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■ A Hill Walks by IMRE ORAVECZ

■ Journey to the Depth of the Penalty Area by PÉTER ESTERHÁZY

The Esterházy Treasures Recollected

When Art Nouveau Turned to Glass

The House Spatial: LAJOS KOZMA's Modern Villas

■ Healthcare under the Knife

■ Why Men Die Young in Hungary

■ "From My Memoirs"—An autobiographical sketch by ERNST VON DOHNÁNYI

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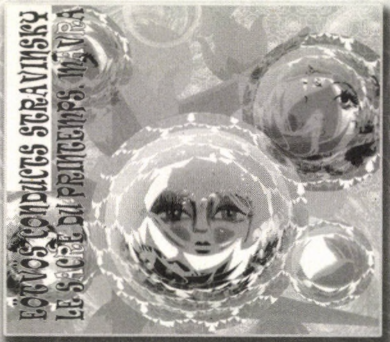

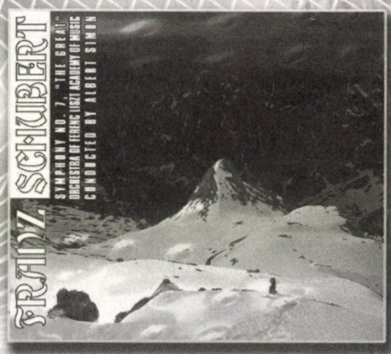

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Cover: *Cupid pendant. Germany or the Netherlands (?), early 17th century.*
Courtesy of Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest
Main photograph on back cover, by Erzsi Gajduschek: Sándor Márai in 1923.
Courtesy of Petőfi Museum of Literature, Budapest

János Végh

Treasures Recollected

Treasures of the Esterházys:
Five Centuries of Art Works from the Collections of the Princely Line.
Exhibition at the Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest,
13 December 2006–30 December 2007

Treasures have always excited people. The aristocracy and the wealthy sought to acquire them, those who could not wondered at them, dreamed of them, told tales about them and, of course, envied those who owned them. The proud possessors were obviously well aware of this envy and strove to keep their treasures safe and under protection, especially those that were not in everyday use. Hence the existence of treasuries, to which no one, apart from the owners and invited guests, would be admitted, and where even the cleaning of their contents, one imagines, was carried out in strict security. That in itself was a prime breeding ground for conjecture and fantasy. The consequences can be seen to this day. Whether at the Old Seraglio in Istanbul, the former residence of the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, or the Hofburg in Vienna, the former residence of the Habsburg emperors, or indeed the Tower of London, the longest queues are those snaking in front of the treasuries, despite all the many other attractions on display. The glitter and glint of gold, silver and precious stones, the reverence and dignity that these symbols of monarchical authority radiate, draw crowds like magnets.

The Esterházy family were never monarchs. Yet although their treasury guarded no crowns, it was none the less fabled for centuries. In order to understand why, a number of things need to be recalled. The Esterházys were one of the grandest and, as regards their landholdings, the richest of Hungary's aristocratic families; this meant that they were of corresponding political importance for centuries. Their estates lay mainly in Transdanubia, the western area of the country, which goes some way towards explaining their consistent loyalty towards the Habsburg rulers. When Hungary's own medieval line of kings died out in 1526, after defeat by the expanding Ottoman power, the central and most densely inhabited, area of

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the country came under direct Turkish occupation. Transylvania, in the east, emerged as a separate principality, retaining independence in internal affairs but obliged to defer to the sultan on foreign policy. The crown of Hungary passed to the Habsburgs as they were the choice of the now weakened country's nobility (or rather of a tight clique of its most powerful magnates). In what remained of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary, they were elected time and time again to the throne, initially in the hope of securing effective action against the Turks and, later, by hereditary right. Relations with the Habsburgs were rarely smooth, in part because they were unable to meet the expectation that they would drive the Turks out, in part because most Hungarians were Protestants during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the era of major religious conflicts, while the House of Habsburg remained fiercely Roman Catholic.

The Esterházy family's renown was fostered by their strange rise to power. Count Nicholas I. Esterházy (1583–1645), the founder of their wealth and subsequent prestige, was born into an average family of the middle nobility, but within a remarkably short period attained the highest secular office in Hungary, that of *nádor,* or Palatine. He thus became the Habsburgs' representative, the medium of their will at national assemblies and hence of their authority in the country as a whole; equally he relayed and represented the wishes of the population vis-à-vis their king. (On paper it should have been the ruler who appointed the Palatine, his most trusted man, but in that era the Hungarian nobility won the right to elect him through a vote in the Diet, so the ruler only endorsed that election by his formal appointment of that person.) The future Palatine laid the foundation for his dizzying rise in the world by converting to Catholicism at the age of seventeen. That step, which must be ascribed to his own deeply felt convictions and which clearly owed much to his education at a Jesuit college, aroused general outrage among his predominantly Protestant fellow noblemen, and he was even disowned by his father, who barred him from his house. Instead, he became the protégé of a highly placed uncle on his mother's side, accompanying him on two campaigns against the Turks. Then, with a favourable reputation reinforced by the bravery he had displayed on the battlefield, he offered his services to the constable of Kassa (Košice in Slovakia), the military commander of extensive territories in eastern Hungary. To win acceptance for himself in that Protestant environment must have called for considerable diplomatic skills. He was so successful that he became the constable's deputy and after his death married the childless and immensely rich widow. He thus became the lord of substantial estates, and his elevation was completed by the Habsburg ruler bestowing on him the rank of baron. In the years to follow he was employed by the ruler in various confidential, what might be called diplomatic, negotiations, which further boosted his authority both inside and outside Hungary. After losing his wife, he contracted a second advantageous marriage, and it is worth noting here that both his wives turned Catholic before the wedding, obviously at his prompting. (Esterházy seems to have followed the much-admired practice by which the Habsburgs acquired their domains in the

fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as reflected in a contemporary bon mot: *Bella gerant alii, tu felix Austria nube,* or "Others make war, you, Happy Austria, marry!")

The Esterházys, in keeping with their wealth, made considerable material sacrifices in carrying on the struggle against the Ottoman empire, and on more than a few occasions personally took part in the fighting. One sad outcome of the Battle of Vezekény (Vel'ky Vozokány, Slovakia), which took place in late November 1652, was the death of no less than four male members of the family, including its head, Ladislaus. Esterházys regularly attained high public office (on one further occasion as *nádor*) and took part in diplomatic missions. For those services they usually earned the gratitude of the Habsburg ruler of the day, sometimes sweetened with a gift or special favour (including the opportunity to purchase goldsmiths' work that had passed to the imperial treasury as the property confiscated from another Hungarian aristocrat who had been executed for treason). Imperial favour culminated in the bestowal of the title of prince in 1687. As far as their subsequent patronage of the arts goes, let it suffice here to note that they built magnificent palaces at Kismarton (Eisenstadt, Austria) and Eszterháza (today's Fertőd), where Joseph Haydn was their kapellmeister and composer for three decades, and that the greater part of the Old Master collection of the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts was purchased from the family by the Hungarian state.

It follows from the subject of the exhibition under review that we shall be concerned primarily with the early phases of the Esterházys' patronage of the arts dominated by the acquisition of treasures. The uncertainties of seventeenth-century conditions that otherwise smiled so beneficently on the family, the fickleness of the fortunes of war, the permanent threat that hostile forces might unexpectedly appear at almost any moment, all these spurred people to invest the greater part of their wealth in easily transportable precious metals. Better-off peasants might sew rows of silver buttons on their clothing, whereas aristocrats endeavoured to amass as much silver, gold and jewels as possible, and then employed goldsmiths to enhance their value. These items might be complemented by the reverently preserved personal possessions of distinguished members of a family—decorations, items of clothing or weapons, for example. (Among the decorations on display in this exhibition is a Grand Cross of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath, bestowed by Queen Victoria on Prince Paul III Anton Esterházy (1786–1866) in 1837 for his services as ambassador to the court of St James.)

The Esterházy Treasury—the private collection of the Old Forchtenstein Line, amassed by Nicholas I and Prince Paul (1635–1713)—was located in what was considered the invincible fortress of Fraknó (Forchtenstein, Austria). A few items would be brought out for display there at sessions of the Palatine's council, while for the national Diet or a coronation the more sumptuous pieces would be carried with them. All of this helped to burnish the family's reputation still further. The collection was housed for almost three hundred years, from the 1630s to the 1930s, in Fraknó Castle. Their splendid isolation from the outside world came to

an end when the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy found itself on the losing side in the First World War. Anticipating occupation of parts of the Monarchy by the armed forces of the successor states, many aristocrats, including the Esterházys, had their treasures and at least important parts of their less transportable family archives transferred to Budapest. Between the two world wars those treasures were exhibited in the Museum of Applied Arts. At the end of the Second World War, with the Red Army approaching, the family saw fit to have the treasures removed to the former royal palace in Buda Castle, where they were stored in a cellar. The building was destroyed by a direct hit, with the collapsing masonry crushing the crates in which the treasures had been stored—irretrievably so, it was supposed, until they finally came to light several years later. That was certainly true for many of the textile, glass and ivory objects, but thanks to the skills of one particularly gifted restorer at the Museum of Applied Arts and his pupils, many of the gold and silver items have proved salvageable.

This exhibition could only have been mounted, then, thanks to this restoration work and the now very close ties with Austria. In moving the treasures to presumed safety during the summer of 1918, a smaller, but far from insignificant, portion stayed in Austria, where it now forms part of the property of the Esterházy Privatstiftung in Eisenstadt, one of the private trusts managed today by the Esterházy Betriebe GesmbH. Some of these items have been brought over to be reunited for a few months with the other parts of the fabulous collection for this show, curated by András Szilágyi*, a specialist on the Esterházy Treasury and on the Esterházys.

In the first of the galleries, immediately to both left and right, are displayed two ornamental cups, the work of Hans Petzold, a highly esteemed master goldsmith of sixteenth-century Nurenberg. One of these is made from an unusually large piece of pearly turban shell, so contemporaries would have classified the artefact as *naturalia.* On its lid is portrayed a woman looking at herself in a mirror, which some suggest depicts the allegorical figure of Prudentia, the Christian virtue of circumspection, though other interpreters have suggested it is more likely to be Cleopatra marvelling at the beauty for which she was famed. In the case of the other cup the beholder is simply overtaken by wonder at the craftsmanship, making it a good representative of *artificialia.* Some of the tiny decorative elements are attached so delicately that they shiver and glitter inside the display case simply because of the vibrations in the floor as one approaches to take a closer look. Hence, the goldsmith has been able to give the impression that the object has a life of its own, moving and shifting without anyone so much as touching it. The left side of the gallery is dominated by an enormous, 78 cm-high silver-gilt goblet called the Matthias Corvinus Cup, which, so tradition has it, was once the property of Hungary's legendary king of the late Middle Ages. (The Esterházys were of course eager to own any object, regardless of quality, that was

* ■ He was also responsible for the exhibition and catalogue of the Gilbert Collection at Somerset House, London: *Hungary's Heritage: Princely Treasures from the Esterházy Collection,* 2004.

Ágnes Kolozs

Fraknó Castle (Forchtenstein, Austria) from the east
Engraving by Matthias Greischer, c. 1690
Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest

In the colourful history of Fraknó Castle, the three decades following the Esterházy family's acquisition of the derelict medieval building (in the mid-1620s) stand out in particular. It was then remodelled to plans drawn up by Simone Retacco, a court architect for the Habsburgs in Vienna, and given the character it has retained, impressive and imposing in size to the present day.

Ágnes Kolozs

Pilgrim bottle
Hungary or Nuremberg, 1470–1480
Silver-gilt, repoussé chased (77.5 cm high).
Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest

An outstanding creation of late-Gothic goldsmiths' work in Central Europe that is also of value for its rarity, being almost the only – and certainly the most impressive – extant example of its kind from the last third of the fifteenth century. Scholars are essentially in agreement over the dating, less so as to where it was made, opinion being divided between Nuremberg and Hungary. Among the known surviving written records, the first to mention this item is an inventory of the treasures in Fraknó Castle that was completed in November 1645, shortly after the death of the Palatine Nicholas.

Ágnes Kolozs

Cup with the armorials of King John Zápolya

Breslau, Silesia (Wrocław, Poland), 1535 (?)
Silver-gilt, cast, repoussé, engraved; cup: polished semi-precious stone (chrysophrase)
(56 cm high; base 18 cm diameter)
Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest

This ingeniously constructed item has long been a subject of divergent views and dispute among experts. There is no question that it was commissioned by King John Zápolya, but it is open as to for whom it was intended and when.
It is conceivable that the piece was held until the 1620s in the treasury of the Berlin residence of the Margraves (later Electors) of Brandenburg. It is presumed to have come to Hungary in 1626, and its presence in the treasury of Fraknó Castle is documented from the early 1700s onwards.

Ágnes Kolozs

Cup and lid with enamel decoration

Munich, 1595 (?)
Gold; cast, repoussé, chased, inlaid enamel
(31.8 cm high)
Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest

This typical sixteenth-century southern German goldsmith's piece is lifted out of the run of comparable items of its period by the virtuoso handling of the enamelling. In its colour combination (blue, white and black), it shows similarities to one of the masterpieces of Bavarian goldsmithing, an ornamental cup produced by Hans Reimer in 1653 for the treasury of the Residenz in Munich. This now somewhat battered gold drinking vessel displays enamel inlays with the armorial bearings of Austria in three places, suggesting that it may have formed part of a set ordered by a member of the House of Habsburg.

Cup with an allegorical figure of Prudentia

Hans Petzolt, Nuremberg, c. 1580
Silver-gilt; cast, repoussé, engraved; mounted amethysts, rubies and pearls; cup: large single piece of turban shell (54.5 cm high; base 15.5 cm in diameter)
Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest

A rare exotic item of outstanding value, an unusually large, curiously shaped large piece of the shell of a marine turban snail, polished to give it a lustrous, mother-of-pearl appearance, is combined with figurative decorations sculpted with exceptional skill. The stem of the cup is formed by a distinctive grouping of a bearded male figure riding a dolphin and raising a conch-shell horn in his right hand to his lips. The lid is decorated with a half-figure of Prudentia, personifying the Christian virtue of circumspection. The cup is known to have been part of the Emperor Rudolph II's treasury in Hradčany Castle, Prague; after his death in 1612 it passed into the inventory of the royal treasury of Bohemia. It eventually found its way into the Esterházy treasury at Fraknó around the middle of the seventeenth century.

Ágnes Kolozs

Safavid appliqué wall hanging

Persia, 16th century
Satin base with silk taffeta and gilt leather appliqués (278 x 254 cm).
Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest

We have no information about exactly where and when this wall hanging showing the Persian Shah Tahmasp (1524–1576) flanked by his retinue was made, nor of its original function, or how and when it passed into Esterházy ownership, but this unique textile item is generally dated to the sixteenth or seventeenth century. Some researchers have argued that it came via the treasury of Count Ferenc Nádasdy (1625–1671) at Sárvár castle or the estate of Count Emeric Thököly (1657–1705), who was briefly Prince of Transylvania, but others maintain that it was part of the ransom paid to Palatine Nicholas Esterházy for the release of high-ranking Turkish prisoners who were captured at the battle of Érsekújvár (Nové Zámky in Slovakia) in 1623.

Ágnes Kolozs

Ágnes Kolozs

Platter depicting the Battle of Vezekény
Philipp Jakob Drentwett, Augsburg, 1654
Silver-gilt; repoussé, cast, chased
(88 cm deep, 105 cm in diameter)
Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest

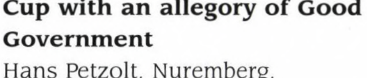
This unusually large platter, the embossed scene on which depicts Ladislaus Esterházy (1626–52) in mortal combat, extols the heroes of the battle of Vezekény (Velké Vozokány, Slovakia) on August 26th, 1652, and in particular the head of the Esterházy family, who fell in the battle. The fierce posture of the unhorsed warrior is clearly intended to convey the message that the Esterházys, and the Hungarian estates generally, were fulfilling their historical mission of acting as a bulwark – if need be, at the cost of their own lives – against the incursions of the infidel empire.

Manfred Horvath

Portrait of Count (later Prince) Paul Esterházy
Benjamin von Block, 1655 (218 x 109 cm).
Oil on canvas
Esterházy Privatstiftung, Eisenstadt
Esterházy-Ahnengalerie, Burg Forchtenstein

This portrait was the first commission to be undertaken in Hungary by the Lübeck-born German painter Benjamin von Block (1631–89). The young count presumably got to hear of the artist in Vienna, where Block lived from 1655 on. Esterházy ordered not only this portrait of himself, but a companion portrait of his wife that was completed only in 1659 and was Block's last Hungarian work.

