered to me by the Hungarian post office. Everybody suspected that things like that often happened, but it was still a strange feeling to have firsthand evidence of it.

At the time, I only saw bits of the Montias case. But I have managed now to reconstruct more or less the full story from the police records.

Montias was an outstanding figure among American Sovietologists. Most of his colleagues knew only one of the many languages spoken in the Soviet region, whereas Montias spoke several and was able to read even more. Although most Sovietologists in those days were qualified economists and had extensive knowledge of the political and economic situation in the Soviet Union or certain Eastern European countries, they were not skilled in the theories of modern economics written in formal mathematical language. Montias, in contrast, belonged to a new generation that handled such modern tools with great skill.

I was happy to help Montias prepare for his trip to Budapest. I gave him some advice on his choice of topic and offered to introduce him to Hungarian colleagues. We exchanged letters several times. Montias handed in a regular application in which he described his scientific program and Hungarian connections. My name was among those in the relevant part of the application form.

While in the foreground everything was proceeding according to the rules and practice of international scientific relations, behind the scenes the secret police

continued to work at full throttle. The first warning came from Czechoslovakia: there was reason to believe that Montias was a CIA agent.*

As the date of the visit approached, more and more people became involved in the case. They fished out the 'material' they had on the Hungarian scholars whom Montias had named in his application. There were some other names in the files as well, but what I managed to find out from the archives was what actions were taken concerning me.

Counterespionage officials must have thought they were going to make a big catch!

My files in the various branch offices of the III/III Department for the period between 1956 and 1959 were retrieved, as well as those for my trips to England in 1963 and 1964. Then Captain Z. Z. wrote a summary report taking stock of everything they had against me.

While studying the written documents of the secret service, I came across transcripts of tapped telephone conversations dating from 1963. A list was drawn up with the names of everyone I had contacts with. This produced nothing of interest for them. The list contained the names of friends in Budapest, relatives, and economist colleagues. Here is a quote from one of the scripts: "Helga? Olga? Paid Kornai money." Here the police agents used a Hungarian slang term, applied when, for example, a man is paying money to his mistress for her services. Very suspicious. Kornai is being paid by a woman... As a matter of fact, it was a dear acquaintance of long standing named Elga, to whom I had lent some money during the summer vacation.

There is a comment on Captain Z. Z.'s report, handwritten by his boss, advising him not to use me for 'throwing under'. I consulted experts to find out what that meant. The secret service had to find an agent who was, in secret service terms, reliable and obedient, and who could gain the confidence of the person under surveillance. Such an agent was said to be 'thrown under' the person under surveillance and would in turn provide the secret service with useful information.

Let us return to the visible surface. Montias's application was accepted by the Hungarian cultural relations bodies and he was granted a visa. So Montias arrived. He met and talked to several Hungarian economists. He started to learn Hungarian. He lived the usual life of foreign visitors, went to the opera with his wife and sometimes ate out with Hungarian colleagues. We wined and dined them, too.

It transpires from the files that he was shadowed all along. His phone was tapped and he was followed about in the streets. I read the observers' reports: absolutely nothing comes out of the piles of pages. We lived on Pusztaszeri út, and so instead of referring to us as Kornai and Laky (my wife), the report called us

* ■ Documents recently obtained reveal just how closely the secret services of the Communist countries cooperated. The Czechoslovak state security bureau conducted a secret search in 1963 of Montias's apartment in Czechoslovakia, and found in his coat a slip of paper with my name and home telephone number on it. This they reported to their Hungarian colleagues (IH 1656. 2/2-2358, p. 3. Date: May 8, 1964. Also IH 34-4-797/1965, p. 4. Date: April 23, 1965).

"Mr and Mrs Puszta." Montias could certainly not appear in the confidential internal reports as Montias. Instead, he was given the name "Zimelio" (and in the street observation reports, he features as "Master" for a change).

The plan took shape. Montias would be accused of obtaining—by misusing his position as a visiting research scholar—classified information about the Hungarian economy and Comecon (the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance). The Hungarian economists with whom Montias was in touch were interrogated.

I was interrogated too. I have recently reread the reports. None of the witnesses made any accusations against Montias. None of them confirmed the suspicion that Montias had collected classified information.

Before long, Montias was expelled from Hungary, effective immediately. An article was published in a newspaper explaining Montias's expulsion. He was accused of gathering secret information, of spying. This accusation, however, could not be supported by facts, testimony, or any other evidence. There was not going to be a spectacular espionage trial.

The story is remarkable in many ways. It is a case that illustrates that the world of scholarship was not a privileged or protected area. The tentacles of the totalitarian state reached deep into it, and it was observed and terrorized.

While there was continuity between the Rákosi and Kádár eras, there were some essential changes as well. In the days of the old ÁVH, all the players would have been arrested—the American professor and his Hungarian friends—and tortured until they confessed and it could be confirmed in court that they had been spying for the CIA all along. Even then, in 1965, the interrogations were depressing and very trying for the Hungarian witnesses. But we did have the chance to refute the false accusations.*

At the time of the Montias case, there were two opposite political trends on the Hungarian political scene. The 'soft-liner' or reform-oriented forces were out to establish friendly relations with the West, especially in culture and science; the 'hard-liner' or anti-reform forces, however, tried to seize every opportunity to blight East–West relations. Uncovering an American agent would have come handy to the hard-liners, but the plan turned out to be a failure in the end.

Two postcripts need to be added to the story.

In 1970, I spent six months at Yale University. There Mike and I met and talked a lot. We did not discuss the story of his expulsion. He—rightly—felt it proper not to bring it up, as he was aware that I would be returning to Hungary. Later, we would meet each time I visited Yale. I even gave a talk at the institute he headed. Montias would have liked to visit Hungary again in the 1970s, but the Hungarian

* ■ I have written in an earlier chapter that after 1956, I resolved to become a member of the Western economic profession. I was well aware of the risks involved. Still fresh in our memory were the times when the mere fact of having a 'Western connection' was enough to make one suspect, and when innocent professional interaction would be classified as 'spying' in trumped-up criminal proceedings. This nightmare haunted us for as long as the Communist system existed. We know now, *in retrospect,* of course, that there was no Stalinist restoration. But nobody then, *in advance,* could say for sure that such an attempt at restoration would necessarily fail.

authorities did not grant him permission to enter the country. His name was not removed from Hungary's *persona non grata* list until the final hours of the old regime in 1989.

Unfortunately, his Hungarian adventure rather dampened Montias's enthusiasm for 'Sovietology.' This was a real loss to the profession. He gradually turned to art history. His books on seventeenth-century Dutch painting are widely regarded by art historians as classics in the subject.

I have to finish this story with a sad report: Mike died recently, in 2005.

The other postscript relates to a Budapest experience of mine. When I first asked to look into the files of the Montias case in 1998, I was granted permission—with a number of restrictions, however. I was not allowed then to make photocopies of the documents. While reading the files, someone from the office was to be present. Perhaps he was told to keep an eye on me, lest I try to sneak out one of the files secretly. He was a pleasant man. After I had finished reading, he started to chat, saying, among others things, something to the effect of "Well, yes, we never managed to catch the man." I could not quote him word for word. I did not tape the conversation so as to be able to report his words verbatim. This much is certain: he made this remark as someone who fully identified with the counter-intelligence people working on the case, in the first-person plural, ironically and with some tone of regret in his voice. A weird continuity.

The Seventies: How I became an academician

The Hungarian Academy of Sciences, following the Soviet pattern, had several functions. I was its paid employee, since I worked at one of its institutes. It employed several tens of thousands of people.

At the same time, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences also had the traditional function of a national academy, declaring itself the body of the best scholars in the country. But how were they judged to be the best? The qualifying procedure prescribed by the statutes of the Academy resembled that of the great Western academies. After careful prior assessment the members of the Academy would elect new members by majority decision in a secret ballot.* But it is worth considering more closely how the election process went in practice. This can be followed through my own example.

Scrutiny of the Academy's charter at that time reveals that its members were expected to have "the most progressive worldview";** in other words, a member must be a Marxist-Leninist. That was a troublesome criterion for those recom-

* ■ Membership has two grades: corresponding membership and full membership. Obtaining the lower grade was the big hurdle; a strong argument for the nomination had to be made by a full member. The next step was easy. Corresponding members became full members almost automatically after a time.

** ■ Section (1) of paragraph 1 of the statutes of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences prescribed that the Academy should pursue its activity "on the basis of the scientific worldview of dialectic materialism."

mending me as an academician.* When the question of my membership was first raised in the early 1970s, I had already gained a reputation at home and even abroad. Perhaps more awkward still, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences had elected me an honorary foreign member and I had had other marks of international recognition as well. The Kádár regime, at that time, was anxious to demonstrate how civilized, cultured and Western intellectual life in Hungary was. How did it look if a Hungarian researcher was a member of the American Academy but not of the Hungarian Academy? Consideration of my membership could not be postponed any longer.

Most of the academicians were party members. It was generally known that the 'official' nomination meetings of the sections were preceded by the meetings of their Party members; there they agreed on which of the possible candidates to vote for and against. Since the Party members formed a majority of the committee, they ultimately decided who was going to be a member.

My nomination was defeated at the first attempt, during the preparation for the election of members in 1973, right at the first phase—the meeting of the Academy's Party members. From what I have gathered from the archival material now available, the relevant department of the Party headquarters prepared a report for the Politburo, the supreme decision-making body, on the preparations for the 1973 General Assembly of the Academy. This contained an account of whose nominations the Party members supported and whose they rejected. The Political Committee considered my nomination and "did not support" (i.e., forbade) it.

The following election was scheduled at the 1976 General Assembly. The usual preparatory procedure took place. This time only a thin majority opposed my Academy membership at the Party members' meeting.

As usual, the relevant department of the Party headquarters submitted its report on the preparations for the Academy's 1976 General Assembly in October 1975, dealing, among other things, with my case. The report refers to the Politburo's negative decision two years before and adds the following comment: "The situation has, in essence, not changed." This time the Politburo did not decide immediately on the nominations to the Academy, but resolved to return to the question later.

After that, the story took an unexpected turn. Not much later, the meeting of the Academy's section of economics and law (Section IX of the Academy of Sciences) was held; there all the members of the section, not just the Party members, took part. This body 'decides' *de jure* on the nominations. On paper, I could not have attained a majority in the secret ballot if every Party member academician had voted in accordance with their previous decision—that is, if each had voted against me. To general surprise, my candidacy was approved by a large majority. Clearly, Party members who had not spoken up in support of my

* ■ Some individuals 'volunteered' for membership, lobbying academicians for recommendations and trying to persuade other academicians to vote for them. Others felt such self-advertisement to be unworthy and trusted the choice to their colleagues' professional conscience. I was among the latter, in this case and with other honours too. Those proposing me as a member in the 1970s did so on their own initiative, according to their own judgment.

candidacy at their own meeting nevertheless had flouted party discipline under cover of the secret ballot and voted for me after all. Apart from me, another economist (with whom the Party had no political problem) received the necessary majority.

The situation was complicated, however: two more economists, whose candidacy the Party headquarters had been promoting, received exactly 50 percent in the secret ballot. According to the letter of the Academy statutes, their names could not go forward, as they had not received a majority.

The functionaries responsible for Academy affairs found this outcome an embarrassment. There was Kornai, politically suspect, gaining a majority, while two reliable people of theirs did not. It was too grave a problem to resolve in the formal venue of the Academy or even at the middle level of Party management. The matter had to go up to the country's supreme political body, the Politburo of the Communist Party.

In January 1976, the Politburo again discussed the issue of nominations. A new submission was prepared, and in the debate, the submitter of the report stated that they had inquired widely about my work; this time, the opinions had been favourable. Finally, János Kádár took the following view (quoted word for word from the minutes): "As far as these changes are concerned, I believe Kornai is acceptable, because the political aspect is not so relevant. It is difficult to compare, but we are not dealing with party functions or party membership, but with the Academy of Sciences, where it is possible that some people with minor political problems will, if their scholarly work is otherwise positive, become productive and useful members of the Academy. So his not meeting the ideological rigour of old Party members is not a reason to exclude him."

With that, the issue was decided. My membership in the Academy could now follow the regular course.

Yet a need for balance was still felt at Party headquarters. The Academy statutes were bent and the two names with precisely 50 percent approval were also put forward at the General Assembly. With three reliable new people joining the Academy along with Kornai, the required balance would be ensured. And that is what happened: four new economists became corresponding members in 1976.

That is how the autonomy of the Academy was maintained in the 1970s, with sovereign secret voting and valid statutes. In the course of selection, the assessment of genuine scholarly performance was mixed, as in every sphere of life, with the Communist Party's desire to wield power. Selection according to political criteria left a marked impression on the composition of the body of the Academy, with consequences that are felt to this day.