Ágnes Kolozs



Cup with an allegory of Good Government

Hans Petzolt, Nuremberg,
1595–1600 (?)
Silver-gilt; repoussé, chased, cast, etched decoration, mounted diamonds, suspended appliqué, strung pearls (67 cm high; base 14.9 cm in diameter).
Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest

Hans Petzolt and Christoph Jamnitzer were among the most highly esteemed of the goldsmiths active in Nuremberg around the year 1600. This splendid piece, on the evidence of its mark, was produced in Petzolt's workshop, but the composition on the cup's lid was very likely sculpted by Jamnitzer. Through its attributes, the allegorical female figure is to be interpreted as personifying good government.

Ágnes Kolozs

Jewelled cup

Pendants: Prague, Jan Vermeyen (?), c. 1600
Goblet: Vienna, 1638 (?)
Silver-gilt, with gold or silver pendants, precious gems, coloured enamel (22.5 cm high; 20 x 24 cm in diameter)
Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest

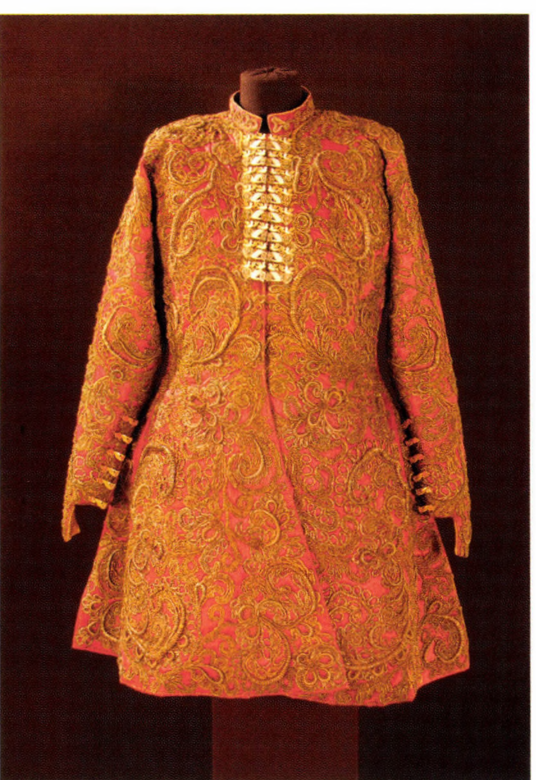
In a letter dated August 11th, 1638, which Palatine Nicholas Esterházy addressed to the court in Vienna – specifically to Archduke Leopold William (1614–1662) – he requested that the imperial family make arrangements to be represented "as they graciously saw fitting" at an imminent notable event, to wit the wedding of his first-born son, Stephen Esterházy. The jewelled cup in its present form may well have been a gift for this wedding, as the allegorical figure on the base – a putto or amoretto riding on the back of a frog – tends to confirm. The belief, rooted in classical mythology, that the frog is a symbol of fertility and marital harmony was still alive in the seventeenth century. The cup as such was made and assembled by the Viennese court's goldsmiths, but the large precious gemstones with which it is encrusted are attributable to one of the superlative goldsmiths of the Emperor Rudolph's court at Prague, Brussels-born Jan Vermeyen, and can be dated to somewhat earlier, around 1600.

Ágnes Kolozs

Cup and cover with enamelled armorials

Ferdinand Kunath, Vienna, 1655
Gold; inlaid enamel, engraved base and coat of arms (19.5 cm high; base 10 cm diameter).
Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest

The name of Ferdinand Kunath, the goldsmith at the Viennese court who created this masterpiece, is inscribed on the lower part of the base. On its lid is inlaid enamelling depicting the coats of arms of the hereditary lands of Lower and Upper Austria, Gorizia, Carniola, Carinthia and Styria.



Ágnes Kolozs

Dolman (undercoat)

Italian silk, Hungarian tailoring and decoration, c. 1680
Satin with trim of silver-gilt and silver thread, ribbon and thin wire; enamel clasps (length 98 cm).
Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest

A dolman was a tunic that could be put on directly over the shirt, without necessarily calling for a pelisse to be worn over it. The Baroque splendour of this tunic of red satin, with its sculpted leaf and floral trimmings of gold and silver thread, stands out even among the many such garments in the Esterházy collection. The front is ornamented with white hands holding half hearts and, perched on the hearts and hands, pairs of clasps enamelled to represent white doves with golden wings. When the tunic is done up the hands shake and the half-hearts are united, and a similar repeated pattern is formed by the pairs of doves. The slits on the sleeves are fastened with a similar, but simpler version of the clasps. It is likely that this extravagant item was worn by Palatine Paul Esterházy in 1682, on the occasion of his second marriage, to Éva Thököly.

Domestic altar depicting the Adoration of the Child Jesus
Elias Lenker, Augsburg, 1624–1625
Ebony, silver, glass stones, enamel; repoussé, cast, gilt (104 cm high, 50 cm wide, 19 cm deep).
Esterházy Privatstiftung, Eisenstadt
Esterházy-Schatzkammer,
Burg Forchtenstein

The work of the Augsburg silversmith Elias Lenker is documented as being in Prince Paul Esterházy's treasury at Fraknó from 1700 onwards, as a consecrated altar of the birth of Jesus. It is unusual for such a piece to be held in such high esteem, but there are signs of use on it that suggest it may well have served as a domestic altar. It is an outstanding example not only of Lenker's craft but also of Prince Paul's deep piety.

Manfred Horvath

Ágnes Kolozs

Cupid pendant
Germany or the Netherlands (?),
early 17th century
Gold, diamonds, rubies, pearls,
ronde bosse enamel.
Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest

The figure of Cupid in flight, wings outstretched, hangs on a double chain with an enamelled section comprising three rosettes adorned with a pair of doves and stylised forget-me-nots. The immense popularity of this type of jewellery is attested by the great number of pieces extant in various collections and their depiction in many portraits of the time. Given the unmistakable amatory symbolism, it is likely that such jewels were intended as engagement gifts.

Ágnes Kolozs

Cup depicting scenes of mining
Selmecbánya (Banská Stiavnica, Slovakia), 1650
Silver-gilt; semi-precious stones; repoussé, cast, chased, engraved decorations and semi-precious gemstones
(43.7 cm high; base 13.2 cm in diameter)
Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest

This cup was presented to the Emperor Ferdinand III (reigned 1637–57) by the citizens of Selmecbánya on the occasion of his visit for the ceremonial opening of a nearby new seam that bore his name. The cup, with its scenes showing almost every stage of mining operations, possibly came into Prince Paul Esterházy's possession from Emperor Leopold I as a gift some time during the 1690s.

Triumph of Bacchus
Abraham I. Drentwett, Augsburg, 1660–65
Silver-gilt; repoussé, cast, chased, gemstones, pearls; inlaid enamel (31 cm high x 27.3 cm).
Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest

This centrepiece was very probably commissioned by Count Ferenc Nádasdy, who is known to have had frequent recourse to the services of Drentwett, a famed Augsburg goldsmith, to enrich the Nádasdy treasury at the fortress of Sárvár right up till the autumn of 1670, when its holdings were confiscated at the order of Emperor Leopold I and taken to the Habsburg treasury in Vienna. Some twenty years later this stunning example of the goldsmith's art again changed hands, thanks to the generosity of the Emperor to Prince Paul Esterházy. Its presence in the treasury at Fraknó is first mentioned in a Latin inventory made in 1693.

Ágnes Kolozs

time to the idea of salvation, or a strange 137 cm-high goldsmith's model of one of the Our Lady columns erected in the main squares of many Catholic towns and cities, including Vienna and Munich, during the seventeenth century.

There is also a long list of opulent accessories involved in the lifestyle of high aristocracy—strange figural table centrepieces, in several cases incorporating an interesting formation from the *naturalia* that were in such vogue (one instance being the figure of an ostrich, the body of which is formed of an actual ostrich egg), in other cases *artificialia* such as a carriage of Bacchus capable of propelling itself on a tabletop. The material that makes up many ceremonial banqueting vessels is their main point of interest, with items on display here being of ivory, the pearly shell of the nautilus, amethyst and many examples of rock crystal, including a number from the Prague workshop of the precious stone-cutter Ottavio Miseroni, who also pioneered glass engraving. Besides these there are condiment pots, ornamental cups, mirrors, table games and a startling diversity of jewellery for men as well as women. Of particular importance are several designs for jewels, previously unknown to scholars, which have been loaned from the Esterházy material held by the Hungarian National Archive and are on show here for the first time. Detailed publication of these has yet to come, but one can hope that this will be able to address the obvious question of whether the designs were produced under Esterházy commission in Augsburg, the leading European centre for goldsmiths at the time, or were designs created by an Augsburg goldsmith in the hope of winning an order.

Following the exhibition proper, apart from the catalogued items, the museum has put on display items of furniture from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which originate from the Esterházy châteaux at Kismarton (now Eisenstadt, Austria), Sopron and Eszterháza, and almost all are now owned by the Museum. These are mostly *pièces de résistance* of Hungarian and French master craftsmen—one of them, on the evidence of its signature, being by Pierre Migeon II of Paris and dating from 1750–58. The paucity of work from the cabinet-makers of nearby Austria is noteworthy. The grounds and interiors of the various Esterházy castles can be seen in a selection of nineteenth-century photographs, while at the very end are several poignant pictures of the destruction wrought on the Treasury in Buda Castle: shots of the ruined building, the crushed crates that emerged from the debris of the cellar, goblets that had buckled to the point of unrecognisability. Subsequent photographs give an idea of how the restoration process was tackled, and there are even a few unrestorable items on show—to the uninitiated eye just fragments or senseless tangles—as a sign of just how much work still lies ahead of the restoration team.

The exhibition will remain in its original form until March 2007, when the pieces that came over from Austria will be returned. The remaining, but by no means insignificant, part—some 80 per cent of the exhibition—will stay on view, with objects from various Hungarian collections to fill the gaps, until the end of the year. Captions for the pictures and the posters that outline the major interconnections are in German and Hungarian, and an English-language "walking guide" giving the main points is also available. ❧

Kristóf Csengery

Poems

Translated by Daniel Hoffman and Andrew Singer

When I Write Your Poem

Mikor a versedet írom

A rider gallops down imaginary street...
but in reality how can this be?
Where am I? What here can protect me
from your visit when the poem I write
is yours—maybe I'll vanish or have a hollow
existence, while below I stay to speak
for someone else, walk with another's feet,
so two travellers melt into one shadow

who never saw each other, each the source
of one another, always elsewhere, thus
from the beginning then, as both of us
from speech and silence by our thought made one:
this whatever-it-is you may speak in
through me, but my words sound as yours.

Translated by Daniel Hoffman

Kristóf Csengery
is a musicologist and critic, on the staff of the Budapest monthly Muzsika.
The poems above were selected from his second volume, Egy korinthusbeli a metróban *(A Corinthian in the Metro), Budapest, Liget, 2005.*

Abandoned Garden

Elhagyott kert

How the rings swing on the walnut tree!
Yet no one holds to them and swings,
the wind alone's what drives these rings
back and forth in their autumn play:
two flyweight champions who fly
dispirited, in the usual schism
of no one and nothing—and sometimes I
hear a swish—their movements' rhythm—
and they too flee with a few stampings.
At last I'll be alone among the trees,
with my steps in rhythm with these rings,
a shadow, a nothing, even less than these?

Slowly everything empties and dries out.
Where the hand once pushed a recently
green bough from the face, silken and leafy,
now the many bare twigs will scratch it.
Whatever is ripe now drops, and the dweller,
having paced his garden all summer,
now enters the house to pack and prepare.
What should he wish? "Next year again here?"
What is he thinking? Or does he know
and yet pretend nothing is different?
That he expected all this, just so,
and as he double-locks the garden gate,
should hum, quietly and indifferent,
just like the rings swinging to and fro?

What else is left? If *I could know*
would I rush out to greet it—or flee?
But I needn't rush in such abundant
ignorance, for today's cares suffice—
they are yet too much—and how I wish
they wouldn't walk so close, the where and how!
Oh, were it all the same: here, there,
just sitting still, not yearning back and forth,
and doing what one must, day in, day out,
come whatever may, waiting for what awaits.

But if it's not all the same? What if one
leaving, pretending it's the same, as he's
pottering, closing the door and window,
is bad at pretending and he forgets
his role, and whatever he omits
shows on his face, more totally so
than the spoken word, and silence nearly
absorbs his complaint, which he tries in vain
to conceal: his wanting to return

though he's not yet even left? There is no help,
and no one to play the advisor.
But inside too, as outside where
on the woodshed's slate roof, walnuts drop,
and only the ripe ones are drumming,
so too the unhusked questions knock.
And as a tidal wave once more, a year
envelopes us—and as we surface
drinking in the gasping breaths of air:
will it taste differently next year
or be just the same? And will the sun flash
darker here next year or be more bright?
Will there be she *and* me*? And what*
entwines the two: will there be us*?*

Questions, then silence; cool wind; pain.
The car's already waiting in the lane,
its engine urging, idling insensate...
One last glance through the garden gate:
the shelter, once a verdant summer tent,
now stands bare, as if intent
on warning thusly: "Don't delay
when you must go. And don't ask me, for I don't know..."
So swing the rings on the walnut tree.

Translated by Andrew Singer

Stick in Someone's Hand

Valaki kezében pálca

Time I always thought of as a worker
diligent, with purpose—but no,
the evidence proves contrary. Our master,
it seems, has no hammer with palm-smoothed handle,
nor a chisel, has no fine small file,
instruments that he could use to shape us.
We are a piece of something, each of us
the same as at the beginning—there's no change
gouging our brittle surface, nor does he
work upon our depths. If you would think
this isn't so, you would be wrong. Despite
appearances, we always imitate
the same thing: the long-known, deadly dull
lesson—our selves. In someone's hand
a stick, marking circles in the sand.

Translated by Daniel Hoffman

All Existing Things

Minden létező

Animals don't know the names of things,
they walk among them up and down
cushioned steps in the light, in shadow,
but never do they say This is
an armchair, I go around a table,
the jug is broken, now between

the cactus and geranium
I'll lie down. Smells they know
and shapes, on their fur they feel
the hard the soft but with the names
have nothing to do. In the mirror
of their glance all existing things
gaze at themselves, gaze without hope.

Translated by Daniel Hoffman

The Gate

Kapu

There in the square it stands
the triumphal arch with dark
mouth yawning darkly.
It divides nothing
from nothing.

It has no clue who pass
under its vault,
doesn't feel the ball that bounces
against its side, nor knows
when it was built or when
the day will come
it tumbles down.

Wind blows, snow falls hard,
cars spatter mud on the legend
carved in the stone
black slush runs down
over the gilt,

and the arch stands for centuries,
its marble feeling neither pain
nor sympathy, for that's its mission,
neither to see nor hear.

People come and go, lean
their backs against its stone,
beggars rest there, and all who go
to war and those who die in war
crowd under it

deaf and blind,
years uncounted pass
teeming with thieves,
presidents, committee members
swarm, prodigally life
squanders its riches,
there's everything that can fit
into the great sack of time,
only victory is missing
there is no victory.

Translated by Daniel Hoffman

Imre Oravecz

A Hill Walks

(Extracts)

Strife over the House

The building work started badly. Laci, the local builder whom we wanted to place the job with, had undergone botched hip-replacement surgery and fell out of the reckoning. He had already done work for us, and we were happy with him, more than that: a sort of friendship had grown up between us. We felt sorry for him and sorry for ourselves as well. Never mind, we comforted one another, we can surely find someone else instead. But things are no longer the way they were under Soviet socialism, in the Eighties, when I had already had occasion to do some building. Those rotten old days have gone when you could find neither labour nor materials for love or money. Capitalism is king now and unemployment. The market regulates everything; builders are just itching for a chance to work and are tumbling all over one another for jobs. Or so we reassured ourselves.

Like I say, the big project started badly, but the fact that it would carry on badly, and as badly as it did, in 2002, twelve years after the change in regime, we wouldn't have imagined in our grisliest dreams.

The building materials were no trouble at all: there was no need to put in an advance order for bricks, or to trawl around the county for a window frame or door as in the past. Or rather there was trouble, but it manifested in the form of us being always talked into buying more of everything than was needed, so we shelled out a fortune quite unnecessarily. Not that the manufacturers and dealers had any real hand in that.

Imre Oravecz

has published a dozen volumes of poems and several collections of autobiographical prose, among them the 2006 volume excerpted above. He spent years in the US where he became interested in native American cultures and where he traced the life and fate of some peasant forbears of his, who worked and died there as poor immigrants. An abiding concern of his is the vanishing village way of life. The book is reviewed on pp. 115–118 of this issue.

The trouble was much more with the workmen, the human factor supposed to transform material, make intelligent use of it. They were totally disinclined to put themselves forward. Or if we managed to flush one out, track him down, the trouble was to get him to bite the bullet and accept the job. Or if he did that, then to knuckle down and actually do some work. Or again—because this gets progressively worse—if, in spite of everything, he plucked up the courage, then sooner or later it became clear that he was an outrageous botcher and not only could he not lay bricks, for instance, but he didn't even know how to lay concrete: he had no qualifications at all but was a failed machine fitter, a sacked stoker, a superannuated baker or a bankrupted candy-floss salesman and incapable of setting even two courses of small bricks vertically. He had more than likely become a builder simply because he had found a bricklayer's hammer somewhere and taken it home, or else he had bought one, and had no scruples about taking on something about which he had no clue at all. No doubt money had driven him to this imposture, but one cannot rule out the possibility that the free drinks also played a part, because the way building work goes in Hungary alcohol almost counts as a building material. All the same, each one of them had come recommended by some friend or acquaintance. That has always been the case in this country: every single one of them has done a good job for someone, some time, which on the other hand just goes to show that we are not all the same, because it begs the question of good in whose opinion: the scope is broad enough to embrace everything up to having the house collapse around one's ears.

The first one was drummed up from the nearby village of Sirok. He struck us as engaging, though it was just a bit fishy that he asked for money up front, even though he didn't have to buy any materials. Fools that we were, we gave it to him, because he claimed to have difficulties in making ends meet. We converted a weekend shack into a family house, and that was going to be expanded by adding an extension to one end and putting in a side-wing. Either he did not follow the marked-out limits when he dug the trenches with his assistant, his son, or else he made a shoddy job of the shuttering, because he ruined the foundations. The extension was not lined up with the older walls while the side-wing was not at right-angles to that. Quite apart from the fact that he had allowed the delivered concrete to pour horribly all over the place, wasting at least two cubic metres of the costly stuff, but by the next day it had set in all the cavities and recesses because he had failed to level the soil on the floor of the trench beforehand. Before sending him on his way, to be rid of him as soon as possible, we rashly paid out a further instalment that was due after the first stage, even though it had been agreed that this was conditional on them mixing the concrete. Yet it had been delivered ready-mixed, and anyway the cost of the work that was actually done, even if it had been satisfactory, would have been amply covered by the advance he had received.

The second builder came from Tarnaszentmária. A placid, slow-talking, easy-going fellow of the old school. What is more, he had his own cement mixer and all the tools that would be needed. He reminded me of Laci for some reason. It wasn't

this that fooled us, though, but the house in which he received us: a big, two-storey building with lots of rooms, a garage, balcony and goodness knows what else. Maybe I should have produced a folding rule and done some measuring up then and there, or at least taken a close look at the angles of the walls on the outside, but I was reassured that the walls were standing and that the ceiling in the kitchen where he offered us seats was in place, and presumably the whole structure must be in working order: after all, he and his family lived there. I explained to him the shoddy workmanship that had been inflicted on us. No problem, he declared, when he came round and inspected the foundations; he would put things right with the wall, starting further out—that was all there was to it. Indeed, he did start, only not further out but further in, as a result of which the lengthways extension was even more crooked. With the side-wing, on the other hand, at the point where the wall should have been pushed in he had done the opposite: pushed it out and thereby made the obtuse angle even wider. We thought we were going to have an apoplectic fit. In plan view the house was supposed to be T–shaped, but the stem of the T was now clearly heeling over and its cap drooping like a huge croissant. We'll sort that out with the plastering, Teach, he tried to reassure me. I didn't fall for that, whereupon he put an end to the debate as far as he was concerned by declaring that I was chopping and changing again. That was his stock response no matter what defect I drew to his attention: you're chopping and changing again, Teach!

There was nothing for it; the walls were too high to have them knocked down, though we now know that would have been the most sensible thing to do. And then we were too far into the construction season to look for another builder. So it was with clenched teeth that we tolerated his continued ravages, his continuing to lay the walls, bodge the piers, the arches, the shuttering, the floors, the doorways and window openings. We called a halt when it came to the chimney, however; that was the last straw. He simply didn't know where to make a start. All it needed was to complete a semi-finished chimney with clinkers. But he chipped away at one pricey facing clinker after another and stuck them in places where common chimney bricks would have done since they wouldn't show anyway. On top of which he failed to make ready, or even clean, the place where the first course was to be laid; he just slapped the mortar onto the old bricks that the carpenter's chain saw had showered with sawdust only the day before. He got very uptight; his composure was done for, as if he had been done some gross injustice. He couldn't understand why we didn't leave him to carry on working.

So, we were again without a builder. But maybe that was all to the good as right then we needed to keep an eye on the carpenter, which was a full-time job in itself. He too was from Sirok, and it started off with him not getting round to doing the work for weeks. That was in spite of having got us to remove in advance the roofing over the older part of the house, because he reckoned it was rotten, so that we were in constant terror that it would rain and all our possessions would get soaked, since by then we were living in the one remaining habitable room

under the exposed roof and had crammed all our belongings in there. Even when he finally brought himself to come round, he would only appear for half an hour before swiftly vanishing again. Sometimes for days on end. On these occasions, apparently, he gave himself up to his irresistible passion for hunting, which was no doubt true as he always went around with a flaying knife in the leather pouch on his belt and would take it out every now and then to show how blood-stained it was. However, it may also be that, along with the perpetual hunting act, he did it only to make himself look more manly as he was a bit on the short side and malicious gossip reckoned that he had difficulty with the ladies. Consequently, the roof—a job that for any reasonably competent carpenter, alive to the weather risks, would take two or three days—stretched out over weeks. It might still have been a job well done, for all that; however, he could only have been accused of that fitfully at best. He arbitrarily departed from the plan; instead of using the screws that were available to him he fixed simple ties to the rafters with nails; he trampled all over the damp-course sheeting; under the misguided impression that he knew something about tinsmithing, he made the flashing look as if a dog had chewed its ends; while the chimney lining let in water on the first occasion that it rained. That is, on the rare occasions when he actually worked, because it was his assistants, a cook and an electrician, who did most of the work for him; he normally only came because he brought them in his car. He would go up on the roof, run along the purlins—he had an unerring sense of balance—issue a few instructions, leap back in his car and wouldn't be seen for dust.

The third builder, the one from Kisfüzes, we spent a long time searching out. He too had built his own dwelling, and we again passed up the opportunity to inspect it. But if, after all that had gone before, we had known that he had been a factory security guard before retiring, it is unlikely that we would have taken him on. Not only was he cack-handed, he was lazy into the bargain. The roof was finished at long last, so at the end of each day we didn't have to spread over the roofing the huge tarpaulin, which weighed a ton and, what's more, was badly fitting. It was now time to put up the partition walls. Which is what the new workman did. After a fashion. Using 40 x 40 cm breeze blocks he managed to put up a grand total of 1–1.5 square metres in a day. And there were occasions even so when the wall was crooked and we had to dismantle it in the evening, after he had gone; he then carried on the next day, seemingly without noticing. After that had happened three days running we were about to ask him not to bother turning up again, but he anticipated us by not coming, and he stayed away, without a word to us. I can't say we were pleased, because by then we had gradually lost our capacity for pleasure, but we did heave a sigh of relief. It was a particular consolation that the place would no longer stink, because he would no longer be peeing furtively in a corner of the living room-to-be—a habit he had clung to as he couldn't be persuaded to have his leak in a secluded nook in the yard or to take the trouble of going next door, where the outside privy had been put at our disposal for the duration of construction work.

Following that, we did try with a contractor, or a prime contractor to be more precise, a so–called professional, but we did not get as far as any work. We had picked his telephone number out of a small-ads paper. He came and took a look around, measured it all up, and a couple of days later, like a true businessman, came back with a quotation for the job. We did not accept it and wished him all speed to a much hotter clime. We had heard that contractors do everything for four or five times the proper rate, and if they don't even provide an invoice, they reckon with all kinds of absurd multipliers, but to bring the building to a structurally complete state, and in point of fact just for the insulation and the interior and exterior plastering alone, this contractor would have asked for more than the whole thing had cost so far. But what horrified us even more than that, indeed scandalised us, were all the invented items that figured in his estimates. He was asking for hefty sums of money, for instance, to pull down a non-existent partition wall and put up another where there was already one in place.

This time, then, we put in an advert of our own. It attracted no serious applicants, however; the only telephone calls we got were from swindlers. The biscuit was taken by someone calling from the Nyírség region who had no equipment, appliances or tools of his own and intended to ask for the loan of these from someone locally. He imparted that information to us from a public telephone in the bus station at Eger, because he had already set off to see us and he wanted our address. We didn't give it to him, but he still somehow managed to track down where we live. We didn't let him in, even though he hung around for hours in front of the house. That wasn't nice of us, but we had to spare our nerves. A plasterer from Eger nevertheless gave a convincing impression and was exceptional in that his work was acceptable. Sadly, though, he brought along his father, who later purported to be a painter and, as I have already related elsewhere, broke my arm when I saw fit to criticise his handiwork. That, however, was as yet still to come; for the time being the only damage he did was, on seeing there was no plaster on the walls, with gaps here and there, he recommended a builder buddy from Egerszólát. Whether the chap in question was a builder or not we never did find out, but we were obliged to part from him and his family on the second day, because he refused to get his son-in-law to pull six small bricks out of a crookedly laid edge. Despite which, at least in regard to the size of his mouth, he acted like a boss with all his shouting and fussing about, and he must have had a large family, because to get anything done he would wheel in someone from home, albeit amateurs every last one. Incidentally, we didn't start getting pernickety right away. On the very first day we tolerated without so much as a whimper, though it went very much against the grain, the fact that they had splashed mortar all over the radiators, which had been set up for trial purposes but had not as yet been plumbed in, simply because they couldn't be bothered to dismount them. And they managed to smash two panelled door wings, because they lifted them off their hinges right enough, but they slammed them down on the ground so hard that they cracked. Then at the end of the first day, after they

had washed down their tools, they ran off the plastery, limy water from the attic straight into the water-meter well, the box bushes and the lilac hedge.

Summer was over. Autumn was approaching and time was pressing. A composer friend from Berlin who has a summer cottage in the village hurried to our assistance. Unable to stand idly by for any longer as he witnessed our sufferings, he had a word with an acquaintance in Bélapátfalva and persuaded two builders in the village to at least do the interior plastering in our house. They were factory labourers, but they could find the time at weekends. So it was they who, over the course of several weeks, finished off the wall surfaces that the plasterers' obstreperous progenitor would later balls up. They were not only quick but, for a change, sane human beings with whom one could have a normal conversation. As far as the work went, however, appearances were again deceptive. The walls had to be repainted, not only on account of the cowboy painter, but also because the coat of plaster they applied was too thick and so cracked all over—not immediately, but later on, just as it transpired that all the other jobs they had worked on had also been skimped. In the living room the mortar they had mixed for the flooring slab was too thin and the cement was washed out by rising damp. The eaves for the small French balcony became lopsided because they made a mess of underpinning the shutter boards. As for the partition-wall on the garden side that was supposed to have been completed, they outright cheated on that by leaving a big, long cavity directly under the roof.

Winter set in. Even if there had been someone, it was now no longer possible to do any work on the house—most certainly not outside. Builder No. 2 had laid the big bricks in such a slap-dash fashion that not only did they drunkenly heel all over the place in the wall, there were also hideous gaps between them as wide as the palm of the hand. After the interior plastering was done one could no longer see through the walls, but on the outside there were still cracks at the bottom of which no more than one or two centimetres were separating the inside from the outside. We could not leave it like that. We had been left a bale of glass fibre, and we used that to pack the holes. However, nature too seemed to be against us. For some reason, blue tits took a liking to the yellow wadding of the insulating material, and within a few days they had pecked it all out and scattered it over the ground. At this point we called in our two labourers (as a rule we had to make arrangements for labourers ourselves), got them to mix some mortar and bung that into the holes. It was November by then: it was snowing, a cold wind was blowing and almost blew us off the ladders at the partition walls, but by good luck it did not freeze.

So the first year went by. The heating was functioning by then, so we didn't freeze and survived the winter without mishap.

In the meantime we ought to have been pressing on with the search for a builder, preparing for the new year and engaging someone while there was still room in work schedules. By now, though, we were in a double bind because the money that we had got for our apartment in Budapest had run out. Maybe we miscalculated and it would not have been enough anyway, but as things were,

having paid everyone over the odds merely to get them onside, and with everyone having persuaded us to purchase substantially more material than was needed, and having spent a packet on alcohol, keeping the men supplied with drink, what had seemed a tidy sum of money had slipped through our fingers. In the end, late though it was in relation to the season, what got us out of the jam was the Kossuth Prize that was awarded to me in March, which came with money.

By then we could not find a builder, but we did manage to grab hold of a painter, a local resident, who patched up and repainted the interior walls. Furthermore, in response to a new advertisement, two young carpenters from Eger got in touch and undertook to strip-floor the rooms. This was far from simple, because no pegs had been set in the floor slab and it was necessary to insert dowels. They had an ingratiating manner, and one other thing that played a part in our giving them the job was the fact that they worked together with a sander, who came in after they had finished. The floorboards fitted nicely together, but they must have been nailed down defectively because they creaked abominably the moment we trod on them. The pair never returned to fix the few clattering pieces that they had not attached to the joists at all, despite promising to do the corrective work.

That summer also came and went, and apart from the flooring we got nothing else done. Finally, that autumn a friend, this time a Hungarian from Sirok, tried to help. He managed to get his accountant's husband, who was a building contractor, to steer one of his subcontractors our way. The first subcontractor who enjoyed the prime contractor's confidence arrived from Ózd with two of his men. For the specified sum, he undertook to render the external walls, to install insulation in those parts of the old part of the house where the walls were thin, and also to do all the tiling, which meant in the kitchen, the bathroom, the shower and the hall (not the lavatory as that had been done a while before). The two men made a start on tiling the shower, but there were no signs of the other men, with the scaffolding. On being pressed for the other men to show up and make a start on the rendering, he always promised it for the next day. Two weeks went by in this fashion. Then he announced that he had had second thoughts: the job was not worth his while and so he was withdrawing. Not before time either, because even after two whole weeks the shower, one and a half square metres in floor area, had not been finished, despite the fact that two men had been working on it every day (they gave themselves away: this was the first time in their lives that they had done any tiling), and on the other hand they had broken or spoiled enough tiles to do two shower cubicles. Then they had tiled over a power point, and carelessly, instead of using grout, they glued tiles to the floor in two places. We subsequently learned that the subcontractor had the men all right but he did not have any of the scaffolding that was needed for the rendering of the exterior.

We turned to the prime contractor, who feigned amazement on hearing about it. He assured us of his sympathy and promised to send someone else along who would not disappoint us. The someone else was another subcontractor, and he likewise ripped us off. He too had been sent along from Ózd. His gang made a start

on the job straight away; one group applied the rendering, the other did the insulation. The rendering sort of got done, though there were gaps around the window frames that were not filled in, but the work on the insulation was atrocious. The sheets of expanded polystyrene had not been fitted together properly, which meant that there were thermal gaps everywhere, and in addition the surface bulged because the wall plugs had not been bored deep enough to take the plastic dowels, and under the eaves they left unfilled a large crack resulting from the difference between the purlins and the thickness of the wall. A glance revealed that they were rank amateurs at insulating. The agreement had also included concreting the foot of the wall at the back of the house to make a sort of path and a run-off for rainwater. They managed to louse that up too. They did do some concreting, and there was a run-off as well, but the whole lot had to be broken up that same autumn, because the mortar had been incorrectly mixed and so had begun to crumble, while rainwater did not run off because the gully had not been laid with a steep enough slope. The second subcontractor differed from the first only in actually having scaffolding, but then he stung us for even more, or rather the prime contractor did, as in the end it was to him that we had to cough up the sum demanded.

To be fair, it should be said that during the three years it took to build the house our dealings were not solely with botch-up artists; we did also have work done for us by master craftsmen, in the true sense of the term. Or rather, by just one—a young tiler who in the second year did a speedy, professional, immaculate job, and what is more: at a reasonable price, of tiling all the walls and floors and was also ready to re-lay the path at the back of the house. He came from faraway Miskolc, by coach since he didn't own a car, carrying his tools by hand in a sports bag. He was busy from early in the morning until late in the evening and he stayed with us, not going home until the job was finished. Well worth it too, he was: we were taken to the cleaners by everyone else. Twice over in fact by the good painter, who eventually also did the outside of the house. He had aged in the meantime, or something else had happened to him, for this time he perpetrated a whole string of mistakes. He did not coat the timbers of the eaves with the transparent varnish we had agreed on. In places he applied a varnish meant for interior rather than exterior use. He agreed to make good the ledge to the French balcony that the Bélapátfalva crowd had mucked up, but despite our explicit warnings he filled the cavity under the polished alpine limestone with polyurethane foam and in the process cracked the slab, which had cost us an arm and a leg.

In this way, under these circumstances, our modest dwelling reached completion in this brave new world. As it is, I haven't bothered to catalogue the untold work and hassle to which we put ourselves with our continual efforts to rectify, or attempt to rectify, things that others had loused up, or that we did for ourselves from the outset, or were able to do for ourselves, such as painting the doors and windows, installing the light fixtures and switches, and even, on occasion, mixing the concrete and mortar, or humping building materials around. Not to speak of all the worry, annoyance, jangling of nerves and constant tension that we endured. And the

arguing, in the end even with one another, eventually looked as though it was going to cost us our marriage. Looking back on all the troubles now, it is a veritable miracle that we put up with the construction work, and meanwhile one another, and it only took ten years off our lives—but that much for certain. There were times when we felt so crummy that we wished we had never sold our apartment but stayed in Budapest and carried on choking on the polluted air and having our eardrums battered.