As well as whittling down the Academy's independence, the incident also illustrates another important phenomenon: the willingness to make concessions, typical of the cultural policy of Kádár and György Aczél. Kádár and his men did not recoil from making occasional compromises. My 'admission' to the Academy was one such compromise, if some recalcitrant Party members, taking refuge behind the secret ballot, so wished. At the same time, they wanted to ensure that the

leading positions remained in their hands; if such a compromise was the formal condition of their exercising their political will within an 'autonomous' organization, those faithfully following the Party line should be the majority.

Building a new home

In 1974 a condominium for ourselves and four other families was completed. Legally, this type of undertaking was known as 'self-built construction,' which meant that there was no outside contractor to coordinate all the necessary activities. The future occupants themselves hired the people to do each task, either tradesmen with official permits or moonlighters from the 'grey' economy. They also had to procure most of the materials and equipment for themselves.

As the work ground on, my wife and I had increasingly become the unwitting managers of the work. We found ourselves up against the reality that it was nearly impossible to obtain the building materials required. Finding clinker bricks or bathroom tiles meant long searches and, if need be, painful reductions in our quality requirements.* We passed all the Stations of the Cross endured by consumers in a shortage economy, which I later put into a systematic order in *Economics of Shortage.* In each case, we had to choose between searching, waiting, making forced substitutions imposed by chronic shortages or giving up our buying intentions. Apart from the product shortages, we came up against labour shortages as now one and now another skilled tradesman failed to turn up and thereby stalled the whole operation. We had to realize that shortage leads to corruption. We learned how much to give to the warehouseman at each factory to obtain the missing material and what brand of brandy it was appropriate to present to the official at the district council who issued the permits.**

I visited the West quite often in those years, and on each occasion, I took a shopping list with me. Not a list of things that were cheaper in the West than in Hungary, or of what local specialities were worth buying, but a list of what could not be had at home and could be found in a normally functioning market economy.

An experience I had in Moscow seemed to emblematize the East–West difference in buyer–seller relations. Taxis stand in lines outside airports in the West. Passengers hop in and say where they want to go. Taxis pulled up intermittently in Moscow, to be besieged by passengers asking where the taxi was going. Those wanting to go where the taxi driver fancied going got in. Who should choose the destination: passenger or taxi driver?

Everyone constantly had similar experiences. Whomever I spoke to, from research workers to cleaners, from company managers to drivers, would be full of

* ■ I had to draw on connections in Szolnok to obtain a bathtub. The one found was slightly faulty, but we brought it 100 km to Budapest.

** ■ János Kenedi published a little diary-like book about his similar experiences of building privately. He wittily chose as his title an old slogan of Mátyás Rákosi's: "The country is yours, you build it for yourself." The book was printed in the series *Magyar Füzetek Könyvei* (Hungarian Pamphlet Books) published by a group of Hungarian émigrés in Paris.

tales of annoyances and trials related to the shortage economy. All of these had settled in me, and they emerged when I set about writing a book about shortage.

The Eighties: Moving to Cambridge

It was felt in the economics department at Harvard some time in 1983–1984 that they needed a specialist in the Communist economies. The search may have gained urgency because Abram Bergson was preparing to retire. He was the most prestigious American scholar in Sovietology and, apart from that, made an important contribution to the theory of welfare economics with the introduction of the social welfare function named after him (the Bergson-Samuelson function). At some point in the search process, my name came up. I was personally known well by colleagues at several American universities. Some I could count as friends, but I happened not to have close relations with anyone at Harvard, apart from meeting in passing with a professor or two. So they wanted to get to know me.

I was invited first to give a lecture, followed by dinner and a professional discussion over the tablecloth. Next came an invitation to fill the prestigious Taussig guest professorship for 1984–1985. I was to move there and the department would find me accommodation. I would teach just one course and spend the rest of the time on research.

At the age of fifty-six I had to start from scratch. The main subject on which I lectured was titled "The Political Economy of the Socialist System". My teaching was addressed exclusively to graduate students in programs leading to a master's degree or a doctorate. Some Western textbooks touched on the subject and I assigned occasional chapters as recommended reading, but I wanted to present the subject in my own way. I had never attended any other professor's lectures on the same subject, so I could not know how others were doing what I had to do. I made use of the huge published literature, of course, but ultimately, I shaped all I wanted to say and all the material I wanted to present, from the first sentence to the last. Furthermore, mine was not a settled, developed subdiscipline such as standard microeconomics or macroeconomics. There the reality defined by the theory is relatively fixed, and changes from year to year are almost imperceptible. In contrast, talking about the socialist economy was like shooting at a moving target. I started teaching at Harvard in the mid-1980s, by which time the Communist camp was in ferment and one event of world-historical importance was followed by another. In the Soviet Union it was the time of glasnost and perestroika. In Beijing's Tiananmen Square millions demonstrated—and the protest was followed by bloody reprisals.* And finally, in 1989 the Berlin Wall was falling. I had to recast the course as "The Political Economy of Socialism and the Post-Socialist Transition".

* ■ During the dramatic occurrences in Beijing, my wife and I were practically glued to the television, watching live the eruption—and suppression—of the Chinese student movement. Anybody who had lived through 1956 in Hungary could see many similarities. We had deep sympathy for my Chinese students and shared their apprehension as the events unfolded.

Although my lectures differed from others in spirit, that was by no means unusual. Harvard University (and many other institutions of American higher education) strove expressly for diversity. Students could choose from a range of intellectual strands, philosophies and scientific schools of thought.

Amartya Sen divided his time between the economics and philosophy departments and for many years ran a philosophy seminar with Robert Nozick. When Nozick's *Anarchy, State and Utopia* appeared, he was viewed as a brilliant new star in the firmament of libertarianism.* Sen was at the opposite end of the political spectrum. He researched problems of poverty and famine and called unconditionally for the state to play a redistributive role. The difference in their views never disturbed their sincere friendship and it gave their joint seminar its spark of excitement.

There were various schools of economic thought within our department and representatives of political views that not merely differed but were bitter rivals. Among the faculty were Steve Marglin, a radical left-wing economist, and a few old-style Keynesians. Another member was Robert Barro, who engaged in theoretical research while contributing regularly to the conservative *Wall Street Journal* on daily policy issues. Certain professors served in presidents' administrations for longer or shorter periods before returning to the university. By the time I arrived, John Kenneth Galbraith was over 80 and retired, but he still came into the department periodically. (We also saw his erect, lanky figure regularly at the swimming pool.) Apart from the enormous reputation he had gained with his books, he had belonged to the circles of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson and served as U.S. ambassador to India. Martin Feldstein coordinated the massive organizational and educational task of providing undergraduate teaching in economics on a mass scale. He belonged to the other political hemisphere, having served President Reagan as senior adviser for several years. Another colleague was Larry Summers, until he left teaching for public service as vice president of the World Bank. He was later deputy secretary, then secretary of the treasury in the Clinton administration. Thereafter he returned to Harvard. Although he nominally remained a member of the faculty of the economics department, he became president of the university in 2001. Following his resignation, effective at the end of the 2006 academic year, he is expected to return to the department as a distinguished professor. The economics department, like the philosophy department, had its pair of professors—in its case, Robert Barro and Gregory Mankiw—who would display their clashing views before the audience at their joint seminars.

1990 onward: A pessimist turned optimist

Understanding the concept of a system has been a central topic throughout my scholarly career. I had been engaged for decades in comparing contemporaneous systems. There was now a unique chance to observe and interpret what

* ■ Nozick came to alter his earlier, radically libertarian views on several issues. A bold thinker, excellent writer and man of warm humour and kindness, he died in 2002, at the peak of his powers.

it meant for different systems to appear consecutively. Though everyone keeps using the expression 'change of system,' there is still no consensus about what it means. Indeed, some current interpretations are strongly opposed and the disagreement causes confusion in political discourse.

I clarified this problem for myself as I worked on my book *The Socialist System,* whose title underscores that 'system' is a central concept in it. Let me sum up here the three characteristics that I see as distinguishing the 'great' systems: (1) political structure and associated dominant political ideology, (2) property relations and (3) coordination mechanisms (the relative weight of market coordination, bureaucratic coordination or other mechanisms). The numbering is not random but refers to the rank order of the three principal components. These three characteristics go on to determine other important features of the system: behavioural regularities, enduring market forces, and so on.

The characteristic features of the classical socialist system are a monopoly of power held by a Communist Party opposed to private ownership and to the market and the predominance of public ownership and bureaucratic coordination. The characteristic features of the capitalist system are a regime friendly toward private ownership and toward the market and the predominance of private ownership and market coordination. The change of system occurred when the socialist system yielded to a new system exhibiting the characteristics of capitalism. Demagogic, populist remarks are often made about how the change of system has not occurred yet. I am afraid those who preach such texts have no idea what "system" or "change of system" really means.

Of course, the mere fact that the transition between the great systems has occurred, that capitalism has succeeded socialism, leaves many questions open. There are many types of capitalism. Some assign a significant role to the state and some a less significant. Some have obtrusive and some unobtrusive inequalities in the distribution of power, rights, or wealth and income. Some provide stronger and some weaker incentives to technical advance, and so on. The real issue for further debate is not whether the change of system has occurred, but what specific direction the changes are taking. The connecting normative question is, what direction would we like to go in? And that brings us to the issue of value judgments.

Many people in Hungary and the Eastern European region are disappointed. They expected the change of system to bring something different, something greater and better. I am not thinking just of those who actually did badly—losing their jobs, descending the income scale, or being deprived of privileges. Disillusionment is also found among many members of the intelligentsia, who have not lost financially or have even benefited, who have not suffered any personal harm and may have gained extra recognition. They are embittered by the widespread dishonesty and mendacity they see and by the dissipation of state wealth. They shudder at the sterile verbal battles in politics, the undiscovered corruption, the revelations that are never followed up or that fail to even take place and the interpenetration of business and politics. It offends their sense of justice to see flaunted wealth and dire poverty juxtaposed.

I share those feelings of bitterness and indignation. But I would not add that I am disillusioned. Disillusionment comes from having expected more, and my expectations must have been more modest than those of many friends and acquaintances who feel that the change of system has let them down.

In one of my articles I referred ironically to those who see history as a convenient supermarket, where the attractive features of various systems are put in the shopping basket and taken home in a combination that best meets one's taste. History offers 'packages,' including 'existing' capitalism with its own immanent, system-specific problems.

In 1983, I wrote an essay titled "The Health of Nations", briefly reviewing the pathologies of seven grave diseases: inflation, unemployment, shortages, excessive growth of foreign debt, disturbances of growth, malignant inequalities, and bureaucratization. (Plenty more could be added to the list, of course.) I then took the risk of saying that there is no such thing as a disease-free socioeconomic system, but we can choose our diseases. Let us be glad to have developed a social system that suffers from only two or three of those diseases. In the worst cases, countries suffer from four or five.

I was not surprised to find that the transition from socialism to capitalism brought mass unemployment. The most we could do was to struggle to keep it down, but it could not be overcome altogether. I was not surprised that income differences suddenly grew. Radical equalization would be impossible, but it was worth making an effort to help the needy and guarantee to all the conditions required for human dignity.

A number of factors tended to make my expectations more realistic than those of my peers. I am a professional researcher specializing in comparative social science—it is my trade. My studies had been focused for decades on exploring the nature of socialism and capitalism and comparing them. And my image of the developed capitalist countries had come not from books or short visits as a tourist, but from daily experience over periods amounting to several years. I took the opportunity to compare the written accounts with what I saw with my own eyes and can safely say I have no illusions about capitalism.* Despite its detrimental and morally nasty features, I concluded I would sooner live under the capitalist system than in the happiest barrack in the socialist camp.

I have to add another explanation of why the change of system did not disillusion me. Deeply ingrained in me is a rule of analysis: positive and normative approaches to a phenomenon need to be kept strictly separate. We all have a right to our dreams—how sad if poets gave them up. But I am irritated at people who style themselves social scientists and mix utopia with reality, especially if they make a virtue of their mental confusion and shrug it off when their dreams are compared with realistic possibilities.

I am sometimes more or less alone in the company of intellectuals with my view that the change of system we have been living through is really a huge achieve-

* ■ I see similarities between two clusters of illusions. The New Left built fantasies on a socialist utopia and turned in disgust from the socialism that actually appeared. At the same time, many members of the intelligentsia before the change of system built up a distorted picture of 'the West' and its democracy and market economy. Faced with real capitalism, they were aghast, as they compared it not with realistic expectations, but with their own imagined utopia.

ment. My feeling of taking part in a fortunate turning point in history did not end with the first euphoria of 1989–1990. It persists today, a decade and a half later.

Before the systemic change, I tended toward a variant of pessimism. Pessimism cannot preclude action, I argued in 1983 in the "Health of Nations" study mentioned earlier. I quoted Camus' novel *The Plague.* Rieux, the physician, is talking to his friend Tarrou, who has been helping him combat the plague. " 'Yes. But your victories will never be lasting; that's all.' Rieux's face darkened. 'Yes, I know that. But it's no reason for giving up the struggle.' "

I write as follows in my preface to the American edition of *Contradictions and Dilemmas* in 1986:

> I must warn the reader: this is not an optimistic book. But neither is it pessimistic. There has been a Hungarian tradition for centuries: you are resigned or desperate or angry and a happy outlook is uncertain or improbable—and yet, you work hard and honestly for improvement. Those who have read classics of Hungarian drama or poetry (some are translated into English), or have listened to Bartók's music, will know exactly this contradictory mood. Perhaps a member of a grey and non-philosophical profession, like that of an economist, can follow the same tradition.