Today, a further three years on from all that, we have no such wish, because the house may be the way it is, but at least it is habitable. One thing is for sure, though, which is that if we had known about all this in advance, we would never have embarked on it and instead would have chosen to camp out in the yard or the garden, but at any rate in peace and harmony. Because anyone who chooses to build a house in Hungary these days is off his rocker.

A Hill Walks

The hill that is walking is in the Northern Mountains, in the Sirok-Szajla-Recsk triangle in County Heves, and is known as Darnó. Actually, it's not really a hill, more a group of hills, a range, which can be little more than ten or fifteen square kilometres in area, though admittedly if laid out flat it would come to two or three times that. And as for why it is walking, it is doing so because it is being ripped apart, broken down and carried off bit by bit as a quarry is being opened up on it.

With forests that are still unbroken in places and its variable surface formations, Darnó is a focal point of the locality. Not that it's a tourist draw, it's just different from the other nearby hills, such as Mount Isten or the Borzsa or any member of the Mátra Mountains. Its steep eastern and northern flanks, covered with common and Turkey oaks and hornbeams, give the impression almost of a mountain range; its gently sprawling, expansive, generally sunlit southern and western slopes have the air of high plateaux. In among the rampant undergrowth, the forest still hides clearings of silky grass here and there. Streams purl in the shady valleys. Red deer, wild pigs, badgers and owls take cover in the thickets. Its windswept peak, 364 metres above sea level, gives a fine vista on the whole countryside all around: the peaks of Kékestető, Galyatető and the Borsod hills, and on clear, sunny days, over towards Eger one can even see beyond Castle Sirok, across the way, as far as the Bükk Massif. Excursionists, ramblers and holiday-home owners escaping from the towns, those who love nature, peace, solitude and calm—they can always find what they are looking for. It is no accident that part of it is a nature reserve. In the southern part lies Lake Nyirjes, to the best of my knowledge the highest primeval marsh in Hungary, and through there also runs a two-star tourist route. The air is so good that is has been a tonic for many people, pre-eminent among them the writer László Németh, who restored his weak lungs at Sirok on several occasions during the 1920s.

For those who know and love it, Darnó is a name to conjure with. Not just for a particular hill, a particular forest, but *the* hill, the forest, although there are

plenty to choose from in this part of the world—at least in respect to hills, since there have been problems with the forests for decades. As far as I personally am concerned it means even more than that: it is one of the arenas of my life, a definitive experience, a truly organic part, like Szajla, my native village, like my mother tongue, or like the 19th-century novelist Kálmán Mikszáth, from whose Palóc kinsmen in this locality I am descended. I am closely bound up with it; it is inseparable from me, if only for family reasons, so to say. You see, for the forester grandfather on my mother's side this was the last district in which he worked; this is where he retired from around the time I was born, from the long-demolished Darnó forester's lodge, which stood on the eastern flank, at the edge of the forest, not far from the future quarry. That circumstance further strengthens the emotional links that have quite simply grown in such a life-defining manner that I have been going about Darnó since as far back as I can remember. I see, hear, smell, touch, taste it while raspberrying, strawberrying, blackberrying, collecting hazelnuts, taking the air, (of late) bicycling and, of course, mushrooming there. Or to be more exact, I no longer do the last since in the mid-Eighties chain saws denuded my favourite spot for mushrooming, the bit over by the Medveczki farm, and acid rain has ruined the soil, and so, sad to say, I have given it up. It has dropped out for good, like the day-labouring jobs in the mid-Fifties when I, along with other kids of my age, handed round pine saplings at the top of Darnó, or the acorn gathering that I also did as part of my childish idea of forestry.

Seeing that Darnó has been so important to me, it's only natural that I should have already written about it, more than a few times at that, to evoke, among other things, the former me rambling in its once managed standing forests, its mysterious coppices, its shady trails. And more often than not with a lump in the throat, stirred, because after a certain age it is impossible to think back to one's childhood, what there was of it that was good, without a twinge of nostalgia. So, I have also mourned the old Darnó in my writings; indeed, on one occasion, on witnessing a brutal and senseless clear-felling, I bade farewell to the forest in a newspaper column in the belief that soon not a single tree would be left standing, that it was the end. I had a very bleak view of the future, in other words, but even in my wildest dreams I would never have believed that the hill itself would fall victim in this brave new world, that this was the fate awaiting it, that what was threatening the forest could also happen to the hill. That someone could just come along one day, like what he saw, and have it knocked to bits and carried away. That would have been absurd. Most particularly when in the neighbourhood, over by Recsk, where the inmates of the notorious forced-labour camp during the Stalinist era were put to work, a stone quarry has been operating for decades and has already bitten at least two Darnósworth of rock out of the Mátra Mountains, to say nothing of any other harmful effects.

But now, who would have thought it, that's what is happening. A greedy capitalist has clapped eyes on this oasis. The test drillings have been done and he has made a start on the preliminary works. He is now having a huge area of forest cleared on

the southern slope of a deep valley, all the way up to the Pál Lookout, on which, as my mother used to have it, the scouts of long, long ago used to pitch camp. It may not be too late to halt this, if that does not infringe on private interests in an area where only the public interest should be at stake. However, everyone just stands around gaping, without doing anything, either because they don't believe anything can be done about it or because they don't see further than the end of their noses and feel that they've done a good deal by selling the barren lands under the hill at a rock-bottom price for use as an access road. Before one knows it, the bulldozers will be coming to peel off the biosphere's most precious element and foundation from the site of future operations, the productive soil that has taken millions of years to form. They are going to install electricity, build a road up to Szajla (though it is still possible that the stone will be carried off through Sirok); excavators will arrive, grabbers and conveyor belts; the hill will be invaded by heavy metal and production will begin. One explosion will follow another, the noise will be constant, the clattering and squeaking; the dust will rise and the diesel fumes; loaded lorries will thunder down village streets, house walls will crack and the wheels will squash run-over dogs and cats flat. And the monstrous hole will deepen, widen and grow; the trees will continue to topple; life in the forest will die, the game, the birds and the beetles will flee; not a stone will be left standing, and so it will go on until the hill has been consumed... God be with you, Darnó! God be with you, Hungary! ❧

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Eszter Gábor

The House Spatial

The New House: Lajos Kozma's Modern Villas. Exhibition at the Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest, 26 November–13 May 2007.

Lajos Kozma (1884–1948) enjoyed a high reputation but was nevertheless a solitary figure in modern Hungarian architecture and design. He was born several decades before the pioneers of Hungarian avant-garde architecture and proceeded streets ahead of his contemporaries. His work straddled the generations and perplexed his contemporaries; posterity has tended to classify it into periods according to genre. Such a division readily offers itself, since Kozma was significant as a graphic artist and interior designer as well as an architect. Articles about him published in a commemorative issue of the modernist journal *Új Építészet* (New Architecture, 1949, No. 23) shortly after his death dealt separately with these three aspects. A book published some twenty-five years later—Judith Koós's *Kozma Lajos munkássága. Grafika, iparművészet, építészet* (L.K.'s Creative Achievements: Graphic Art, Applied Art, Architecture. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1975) — retained that partitioning without attempting to provide a view of his work as a coherent whole.

Kozma graduated as an architect in 1906 from what was then called the Archduke Joseph Technical University of Budapest. He first came to notice some two years later, in the 1908 issues of the arts & crafts journal *Magyar Iparművészet*, as one of a group of newly qualified kindred spirits, soon to be called the 'Fiatalok' (Young Ones), who worked in an appealing new style. This new trend, influenced in part by the folk architecture of Transylvania, in part by contemporary Finnish architects (Eliel Saarinen, Herman Gesellius, Armas Lindgren) and to some extent by English rural architecture, was a significant departure from the then prevalent historicist and Art Nouveau styles. They presented drawings as idealised architectural plans alongside drawings made by Károly Kós in his native Transylvania, as well as book covers and illustrations designed by Kozma. Even at his debut, then, Kozma demonstrated his interest in, and flair for, graphic art. However, as the years went by, while most of his contemporaries obtained major commissions to design churches and schools, Kozma was passed over and instead became known for a short period solely for his work as the designer of publications of outstanding graphic quality produced by the Kner Press, in the small town of Gyoma in south-eastern Hungary. Thus he illustrated a volume of poems by Endre Ady, the leading Hungarian poet of that time, as well as several volumes by Béla Balázs, who was to become Béla Bartók's librettist; indeed Kozma designed the title page for the published sheet music of one of Bartók's works as well.

Eszter Gábor

retired as Chief Consultant of the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest. She has published widely on 19th- and 20th-century architecture, including books on Andrássy Avenue.

Nothing is known of any architectural designs of his that date from before the First World War. Although Kozma joined the office studio of the architect Béla Lajta (1873–1920), that collaboration was not strictly of an architectural nature. It was Lajta who planned the magnificent office block at 5 Szervita Square (1911–12), in Pest's inner city area, which housed—and still does—the Rózsavölgyi Music Shop, for which Kozma designed the interior decoration destroyed in 1962. Around this time Kozma was also displaying furniture and furniture designs at exhibitions by the KÉVE Artists' Association. In 1913 he founded a studio called the Budapest Workshop, a short-lived enterprise that primarily took on interior design projects. In the same year, he was engaged as a teacher in the Department of Interior and Metalwork Design at the Metropolitan School of Industrial Design. Then war broke out in 1914, and a long spell of army duty on the front line ensued. The 'Young Ones' grouping ceased to exist, with Lajos Tátrai dying in 1909, and Valér Mende and Dezső Zrumetzky killed during the war. Károly Kós left post-Trianon Hungary to return to Transylvania. The three remaining members, Béla Janszky, Dénes Györgyi and Kozma, went their own separate ways.

During the Hungarian Soviet Republic, in the first half of 1919, Kozma was given the chair of Interior Design at a reorganised Budapest Technical University. The Soviet Republic was so short-lived that he had no time even to start work, but the appointment was fateful for the future course of Kozma's life. His name was effectively put on a blacklist, and for the next quarter of a century he received no public commissions in Hungary. (He did design a synagogue and attached school in Kassa [Košice], then already in Czechoslovakia.)

By the 1920s, however, there were private commissions even within Hungary, though some of these were conversions of existing buildings. One instance was the building at the City Park end of Andrássy Avenue which now houses the Serbian Embassy. Originally the Babocsay family villa, it was felt to be too extravagantly Art Nouveau and Kozma toned it down into a more modest structure that fitted in better with its surroundings. By the end of the Twenties, though, a number of his designs for homes had

Ágnes Kolozs

Small toiletry cabinet, cca. 1923.

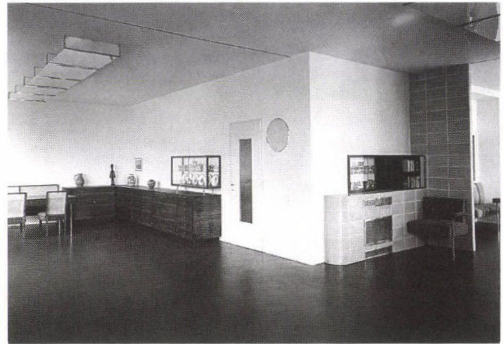
Ágnes Kolozs

"Kozma Baroque" chair for the Rózsavölgyi Music Shop at 5 Szervita Square (part of the interior decorations destroyed in 1962).

Zoltán Seidner

Façade of the Havas Villa on Ruszti Street, in the Pasarét district of Buda, 1931.

been built (e.g. a villa for the Kner family in Gyoma; the villa at 32 Retek Street, just off Moszkva Square in Buda; and the villa at 47 Alkotás Street, which is part of the Buda ring road). For Kozma this was a period of searching for architectural form. He did not fall in with the Neo-Historicism that was favoured in Hungary at that time any more than he did with other fashions. He endeavoured to carry on some pre-war trends, though not with much success. Thus, the design he submitted for the Košice synagogue was conceived in keeping with Lajta's ideas, but the resulting building was poorly proportioned and less unified in style. The design of the house on Alkotás Street that he built for the sculptor Ede Telcs perhaps owed a debt to József Vágó (1877–1947), who by then was living in exile; however, the design is more tentative than Vágó's work, or even Kozma's own later handling of space. His compact single-storey house at 32 Retek Street is simplicity itself, but the idea of combining the grille of the gallery railing with an armchair is an early flash of Kozma the brilliant furniture designer.



Zoltán Seidner

Detail of the living room in the Havas Villa.

During the Twenties, then, Kozma made his living mainly as a furniture designer. His ornate

Zoltán Seidner

The Klinger villa at 10 Hermann Ottó Road, in the Pasarét district of Buda, 1933.

pieces with their Neo-Baroque style, the employment of folk motifs and repeatedly broken contours (ever-present in his book designs) were a special sort of Art Deco that has come to be referred to as Kozma Baroque. Several of his buildings that saw the light of day at that time also incorporated marks of that style (the Košice synagogue and a home on Zivatar Street in the Rózsadomb district of Budapest). His highly crafted but, overall, more anachronistic furniture designs are perhaps best regarded as a fusion of Art Deco with folk art that even Kozma himself soon abandoned in his search for more functional solutions. The furniture designs that he published in 1929 had broken with Kozma Baroque and attest to a more sober approach.

The early Thirties brought a sharp change of direction for Kozma as they did for Hungarian architecture as a whole. Being someone who kept himself abreast of wider European developments, he was well aware of what was emerging to the west of Hungary, particularly in Germany. The conservatism favoured by the political establishment, dominant in Hungary's post-war architecture, began to give way, and the influences of German functionalism and

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Glimpse from the terrace of the living room.

ZOLTÁN SEIDNER

THE SZEGŐ VILLA ON SOMLÓI ROAD, AT THE SOUTHERN FOOT OF GELLÉRT HILL, IN BUDA, 1937.

ZOLTÁN SEIDNER

LIVING ROOM OF THE SZEGŐ VILLA.

Italian Novecento made themselves felt in the simple forms of buildings that were being erected around 1930. It was then that Kozma found himself again, so to speak, and put the earlier indecisiveness behind him. His designs for several houses (5 and 6-8) that were built in 1931 as part of a residential development on Napraforgó Street, in the Pasarét district in Buda, blend in the modest gestures towards modernist architecture that were being made by other architects on the same estate.

During the same period, Kozma began gradually to abandon the decorative elements in his buildings, shifting the centre of interest away from the attractiveness of detail towards a carefully weighed offsetting of masses. Kozma achieved their harmony by using perforations by large apertures to offset their compactness, although he was unable (and did not seek) to hide his approach as an interior designer. The villas can be regarded as his chief body of work and their core was a living space that could be divided into several parts by sliding walls, with ceiling-high doors that opened full-length. Most typically, the living space would comprise three areas with a large sitting-room that, if at all possible, would have a window all along one wall; outside that there would be a covered terrace, while abutting on the living room would be a smaller, usually cosier, dining area. That tripartite space could be opened into one by pulling the partition screens aside, so that the transition between interior and exterior was achieved almost imperceptibly. (The same kind of "flexible space" was also fundamental in the work of Mies van der Rohe.) Farkas Molnár (1897–1945) tried a similar concept in his designs of villas on Lotz Károly Road and Harangvirág Road, both in Buda's Pasarét district, but his attempts were clumsier than what Kozma had achieved through spatial relationships that were almost self-explanatory.

Increasingly, Kozma became one of the most highly sought-after architects of the Hungarian haute bourgeoisie: it was a status symbol to live in a house designed by him. That may be one reason why the architectural avant-garde, and especially members of the Hungarian section of the Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), kept him at arm's length. Their emphasis was on the social tasks of architecture, seeking to build homes for people living on subsistence incomes. (However, the realities of life in Hungary put that out of the question, so CIAM members too were obliged to work for a middle-class clientele, albeit the less well-off, for whom they designed smaller buildings on smaller plots of land and to less demanding standards than Kozma.) Kozma's own approach in any case would have distanced him from that group: he was never as strict and doctrinaire as the CIAM modernists, who were only able to accept constructions that displayed total honesty. They held it against Kozma that in several buildings he had committed the cardinal sin of cladding wall surfaces between lengthwise rectangular

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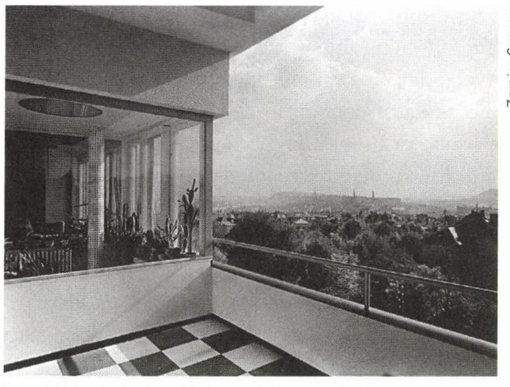
The Magyar Villa at 19 Berkenye Road in the Rózsadomb district of Buda, 1937.

windows with black-tinted glass purely in order to give the impression of a continuous window band; or that he covered up the columns in the lobby of the Átrium cinema with mirrors in order to provide visual relief in spatial terms. Kozma was, indeed, often accused of going for the aesthetic effect, and it is certainly true that he would tackle architectural problems from an aesthetic angle, seeing buildings first and foremost as issues of mass and space, and only secondarily as socially significant issues.

Looking back from a perspective of some seventy years, we can see just how forward-thinking Kozma was—maybe simply because he did not set out from a doctrinaire position. That does not mean to say he lacked principles or was not equipped with an appropriate theoretical grounding. He, like any self-respecting modern architect, proceeded from an analysis of the functional requirements, adjusting the relationship of the spaces that fulfilled the client's demands to the requirements of their users. In the vast majority of cases, his clients commissioned him to furnish as well as build a villa, so he was in a position to design the space together with its furniture. He was therefore able to break up a large living room with, say, a reading corner or music-making area, and thereby give it a homely feel. His houses were emphatically never little boxes. Trained as he was at the start of the century, Kozma was able to sense precisely, and utilise, the role that a protrusion or a recess would have in articulating mass and space. It is customary to view the



Zoltán Seidner

View from the terrace of the Magyar Villa.

projection on the right-hand side of the living room in his Klinger Villa (10 Hermann Ottó Road in the Pasarét district) as being there purely for its own sake, but Kozma in fact used it to create a dimly lit, intimate alcove for conversation within the large living room, which was brightly illuminated by the huge window. (The terrace that was planned to go on top of this alcove, in front of the bedroom, was merely an extra; it was something that could have been achieved without any substructure, just by using a cantilever.) It should be recognised, nevertheless, that Kozma had an easier time of it than his younger contemporaries, simply because he was sought after by a wealthier clientele who could afford to give him a freer hand: he was under no great pressure to be sparing where scale or cost were concerned. He was therefore able to plan more expansive spaces and to insist on contractors who could ensure a higher quality of work: in short, he could deliver his houses to a higher standard.

In addition to his villas, Kozma also designed two major apartment blocks, one on Régiposta Street, in Pest's inner-city area, the other on Margit Boulevard in Buda. (At the ground-floor level of the apartment block on Margit Boulevard, in the courtyard space, he created the Átrium cinema, arguably the finest of that era, with its scallop-shell auditorium.) In these cases, of course, like anyone else, he had no scope to create complex spatial relationships; however, he did have an opportunity to demonstrate that he too was capable of making sensible use of every last square centimetre of a limited available space. He paid attention to every detail, from the bathroom soap-holders to the sinks of cooking recesses fitted in hallway closets, or indeed to the elegant proportions of the standardised "communications unit" (the flat number, name-plate, letterbox, peephole) placed on the front doors. He was therefore not outdone by any of his contemporaries when it came to functional analysis and design; it was just that his attention was not concentrated on minimising the use of materials or surface area, and thus he did not plan buildings for use by the *hoi polloi*.

It seems odd, almost inexplicable, that Kozma received no commissions to design any of the apartment buildings put up during the 1930s in the rapidly emerging New Lipótváros, on the Pest bank of the Danube facing Margaret Island, since all of that housing was privately owned, and Kozma was not blacklisted as far as they were concerned. Was he perhaps perceived to be ultramodern? That is a question one hopes future research will address. One can perhaps best liken his position as a "native outsider" to that occupied by Erich Mendelsohn (1889–1953) in German architecture, there being much similarity (though not total) in their relations to their professional milieu. To the very end Kozma's work retained evidence of his roots in turn-of-century craftsmanship, his boundless respect for, and love of, detail; nevertheless, he could not be accused of lacking a comprehensive vision, of allowing the details to distract him from attending to the whole, the balancing of masses. The best proof of his quality lies in the fact that his dwellings and furniture have lost none of their topicality over the ensuing decades. His villas are still much sought-after, and his chairs have not been bettered to this day: they may have been designed with larger spaces in mind, but they still do not take up any more room than is strictly necessary.

The peak years of Lajos Kozma's creativity came in the Thirties, when he produced his main body of work. By the end of that decade, successive anti-Jewish laws (1938 and 1939) had made it ever harder for him to earn his living as an architect. Eventually he, as a Jew, was stripped of his membership of the Chamber of Architects (and thus of his licence to work as such) and his circle of potential clients was also greatly reduced: his sort of clients no longer planned to build houses. Kozma's initial response was to withdraw and write a book about the architectural principles that he espoused, which he was able to illustrate with the practical achievements of his own career. Written in German, this was published in Zurich in 1941, under the title *Das neue Haus: Ideen*

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FIREPLACE WITH COCKTAIL CABINET FOR A HOUSE AT TASZILÓPUSZTA, ZALA COUNTY, 1934.

und Versuche zur Gestaltung des Familienhauses, mit Zeichnungen und Fotografien eigener Arbeiten (The New House: Ideas for and Attempts at Laying Out the Family House, with Drawings and Photographs of the Author's Own Work) by the Dr H. Girsberger Verlag. As conditions worsened, Kozma retired to his house in the village of Nógrádverőce, on the Danube Bend north of Budapest, where he kept himself busy by writing about architecture. Not one of these works has yet been published, but the Hungarian Museum of Architecture will shortly be including a collection of his writings in their *Lapis Angularis* series.

After the German occupation of Hungary in March 1944, Kozma was forced into hiding, and he managed to escape deportation to the extermination camps. After the end of the war, he was able to resume work as an architect. Now, aged 60, he received his very first commission from a Hungarian public institution, a school for the Angyalföld District of Pest. His relationship to the surviving representatives of the Hungarian pre-war avant-garde also improved, with the result that he joined the editorial board of the modernist journal *Új Építészet* and became president of the Circle for New Architecture. In 1946 he was appointed as director of the Academy of Applied Arts, and he was later finally rehabilitated as a professor in the School of Architecture at Budapest Technical University. However, he was unable to take up his duties as he died on 26 November 1948, at the age of 64, before construction of the School on Gyöngyösi Road had been completed.

An exhibition of Lajos Kozma's most significant work opened in November 2006 at the Museum of Applied Arts in Budapest. Among the items on display in the lower-floor gallery are the plans for—and, above all, contemporary photographs of—ten of his villas built during the Thirties; in the large upper section and the spacious corridor that leads to it designs for furniture with those houses directly or indirectly in mind, augmented by a number of actual pieces of furniture and a reconstruction of

part of Kozma's study involving the original furnishings, are on display. The mainstay of the exhibition comprises material that Kozma's daughter, Erzsébet, donated to the Museum before she emigrated to Australia. This has been supplemented by material from the Hungarian Museum of Architecture that was bequeathed by Gyula Kaesz, a Kozma pupil and working partner. (This material may well have passed into his hands originally for safekeeping at the time of the anti-Semitic persecutions of the Second World War, and remained with him when Kozma died, not too long after.) The exhibition therefore throws a spotlight on just a small segment of Kozma's output, but it does so most informatively, with elegance and taste. The assembled and precisely defined items (designs, photographs, sketches) that relate to a specific building are complemented by beautifully set legends that supply key data (the location of the building, its date of construction, the client, the builder and other craftsmen involved, its present condition and references). Éva Horányi, who curated the exhibition, has even gone so far as to have the floor of the main exhibition gallery covered with linoleum—the material that Kozma himself favoured.

A splendid book, lavishly illustrated,* has also been produced for the exhibition, containing ten articles that discuss various aspects of Kozma's work. Some also appear in English, either in whole or as summaries. These have a wider compass than the material actually on display, including, for instance, alongside pieces about the villas of the Thirties, an essay on his apartment houses; a reprinted piece about the dental surgery that Kozma designed —which fortunately survives—and, most delightfully of all, an interview with a former client who had commissioned a since-destroyed house in the southwest Hungarian hamlet of Taszilópuszta, Zala County. One of the essential chapters is a catalogue of the documentation about the villas that are on show, along with all the illustrative material that could be traced. There is a separate section about the superb photographs taken by Zoltán Seidner of Kozma's buildings on completion, as well as information about the photographer himself. Overall the volume contains some 300 illustrations, almost thirty of them full-page plates. (One could do without the rust-brown reproductions that have been enlarged from Seidner's originally black-and-white photographs.) Along with the exhibition itself, this attempt should take us a step closer to seeing a fully researched book on Kozma that gets to grips with his output as a whole. ❧

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The Átrium apartment building and cinema at 55 Margit Boulevard, 1936.

* ■ Éva Horányi (ed): *Kozma Lajos modern épületei* (Modern Buildings Designed by Lajos Kozma). Budapest, Terc, 2006. 254 pp.

Péter Esterházy

Journey to the Depths of the Penalty Area

(Extracts)

I have again taken to browsing the pages of *National Sport,* which used to be called *People's Sport;* in fact I still ask for it under that name, and the newsagent hands it over without a word. Lots of street names have also changed, with the inhabitants, guided by abstruse conventions and humours, either falling in or not falling in with the changes. Thus, not even the most brutal dictatorship could turn Andrássy Avenue into People's Republic Avenue, or even just Youth Avenue, though Marx Square remains Marx Square to this day, or so I believe.

In the Friday edition I see that Csillaghegy, my team, will be playing at home on Saturday; the veterans' team too, on Monday. The expert opinion of the neighbourhood is quietly astonished to see me coming to matches again. ("Everything's all right, Pete, isn't it? The family, the marriage—OK, aren't they?...")

I can find my way to the pitch blindfolded. Like a horse that can head for home on its own, carrying its drunken master who has dropped off to sleep and is snoring his head off on the box. This was how it was for a quarter of a century of my life, three and sometimes even four times a week! I look at the poles, the electricity poles that were cursed a thousand times over! January and February, the time for basic training, long-distance runs, the Long Course and the Short Course, it would be hard to say which I loathed more. But more than anything else I loathed those poles, because when one reached that point in the run and had got into a stride, bumptiously feeling one was young and strong, one could take anything, even run to the ends of the earth, and we were going to beat UFC, no trouble, and I don't just mean beat, but smash!, they won't know what's hit them, so the boss can kiss our arses, making us do all this running around—this was precisely the point when the dreaded order "Sprint!" would ring out, sprint between the two poles, followed by a slow jog (never, ever walk) to the next, then sprint again, all along the street and

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Péter Esterházy,
the internationally acclaimed novelist, himself played in the Hungarian lower divisions for many years. He published this volume on the occasion of the 2006 World Cup in Germany.
The book is reviewed on pp. 115–118 of this issue.

up as far as the outdoor pool. Death itself. By the time you'd reached the outdoor pool you didn't exist, just a wheezing mass of flesh that pants air out and gasps it in, aches in every muscle and sinew, and knows that only a short time is left of its grim and forlorn life, but what the hell, anything is better than this mortification of body and soul, and you won't have to play UFC either.

Where, I wonder, do coaches get that refined malice, that sadism nigh on depravity, to know, down to the last centimetre and second, how much a person can take, and when we feel inside, know objectively, that we have reached the extreme limit of human endurance (the outdoor pool), and then drop in, quietly, almost mournfully (or bawling exultantly, as they come in all shapes and sizes, from which one may dimly suspect that even coaches are human): one more circuit, one more sprint—in any case *one more.* That's what it is always like, without a single exception. Even when you play crafty by reckoning on it and add one yourself so as not to be caught out again by the shock of it—even then you get coach's "one more". They never err. Or if they do, then something's wrong: the wife has been cheating on him, he's been fired from his job, or life has simply lost its meaning, so just run around as much as you feel like. Or they're bad—bad coaches. No coach is a true coach without this capacity for brutality. (This is presumably the source of the soccer commonplace that a team is united by alcohol and its hatred for the coach, which can easily be rephrased to apply to public sentiment under a dictatorship.)

All of a sudden, I am filled with gratitude to be reminded of my new hip replacement: I couldn't run even if I wanted to. At this point, between the two old poles, I say out loud, almost happily, I am never going to run again as long as I live. I grin triumphantly at the poles. A great feeling. I look on that "no" as some sort of accomplishment, proud of myself, like someone who, despite everything, has nevertheless achieved something in life: come hell or high water, I will never run again. (The ageing footballer keeps bubbling up in me, time and time again.) I felt the same back when I did my school-leaving exams and I had got through a nasty grammar paper: never again in my life am I going to have anything to do with Hungarian grammar. It was a liberating, ecstatic feeling.

The ageing footballer (hereinafter a.f.) is a slow-moving mammal of indeterminate age who usually has a wife and kids. To be a.f., albeit not irrespective of age, is a state, a philosophy, a world-view. Our place in the world. A.f. is at bottom an evil soul, which is only made even more repugnant by sudden accesses of sentimentality, the froth of humanism, and the hush that undoubtedly surrounds him. A.f. is above all suspicious. Everything is suspicious, most especially things that are not suspicious. (Compared to him, the suicidal, class-warrior suspicions of Communist movements of the Thirties (or in Hungary the Fifties) are convivial presumptions that are not worth the mention—leaving aside the dead, that is. How little Rákosi knew as compared with a Puskás...) A.f. is dogmatic... A.f. is not yet old. In training (!) he still knows everything best. As a result he is arrogant. The arrogance goes hand in hand with humiliation, because a.f., believing himself to be a master of time and the ball, demands privileges, respect, recognition and a

guaranteed position, and if he reads in the sports press that nobody has a reserved place, he sees that as an attack and conspiracy against himself... The two basic mainstays of the natural history of a.f. are *laziness* and *moaning*. One can safely categorise the laziness as being ontological. It is a profound, unperturbed obtuseness and antagonism that is not a matter of deciding, it is much more natural than that (one might as well ask a rock why it doesn't fly, a forest why it doesn't run, or gold why it doesn't swim); it may be covered up for a while by a spot of running or physical jerks, but there comes a moment of truth when a.f. does not come to a halt so much as digs in for good, sighs so deeply that the stars tremble, and almost in concert with the firmament heaves out the word "No! I won't budge an inch further. Not a step. I don't want to *suffer* any more. Enough. I can run no more even if wanted to." Not that he runs much without a ball at his feet anyway, and with those rare sprints of more than ten metres he would be overcome with the loneliness of the long-distance runner...

I am standing on the rivulet of a little path that leads from the dressing rooms (rebuilt!) to the pitch (how muddy it is when it rains! Mud so glutinous that one thought one would never reach the pitch!) and the players are just starting to warm up; they greet me as if they knew me. Or as if it showed (was written all over me) that I belonged there, to the pitch. Is that in any way true? No, it's not, or to call on Helmut Heissenbüttel to assist me, as is my wont: *"darüber wäre wohl viel zu sagen"*—there might well be a thing or two to say about that. I used to belong, but don't belong now, though I pretend that I do. Indeed, that is what's expected of me, and I cheerfully submit to the public's wishes. I look at the pitch: I am acquainted with every centimetre of it.

I could even see that treacherous clump of grass on the edge of the goal area, right in front of the goal, on which a ball bounced in such a way that it was quite impossible to find the net, even if the goalmouth happened, then and there, to be empty. The ball whisked by right in front of me, but standing there was Bodonyi (Péter, elder brother of Béla, the Béla who played in the Honvéd first team with my younger brother: football is no longer the collective memory of a community, nor is there a substitute for it, there is nothing, which is why one is reduced to speaking as if to foreigners, or like Bridget Jones's mum, always spelling out who's who), facing an open goal, a clear shot, a doddle even for a nursery-school kid, even a clumsy clot. But then there was that clump of grass. It was a physical impossibility to connect with that unexpectedly bouncing ball. I could see that. I could see that there was nothing he could do about it. Nothing at all, no wise. Even Maradona couldn't have booted it in (maybe Gerd Müller, but only because he booted everything in). And did I tell him? I did not. What specifically I did tell him I won't repeat here, but what transpired from the flood of curses that inventively enlarged upon popular spicy texts is that there are situations that have to be booted in even when it is impossible. From five metres into an open goal, a dead cert, there is just no excuse. But you see, old chap, it bounced on that clump of grass. Yes I know, old chap. At this juncture a reprise of that exquisite analytical train of thought beginning "you can ruddy go to."

The referee comes over. We are manifestly close old acquaintances—more than that: friends, on familiar terms, pat one another on the back. My guess is this is the first time I have seen him. I feel good. A little huddle forms, spectators spring up and players, a scene. My friend turns toward the audience and outlines the dramatic situation: Many's the time I refereed a match for *him.* (The classical opening sentence for a stage work, to make the relationships clear: Our father, as you are well aware, was a grain merchant.) I bow my head: yes, I'm the one for whom matches were refereed. I can't recall one of them. The players (almost unimaginably young when seen from this close) look on with curiosity but would prefer to be on the pitch. I'm in the way; I've become an interesting, intrusive factor. The referee gives me another reassuring pat on the back: the three Esterházys! You didn't see that every day! To be more exact: never, because for one thing there were four of us, and for another even three of us never did play together (each one with each of the others, but never all together), not that it matters now, it's not the facts that count but those trustworthy and cosy commonplaces of memory which nevertheless have a kind of factual basis. Do you remember that time when you looked for your handkerchief? Wicked that was!, he whoops into my face and exits stage left. What's he on about? What handkerchief? I don't recall any handkerchief with sporting connections. I've been a clean-living man in that respect at least.