In me, the mix of optimism and pessimism has tipped toward optimism since the change of system. It would be irresponsible to sketch in a few lines a balance of the favourable and unfavorable aspects of the changes in progress in the country and the world—even another long book would be insufficient for that. I will mention only a few phenomena to illustrate the kinds of changes that have affected my attitude toward life. I do not deny the problems and I face up to them, but I see a different future since the chance of freedom has opened up before hundreds of millions of people in the post-socialist region. Following that opening, a new, great wave of democracy has augmented other, earlier waves of democracy. In historical terms, the area of the world under tyranny has narrowed and the area covered by democratic institutions, stronger or weaker, has widened considerably. Though the process may be coming to a halt in some places or even going into reverse, I am convinced that such setbacks can last only briefly. I, too, shiver to learn of the dreadful deeds of extremists, and I sense what the unforeseeable consequences may be if weapons of mass destruction come into the hands of terrorists. Nevertheless, I believe that the historical process of the spread of democracy, in line with the trend of former decades and centuries, will continue.

Production is growing everywhere, though unevenly, technology is developing, and the quantity of resources available for human consumption has grown. I am fully aware that there always are new difficulties to overcome. Still, I am not going to bewail the woes of a consumer society or an aging society or the spread of computers. To me, it is an advance if lights burn in villages and sewage is piped away, if epidemics are stemmed and life expectancy is extended, and if people are better linked by modern information technology and telecommunications. I have turned into an optimist who recognizes the problems and wishes to alleviate them. ❧

Miklós Györffy

Women, Loves, Ruins

Zoltán Kőrösi: *Milyen egy női mell? Hazánk szíve* (What Is a Woman's Breast Like? The Heart of the Homeland), Kalligram, Bratislava (Pozsony), 2006, 288 pp. • Endre Kukorelly: *Rom. A komonizmus története (második, javított, bővített kiadás* (Ruins. A History of Commonism. Second, updated, enlarged edition). Kalligram, Bratislava (Pozsony), 2006, 189 pp. • Krisztina Tóth: *Vonalkód. Tizenöt történet* (Line Code. Fifteen Stories). Magvető, Budapest, 2006, 184 pp.

The title of Zoltán Kőrösi's new novel is somewhat misleading and thus hardly the most fortunate. Strictly speaking, no breasts figure in it. And although it is about women's lives and loves, the descriptions are almost old-fashionedly prudish and the physical is avoided. There is, however, an important role here for some sort of a 'female' principle, just as there was in Kőrösi's previous novel *Budapest, nőváros* (Budapest, the Feminine Capital, reviewed in *HQ* 177), to which this is a sequel and a supplement. In its penultimate chapter, "Entangled Roots (Veronika, Liszi, Ilona, Mária)", the four women appear together. In the previous 18 chapters, spanning 150 years, the four of them emerge from a labyrinthine family history as figures whose lives are so similar that one could almost be mistaken for the other. This penultimate chapter is set in the 1990s; all four are lonely old women (two of them die in the chapter). All have connections with a house in the Ferencváros district of Budapest: two live in it, two do the cleaning in the early hours of the morning in the restaurant on the ground floor. This house, and other houses and streets, are characteristic of the district, which also featured in *Budapest, nőváros.*

The stories of two of the four women in the photograph in Chapter 19 begin in an imaginary, in any case, unnamed and unidentifiable, small town on the Danube. It is a mythical location, a region of springs. The source, or spring, plays an important role in *What Is a Woman's Breast Like.* The title of Chapter 1 is "Spring (Flaschner)": here, according to popular tradition, a spring once burst up from under a warehouse on the riverbank and swept away everything in its way. Later, the hotel in the town was named The Spring in memory of the event. By way of another emphasis, perhaps unnecessary, another magical event takes place here in the old times. Ice blocks in the ice-house of the town start melting in the great heat, the soaked walls give way, the blocks slide out into the market and the riverbank, and once again knock everything down. Even the restaurant on Ferenc Boulevard in the penultimate chapter 19, which over the years became a cheap hotel, is called The Spring. The owner is a descendant of the owner of the hotel in the small town. Even a late repeat of the ice catastrophe takes place here: a large refrigerator is upturned somehow or other, its contents pour onto the floor, and the frozen blocks strike open

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reviews new fiction for this journal.

doors and break bottles, scattering the broken glass everywhere.

In this frame of magical motifs, the history of the Flaschner family, settlers of German origin from Moravia, emerges. István Flaschner is a blacksmith; his son János, handy with all kinds of machines and tools, emigrates with his young wife to America, where they make a modest fortune. They return to their birthplace and open a general store. After János is killed in the First World War, his wife consoles herself with various lovers; their daughter Gizella moves to Budapest, where she becomes a nurse. There she meets Ádám Kövesdi, a "parliamentarian" (an officer of the guard charged with protecting the Houses of Parliament). Child of a peasant family from the Great Plain, he is as much interested in "electricity" as the girl's father and eventually finds a post at an electric substation. He marries Gizella, and their daughter is "Ilona", whose relationship with Feri Czabán, a secret police lieutenant, is one of the love stories threading the novel.

Another such story is that of Veronika Tolnay, a childhood friend of Gizella's and daughter of a presiding judge, for a taciturn and unnamed diver and fisherman, whom she marries against her father's wishes, during the Second World War, immediately before her lover is called up. In their long years of marriage, they only manage to live together for a few weeks. Her husband spends eleven years as a prisoner-of-war in Russia and serves six years in prison for his part in the 1956 Revolution. Afterwards he is engaged in mysterious affairs and visits his wife only rarely. Meanwhile, Veronika's enduring support is Mészöly, an assistant to the fisherman in the Danube small town, who had been her admirer. He later becomes a high-ranking police officer.

The third woman, Liszi, is Jewish. Her father had disappeared during the war in a forced labour camp. A dedicated kindergarten teacher, she never marries and for a long time lives without love. Then unexpectedly, her relationship with her former music teacher, János Durst, a family man, flares up into a passionate affair, which they manage to keep secret from his family. When he becomes ill with cancer, and totally incapacitated, Liszi, as a former pupil, presents herself as a nurse to his family, looking after her secret love for three years. While the core of the love stories of three women in the photograph feature in *Budapest, the Feminine Capital,* Liszi's is a new story. As the author explained in an interview, the story of a reader of the earlier novel comes to life in it; she felt she had been affected by the stories told in the book, and related her life to him.

The connection between Veronika and Ilona is that Ilona's mother was a great friend of Veronika's. Between Ilona and Liszi, the distant link is that a lover of Ilona's grandmother, Mrs János Flaschner née Ilona Kálovits, was one Péter Orlik, and Liszi on her mother's side descends from the Orliks. But they are not aware of this, and Liszi, who is a cleaning woman at the restaurant in Ferenc Boulevard, and Ilona, who lives in the same house, do not even know each other. Liszi chars with Mária, who only makes her appearance in Chapter 17, in a short story taken over from *Budapest, the Feminine Capital.*

The magical links and relations appear primarily through the motifs and the organization of the text. The omniscient third-person narrator may give us the impression that the fragments of stories belong together like the shattered pieces of the mirror image of a unified and comprehensive experience of existence (a preconception perhaps?). But the individual fragments mirror more or less the same picture, and when put together, they do not necessarily provide a fuller and more precise picture than the fragments do. The repetition of motifs at places verges on the ludicrous. Many of the characters die:

through falling, tripping up, running into a mirror or dying of a stroke.

Kőrösi's apparent intention is to confront the passing of time with moments of timelessness. On the one hand, time passes fast in the novel, the individual life stories slip away frighteningly quickly; on the other, there are everlasting moments in each, the timeless moments of happiness. "... happiness is simply to believe that there is no time," runs one passage about Liszi. The repetitive motifs and signals in the text are inclusions of timelessness and permanence in the multitude of the story versions. The trouble is that, after a while, these repetitions tend to become mechanical and affected. Worse than that, they wash together the contours of the characters. One woman's life can be easily confused with another's and there are so many loves and deaths that they almost neutralise one another.

There is one really memorable aspect of Kőrösi's novel—the depiction of the everyday life and environment of ordinary people. He approaches his characters from the direction of this material and atmospheric medium. Just as in *Budapest, the Feminine Capital,* he employs a pointillist technique in depicting passing situations and moods. From this perspective, the tragic appears as inevitable in the passage of time, and the individual characters appear as actualized versions of eternal and general formulae. When we ought to be getting nearer to one of the characters, textual formulae take over. "Time is to be lived through, rather than to be survived," appears umpteen times. Still, it seems that in their exceptional moments his characters literally live through the same thing.

Endre Kukorelly's work of indefinable genre, *Rom* (Ruins), was first published in 2000. This year an "updated, enlarged" edition appeared. The subtitle of the first edition was *A szovjetónió története* (A History of the Sovietonion), the subtitle of the second is *A komonizmus története* (A History of Commonism). There is no pun in the Hungarian, only a malaproprism, as this misspelling is common usage in the parlance of the average Hungarian. Needless to say, it is to be understood ironically. Kukorelly's book refers to everyday 'commonism', rather than to the picture of communism. It is an image of the ruins of a disreputable and drab period as it lives in us and with us to this day. Indeed, the first person plural ought to be replaced by the first person singular: *Ruins* is about the way the author had lived through the decades of communism and the way he now reminisces about it.

The personal touch from the author is justified on two counts—one, he grew up in the Kádár regime and, two, in his novel *Tündérvölgy* (Fairy Vale, see *HQ* 172, Winter 2003), more or less autobiographical in inspiration, he gave an account of his coming of age as a thinking man in the drab everydays of this period. Apart from its reference to the ruins of communism, the title refers to the actual ruins of a Soviet military base in the old German Democratic Republic. It is a counterpoint to *Fairy Vale*. The personal touch is also motivated by contemporary speech, by the fact that the communist period has not been properly discussed, and by the poor, superficial rhetoric which manifests itself in both the self-justifying name-calling of communists for present political purposes and by all the disappointing variations of refusing to accept any responsibility for the past, whether political, legal or moral. In its 30 parts, in the "Coda" and 45 pages of notes, Kukorelly uses the genres of the essay, diary, memoir, historical documents and poetry in conducting a dialogue with the present and the near-past, communism and post-communism, and above all, with himself—with at least two halves of his personality, the one that had willy-nilly

accepted the communist era and the other that loathed it, owing to his given circumstances, family background and upbringing.

We know from *Fairy Vale* (and here too) that Kukorelly comes from the kind of Christian middle-class family that had suffered the most after the Communist takeover. Nobody around him ever entertained any illusions about Communism. At the same time, the child found it hard to digest that they did not belong:

> Enthusiastic faces, grandstands full of people waving—they are celebrating, you are not. You envy them because you are left out, you believe you are passed over, and you are, because you feel so. You are not 'the workers' then? Nor 'the people'? You don't want Long live May Day, let us celebrate it with singing and dancing? You should not get a balloon? Nor free candy floss? It was not a very good feeling; it was, just a little bit, bad. A class alien.

In 1968 he suffered no disappointments, as did so many of his fellow students.

> I did not have to work it out for myself, on my own, that commonism was not a good thing; I did not have to realise it because it had never occurred to me that it could be any good. I just knew, I was so informed, I have no idea how, that it was not good... It was evident to me, this was the way I saw it, the way I was surrounded by it, by this horror. And the others did not see it that way, and I felt bad about it, even if not awfully bad... And I did not understand the way they felt about '68 at all. Prague Spring, human face, and Commies protest, but their Soviet comrades do not let them ... Have they truly *realised* that... er... there is intervention, do they notice only now, are they outraged, gaping now with these innocent, wide-open eyes? Is it not exactly the Sovietonion that has intervened from the very first? It has not marched in, because it had been in all the time...?

While he knew "where *we* stand", he did not really feel like belonging to this 'we'. He was loyal to his parents and to his class, but did not see eye to eye with them, and he saw their opposition, their "dead reactionary" stance as infra dig. Important parts in the novel are those in which Kukorelly quotes passages, embarrassing both politically and artistically ("camaraderie sanctified by the end"), by populist-national writers such as László Németh or Gyula Illyés, leading lights of the 1960s, wearing the halo of oppositionists. He confronts Illyés's and André Gide's diaries of their travels in the Soviet Union in the 1930s with the historical facts and with his own later experiences. Between 1974 and 1982, Kukorelly made eight visits to the Soviet Union, and he holidayed in Sukhumi for months. "We visited a model kolkhoz near Sukhumi. Everything here spells out happiness," he quotes from André Gide's *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, whose Hungarian translator, the novelist Tibor Déry, was sentenced to two months' imprisonment during the Horthy era for the translation. (He was also sentenced to nine years in 1957 in the Kádár regime for his part in the 1956 Revolution, as we learn from Note 79.) At places the main text and the notes give bare facts only, abandoning a personal tone, and this dichotomy of the personal vein and historical documentation reminds us of Martin Amis's *Koba the Dread* (which came out after the first edition of Kukorelly's book).