Later on, when I am caught up in a similar clutch of attention with the coach, B., he too comes up with two preposterous (and by the way true) stories. They concerned two of my goals, so it would appear that I am the hero of my story. It so happened, allegedly, that our brilliant outside left, wee Szimcsák, whose footwork was as dainty as a ballerina's, tripping two or three steps while a defender shuffled just the one, you can imagine with what results, well anyway he had again just dribbled past everyone, at least five of their men, then the goalkeeper as well, and he had side-tapped the ball towards the goal. It might have gone in of its own accord, but I, having kept up with the whole attacking move, expecting after each and every dummy that the ball would now, perhaps now at last, be passed to me, but no, and so quite justifiably in professional terms, better safe than sorry, I slammed the ball into the net from about 20 centimetres off the line. What do I mean ball! The pill, the pigskin, the leather. I wheeled round triumphantly, waiting for the clutch of admirers, but the clutch of admirers was by then clinging round wee Szimcsák's neck. There was me in celebratory mode on the goal line: never has a goal scorer been so alone in the world. He was standing there in the goalmouth, for fuck's sake, on his tod, miffed that no-one was rushing over to him. What happened on the other occasion was I punted the ball half the length of the pitch, though the story meanly did not reveal whether I had spotted that the goalkeeper was off his line and so I acted swiftly and resourcefully in response, or I spotted nothing of the sort and my shot had blind chance or lady luck on its side and went in, but anyway since, for understandable reasons, I wasn't wearing my specs I couldn't see at first whether it had really gone in, I just

peered ahead—he was just standing there, peering ahead, for fuck's sake, alone in the centre circle, and astonished because all at once the whole team is scrambling all over him. All true, but he could surely have come up with something a bit more noble out of the fruits of twenty-five years at the sharp end, like that time against UFC when I... but let's drop it, those days are gone. Sporting anecdotes about me are somehow not sportsmanlike.

B. was the last coach that I had (a relationship not without its tensions) and in the meantime he has become an entrepreneur: the money shows. That may be new, but his old passion has remained; for some reason the game is important to him. He's a different man yet hasn't changed; a sea change can be seen on him (the swanky shirt materials! the jewels!) and the personal root of this change is a simple story. As then, so now, he can precipitate total chaos in an instant with his yells from the touchline. Insulting and destructive and well-intentioned—I remember from back then. It's over, put a sock in it, 'Uncle' Immie, my old china, the team captain still bawls furiously till he's red in the face.

That 'Uncle' Imre is so typical of social relations in Hungary. It is not a question of Hungarian citizens whose relationships are regulated by any contract, but the player is a child and the coach an adult, so he's addressed as 'Uncle'. No Herr Weissweilers here. (Is it true that posted up in the dressing room there was a notice saying: 1) the coach is always right; 2) even if he isn't, then rule 1 automatically applies? Or is that just one of those apocryphal tales?) 'Uncle' Imre signifies a fuzzy principle of authority but equally the instability of a hierarchy as such, the imminence of chaos. An 'Uncle' Imre can yell and can at any time be sent to hell, can play silly buggers and be told to bugger off. It is not a balance of rights and responsibilities but an unpredictable swirl of fears, threats, flattery, personal discipline and unruliness.

The match began with a minute's silence in memory of Mr Pék. So unexpected is this that I almost choke. Maybe just because it has been years since the old boy came to mind. Mr Pék's heyday fell within "my time": he was the team's No. 1 supporter and travelled everywhere with us. Before every match, without exception, he would draw me to one side and ask "Are we going to win, young Pete?" And I would always, without exception, respond in utmost seriousness: "We shall, Mr Pék." At that he would always, without exception, regain his composure, and he never held me to account afterwards. Short and ugly he was: somehow everything about him was skew-whiff or misshapen, from his feet through his shoulders to his teeth. But his eyes constantly sparkled as if he had just been given glad tidings; he was an endless fount of stories about women that he would never tell right to the end but just make disgusting, indeed nauseating signs. He was a baker by trade, which is why we called him Mr Pék; I don't know what his real name was. 'Uncle' Bandi as I now hear. Strange that they've got out of the habit of Mr Pék. They might have let me know on account of the funeral. Mr Pék seemed everlasting. Evidently not so everlasting, after all.

A minute's silence on a football ground is unbearably long.

A country and its sport, they say, is an ocean in the drop. If that's what they say, then they've got it wrong: it's so untrue that at times that is how it really is. At those times a country's vital force is reflected in the features of its sport. Puskás and Rákosi hand in hand (or should that be left foot in left foot?). Though in that case it was a matter of the Golden Team being aside from the country, the everyday, or to use an unfair simile just as isolated as the secret police, the ÁVÓ, a state within the state. There was something comparable in their self-assurance as well. Democracy did football no favours: *the lads* became one of us, but then what are we like? First one thing, then another. And then there's the national quirk as well; people really do play football on the beaches like a stereotype of the country (cf. Copacabana, Siófok, Grado, Warnemünde—a drop in the ocean).

Let us try from another angle: life in sport. The struggle for existence. May the best win. That's a tricky matter. Because in all truth we would prefer to say may *the good win.* The trouble being that the good does not want to win: that's the last thing it has in mind, though it does not want to lose either; but the good is somehow after something else: it presumably doesn't want anything, just to be.

That is no use on a football pitch, that just being. There one has to win, or to be more precise, want to win; it can't be any other way. The differences presumably stem from God and ontological differences between referees. (Imagine for a second God refereeing a footie match. Offside! You've got to be joking, Lord. Ye Gods!)

I would not be happy to live the way I used to play, though I was an uncommonly mild-mannered, sportsmanlike player—famous for it. I never deliberately committed a foul, although... Although, for one thing, I did count heavily on a division of labour, or to be more specific, on our defence, the backs, whose bounden duty it was to grind opponents into the ground; and for another, there were occasions on which one intervened, a euphemism that is readily described, professionally speaking, as being a skill that is part of the craft. Not that I ever cheated, not as far as cheating goes. But I may have sometimes added a little extra to a fall in order to make the foul perpetrated on me more obvious, or to put it bluntly: no one touched me, I just dived, and I considered that to be entirely proper. Story: I did once feel a (slight) twinge of guilt. Somehow a scrimmage had formed on the goal line, I was lying on the ground, at the bottom, and next to me was the opposing goalie, the ball on the line, with the former just about to reach out for the latter, when I, using a limb by his hand, nudged the ball across said fateful line. Our faces could have been no more than about ten centimetres apart: his dismayed countenance from my happy one. Shaking the scrimmage off me, I raced to celebrate; the goalie, growling after me, grabbed me quite literally by the scruff of the neck and hauled me over to the ref in order that I, scum that I was (and the rest!), should tell him that I had flipped it over with my hand. Referees, quite properly, know that they are not omnipotent and so are

generally unresponsive to belated appeals, being well aware that it is given to them to be acquainted with only one version of a game, and if they are lucky, that is the majority version, justice or truth having nothing to do with it. But the goalie emanated such raw passion, a blatant craving for justice, that the ref stopped short and raised a quizzical eye at me. (Given the fervour, it should be noted that we played in a low enough league for such things, gripes of this magnitude, to be simply out of order.) The matter suddenly became a point of honour, with me being asked if I had handled the ball, and I had handled the ball. If there hadn't been a referee, the answer would have been a simple "Yes", but with a referee being there, the question is inadmissible, you can't ask a player that, since his word will not be taken if the boot is on the other foot; my manifest rightness will never correct a referee's manifest error. But this time I was being asked nonetheless, and an answer was expected. For a fleeting second it crossed my mind to adopt a tone of injured pride and fling the truth in their face, but this was not the place for that. On the other hand, I couldn't say that I hadn't touched it. The goalie's face was again very close to mine. In the end I resorted to a categorical ruse and with a broad grin all over my face announced that, gentlemen, the management has forbidden me to say anything. That was too much for the ref, who gave a disgusted wave and allowed the goal. As to what the goalie said I won't record here (my mother was no longer alive by then). The predicament was insoluble.

Sport is measurable: two points are two points (or three now), whereas life is immeasurable, three red points is one black mark. Those who are first shall be last. But doesn't that trip off the tongue a little too glibly? Because if we are the last, then we are last. If we are unprepared, then we shall be at a real disadvantage in that game. I would remind you of the classical dilemma of Green Parties; on getting into parliament, they have to decide whether they are going to accept the rules of the game, because if they don't, they will be ejected, or in other words not exist, and then they would be unable to pass any judgement on the rules of the game.

You have to compromise in order that you can be. In order to be yourself. But compromising is tantamount to self-denial. One has to survive, but it's me who has to survive. There are limits, in other words. And who says where those lie? Tricky.

More than one game is going on at once: short-term and long-term games, personal and communal, material and intellectual, with the good and with the better. There is no recipe for making a good choice. It is a common misperception that the loser is on the side of the good. Sometimes he is, sometimes not. Vanity has a thousand faces, and sport is a synonym for vanity.

I don't consider football as being a competition but a game. Which is a bit different, though as we have seen, it's not beyond reproach. Through football, then, I would not have wished to recognise something like an ocean in the drop, but like an ocean in the ocean—not to recognise but to be lost in it. That being lost, that forgetting oneself, is the game. ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

Judit Pataki

When Art Nouveau Turned to Glass

Tiffany, Gallé and Their Followers: The Masters of Art Nouveau Glass. Exhibition of Selected Items from the Art Nouveau Collection of the Museum of Applied Arts. Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest, 21 March–18 November 2007.

If only from Truman Capote's 1958 novel, *Breakfast at Tiffany's,* or from its film version, most people have heard of Tiffany & Co. There a dignified hush and elegance reign and the showcases display alligator wallets, jewellery and silver. But Charles Lewis Tiffany (1812–1902), the company's founder and his son, Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848–1933), have earned the gratitude of posterity not so much for the luxury store on Fifth Avenue as for the art objects and interior decoration that they created. Louis Comfort Tiffany designed stained glass windows and lamps, glass mosaics, blown glass, ceramics, jewellery, enamels and metalwork. At the turn of the last century, his creations were already to be found in the homes of the wealthy and the interiors of important public buildings.

Attractive to the eye, exhibitions that bear the Tiffany name can usually count on drawing lively interest, one reason why the Museum of Applied Arts has undertaken, as part of the Budapest Spring Festival 2007, to mount an exhibition of around 140 outstanding items, selected and curated by Vera Varga, from the museum's own collection of glass objects created by Tiffany and his European contemporaries, the high priests of Art Nouveau.

An extraordinarily rich Art Nouveau collection (some of which is included in the exhibition) was started by the Budapest Museum of Applied Arts (founded in 1872) around the turn of the century. This was due to the expertise and resourcefulness of Jenő Radisics, the Museum's first director, in collecting representative examples of contemporary decorative arts. He was helped by several highly respected and influential experts, but the decisive factor in the Tiffany collection was Radisics's frequent attendance at international exhibitions, (including the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris) where he invariably made purchases. For a considerable time, the series of annual Christmas exhibitions arranged by the Museum of Applied Arts

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and the Applied Arts Society were a prime platform for presenting the work of Hungarian artists and also gave the museum a splendid opportunity to acquire the very finest of the pieces on show. Thus established, the museum's glassware collection continued to be expanded throughout the twentieth century; it would be fair to say that it covers a fair cross-section of all the major Hungarian and foreign names of this period, as well as of the formal and technical innovations, including representative examples of the two main trends in Art Nouveau glassware, the floral and the geometric styles. The early Tiffany material in the collection, which amounts to more than fifty items, is virtually unparalleled anywhere else in the world.

Up to the middle of the nineteenth century, the two divergent ways of fashioning mould-blown and cut glass alternated or rubbed shoulders. The two techniques were brought together by the turn-of-the-century technical experiments and the innovative drive of Émile Gallé, Louis Comfort Tiffany, René Lalique, the Daum brothers and others. The new products of technical innovation were the carved and layered glass pieces, decorated with plant and animal motifs, sometimes even with landscapes, that enriched the repertoire of Gallé and his followers, among them the Hungarian István Sovánka; Tiffany's iridescent glass or, as registered in his patent, 'Favrile' glass; the crackled glass with gold leaf inclusions that Ernest Baptiste Léveille employed for his decorative vases; and Christopher Dresser's 'Clutha' glass.

Trends in Art Nouveau glass were set by the most influential designers and their workshops. More than a few of them—Louis Tiffany, Gallé and the painter József Rippl-Rónai, a Hungarian who trained in France—designed complete interiors under the inspiration of the new style which, they felt, was to imbue every little detail. Lalique, aside from his designs for architectural glassware, also produced jewellery, statues, medal and typographical designs. A wide range of domestic Hungarian and foreign examples of this concept of "total art" could be mentioned to explain how the previously distinctly undervalued decorative arts became elevated to the status of high art. Those working in these media were self-assured enough by then to assert their individuality as artists by signing their own work, just like painters and sculptors. Gallé was the first to do so, and by the 1880s the marking of glass items with names had become general practice all over the world. However, it was not just through the use of his signature that Gallé wanted to establish his works as high art, but also by his making them the carriers of explicit messages, including political statements. His *'Les hommes noires'* series, for instance, was meant as an early gesture of support for Captain Dreyfus, the Jewish French army officer who was falsely accused and found guilty of selling military secrets to the Germans. The *'Verreries parlantes'* and *'Poèmes vitrifiés'* series were envisaged as illustrations in glass of literary works and poetry. It was Gallé who conceived the idea of sculptured glass and its functional variants—thus the statuette as lamp base. The idea of giving titles to glass objects was gradually taken up by others and became widespread. Among the items in the Budapest Museum of Applied Arts there are two from Tiffany & Co. that have titles, though unlike Gallé's objects these were not named for their subject matter, owing their

names to the technique used to produce them. Thus, 'Peacock' merely denotes the iridescent central decoration resembling peacock plumes, while 'Lava', with its roughly structured, free-shape relief and luminescent colouring, was intended to evoke the spectacle of flowing volcanic lava.

Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848–1933) went to Paris to study painting and metalwork design, jewellery and *objets d'art,* and even occupied himself with photography. Returning home in 1879, he set up his own firm under the name Louis C. Tiffany & Associated Artists, which specialised primarily in interior decoration. His interest was initially directed at ceramics, with glass only a sideline, but when he first exhibited his glass pieces these were received with such acclaim that he was prompted to expand this area of production. In 1885 he founded his first glass-making manufactory, the Tiffany Glass Co., which in time was to be followed by others. He did not concern himself with the production processes, shrewdly hand-picking experts to realise his designs. Siegfried Bing, the great Paris dealer, made Tiffany's acquaintance during a visit to America. He became such an enthusiastic admirer of his work that, on returning to Paris, he transformed his shop from an Oriental Emporium into 'La Maison de L'Art Nouveau' in the rue de Provence, and through this set up a two-way commercial collaboration with Tiffany. He was successful in making a name for his friend in France, to the point that at the 1900 Exposition Universelle the American won a gold medal (and was awarded the Légion d'Honneur). His works soon became sought after right across Europe.

As already noted, from the time of its foundation, the Budapest Museum of Applied Arts took a keen interest in contemporary art; this was expressed through its acquisition policy and also through its exhibitions. Thus, it is no surprise that in the spring of 1898, under the title 'Modern Art', it should have displayed fifty of Tiffany's ornamental glass pieces, 29 of which he had created specifically for that exhibition. In the words of József Mihalik, an artist and art critic of the time:

> ... these display wonderful colours that combine the lustre of mother-of-pearl with the brilliance of a rainbow and the colour play of iridescent glass, and are worthy objects of general admiration.

Presumably some of the 11 early Tiffany items that are owned by the museum were acquired following this show, and the collection was substantially amplified by a further 45 items that came as a bequest from Dr Ottó Fettick, a collector, in 1952–53.

The shapes that Tiffany adopted were derived from historical sources, from nature, or were their abstract versions. Among the historicising pieces there are some —a Persian rosewater sprinkler, for example—that draw on ancient Oriental forms and decorations, while others show the influence of the archaeological finds from

1 ■ József Mihalik, "Az Iparművészeti Múzeum tavaszi nemzetközi kiállítása. II. A művészi ipar tárgyai (The Spring International Exhibition at the Museum of Applied Arts II: Applied art objects)," *Magyar Iparművészet* 1897–98, p. 272.

the Tell el-Amarna site in Egypt that Tiffany visited. The 'Flower-form' vases are not taken from any specific flower but, with their compositions of opening buds or the fully unfolded corolla on a slender item, are metaphors for birth and the fullness of life. A key motif of the early works is the continuous wavy pulled decoration around the bowl, which symbolises the regularity with which life is propagated.

The 'Lava' series, one of which is on display in this exhibition, has a special place in Tiffany's repertoire. He produced objects that evoked petrified, golden-glowing streams of lava, or elemental forces, employing a wide range of methods. The peacock is likewise a subject that excited and inspired countless variants. The coloration and iridescence of peacock feathers appear in a range of objects; by using a soft lustre developed specifically for this purpose, and sometimes by employing gold-threaded (aventurine) glass, the artist strove to achieve ever greater fidelity to life and even simulates the 'eye' of the feathers. The 'Peacock' series embodies many symbolic meanings associated with the bird; important items of this early series are also in the show.

The other defining personality of Art Nouveau glass and, in fact, the initiator of the whole movement, was Émile Gallé (1846–1904). He studied mineralogy, botany and art history in Weimar before moving to the Meisenthal Glass Works to study glass techniques. He set up a glass studio of his own in Nancy in 1873. His work received recognition at the 1878 Exposition Universelle in Paris, and by the time of the 1889 Paris Exhibition he had made an international name for himself. His fame increased throughout the 1890s. In 1901 Gallé established the School of Nancy, other members of which included Auguste and Antonin Daum, Victor Prouvé and Louis Majorelle, to organize courses in the various arts and crafts, and to nurture and foster the new style.

In the early phase of his activity, Gallé, like most of his contemporaries, was heavily under historicist influences. He employed the forms of Venetian Renaissance glass from Murano, Silesian dessert dishes of the Baroque era, glass tableware, and faïence ware, even adopting stylised versions of their ornamental motifs, very often mixing all these with Islamic, Egyptian, Persian and Far Eastern elements. In 1884, the first items that can be regarded as belonging to the *'Verreries parlantes'* series began to appear, vessels inscribed with quotations from medieval poems and legends, heraldic devices, and 'Neo-Gothic' forms decorated with scenes in coloured enamelling.

Gallé's early multi-layered glass pieces also show the special path down which his historicising bent took him, revealing the influences of motifs from Chinese scent bottles as well as from Japanese woodcuts and wood carvings. The glass for the pieces in the Japanese manner, with their floral décor or depictions of insects, was carved or acid-etched stepwise so that each layer depicted a different motif. This allowed him to achieve a perfect spatial effect, which could be further enhanced by varying the coloration of the various layers and by introducing flecks of gold or silver foil sandwiched between them. The sober elegance of these compositions, the use

of sharp lines to demarcate the highly stylised shapes and an intentionally striking asymmetry all bear the imprint of Japanese woodcuts. In Gallé's work, light always plays a special, highly planned role, with one and the same object being transformed almost to the point of unrecognisability, and gaining a new significance by incidental or transmitted light. Glass for Gallé was an intellectual medium:

> My own work consists above all in the execution of personal dreams: to dress crystal in tender and terrible roles alike so as to compose for it the thoughtful faces of pleasure or tragedy. For its success this aim is served by the assembly and careful preparation of all the elements needed for accomplishing future plans in production, with technique being subordinate to the predetermined artistic work, and balancing up the potentialities of the gamut of 'master craftsmanship', of technical execution.[1]

In the Museum's Gallé Collection, pieces decorated with floral motifs predominate, as they did in his broader oeuvre (he originally trained as a botanist). He thus made good use of the rich collection of plants that he had amassed in his younger years, but in Gallé's art the flowers that were so favoured by Art Nouveau gained a symbolic content. The poppy stands for opium, the dream world and death, the sunflower for the soul turning towards God, orchids for refinement, the iris for the rainbow and the compact between God and man. His disciples of the School of Nancy, the Daum brothers in particular, took his meticulousness of depiction and his striving for technical perfection as the aspects to be emulated. They did not share Gallé's fondness for symbolism, and the extraordinary precision of their floral and scenic decoration owe more to Impressionist painting.

René Lalique (1860–1945), the third major figure in French glass design around the turn of the century, began his career as a designer of jewellery. He gained huge success at the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris, when he presented his exquisite jewels, in which the plain gold setting was conceived as *objet d'art,* the jewel taking the form of a dragonfly or mermaid, with insects, plants and female figures as their subjects. The wit and imaginative power these pieces attested swept Paris off its feet. Lalique was already using glass at this stage as a facet of the jewellery, but by 1909, when he purchased the Verrerie de Combs-la-Ville, he was devoting himself fully to glassmaking. By the time he held the first big show of this work, in Paris in 1912, he was already master of a huge variety of techniques. This Budapest exhibition features his opalescent glass objects, of which the tree-legged 'Siren' dish is a splendid example. Produced in the stamping press, a technique that Lalique himself pioneered, this vessel displays at its centre the supple figure of a mermaid, palely lustrous in a gentle play of the full spectrum of opal colours (from pale blue to a warm brown). So fond was the artist of these opalescent frosted or transparent glass forms that he experimented with them throughout his work as a designer; indeed, it is interesting to note that he always produced a transparent version even of the coloured pieces that he brought out in limited editions.

1 ■ Cited by William Warmus, in: Emile Gallé: *Dreams into Glass.* New York, 1984, p. 188.

One of the main aims of the show is to draw parallels between two prominent oeuvres in Art Nouveau glass, those of Tiffany and Gallé and those of their contemporaries, and also to show the influence they exercised on those who came after them. Consequently, only a modest selection of the comprehensive Hungarian Collection is presented, with no more than seven items from the Museum's uniquely rich collection of pieces by Valentin Leó Pantocsek (1812–93). By the middle of the nineteenth century, he had developed a technique that decades later became widespread among English, American and Austrian firms and craftsmen; from the outset it also displayed conspicuous parallels with the techniques that Tiffany adopted in his work. Pantocsek's undecorated iridescent glass objects are exact replicas of Roman, Persian or Egyptian glass, or have free forms. What he called "iris glass" glitters in a rainbow of colours, which was completely novel at the time, in the 1860s, when he produced them in the Zlatnó glassworks in Upper Hungary. That is why they came to the notice of Professor Vince Wartha, who, as the head of the new Department of Chemical Engineering at what was then the Polytechnic School of Buda (later the Technical University), accumulated a major collection of glass and ceramic work for teaching purposes. The pieces were made accessible to the wider public by their transfer to the Museum of Applied Arts in 1949. It is thanks to Wartha that we are able to trace the early history of Hungarian decorative arts.

By the mid-nineteenth century Hungarian glassmaking reached a point for the first time in its several hundred years of history where it could stand comparison with the best international work. In the person of Pantocsek it could even produce a pioneer. On the matter of ornamentation, however, there were two opposing schools of thought: to one belonged the advocates of the international, 'cosmopolitan' style, and to the other the 'nationalists', who espoused a vocabulary of forms and motifs based on folk art. The latter developed a style that was also based on research by József Huszka into what was called national decorative art. However, the very best, especially the finest pieces coming from the studio of István Sovánka, the Schreiber factory and the Giergl studio, tended to be a fusion of both styles. In respect to their function, these were in part designed for domestic use or were decorative objects of all description made to meet the needs of the growing middle class and the aristocracy, such as tableware or individual pieces of particularly high quality, and in part designed as one-off pieces, produced for display at domestic or international fairs. An example of such a one-off piece is a baptismal font by István Sovánka (1858–1944), an early piece designed for Hungary's Millenial Exhibition of 1896 and conceived in the spirit of that exhibition's national historicism. Sovánka based his work on what Huszka considered to be authoritative patterns and motifs of the national style that included a trademark peacock-eye floral motif. The works that he showed at the grander international exhibitions, from the early 1900s onwards, were produced in what at the time was arguably the most advanced glassworks in Hungary, the Zay-Ugrócz Works. These bore typical marks of the international Art Nouveau

style, and the discernible influence of Gallé on his work was both noticed and seen in a positive light by commentators in Hungary.

The oeuvre of Miksa Róth (1865–1944), the stained glass and mosaic artist, was also internationally well known, with a considerable number of major pieces being commissioned by buyers outside Hungary. The bulk of them were produced following principles laid down by John Ruskin and William Morris, while in technique he employed opalescent glass in Tiffany's style. These were also the objects that met with the greatest success, with two compositions, 'Pax' and 'Sunrise', being awarded silver medals at the 1900 Paris Exposition Universelle.

In the present exhibition, the Museum of Applied Arts is presenting the outstanding pieces of its glass collection, those which demonstrate the hugely varied technical devices that the best artists brought to bear in order to achieve a beauty of form which conveyed a message to those lucky enough to possess these objects. ❧

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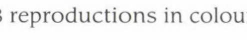

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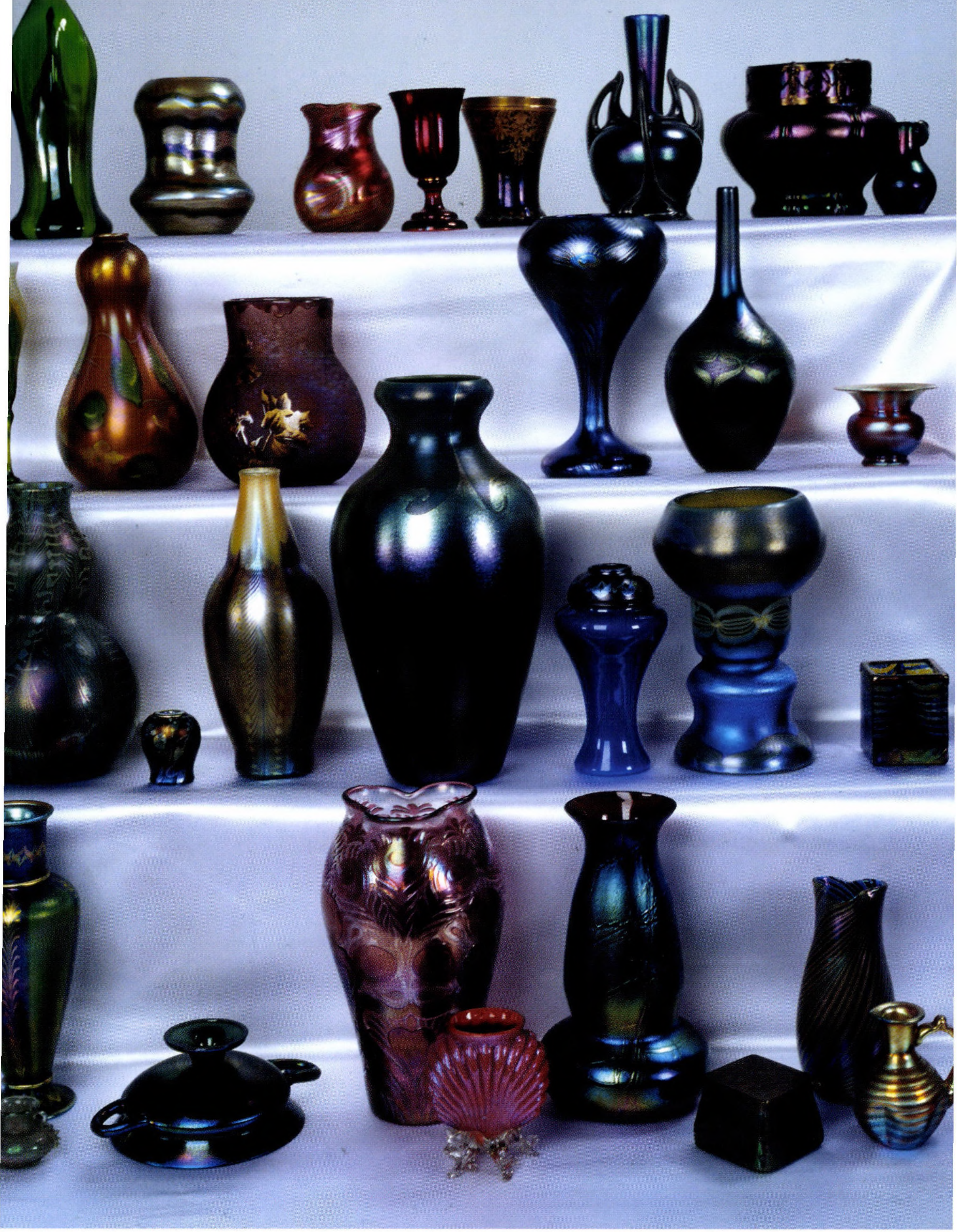


Ágnes Kolozs

Art Nouveau glassware with iridescent and lustre decoration
from the Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest.

Variations on the 'Peacock' theme
Louis Comfort Tiffany. Tiffany Glass & Decorating Co., New York, before 1898

Blown, cobalt blue glassware. The peacock, one of the most popular Art Nouveau motifs, was a richly laden evocative symbol, being among other things an embodiment of immortality and completeness. The fan of the opened tail feathers stands for the universe. Some outstanding examples of 'Peacock' glass are owned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Inv. Nos. 5153 and 53.1787

Ágnes Kolozs

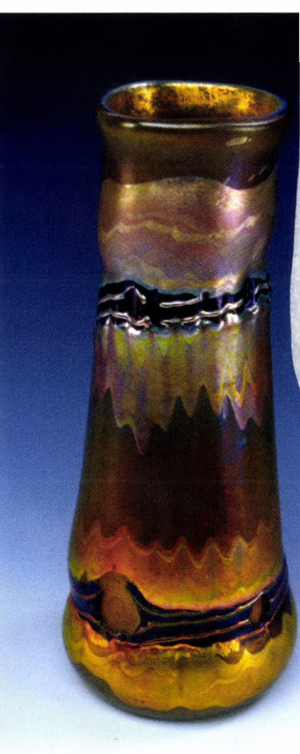
Ornamental glass 'Clutha'
Designed by Christopher Dresser, made by James Couper & Sons of Glasgow, c. 1889

Mould-blown, bubbled algae-green glass with decorations of micaceous granules and yellow-white and red oxide enamelled streaks and striations. As this piece shows, Dresser kept to Ruskin's precepts considering blowing to be the primary technique for shaping glass as this was best suited to demonstrate its fluidity when heated. His 'Clutha'-type pieces were modelled in a wide variety of shapes, being free-form, twisting, asymmetrical, and often drawing on the forms of ancient Roman and Eastern glassware. Inv. No. 843

Ágnes Kolozs

'Lava' glass
Louis Comfort Tiffany. Tiffany Glass & Decorating Co., New York, before 1898

Blown glass covered with gold lustre. The free form and the decoration are an attempt to express the force of flowing lava. This is one of Tiffany's best-known pieces. Inv. No. 53.1783



Ágnes Ko

Ornamental glass from the *'Verreries parlantes'* (Talking Glass) series

Émile Gallé, Nancy, c. 1900

Mould-blown layered glass, with carved and acid-etched decoration, enamelled with metallic oxide. The relief inscription running round the circular foot is a quotation from Victor Hugo: "Les arbres se parlent tout bas." This object epitomises Gallé's interpretation of "the forest of symbols".
Inv. No. 53.29

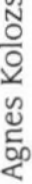
Ágnes Kolozs

Vase

Émile Gallé, Nancy, c. 1889

Mould-blown layered glass, decorated with cameo and intaglio-etched or faceted locusts, crickets and other insects. The composition is stylised, with no attempt to confer depth, giving it a Japanese feel. This is one of the superb pieces from Gallé's early Art Nouveau period that were produced for the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris.
Inv. No. 842

Ágnes Kolozs



'Goblet with autumn crocus'
Émile Gallé, Nancy, c. 1898

Mould-blown glass in transparent and amber-coloured layers, with *'marqueterie de verre',* fused glass threads, coloured enamel and acid-etched decoration.
The bubbled, thinly striated, amber-coloured calyx of the goblet has violet autumn crocuses on it. This is one of the very few such items that Gallé produced.
Inv. No. 53.30

Ágnes Kolozs

Ornamental glass
Émile Gallé, Nancy, c. 1898

Mould-blown glass with multiple colourless or coloured transparent or opaque layers, with embedded gold and silver foil and coloured enamel relief. The passion flower motif is one of the most distinctive plant symbols in Christian thought. The spirally winding runner is meant to symbolise the whip with which Christ was scourged; the floral pillar in the centre, the stake on which he was tortured; the seventy-two radially forking spines, the crown of thorns; the three pistils on top, the three nails used to impale him to the cross; and the five stamens at the bottom, the wounds of the crucified Christ.
Inv. No. 53.27

Ornamental glass ►
Émile Gallé, Nancy, c. 1900

Mould-blown layered glass with incised and acid-etched decoration. The base is fashioned to look like brown agate; the flowering and leaf-bearing orchid sprays on the clouded, horn-like background have associations both with the erotic and with death.
Inv. No. 53.28

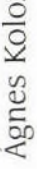
Ágnes Kolozs

Art Nouveau Glassware from the Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest

Ágnes Kolozs

Bottle with stopper
Émile Gallé, Nancy, c. 1900

This mould-blown bottle is shaped like a tomato. The body is split into three sections, the stopper is a bud resting on four sepals; the colouring is naturalistic. This is an early example of Gallé's sculptures in glass.
Inv. No. 53.23