A feature of the second edition is that certain parts and notes contain reflections on the time that has passed since the first edition. Again, what is shown is that the Communist past is not over and, because it is not and cannot be properly processed, any book about it has to be rewritten again and again. He mentions those informers who did not come forward at the time of the changeover in 1989 and have been exposed recently. "It is frightening that they do not step forward of their own will, this is the most frightening thing. It is a terrifying sign of oblivion. Oblivion is

the most terrifying of all." In one note, Kukorelly refers to the criticism of the first edition of his book, stating with some malice that there was some sort of accord between the two types of objections raised against it, the "Why do I name the Commies?" type and the "Why do I not name the Commies?" type. A critic 'from the left' says that the author "looks at and judges these travel diaries [by Illyés and Gide] with today's eyes", and the one 'from the right' says, "I always suspect the wisdom of hindsight". To which Kukorelly says, "Hindsight? Well then, let it be hindsight. But where's the wisdom?"

Krisztina Tóth, who turned forty this year, has so far been known as a poet. *Vonalkód* (Line Code) is her debut as a short story writer. The title of each story in the collection contains the word *vonal* (line) in a compound or a phrase in the subtitle, such as "Borderline", Bloodline", "Closing Line", "Line Engaged", etc. Hence 'line code', which is the literal meaning of the Hungarian word for 'bar code'.

It is true, though, that the short stories are all like straight lines or bars—slim, objective and straightforward. All but one are told in the first-person singular, which may lead us to believe that they are autobiographical in inspiration, an interpretation that does not hold water here. On the one hand, we are unable to decide which of them are based on her own experience on the other, we can be sure that if we know for some reason that some are autobiographical, this knowledge brings us no closer to them. The short stories thus narrated offer the charm of personal authenticity and reflect a kind of objectivity in which the narrator's reduced or frustrated personality is inseparable from the predominantly bleak and gloomy atmosphere of the stories.

This atmosphere is that of the 1970s and '80s, of the private sphere of the Kádár regime. The stories evoke the time's oppressing mood of miserable stagnation seen mostly through a child's eyes.

Since a child's vision takes in the given world, the surroundings, as the only one that exists, without its wider social context, the short stories are not consciously meant to be about this age; they convey the attributes and moods of the age 'spontaneously', as it were. "The Pencil Case" (Guide-Line)" is about the disappearance of a pencil case belonging to a girl, whose father is a famous politician. The members of the school choir are not allowed to go home until the guilty person comes forward. Time passes in the crowded room in the sultry, hot weather, and eventually 'stands still'. The narrator finds it unbearable and at the end stands up and declares, "so that the airless present should at last come to an end and we could go home: It was me". It was not her, of course, but "it could have been me, who knows". "It may have been me, in another story, at another time".

The narrator in "Black Snowman (Net of Lines)" is also a schoolgirl who lives her life in the web of lines of the housing estate. There is an artificial little sledging hill, from which "strange, light, sponge-like stones come to light, which glitter in oily rainbow colours." The children build a black snowman from the mysteriously glittering mineral, of which we learn in the last passage that it is "an extremely dangerous waste material, slag full of heavy metals, tar and slow-decaying poisons." "Its glittering dust has settled in our lungs, filled the air, and was finely swept in the wind right up to the top of the ten-story houses..."

In "Warm Flooring (Line Tickets)", the girl (or boy?) narrator accompanies a father and son, Big Tibi and Small Tibi, when they go warm-flooring, i.e. fitting wall-to-wall carpets and linoleum in the flats in the housing estate—on the side, without a permit or qualifications. The story ends with no real point, apart from the fact that

when they botch up a job somewhere, on their way home Big Tibi thinks of the inspectors who "always come in pairs" and find you even if you give them a false address. In "Mansion (Front Line)", a girl is taken to a mansion for a summer holiday, where she suffers from the strict, military discipline and is relieved when she "gets a hole in the shoulder" and develops a high fever. She has blood poisoning and is taken to a hospital, after which her parents take her home. The point is not this succession of events, so much so that the short, trivial story of the summer camp in the mansion appears again in another story, of the visit made by Uncle Franci from Kassa (Košice), and it would be difficult to tell in what way they are connected. Unless it is through Uncle Franci's little dog, who pops out from the battered Mercedes with the usual excitement to "hug the first leg approaching. But this time this leg was bandaged, for "the hot exhaust pipe of the Simpson burns a deep, round wound in the calf of your leg if you sit behind the driver without caution."

The driver in this case is obviously a boy, a 'boyfriend', which also marks the passing of time. More cheerful than the childhood stories, the teenage stories are about teenage loves. "Lukewarm Milk (Line Code)" is told by a teenage girl who vows vengeance against Robi, who jilted her for Kathy, a relative on a visit home from America. She steals the boy's skates and hockeysticks from the locker in the school and scatters them in different dustbins far from the school. The sulky, spiteful tone of the narrative offers a brilliant insight into the teenage girl's mind and, at the same time, puts it at a distance by way of subtle irony.

The stories narrated by an adult woman, about her disappointments in love and emotional ups-and-downs, are characterised by irony, conciseness and straightforwardness. "There's a Witch (Line Engaged)" and I Love Dancing (Closing Line)" are about betrayals apparently by the same man. Brilliantly rendered, "Cold-flooring (High Line)" (see under the title "Freed", pp. 75–87 of this issue) is about a humiliating, senseless journey to Japan, the point of which eventually is that at carefully selected places the narrator deposits the twelve slips of paper on which she and her lover had noted down his erotic wishes during a previous journey together.

The best story in the volume is the last one, "Miserere (To Draw a Line)", the most mature version of the type of story that is latent throughout the book, in which the writing, which is called a story, does not really tell a story; it is a narrative voice speaking without any special rules and programme of the genre. It is first the voice of a little girl, on holiday at friends of her parents, together with the hosts' children. She is horrified to see that the father and his sons catch frogs and tear off their legs and fry them; the legless bodies of the frogs are still moving in the grass the next day and the frog's legs are inedible. Long years pass, then the father is taken ill with a horrible disease called 'miserere': excrement wells up and passes through the mouth, to put it plainly, the patient "vomits shit". Though the narrator does not spell it out, the spectacle of "the incredibly thin thighs and yellowish-white lower body shrunk to the size of a child's, showing from under the cover" invokes the skinned white legs of the frogs. ❧

László Somfai

Bartók's Great Crescendos

Some Observations for Young Musicians

Béla Bartók's mature music is essentially non-Classical (though the large-scale instrumental works composed between 1926 and 1937 may be said to have Classical ambitions); the entirety of his oeuvre and his whole artistic personality are fundamentally Romantic. On several occasions, I have tried to find the right form to express this conviction of mine, but a number of my colleagues have disagreed, whether they said so openly or not. The problem derives, in part, from the divergence between aesthetic terminology and musicians' everyday talk. In the case of composers, 'Classical' often implies a value judgment (more valuable and more noble, more enduring than 'Romantic' art), and given the fact that Bartók himself affirmed that his new style had arisen as a reaction to the excesses of nineteenth-century Romantic music, we ought to spare him the disparaging 'Romantic' epithet. (It has to be noted, though, that after 1930, Bartók only distanced himself from "excessive sentimentality", not Romanticism *as such*.) Yet, if we keep the dichotomy of Apollonian and Dionysian attitudes in mind as we try to determine the basic traits of Bartók's personality and music within the context of a great historic era of the past (the classics of the twentieth century: Schoenberg, Bartók, Stravinsky), then Bartók's powerful Romantic attributes begin to appear in a positive light.

All this is confirmed to me by the study of Bartók's piano recordings. One has to admit that the general interpretive trends of the 1950s and '60s were scarcely helpful to Bartók performers. True, the idiom of new music became more familiar; mixed metres no longer presented any problems, and Bartók's scores began to seem easier after the appearance of performances that were more and more accomplished technically. In the process, the compositions themselves—especially the string quartets and some of the symphonic and piano music—came across as being purely 'classical', sometimes even 'classicising' masterpieces. Yet

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Bartók's own playing is extremely personal, eventful and stirring. He deployed an entire arsenal of Romantic piano techniques, made the musical characters larger than life and strove for a powerful cathartic experience. He was able to create catharsis several times, and at different levels of intensity, in the performance of works such as the Sonata for Violin and Piano No.2, the first movement of the Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion, or the Second Piano Concerto. Still, even in his shorter piano pieces, he could shape deeply moving conclusions or penultimate moments that the printed score would not have suggested to another performer. Through his performances of his works, Bartók made it clear that precise reading of the score and virtuosity were worthless if not backed by a true artistic personality, courage and imagination.

Twice as wide

The sound documents of Bartók's piano playing have been accessible for 25 years now, and their influence on performers may be easily traced. When contemporary Hungarian pianists perform Bartók, one can see a certain shift in style and find interpretations that are bolder, more persuasive and more individual than those of the past. This first manifested itself in the interpretations of Zoltán Kocsis, which have exerted a great influence on others. Kocsis got to the bottom of the issues when he studied and recorded Bartók's entire piano oeuvre for Philips. He put his own creativity to the test by asking himself how Bartók might have played those pieces that have not come down to us in his own recording. For younger Hungarian pianists, it is no mean task to come to grips with this dual model—Bartók's recordings and Kocsis's Bartók interpretations. In other genres, there is only sporadic evidence that the message of Bartók's recordings have been artistically processed; it is enough to listen to Boulez's recent Bartók CDs of the piano concertos or the majority of recent string quartet recordings.

It seems to me that the study of Bartók's compositional methods and working habits reveals another way in which the Romantic nature of his personality manifests itself. How did Bartók compose? In 1925, the writer and poet Dezső Kosztolányi asked him, "How do you work? Systematically?" Bartók answered, "I can say this: I don't like to do two things at once. If I begin something, then I live only for it until it is finished." "At the desk? At the piano?" "Between the desk and the piano."[1] Or should we believe the later recollections of the musicologist Antal Molnár? According to him, "Bartók composed like Mozart—he worked out everything in his head and then wrote it down with fiery speed." The latter comment receives no support at all from the documentary evidence. With my knowledge of the entire manuscript material, I can safely say that, under normal circumstances, Bartók began work on a new composition by improvising at the

1 ■ Translated by David E. Schneider in *Bartók and His World,* ed. Peter Laki. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 230.

piano, searching for materials and shaping them behind closed doors. When the beginning of a movement or a more substantial section had emerged, he wrote down the draft, not "with fiery speed", but rather with the precision of an experienced musician/ethnomusicologist. In an often-quoted letter of June 1926 to his wife Ditta (written after he had sent her and their son Péter off on vacation, so he could work on the First Piano Concerto undisturbed), we read:

> The other night, I was getting ready for bed around midnight when all of a sudden I thought of something I had to write down immediately. And that was the end of my desire, and ability, to sleep. I spent at least another hour ruminating over what I had written. Another time, I jumped out of bed to write something down... The problem is that I couldn't even begin the most important thing, the piano concerto. But such things can never be forced.

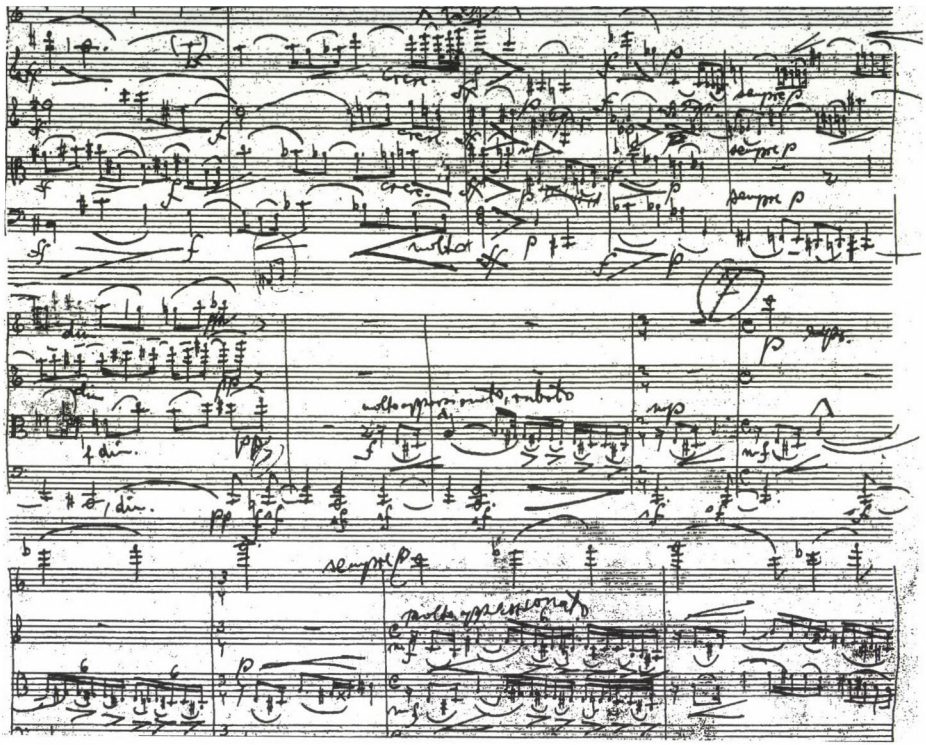
All this must have sounded extremely Romantic even in the 1920s, when many prominent composers, especially those belonging to the Schoenberg circle, started work only after a stage of rational planning and preparation. In those days, the craftsman-like attitude of a Hindemith, who could write a new piece in the dining car of an express train between Berlin and Frankfurt, passed for a virtue. The composer himself had boasted of his feat. Bartók must have felt out of place in such company. After all, he was not a full-time composer and could not afford to sit at his desk every morning, all the year round, to fulfill his daily quota. His experience must have been that finding the main idea and the opening materials of a new work was almost always unpredictable. Then, after a period of planning and preliminary thinking, the opening material would finally crystallise as if by miracle and now there was something that could be further polished, improved, made into a complete piece. Bartók himself probably did not understand how this happened, and we must believe that he did not want to understand it. The study of his manuscripts confirms what we know from the printed scores to be one of the most salient aspects of his art—namely, that he begins each important work with a new theme or character that has not existed before, strong and emphatically original. These themes or characters were not *made* but rather *found* by the composer who, after the necessary mental prepration, had to wait for this to happen. As the work continues, technique may take over; personal habits of shaping the material, tried-and-true harmonies and favourite rhythmic processes may come into play. Those are the elements that constitute Bartók's personal style, the totality of the fingerprints usually described and catalogued by analysts.

Of course, one can be confident about such observations only after decades of research and repeated, systematic investigation of every single extant manuscript of a Bartók composition. Yet, I would like to share my conviction with young Bartók players who are all too often lured by the siren voices of analytical trends not primarily geared towards the things that really mattered to Bartók, but which rather emphasize the search for abstract proportions, the labelling of certain technical fingerprints or an excessively literal identification of folk music models.

A study of Bartók's manuscripts may be helpful in understanding which elements were crucially important to him. There are many reasons why sensitive musicians should want to see composers' manuscripts, whether they are by Bach, Mozart, Liszt, Brahms, Stravinsky or Bartók. In some cases they might suspect a wrong note, or else they might want to see first-hand whether an irregular slurring pattern is authentic. They might also be curious as to what was corrected, deleted, or added in the course of the compositional process. And in general, they would like to see the visual image of the score, the style of the handwriting, in order to come closer to the composer. With regard to Bartók, the situation is rather complex, but very exciting. Not only string players, but pianists and conductors as well would greatly benefit from consulting Bartók's first draft for the opening movement of his String Quartet No.4—a composition crystal-clear in its layout and elaborated in great detail. This is a three-and-a-half page long document written in ink. Here we see what Bartók considered the most important thematic material and what he did not notate (did not decide on) for the time being. Then, one should look at the next autograph draft, which runs to eight full pages, and contains all the filling materials, transitions and developments. It will turn out that some of the canonic imitations and other 'clever' techniques, so impressive in the score, only serve to give form to a texture. There is even a third autograph manuscript, the fair copy (here the first movement takes up ten pages), in an easily readable, larger hand, where the crucial performing instructions concerning articulation, dynamics, accents and tempo finally appear. With three autograph scores, this is a complicated source situation. Yet even that is not the complete picture, for Bartók made some more small, but crucial changes in the copy sent to the publisher, and even more in two sets of galley proofs. In other words, the main interest of the Bartók manuscripts—unlike with those of Bach, Mozart or Haydn—does not lie in double-checking suspected wrong notes and slurs (a task that the editors of the critical edition of Bartók's complete works will undertake), but above all, in allowing us to approach the composition from up close.

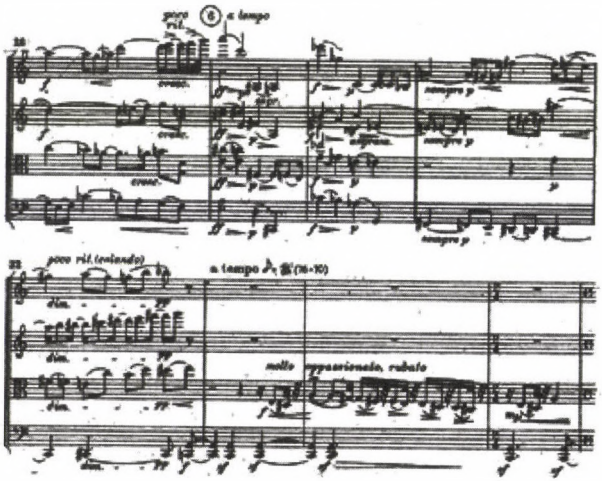
The dynamic markings and accent signs are particularly revealing. To pick out a single symbol, the *crescendo/decrescendo* hairpins appear in most printed scores as uniform signs, which is an artificially regulated version of what Bartók had intended for the musician to see. Example 1 shows a passage from the First String Quartet's opening movement in the autograph score—the climax of the *Lento*'s first section, preceding the *molto appassionato, rubato* viola theme of the middle section. For the sake of comparison, Example 2 shows the same passage as printed by Editio Musica Budapest, to illustrate how these hairpins were treated by a professional engraver who is familiar with the traditions, general rules and aesthetic principles of musical notation. (NB: This revised edition contains some authentic tempo instructions which are not in the autograph, but were added later.)

The wide hairpins in Bartók's handwriting are beautiful and suggestive: they indicate a powerful increase in volume or an enormous—and rapid—loss of intensity. In some cases, they are tilted up or down, following the direction of the



Ex. 1. String Quartet No. 1, excerpt from the autograph score of the first movement. (The original manuscript is in Peter Bartók's collection.)

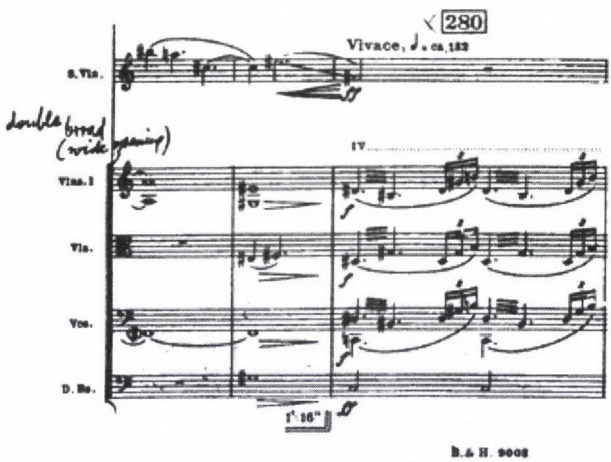
melody. Some are thick, others thin. (It is not generally known that in the printed edition of the *Fourteen Bagatelles,* from the time of the First Quartet, Bartók expressly asked the engraver for two kinds of *crescendo/decrescendo* hairpins: thick and regular.) The two-note slurs in the "Hungarian" rubato melody for the viola look so much more exciting in the autograph! Any musician with a keen eye will notice that a number of notational subtleties got lost in the printed version; around this time (1908) Bartók was not yet the hawk-eyed, meticulous proof-reader he later became. The word *molto,* written inside the giant crescendo hairpin of the cello, is not there in print; in the next measure, the *espressivo* melodic step of the second violin (originally *mezzoforte*) erroneously became *piano*; in the first measure of the next system, the *tenuto* signs are absent in the second violin part; the first of the cello's open fifths



Ex. 2. String Quartet No. 1, excerpt from the first movement in the EMB edition.

(C–G) lost its *sforzato* accent; several vertical *marcatissimo* signs were converted into weaker, horizontal *marcatos,* etc.

If someone were to link these vigorous *crescendo* and *decrescendo* hairpins to Bartók's truly 'Romantic' phase from January 1908—a style saturated with memories of *Tristan,* which helped the young composer get out of his system his grief over Stefi Geyer—I could counter with any number of wide hairpins from the manuscripts of the later string quartets, piano and symphonic works. I could also cite one of Bartók's strict injunctions to the printer of his Piano Sonata (1926), where he insisted that the *crescendo* and *decrescendo* hairpins be engraved with an opening just as wide as they were in the manuscript, and thicker than usual. For an example of Bartók's style in the 1930s, consider the (Second) Violin Concerto. Example 3 shows an excerpt from the first movement in the Boosey & Hawkes score—the *crescendo* sign accompanying the solo violin's glissando at the end of the *Calmo* section with the dodecaphonic theme. Here Bartók wrote on the margin of the galley proofs that he wanted a hairpin twice as wide as before. (In the published edition the hairpin was, in fact, modified, though not exactly doubled in width.)



Ex. 3. Violin Concerto, 1937–38. Excerpt from the the galley proofs of the first movement from the Boosey & Hawkes edition.

A correct musical text is one thing; a score whose visual appearance in itself inspires the performer is quite another. The issue of the wide hairpins is but one component of Bartók's elaborate ideas about performance, many of which, unfortunately, can only be seen in the manuscripts. Yet this one issue might suffice to encourage a young artist who reads Bartók's scores with fresh eyes to try out some "heresies" in order to make his or her performance more expressive, more fiery, more personal.

My partner in this imaginary conversation, the enthusiastic young musician, will ask, "What scores should we use to play Bartók? Don't we need facsimile editions more than anything else?" I am certainly a proponent of facsimile editions, accompanied by the necessary commentaries.[2] At the same time, given

2 ■ I recommend the following facsimile editions of Bartók manuscripts that I have prepared: *Two Rumanian Dances* (Budapest: Editio Musica, 1974); *Piano Sonata* (Budapest/Vienna: Editio Musica/Universal, 1980); *Béla Bartók's Black Pocket-book: Sketches 1907–1922* (Budapest: Editio Musica, 1987); *Viola Concerto* (Homosassa, Florida: Bartók Records, 1995). Furthermore, some interesting facsimile pages may be found in one of my exhibition catalogues *[In Bartók's Workshop. Sketches, Manuscripts, Variants: the Documents of Creative Work]*; Budapest: MTA Zenetudományi Intézet, 1987), as well as in my book *Béla Bartók: Composition, Concepts, and Autograph Sources* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1996).

the complex source situation of certain Bartók works, I would caution against using the autograph (*any* autograph) as an exclusive authentic basis for the performing musician—the kind of basis a Mozart or Haydn autograph would provide. With Bartók, the text was not definitive until it was printed or revised. The young musician might ask whether the new printed editions are better than the old ones when it comes to doing justice to Bartók's performance instructions. There are no easy answers to this question. First of all, even those first editions which had been proofread by Bartók are not all alike in this respect. With regard to the *crescendo/ decrescendo* hairpins, the score of the Piano Sonata by Universal Edition is certainly better than many other Universal Edition scores (though only a seasoned Bartók scholar would know this). Some of the string-quartet parts are better than the full scores, which often have a crammed look. In the Universal Edition and Boosey & Hawkes scores revised by Peter Bartók, hairpins are often corrected so they do not stop before a barline but lead straight into the new dynamics as Bartók had intended—yet, the width of the hairpins is usually not taken into consideration. The Bartók complete critical edition in preparation will widen the hairpins within reason and make them more 'Bartók-like', but a hairpin like the one seen in the manuscript of the First String Quartet would look absurd in print. Bartók's scoring was extremely dense; he crammed more measures in a single system than a printed edition can accommodate in an aesthetically pleasing manner. The hairpins in the complete edition, though relatively wide, will have to be more elongated.

The tempo changes by itself, so to speak

One of the inhibitions that becomes an obstacle to an artistically free, expressive Bartók interpretation has to do with tempo. I am certain that today's young Hungarian musicians have received much better guidance about authentic Bartók tempi than their teachers' generation had. They know that Bartók attached special importance to tempo, despite evidence that in some cases may seem confusing. A well-chosen tempo is a defining element of the character of a given movement or theme. It is natural these days to use a pocket-size digital metronome and to take the composer's own tempo markings as a starting point when practising a piece by Bartók. When checking a recording (our own or someone else's), the metronome or stopwatch will come out of its case and, at the slightest discrepancy, the verdict will arrive quickly, Beckmesser-fashion: the tempo is not authentic; Bartók's indicated durations are not being observed. (On a subjective note: it is easy to notice discrepancies in tempo, but much harder to gauge dynamics, accents, intelligent articulation, character or the balance between main and subsidiary voices. If a performance—conducted, say, by Sándor Végh or Nikolaus Harnoncourt—is really significant and reveals the depths of Bartók's scores, it no longer matters to me whether or not the tempo is exactly identical to what the score says it should be.)

No doubt, we have turned the question of Bartók's tempi into a fetish. In an earlier article and in the last chapter of my book,[3] I adduced a great deal of evidence to show the impossibility of interpreting all of Bartók's tempo markings in the same way, since those markings come from different times in his life, belong to different genres and appear in editions with different publication histories. There are countless typographical errors, from the famous case of the *Adagio barbaro* to any number of data that were entered wrong and never corrected, even in the American years.[4] These should be enough to shake the confidence of every committed Bartók player who wants to believe firmly that the author's markings can never be questioned. Two famous metronome markings deserve to be mentioned here in particular. For decades, the world's most famous conductors—Hungarian and non-Hungarian alike—have tried to interpret the second movement of Concerto for Orchestra convincingly while following the marking *Allegro scherzando,* ♩ = 74, which was more like *allegretto*. Yet Bartók's manuscript has ♩ = 94! What happened was that in the bound photocopy, mailed from the United States to the London offices of Boosey & Hawkes, the upper semicircle of the digit 9 had been cut off. The number 94 became 74 and was engraved that way. Bartók read the galley proofs, but failed to notice this fatal error. It has to be noted that the discrepancy became apparent as soon as Koussevitzky's recording, made shortly after the world premiere from the handwritten score, was released on CD. Another case has been a major headache for pianists. The balladesque third movement of *Improvisations,* marked *Lento, rubato,* bears the metronome marking ♩ = 96 in the printed score. Yet there is no doubt that Bartók had written ♩ = 69. The two digits were transposed by the engraver and the error, once again, escaped Bartók's attention. It is the only one of the work's eight movements of which we do not have a recording by the composer. For a long time it was up to the pianist to decide whether they should adopt the rather hectic rubato suggested by the print, or rather follow their instincts and disregard the metronome marking in the score. Peter Bartók's corrected edition gets the numbers right; the new editions supervised by the composer's son are, therefore, a must for any performer today.

I have spoken elsewhere of the tempi heard on Bartók's recordings, which (even the main tempi at the beginning) often significantly differ from the printed scores. At this point, I do not wish to go into the possible causes of these discrepancies or how today's young performer should deal with them. Yet I want to draw attention to an important fact, and to a Bartók statement that is difficult to find. We must know that Bartók couldn't, or wouldn't, make a final decision on the ideal tempo until the piece had been performed; this was true even in the genres where he could count on good performers, well versed in his music. For

3 ■ *Béla Bartók: Composition, Concepts and Autograph Sources,* pp. 252–262, 279–294.

4 ■ For instance, the duration of the Bagatelle No.2 is 1'48" according to Bartók's handwritten note—yet there are two extant recordings with the composer which clock in at 45" and 44", respectively. Bartók erroneously wrote 1'48" instead of 48".

instance, when he sent the engraving copy of the Third String Quartet to his publisher in Vienna in the autumn of 1928, he stipulated that "it cannot be printed until it has been performed and I have heard it"; on 24 April 1929, he declared, "I wasn't able to revise the metronomic markings until now, during the rehearsals of the Waldbauer-Kerpely Quartet; many of the markings had to be corrected." The issue, here and in numerous other cases, was not to slow down a tempo to make it easier to play. On the contrary, he made the *Prima parte* faster; the allegro in the *Seconda parte* stayed the way it was, but some of the *Più mosso*'s were accelerated.[5]

The statement that is difficult to find concerns the correct interpretation of metronomic markings and the timings, precise to the second, which appear in Bartók's scores. This statement was published in English in the 1941 piano reduction of the Violin Concerto. Who would look there if a full score is available to the student and a printed part to the soloist? Yet it is very important that every Bartók player should know it.

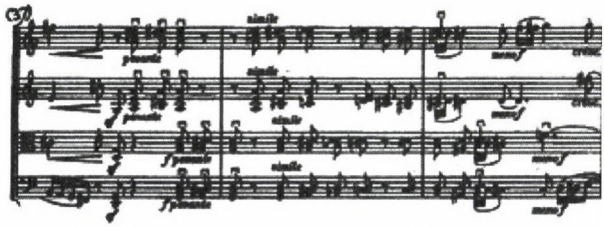
> Timings, noted from an actual performance, are given for sections of movements and, at the end of each movement, for the whole thereof. It is not suggested that the duration should be exactly the same at each performance; both these and the metronomic indications are suggested only as a guide for the executants. It appears to me better to present them as exact timings, rather than round off the figures.

It is one of those declarations where the outlook of the composer is inseparable from that of the ethnomusicologist, who had painstakingly notated thousands of folksongs, constantly revising them over the years. Bartók knew that every performance was unique, both in folk practice and in the concert hall, but he still thought it better to document the specifics of a given performance than to give approximations.

An expressive performance in Bartók's spirit entails more than the choice of correct basic tempi; even more important is, perhaps, the observation of tempo fluctuations—segments played somewhat more slowly, followed by a return of the original tempo. For the most part, Bartók did not indicate these fluctuations as downright tempo changes in the score; a good musician must feel these things with the help of his or her schooling and taste. Also, these tempo differences cannot be measured exactly; they are more like agogic emphases. Many of his recordings—the two *Allegro barbaro* renditions, numerous pieces from *Mikrokosmos* and, of course, the performance of Beethoven's *Kreutzer* Sonata—strikingly demonstrate how Bartók took themes emerging from *ostinato* motion as well as from transitional sections, slightly more slowly than their immediate context. After all, such segments are more important, more individual. Bartók even wrote about this when, in 1931, he answered a query from Max Rostal concerning the correct tempi

5 ■ See my "Tempo, Metronome and Timing in Bartók's Music: The Case of the Pianist-Composer", Jean-Jacques Dünki, Anton Haefeli, Regula Rapp, eds., *Der Grad der Bewegung. Tempovorstellungen und -konzepte in Komposition und Interpretation 1900–1950* (Basler Studien zur Musik in Theorie und Praxis 1, Bern: Peter Lang, 1998, pp. 47–71).

in String Quartets Nos. 1 and 4. This is what he had to say on one particular passage in the first movement of the Fourth Quartet (see Ex. 4):



Ex. 4. String Quartet No. 4, excerpt from the first movement from the Universal Edition.

> In measure 37 of the first movement, the chords may, and even must, be played much more powerfully; as a result, the tempo will, of course, become more drawn out. Here and in similar places, it would be confusing to indicate tempo changes; the tempo changes by itself, so to speak, if we understand and render the character of these pesante chords correctly.

About 2,000 printed pages of Bartók's correspondence have so far been published and at least as many are still awaiting publication. Yet in all this material, there are no more than a dozen or two statements like this one, containing otherwise unobtainable information from the author, addressed directly to the performer. These should be published in the preface of every score; they will all be included in the critical edition.[6]

Definitely not *spiccato*!

In his above-quoted letter, Bartók cautioned Rostal regarding the performance style of the second-movement *Prestissimo, con sordino* of the Fourth Quartet, "with legato bowing, of course, definitely not spiccato!" In the postscript to a letter dated 23 October 1934, to the violinist Rudolf Kolisch, who was then preparing the world premiere of the Fifth Quartet, he wrote:

> PS I am not very fond of spiccato playing. Any passages not marked with a ⌒ should be played on the string, separating the notes to some extent (or hardly separating them) depending on the character of the passage. The note groups marked with ..... (dots) could, perhaps, be played spiccato.[7]

6 ■ I have to point out that some of the revised editions published after Bartók's death have been manipulated. The Rózsavölgyi edition of the First String Quartet is, in general, one of the most problematic Bartók scores. True, it was improved by Denijs Dille in 1964, when the edition was reissued by Editio Musica. Dille corrected many performance instructions on the basis of a list made by Bartók in the 1930s ("Correction of Metronome Numbers, etc."), the aforementioned letter to Rostal and a personal copy in which Bartók had made some entries. Even so, the score contains hundreds of inaccuracies. For an example of the manipulations on the text, one should look at the first page of the third-movement Allegro vivace. Here one finds three *poco più mosso* indications, separated by two metronome markings: ♩ = 88–92. These are not notations made by Bartók. All the composer had written to Rostal was "3rd movement. From [rehearsal number] 1 to 3 somewhat faster, with the exception of the sixth measure after 1 and the fourth measure after 2, which are more or less in the main tempo." In other words, this is one of those cases where "the tempo changes by itself, so to speak", as in the Fourth Quartet where "it would be confusing to indicate tempo changes."

7 ■ *Spiccato* technique, which was becoming very fashionable, made Bartók see red to the point where he even cautioned orchestral players against using it. In measure 8 in the fifth movement of Concerto for Orchestra, where the violins begin their semiquaver runs in the Romanian style, he appended the footnote [in English]: *always non spiccato (i.e. legato).*

In his memoirs, Zoltán Székely also repeatedly mentions on-the-string playing,[8] which might be called Bartók's 'default' string technique. If we listen to the opening of the Second Rhapsody's *Friss* section in Székely's performance, of which Bartók thought so highly, and compare it to the readings of other Hungarian violinists whose style has been deemed "authentic", it turns out that many otherwise great violinists who claimed to be genuine Bartók players (including André Gertler) were not authentic witnesses at all. I add with some trepidation that even Sándor Végh, during his years as a quartet player, occasionally forgot the instructions he had received from Bartók, or revised them in the spirit of the new times, particularly when it came to *tenuto* playing.[9]

The young Hungarian string player—my imaginary conversation partner—might interject that he or she is familiar with these documents, has studied the old recordings and attended the masterclasses of Lorand Fenyves and others. Yet we cannot go back in time or undo all that has happened in the development of violin technique since the 1940s, as a result of which the string instruments today sound more intense and secure in larger concert halls, whether in solo or in quartet or even in orchestra. Of course, a Bartók scholar could not change the tastes of today's string players or the tastes of the audiences influenced by these players—nor would he ever want to effect such changes. Yet it is to be regretted that a variegated, refined and discriminating sound, or a multifaceted right-hand technique that does not hesitate to take risks, is no longer considered a virtue. Such features were found in the performances of the best Hungarian soloists and chamber musicians of the early twentieth century, and they contributed to the excellence of such Bartók interpreters as Stefi Geyer, Jelly d'Arányi, Joseph Szigeti, Zoltán Székely and Ede Zathureczky. (We can still admire these qualities in the cello playing of Miklós Perényi.) Many people think that audible shifts are antiquated; yet they were an essential feature of any expressive performance, and they were very much part of Bartók's consciousness (as well as Schoenberg's, by the way), while continuous vibrato was practically unknown. Artists playing Bartók today must be aware that the composer counted on a wide range of timbres, playing techniques and nuances. They must take this into account and try to translate it into modern technical language, while avoiding significant losses if possible. One should acknowledge, too, that producing a consistently beautiful, intense sound is no substitute for crystal-clear intonation, especially in a string quartet. In the above-quoted last chapter of my book, a chapter intended for performers, I pointed out that only instructions like *espressivo, molto espress., ma con calore, cantabile,* etc., call for a genuine vibrato that is so ubiquitous today. Even grazioso and dolce passages should not be played with too much vibrato, as such passages are rather far removed from *espressivo*.

8 ■ Claude Kenneson, *Székely and Bartók: The Story of a Friendship* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus, 1994).

9 ■ See my "Idea, Notation, Interpretation: Written and Oral Transmission in Bartók's Works for Strings", *Studia Musicologica* 37 (1996), pp. 37-49, esp. pp. 42–43.

To focus on string-quartet playing for the moment, do we have any authentic recordings from Bartók's lifetime, made under his supervision, that would back up these claims? Unfortunately, we don't. It is one of the major lacunae of interpretation history that we have no recordings whatsoever of the Waldbauer-Kerpely Quartet, which premiered the first four Bartók quartets. The Fifth and Sixth Quartets were premiered by the Kolisch Quartet; we only have a Kolisch recording of the Fifth, but by the time that recording was made, the personnel of the quartet had changed, and the new foursome had only rehearsed the Sixth Quartet with Bartók, not the Fifth. Nor is there a recording of the Fifth Quartet with the New Hungarian Quartet (Sándor Végh, László Halmos, Dénes Koromzay, Vilmos Palotai), which gave it its first Hungarian performance after rehearsals with Bartók. To be sure, some of these players later played with other partners and recorded the works. The Hungarian String Quartet, led by Székely, included Koromzay and Palotai; Végh was to found the Végh Quartet. There were only four string quartet recordings made in Bartók's lifetime. These are highly recommended to young Bartók players, though their source value is only secondary.[10]

Not surprisingly, there is hardly any trace of the instructions Bartók gave to Hungarian artists; he could talk to them in person at the Academy of Music during rehearsals.[11] However, he sometimes shared important details with foreigners. One particular warning, addressed to Kolisch in an as-yet-unpublished letter on the Fifth Quartet, shows how important the correct performance of upbeats and downbeats was for Bartók.

> As in the first movement of the Fourth Quartet, barlines often serve merely as orientation points; to avoid misunderstandings, I frequently use the ⋮ sign; what precedes the ⋮ is an upbeat, what follows it is a downbeat (mostly accented).

10 ■ The four recordings are as follows:
1925: String Quartet No.2, *Amar-Hindemith Quartet* (Licco Amar, Walter Caspar, Paul Hindemith, Maurits Frank), DG Polydor 66425/28. They used the first edition which contained many wrong tempi. Bartók only found out about this recording after the fact.
c1936: String Quartet No.2, *Budapest Quartet* (Josef Roisman, Alexander Schneider, István Ipolyi, Mischa Schneider), CD=Biddulph Recordings (1995) LAB 107. Bartók never heard this recording.
c.1936: String Quartet No.1, *Pro Arte Quartet* (Alphonse Onnou, Laurent Halleux, Germain Prevost, Robert Maas), HMV D.B.2379-82. Bartók valued their playing, but he didn't hear this performance prior to the recording. It does not contain the comments regarding tempo, etc., which Bartók shared with Rostal.
c.1941: String Quartet No.5, *Kolisch Quartet* (the second group formed in America: Rudolf Kolisch, Felix Khuner, Jascha Veissi, Stefan Auber), CD = Biddulph Recordings (1995) LAB 107. Bartók knew and valued the Kolisch Quartet in its original, European composition; this, however, is a reorganized group.
11 ■ A couple of documents, which have come down to us by accident, attest to the fact that even performers intimately familiar with Bartók's music occasionally had to be corrected after their first readings. For instance, Bartók wrote out the first 142 measures of the first violin part from the Fourth Quartet for Imre Waldbauer, maybe to test the technical difficulties of the piece. The part originally contained only slurs and staccato markings, but in a later stage (after hearing his friend's reading), Bartók added articulation signs—*tenuto, staccato+tenuto, staccato* at the end of a slur, etc.—to almost every single note. Even Waldbauer did not at first play the "ordinary notes" the way Bartók wanted to hear them. See my "Idea, Notation, Interpretation" (fn. 9), where musical examples are given.

I doubt whether performers of today, Hungarian or not, always read and accentuate Bartók's scores in this way. One of the most exciting Bartók quartet performances I have heard in recent years is the Zehetmair Quartet's (Thomas Zehetmair, Ulf Schneider, Ruth Killius, Françoise Groben) recording of the Fourth Quartet.[12] It is very inspiring, particularly in their rendering of the special muted, plucked, *sul ponticello* and *glissando* sounds. Yet in the fast movements they play many measures of music practically without any accentuation at all, as a single undifferentiated surface. It is like reading a poem as prose, disregarding verse structure and rhymes, intentionally proceeding too fast and creating new connections among the elements. This may be interesting and novel, but the original is perhaps better, or at least is still valid. Even though Bartók's scores appear to be constructed with the precision of an engineer, the notes, measures and phrases are not all equal. A performance must breathe. If a listener feels tired too soon by an interpretation that is too tight and has no relaxed moments, if he or she only hears masses of sound and virtuosity instead of meaningful musical sentences, then Bartók has fallen victim to fashion.

One day in America, Yehudi Menuhin paid a visit to Bartók to play the First Violin Sonata for him and to ask for his advice. The composer found the performance surprisingly good. We know the story from Menuhin's memoirs, but the following passage from one of Bartók's letters (to Wilhelmine Creel, dated 17 December 1943) is perhaps even more revealing:

> When there is a real great artist, then the composer's advice and help is not necessary, the performer finds his way quite well, alone.

Many of us remember the First Sonata as played by Menuhin in concert in the years after Bartók's death. Younger people may want to consult his recording or the video of his appearance in St. Petersburg. This score was a perfect fit for Menuhin's temperament and artistic personality; his performance was magnificent, powerful and deeply personal. Bartók himself had played his First Sonata with several outstanding Hungarian violinists. Jelly d'Arányi's rendition was probably in no way inferior to Menuhin's; the composer of the sonata and its dedicatee must have played the work more 'authentically'. Yet to Bartók, true artistic greatness and a searing, inspired approach were more important than 'authenticity' in such details as musical 'mother-tongue' with its attendant *rubatos* and agogic accents. Young Hungarian Bartók players take note: even if it is not going to be easy to escape the long shadow of today's leading interpreters, there is always hope. ❧

12 ■ ECM New Music Series (2001) 1727, 465 776–2.

Tamás Koltai

1956 on the Stage

András Papp & János Térey: *Kazamaták* (Casemates).

The reburial, on June 16th, 1989, of Prime Minister Imre Nagy, hanged and buried in an unmarked grave in 1958, was the foundational event in Hungary's change of régime. What had been forbidden even to talk about had to be looked squarely in the face—the bloody genesis that lay behind Hungary's Kádár-style consolidation, the price the country paid for its relative prosperity within the penumbra of Soviet occupation and the relative freedom in this 'happiest of barracks'. The tacit compromise that the bulk of Hungarian society had made with the Kádár régime aroused painful feelings of guilt and self-examination; however, the changeover proceeded as a quiet transition. In contrast to the fall of the Berlin Wall, or the events in Prague and Bucharest, there was no dramatic catharsis, but rather an unease, grumpiness, indifference and, perhaps, shame. Equally, the demands that had been made in 1956 had, by 1989, lost their topicality; interpretations of the Revolution diversified as competing, occasionally updated 'accounts' of '56 emerged. All of this led to argument, acrimonious confrontation, 'appropriations' of the Revolution and even the vacuous claims that no change of régime had taken place. This, sadly, is still the case. At the time of writing (four months before the 50th anniversary of outbreak of the Revolution), it is not hard to forecast the discordant voices that commemoration is going to set loose.

None of which makes for an easy reception for any play about the events of 1956, and particularly not when we know the background to the incidents that the playwrights set at the core of the plot.

What happened in Köztársaság tér—Republic Square—in Budapest on October 30th, 1956, was nothing less than mob rule, and *Life* magazine gave the world tragic and abhorrent images of what happened there. To this day, an unchallenged reconstruction of what happened remains unattainable. A group of armed freedom fighters entered the building of the headquarters of the Greater Budapest Communist Party, which, apart from party officials and members of the secret police, was staffed by civilian employees and a detachment of young conscripts. There is no way now of knowing for sure whether there had been any prior provocation, but repeated pleas from the occupants of the building asking for the armed guard at the headquarters to be reinforced fell on deaf ears. The commander of the sole tank that was eventually

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dispatched to quell the disturbance was so uncertain as to what his task was, and who exactly he was supposed to be defending, that he left the scene not long after. It seems likely that the "defenders" opened fire and that fire was returned, with casualties, both dead and wounded. A group who were sent out of the building to negotiate a cease-fire were mowed down and hacked to pieces, as were others who attempted to flee. Public opinion condemned the lynching from the outset, except for a few individuals who claimed that the killings were provoked, or who forwarded bizarre conspiracy theories as to why the people defending the Party Headquarters could be held responsible. The execution of the truce negotiators and those who had already surrendered, along with the abuse of their corpses, constituted an outrage from which other armed groups of freedom fighters sharply dissociated themselves—at least, in their recollections.

The big question for the play's reception is why its authors chose as their subject this isolated, unrepresentative event, demonstrably the revolution's sole atrocity, to mark the solemn occasion of its half-centenary, rather than create a monument to the unsullied idealism and courage of the freedom fighters and their willingness to lay down their lives. The issue is not the socio-political assessment of 1956, or the placing of its aftermath into perspective, but rather the aesthetics and cultural role of drama as a genre.

Casemates is not an anniversary piece; the Katona József Theatre is too good an ensemble to put on such a piece. It is not the theatre's job to commemorate, eulogize or celebrate. Nor is it to write history. The striking of postures of heroism, pathos or catastrophe by Hungarian historical dramas, with few exceptions, usually fizzles out in self-pitying or self-justifying anguish. *Casemates* does not seek to locate or evaluate the Revolution in the light of intervening time, and thus it is irrelevant to ask why it takes as its subject the October 30th massacre in Republic Square, of all things, if it does not provide an appropriate slant for evaluating the Revolution. It may be based on documentary evidence, but *Casemates* is not a docudrama; it may probe the reasons for human acts, but it is not a whodunit, either (no more than, say, *Oedipus Rex* or *Hamlet*).

Hungarian newspapers over recent months have often reproduced a photograph that was taken in Republic Square during those days. A number of people have professed to recognize the figure of a man in a white raincoat as being a (later) film director whose presence there at the time is supposed to have been covered up by another (later) film director during the period of post-revolutionary reprisals. Others reckon the figure is someone else. Another recent story involves the shooting of a street scene in a film about 1956. A passer-by informed the director, "It wasn't like that." Truth and legend merge in memory. Calls for historical authenticity have a place from the standpoint of writing history, but it is not the task of art to reconstruct the past.

There are as many histories of 1956 as there are people who lived through the events. András Papp and János Térey, the authors of *Casemates,* who had not been born yet at the time, end the play with two lines: "One historical event disintegrates / Into nineteen hundred and fifty-six pieces." (The word-play on pieces, of course, is deliberate.)

The critic Sándor Radnóti has pointed out that "the authors of the piece wrote a historical play that has the ambition to faithfully follow, as far as possible, the actual events of a dramatic episode of the Revolution that is superbly suited to be shaped as drama. Indeed, they pose historical questions, but those questions do

not include the historical topicality in any sense of the events portrayed, nor do they have anything to do with identifying with the event itself or any of its protagonists."

The story of Republic Square, as Papp and Térey see it, is a horror scene in a magnificent revolutionary narrative. It embraces heroism, cowardice, villainy, narrow-mindedness and the abominable. It is a monstrous nightmare farce; a lethal tragicomedy of intentions, accidents, wills and errors; a unique moment of awfulness that, opened out and enlarged, shows the Whole—not the 1956 Revolution, not the psyche of the Hungarian nation or its historical fate, but the mutually rancorous murderous instincts that can be stirred up by fear and vengeance—man's hidden upheavals and their dimensions.

It is no doubt pure chance that the Katona József Theatre's program for the same season also included *Troilus and Cressida,* in a production under the Romanian director Silviu Purcarete. That also deals with murders occurring as metaphysical nonsense, irrespective of the fact that at the back of the mundane episode in Shakespeare's play is a war that was unleashed for a woman of no virtue, whereas with Papp and Térey it is a fight for freedom. The stance and technique adopted by the two latter are Shakespearean—iambic pentameters alternate with prose, while the first speech after the prologue is a paraphrase of the opening lines of *Richard III*—in the manner in which a mundane story is elevated into universal drama. (Térey's mythologizing inclinations are in no doubt, given earlier works like his verse novel *Paulus*—see *HQ* 166—and his monumental play *The Nibelung Gated Housing Estate*—see *HQ* 176—loosely based on the Wagner tetralogy).

Casemates carries off the literary feat of elevating a real story to an abstract level. The local party headquarters and the square—the defenders and the attackers—provide a model for the antithesis of insider and outsider. The insiders are the power-holding ideological dogmatists (their ideas and activists' jargon are abstracted), the outsiders are the people seeking to depose them. Both groups display hierarchic and moral gradations. The insiders run the gamut of party officials, officers of the security force (ÁVÓ), special police, officials, Communist true-believers and careerists, decent and spineless people, employees and conscripts—some brave and some cowardly. The outsiders include insurgents, passers-by, released jailbirds, working-class people and former aristocrats, one-time adherents of the wartime extreme-right Arrow Cross, ranters and mollifiers, the humane and the inhumane. The inside and outside are at the same time the upper and the lower, as in the classical pattern, with the insiders as the wealthy and the outsiders as the dispossessed. As to the insiders, rumour on the outside suspects they are leading a life of luxury within and that they have a system of underground casemates, or vaults, where freedom fighters are being held. The siege of the party headquarters begins almost by accident, with ambushes being laid on both sides and innocent victims falling on both sides. A bloody farce ensues, with the tanks sent to relieve the defenders opening fire on them by mistake. Fatal terror erupts, with someone trying to parley a truce stretched out dead, with no way of knowing who shot him and from where. A hell is let loose—hangings, lynch-mob frenzy, mutilation of corpses. The people are degraded into a mob, the crowd into a rabble. In the end comes the rude awakening when it turns out there was no luxury, nor were there any casemates.

The authors highlight individual faces on both sides, each with their fragment of fate. There are no main characters, just these largely one-way figures, though two individuals are focused upon. One is Endre Mérő, a party third secretary who is left alone as he wrestles with his conscience

(this character is "modelled" on a real-life individual named Imre Mező, secretary of the Greater Budapest Communist Party); the other, Nikkel, leader of the besiegers (likewise an identifiable leader of a group of insurgents), who by the end reaches a state of near-total disillusionment. The story-teller-cum-commentator known as Spokesman is a figure who brings to mind the *Paris-Match* photographer Jean-Pierre Pedrazzini, who was fatally wounded in Republic Square. He is an anti-Thersites who, unlike his abusive Shakespearean counterpart in *Troilus and Cressida,* enunciates bitter moral principles. One of these, for instance, is "we have a single house, a single space", and therefore also a single leadership structure and a single rabble—those, too, are what "we" are. His outsider's tragic-ironic viewpoint necessarily expands the dramatic dimension into the present-day—for example, by posing quiz questions and acting like a straitlaced reporter in a reality show, giving the parley team three minutes "to leave the House" (which is a reference both to the "Party House", as the building was called, and the TV reality show Big Brother). Spokesman's role as an intermediary adds to a long list of other verbal anachronisms, like a poet type who, on a phone call out of party headquarters, blames the celebrated rebel Communist author Gyula Háy for the turn taken by events. (The writer emigrated from Hungary after serving over three years of a prison sentence for his part in wording the intellectuals' revolutionary manifesto.) He also grumbles that a day will come when he will become one particular besieger's minder (i.e., as an officer in the security forces, he will recruit the besieger as an informer to report on friends, colleagues and neighbours). Past joins up with present, the rhetoric of iambic verse with the obscenities of everyday language, a tragic historical horror with a political pamphlet in the form of a dramatic poem; thus creating the strangest, the most original and the most outstanding new Hungarian play of recent years.

The production was directed by Péter Gothár. Some people thought it would have been better to go for a director who, like the authors, belongs to the post-1956 generation. It would certainly have been different, and there should be no obstacle to doing so in the future. There is no question that Gothár carries the imprint of the last fifty years within his very being (not to speak of his work), as the distinguished theatre productions and films to his credit bear witness. His directing style sits well with the Katona company—sticking closely to real-life specifics, but still retaining enough elasticity to stretch to a tragi-grotesque dance of death, almost a modern morality play. (A subsequent director may be able to demonstrate that a more abstract dramaturgy also works.) The stage setting, which Gothár also designed, revolves around a mobile steel frame that is fitted with wheels, a tippable platform and swing-down or pop-out window-door sections, which permits it to convey both the metaphor of the "House'"as an island and its progressive destruction. The outsiders' base is formed by a corrugated portico and a few steps. The two groups are positioned close together, almost eyeball to eyeball, and the inevitable narrowness of the space between them is a signal that the two groups are ultimately one. Gothár indeed capitalizes on that by having the outsiders and insiders hold a discussion over the corpse of the shot-down bearer of the white flag—rather as if they were on a companionable hunting party—as to the input and output, meaning the fatal bullet's entry and exit wounds. (This was originally part of the text to be delivered by Spokesman.) The biting irony comes to the fore at other points also, such as when the whole crowd whispers a password all together, or when

the sickeningly disparate company poses for an idyllic group picture. ("The light is good now," Spokesman says.)

The tightly abridged text imposes a tautness on the play. Scenes come in quick succession, with the rhythm being set by the mixture of stylized and realistic effects (blood sprinkled from a tea-pot, gunshots and explosions produced by varied means, panels of real steel and a surrealistically tumbling piano) and variations of theatrical dynamics. It is not acting but the ensemble that has a solid presence on the stage. The martyred truce negotiator is a fall guy trapped by ideology. The crowd leader ("love him for being ours and Hungarian") in the end tears off his National Guard armband and, disenchanted, "leaves to go courting". A colonel who loses his nerve dies in action wearing tracksuit bottoms, while a colleague of the same rank turns out to be an insane fanatic. A range of female fates are built into the destinies of the woman soldiers among the insiders. The pilot of a "biplane" flies round the auditorium on a wire cable, and a misinformed tank commander plays out a tragic farce highlighted by a gigantic magnifying mirror. On the other side, appearances are made by, among others, a peg-legged marauder, a homophobic prison lag, a woman who cuts out a human heart (she later hops it because "her kitchen's in a mess"), a gentleman of the old school in a Tyrolean hat, a kind-hearted young woman with conciliatory instincts (the thing that stops her from being lynched is that she is said to be an actress because of her declaiming a dramatic tirade), and a humanistic saver of lives. "The authors' aim," writes Radnóti—and the production bears this out—is

> sensual evocation of the crowd. The crowd is the dramatic formation from which the characters step out, only to return to it after playing their scene. The episodic structure makes it possible for the chaotic automatism of the multitude to come into being not through voices, but characters. For that, it was necessary that no main figure stand out from the crowd... All the same, the crowd here is not a faceless mass for which only the whole, but not its components, gains as a face.

The cast ends the play in their street clothes, with their own faces. Unlike Pushkin's or Büchner's portrayals of crowds, we see the appearance here of the alienating effect of the actor's face separate from his or her role.

In relation to the play, the production is both conceptually and stylistically rather muted to be in any danger of running too close to the bone of current public taste, either politically or aesthetically. Notwithstanding that, surprise and resistance on the part of the audience were palpable. Some walked out; others did not join in the applause at the end. There are countries where that is by no means unusual, where real theatrical scandals may occur, but Hungary is not one of them. Nor were there demonstrations against the Katona József Theatre's production. A prevailing apathy would seem nearer the mark. The critical reaction has not been appreciable either, with no airing of polemics. The influential critics who so often loudly decry the publication of mediocre volumes of poetry or run-of-the-mill novels have been strangely subdued. Could it be that they are too stunned, or has the prestige of theatre fallen so low?

Because there are things to talk about. A discussion of the play's merits would be of more value than silent indifference. ❧

Erzsébet Bori

Salto mortale

Szabolcs Hajdu: *Fehér Tenyér* (White Palms)

Do you remember Olga Korbut? The darling of the 1972 Munich Olympics, "the sparrow from Minsk", who at 16 didn't look more than 12? The girl who came up with acrobatic elements never seen before, changing once and for all her sport—gymnastics, previously the preserve of shapely twenty-year-olds and attracting only mild spectator interest? The beauties in their twenties suddenly turned into sluggish old cows, with their feminine curves and harmonious movements: they were swept away by the underdeveloped, tiny girls who could do ten times as much and were a hundred times more daring. All of them came from East Europe.

At the following Olympics, the 20-year-old Korbut was outclassed by the 15-year-old Nadia Comaneci. A few years later the star coach of the Romanian team, a Hungarian by the name of Béla Károlyi, was training young hopefuls in the US. At the beginning there were good results, too, but once they had dropped off, people began to look for the reasons, and the East European training methods were caught up in controversy. Alarming information came to light about Soviet children permanently crippled by highly dangerous exercises, the ruthless use of physical and mental terror in sports schools and training camps cut off from the outside world. All this seemed outrageous, even with the awareness that the Communist system went all out for success in sport and wasn't exactly known for its respect for individuals and their rights.

Szabolcs Hajdu's new film, *White Palms,* casts a strong light on all this, although exposure was hardly his intent; he only wanted to make a film about his brother Dongó, who happened to be a competitive gymnast as a boy. After an accident, Dongó became a coach, but he competed once more at the world championship held in his home town, winning a bronze medal on the vault—the same event in which his young Canadian pupil took gold. He then bid a final farewell to gymnastics and went on to be an artiste in the Cirque du Soleil company.

This outline seems to suggest that *White Palms* is a standard sports film. This is surprising only to those who are familiar with Szabolcs Hajdu's career, his special experiments with formal expression in his short films—*Necropolis*, 1997 and *Kicsi-marapagoda* (Pagoda for Little Mara), 1998—and the continuation of these

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experiments in two highly personal feature films—*Macerás ügyek* (Sticky Matters), 2000, and *Tamara,* 2004. There's no lack of a personal touch now either. The director was a competitive gymnast at one time, and he's not only familiar with his younger brother's experiences, he actually shared them. The parents of the film are his parents; the location, the town of Debrecen in eastern Hungary, is his home town. As he said in an interview, the elements of the story are 90 per cent true to life.

In general, Hungarian critics praised the "first half" of *White Palms*—by which they mean the depiction of the by-gone political system, Hungary in the 1980s and children's competitive sport—and considered the filming of Dongó's coaching in Canada and the 2002 world championship the weaker part. Except that the film doesn't have a first and second part in this sense, since the narrative doesn't progress chronologically, but jumps forwards and backwards across many years, letting the events which are distant in time and space interpret each other through the classical use of cutting.

In the early sequences, Dongó as an adult (the director's brother, Zoltán Miklós Hajdu playing himself) arrives in Calgary to take up his position as coach to a young Canadian talent, Kyle Sewfelt (also playing himself) and a group of boys. From this situation, we go back to the past, to the children's training squad in which Dongó suffered as a boy of about ten at the hands of a sadistic slave-driver. Uncle Feri, the coach (a terrifyingly authentic interpretation by the Romanian actor Gheorge Dinica) punishes his pupils with the help of a sword (!), strap and rope and forces them into precision and obedience. The children do what they are told to do without a word of complaint and learn to put up with physical pain and humiliation. There's no escape, comfort or help; the parents tolerate all this, accepting these methods as a natural part of life. That was how they were raised, and this is what they pass on to their children in word, deed and example—by submitting to all sorts and conditions of power, whether exercised by a boss, policeman, teacher or coach. When his parents discover a sword cut on Dongó's leg, the boy invents a crime to fit the punishment, since they'd never believe he'd been given an unjust or disproportionate punishment. This is a merciless description of the submissive behaviour of someone under tyranny. Here the person suffering from a chronic lack of freedom isn't exalted as an innocent victim, as we have seen in so many films; there is no solidarity, not even a wink behind the jailer's back. The depiction of the horrors is, in fact, impassive. The sight of palms grazed bloody, sprained ankles, curved spines, or small boys crying or gritting their teeth is not intended to arouse sentimental tears. It's not this that really pulls at the heartstrings; it's the infinite loneliness of the children. There isn't a trace of expression of camaraderie between the oppressed here.

Loneliness accompanies Dongó to Canada where he is again on his own against a whole community when, as a coach, he lightly slaps the face of one of his pupils. The boys—among them the guilty party and the victim (in whose defence the slap is given)—look at him with the same amazement as the headmaster and the parents do later on. What he had done wasn't just unacceptable to them, it was quite incomprehensible. Dongó gets another lesson when he meets the young Kyle Sewfelt. He can cast all the knowledge and conditioning he has brought from home to the wind, because Kyle is difficult and pig-headed and refuses to obey orders. It is a total failure on all counts until a chance incident makes Dongó realize that he can only achieve success through a relationship of partners and mutual trust. So as Kyle's coach, he also prepares himself for the world championship to be held in

Debrecen. Of course, the press pounces on the master and pupil pair competing side by side and against each other. Both are questioned as to what results they hope for. I naturally want to come first, says the Canadian champion. I don't want to win, but I hate being beaten, says the Hungarian. From these two attitudes we could almost draw conclusions about the mystical soul of different nations, but let's be more modest.

Szabolcs Hajdu has traced the life and upbringing of a generation (though several East European generations may recognize themselves). The generation of those who were born, went to school and started a career before 1989, with the burden of this socialization, had to change track en route. Under the circumstances, it's no wonder that *White Palms* constantly breaks out of the framework of the normal sport film. This approach is backed up by the natural acting of the cast, both professional and amateur and wonderful music by Ferenc Darvas. Moreover, András Nagy's cinematography excels both in the parallel shots of the world championship and the acrobatic feat—the salto mortale without a net—and in capturing the loneliness of the Canadian prairies and the cramped, suffocating flat in a Debrecen housing estate.

Szabolcs Hajdu considers his master to be Miklós Jancsó, who in his third full-length feature film described his beginnings as a director and the experiences that define his generation. The title of Jancsó's 1964 film was *My Way Home*. *White Palms* could have been given the same title. ❧

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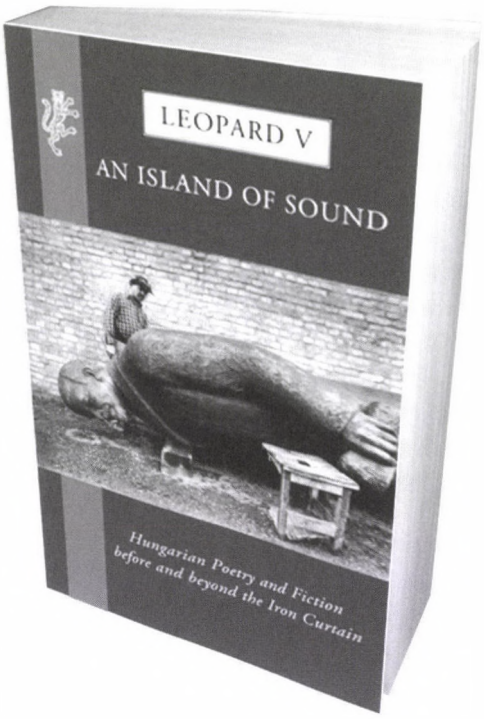

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He was not staring indifferently but wanted something, or was unable not to want something, he saw something, was maniacally keeping his eye on something, could not let it go. That something was across the square, down there at the mouth of the Grand Boulevard, on the far side. It would sometimes be covered by a passing tram. Maybe at the bus stop. When a bus stopped, as if he had to look beyond it, he would stand even more on tiptoe. Maybe someone ought to be coming, that's what he was waiting for, and that's why he could not abandon his watch-post.

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