Ágnes Kolozs

Vase
The Daum brothers' glassworks,
Verrerie de Nancy, c. 1910

Mould-blown layered glass, consisting of colourless, transparent glass, greenish-white opaque "clouded" glass, and glass rolled on pulverised glass powder mixed with metal oxides for colour, with acid-etched, polished and enamel decoration. This is an excellent example of the high technical standards of the Daum brothers' work.
Inv. No. 53.127

Ágnes Kolozs

Three-legged 'Siren' dish
René Lalique, Paris, c. 1925

The flat, press-moulded dish stands on three legs fashioned as seashells, carrying in its centre an opalescent relief of a mermaid figure. This is one of the items that Lalique designed in the Art Nouveau spirit before abandoning that style for the more streamlined Art Deco.
Inv. No. 58.1054

Ornamental jug
Leó Valentin Pantocsek, György J. Zahn's glassworks, Zlatnó (Zlatno, Slovakia), before 1862

Blown, light green, iridescent glass. The short, round foot supports a pear-shaped body, with a remarkably long spout. In its shape, the object is modelled on an eighteenth-century Persian and a Cypriot prototype. It is almost identical with the jug produced in the Daum glassworks and in the collection of the Museum of Applied Arts.
Inv. No. 23.289

Ágnes Kolozs

Ornamental jug
The Daum brothers glassworks Verrerie de Nancy, c. 1890

Mould-blown, colourless, transparent glass, rolled in polychrome glass powder, acid-etched, decorated with a glass thread applied hot over the body and modelled on an eighteenth-century Persian prototype.
Inv. No. 53.139

Ágnes Kolozs

Ágnes Kolozs

Decanter with a glass

The glass factory of J. Schreiber and nephews, Zay-Ugrócz (Uhrovec, Slovakia), around 1896

Mould-blown, colourless, transparent glass, with polychrome, transparent enamel painting, gilt. The whole surface of the carafe is slightly iridescent. The shape is in the Venetian blown glass tradition, the decoration is a special combination of Neo-Rococo and Art Nouveau motifs.
Inv. No. 862

Ágnes Kolozs

Vase

István Sovánka, glass factory of J. Schreiber and nephews, Zay-Ugrócz (Uhrovec, Slovakia), between 1902 and 1904

Blown, transparent, translucent and brown layered glass, acid-etched, iridescent. The motifs over the surface of this oval vase are shaped with etching and partial etching of the top brown layer. The ornaments display an influence of international Art Nouveau, but in an individual interpretation.
Inv. No. 23.335

Zoltán András Bán

A Sentimental Education

A Portrait of Sándor Márai as Traveller and Journalist

(The traveller) If we were to follow Lawrence Sterne's whimsy, into which category of traveller are we to place Sándor Márai? Certainly not among the vain, nor presumably was he mendacious, least of all sentimental. Nor was he conceited, though there might have been a touch of the reserved and aristocratic outsider in his temperament. Was he haughty? Or inquisitive? Clearly both, but this is a meagre explanation. Observant, prying? Perchance splenetic? Now we are getting closer. And indeed he was much more, of course. I suggest irony as the key to his temperament because this—an ever-present irony, which nothing can shake or affront—may be what best characterizes his entire course as a traveller. And he was at times a traveller out of inevitable necessity (to cite Sterne again): the entire course of his life and oeuvre was marked out by the changes of address forced on him. At the time of his last departure, on the eve of the Communist takeover in the summer of 1948, when Márai decided to quit Hungary, he was no longer a simple traveller or traveller in transit, but a wanderer, a fugitive persecuted by unfathomable fate. His journeys as an exile were mostly motivated by desperation, or financial and spiritual necessity. The most heart-rending stage was in Vienna in October, 1956, when he waited expectantly, on tenterhooks to return home once and for all. He suffered great disappointment, for reasons we know all too well. From that point on, he lost his sense of irony, until then seemingly indomitable, and a bitter resignation took over. But this is another story to which here we can but allude.

(The travels) Márai, born in 1900 in the city of Kassa, at the time still in Hungary, was a regular contributor to the Communist paper *Vörös Lobogó* (Red Flag) in 1919. Following the fall of the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic, he left Hungary to study abroad—but in a way he fled. He lived first in Leipzig, then in Frankfurt and Berlin. In 1923 he settled in Paris (after originally planning to stay

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only six weeks) and remained there until 1928. He then lived almost uninterruptedly in Budapest until 1948, before going into exile for good: he felt that in a Hungary in the hands of the Bolsheviks, not only was one not free to speak, one was not even free to remain silent. He and his wife and adopted son lived first in Switzerland and then in Italy. In April 1952, they settled in New York, returning to Italy in 1967 to live in Salerno. From May of 1980 San Diego, California, became their home. It was here that Márai, utterly alone following the deaths of his wife and adopted son, committed suicide on February 21, 1989: he felt like a guest who had tarried "impolitely long".

(Abroad, Europe) The dry facts show clearly that Márai spent most of his adult life abroad, the latter part in total isolation from his homeland. Because of a whim of history, when he visited the city of his birth after 1920, this too constituted travel abroad, as Košice/Kassa had become, in accordance with the terms of the Treaty of Trianon, part of Czechoslovakia. (The perpetual migration of the city, which was the *fons et origo* of his make-up, symbolises Márai's life: in 1938 the First Vienna Award returned it to Hungary, in 1945 it again became part of Czechoslovakia, only to become later the second largest city of an independent Slovakia.) The first of Márai's sojourns abroad hardly qualified as exile: a few Bolshevik articles he had written in his adolescence were not likely to jeopardise the prospects of young Márai. We can safely assume that he set out on his travels through Europe out of a yearning for adventure. He travelled abroad seeking experience in the manner of the German *Bildungsromans*—and found what he sought. Though he went to Leipzig to study (Goethe, one of Márai's idols, attended the university there), various autobiographical writings tell us that within a few weeks he had turned his back on the *Institut für Zeitungskunde* where he was training as a journalist, to try his hand at journalism itself. And he began not just anywhere. The articles he wrote in German (in Márai's childhood most of the citizens of Kassa of German descent were bilingual in German and Hungarian) were published in one of Germany's most prestigious dailies, the *Frankfurter Zeitung,* alongside articles by Bertolt Brecht, Stefan Zweig, Joseph Roth, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch and Theodor W. Adorno, among others.

The young Márai was a restless traveller. In it, even from the outset, can be seen one of Márai's prime motivations: the striving towards "Europeanness", or more precisely, West Europeanness. Márai confessed on innumerable occasions that for him Europe had always meant the West. He considered himself an inveterate occidental. As against the usual understanding of the term, for him it was always synonymous with adventure—with a capital A. Of the three great types of European man Márai recognised (Ulysses, Faust and Christ) it was the first he came closest to. (He even wrote a novel about him, *Béke Ithakában* [Peace in Ithaca]). In Márai's view, however, West European man was more than an adventurer, he was a hero. "I was born in Europe," Péter Garren, the protagonist of his later novels and Márai's alter ego, begins his confessions, "so I am a hero."

(Yearning for adventure, searching for identity) As a traveller, Márai was passionate, insatiable, even voracious—a Ulyssean characteristic. When he found himself in Leipzig, he immediately set forth for Frankfurt, only to take the first fast train from there to Berlin. Then back. In Paris he would not linger long; something drove him onwards to Chartres, Britanny, even Marseille, and then over to London. In Florence he would not be content with Florence, but would be in need of Genova and Venice, as well as Sils Maria, the scene of Nietzsche's great conversion. And while he visited all the famous sites of cultural pilgrimage, it was surely not zeal for culture that primarily drove him—and even less any Baedekerish grand tour fever. He was goaded by something else, by a few questions that were fundamental for him, as well as by considerable unease over his own identity. This constant taking to trains was also a search for self: he was trying to find out who he himself was, what business he had here in the world and, specifically, in Europe.

That he was a writer, and a Hungarian writer at that, was something he came to realize quite late and much to his own astonishment. Characteristically it came to him abroad, in 1926, in his relatively comfortable apartment and, as he considered it, permanent home in Paris after reading Zsigmond Móricz's novel *Úri muri* (Gentlemen's Fun). He packed up and returned to Budapest—very slowly, over the course of two years, as if he had been familiar with the opening lines of Cavafy's wonderful *"Ithaca": "When you set out on your journey for Ithaca, / pray that the road is long."**

The search for identity took two different directions. The first was of a personal nature, for when the nineteen-year-old Márai first set off through Europe he had not the slightest inkling what he wanted to do with his life. He did not set out to be a writer, he did not intend to be anything in particular, he was an "aimless young man" as he later described himself in *The Confessions of a Bourgeois.* He was a belated Werther, in love not with one woman but with all of European culture, a Werther who slowly grew into a staid Wilhelm Meister, who considered his education complete. The second was also of a personal nature, though slightly more general, an issue that preoccupied Márai throughout his entire life. Namely, what does it mean to be a Hungarian abroad and, in particular, a Hungarian in Western Europe? How does a Hungarian appear to people of other nationalities? What can a Hungarian gain from Europe and, more importantly, what can a Hungarian give to Europe? Is a Hungarian, who had always considered and identified himself as European, sufficiently European? For the young Márai, travel was a kind of examination. (Later, in the gruesome years of the Second World War, he applied this "educational" concept to the Hungarian nation and drew the bitter conclusion that his nation had failed its most important exam.)

* ■ Translated by Edmund Keeley.

(Exam: Foreigner, European, Hungarian) The first results of that exam were extremely depressing, even grotesque. It is also important to note that Márai was preoccupied by these questions early on, as a novelist as well as an observer and journalist. Even the title of one of his first novels is symptomatic: *Idegen emberek* ("Strangers" or "Foreigners"). It is primarily set in Paris, where the protagonist has arrived from Berlin. (The autobiographical inspiration is apparent and some passages could be inserted seamlessly into Márai's travel writing.) Upon arrival in his hotel in Paris, the protagonist meets an Albanian, who asks him straightaway: "Are you Turkish?" The surprise provoked by this question is elemental:

> This had never occurred to him. Unconsciously he lifted his hand, he wanted to touch his face, as if to find a change, as if he had grown a wart, or perhaps during the night, while he was dreaming, his nose had developed a crook of its own.
> "What makes you think so?" he asked timidly, taken aback.
> "Your eyes," said the Albanian.

This scene is repeated in his travel book *Istenek nyomában* (In the Footsteps of the Gods, 1927). It is evening on a dark street in Luxor. Suddenly a mellifluous Hungarian voice rings forth: "A good evening to you!" The narrator freezes in terror, for he has only just arrived in Luxor, he doesn't know anyone in the city, and now on a twilit street a man of about fifty, in Arab dress and clearly an Arab, greets him in the dulcet accent of the Great Hungarian Plain. The scene is dreamlike:

> "How did you know that I am Hungarian?" The reply came, which I will not forget as long as I live, "From the colour of your skin, my good sir. And the shape of your brow. From these two things I can immediately recognize Hungarians."

The irony, of course, immediately comes into play:

> Thus they of course exposed me, five paces from the Nile and the graves of the 18th Dynasty, on the border of Sudan; they exposed me, in vain had I purchased my clothes in Paris, my hat in London, my shoes in Vienna, a blind man could see that I was Hungarian.

The explanation is simple: the Arab dragoman had spent some time in the service of a Count Teleki in Hungary, hence his command of Hungarian. The narrator then exhaustively questions him on the colour of his skin, on what the distinctive tint is. Naturally there is no rationally demonstrable explanation.

That scene in turn can be paired with another in *Idegen emberek*. The protagonist becomes entangled with a French woman, travelling with her to Brittany on an impulse. After they break off the relationship, she calls him a "dirty foreigner" to his face. Then comes the crucial scene. Our protagonist calls on a Monsieur Durand, with whom he had once lodged at the same hotel and who is black and homosexual. (The young Márai had a noteworthy sensitivity to the

shunned or the marginalized, perhaps because, as an artist and a young man in search of his own identity, he felt a fellowship with them.) Although the question is deadly serious, the ironic intent is unmistakable:

> He took a breath and quickly said, "Tell me, do you consider me a white man?"
>
> The black man looked up, rolled the whites of his eyes, and measured him up and down. In a flush of excitement he added: "I mean, am I a real white man, one hundred per cent? I know that I am neither black, nor brown, nor yellow. But recently I have been beset by doubts… I think you are an expert."

The black man walks around him, thoroughly examining him, palpating his face, and passes his judgment, "White enough," he said decidedly.

It is not entirely groundless to assume that this expert verdict decides the narrator to return home to Hungary. Sufficient whiteness (coming from a dark-skinned man) is enough to bring the search for identity to a close. The not-completely-white man must content himself with his not-completely-West-European homeland. There is a reflexive irony to this gesture. It has an aftertaste of resignation and wry melancholy. And something of the self-pity of an aristocrat.

(Search for identity, literature and journalism) Like every significant twentieth-century Hungarian writer (Endre Ady, Frigyes Karinthy, Dezső Kosztolányi, Gyula Krúdy and Zsigmond Móricz are among the best known), Márai began as a journalist. He remained faithful to journalism even as a refugee, frequently addressing Radio Free Europe listeners in the 1950s. (This, however, was little more than a sad endgame, for there could be no response from his audience.) The 1920s and 1930s were the golden years of Márai's journalism. The examples alluded to here may demonstrate how much his journalism permeated his literary work. As Márai himself saw it, journalism is often the antechamber to artistic creation. He had a penchant for the aphoristic and the glittery, the pleasure of a pensive moment, the *profondeur* of the instant. In his autobiographical *Memoirs of Hungary* (1971) he confesses that he never wanted to be a journalist but adored writing for newspapers and the immediate pleasure that it affords. Journalism brings instant satisfaction to the writer and to readers, who by the next day may have forgotten their delight and are already craving something new, a repetition of what appeared the day before and with the same intensity and style—but with some new titillation. There were very few who satisfied this desire with such ingenuity and craftiness as Márai. Let it be said to his credit that, in contrast to many of his colleagues, he was fully aware of all this. Writing for newspapers gives a writer an immediate gratification: the lines produced on a Monday are already grinning at him from the stands on Tuesday; sitting on the tram, he can see someone reading his little sketch, in the afternoon the first telephone calls start coming in (congratulatory, of course), and by the next day everybody has forgotten about it. But this is of little concern, there will

be another edition tomorrow. It is a blissful pleasure, though it is also a responsibility and an exam to be taken repeatedly. As he recalled, "Journalism is a field in which one must prove one's talent again and again, daily."

To prove his talent, he worked in every genre. He wrote *feuilletons* on trifles, he wrote regular reports, he did interviews, he responded to books and performances, he produced snapshots from daily life. He took notice of everything and there was no subject that he considered beneath him. He did biographical sketches and portrait pieces, and in his young days made what amounted to a survey of the spiritual, intellectual and material condition of Europe, seeking out the side-streets and not only the grand boulevards. At first he worked without any specific goal, a kind of spiritual vagrant, in order to earn a living. He sent copies of his articles, with or without minor changes, to Hungarian newspapers in Budapest, Košice and Prague, and sent German versions of them to Frankfurt, Leipzig and Vienna. This was when Márai learned how to write prose, how to situate an attributive or a conjunction. He mastered paragraphs and the art of rhythm, and practised the epic cadence, the simple and the complex procedures for sustaining a reader's attention.

When he published three novels in quick succession in Budapest (*Bébi avagy az első szerelem* [Baby or First Love]; *Zendülők* [The Rebels]; *Idegen emberek* [Foreigners], his contemporaries were stunned. They were at a loss to explain where this originality and self-assurance had come from, the alarmingly mature *Weltanschauung* and thinking of someone so young (we must not forget that he was not yet thirty), the intellect and thrust accompanied by such ease of expression. He had clearly acquired all this through his journalism, a field that at the time bore even more substantial freight: Ernst Bloch wrote *Erbschaft dieser Zeit,* one of his principal philosophical works, on the basis of a series of *feuilletons* he had published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung.*

There is a sort of fluttering, an intoxicating uncertainty in these articles. They emanate a mood of transition, the mood swings back and forth between sadness, even lethargy, somewhere between despair, with its wave of resignation, and a guffaw, with a slap on the knee. Their author is passing through and these articles are works of a genre in passing. A literature in transit, with no lodging secured, with papers of uncertain origin (though never false!), sometimes without even a passport or visa. Because of this, no single feeling emerges as dominant; Márai works with extremely fine transitions. Before a text tilts incurably in one direction, he thrusts it back in the other with an attributive so well-aimed or a punctuation mark so deadly placed that the reader is only conscious of them later. Or else he flips the point of view on a pinhead, putting everything in a different perspective. The journalist Márai was the crucible for the writer Márai. On the other hand, the incredible experience the journalist gained by writing several thousand (!) articles, affected his craft as a novelist both for good and for ill. He acquired a facility for rapid and concise expression, a terseness specific to him, but this sometimes lapsed into a certain superficiality, a glittery frivolity, as if at times it was the pen at work and not the person holding it.

(Engagement, ivory tower) Márai, like his friend and contemporary Dezső Kosztolányi, is usually held to be a writer of *impassibilité,* of aloofness from daily affairs, from politics. This could well be true in as much as he presumably would have concurred with a famous passage of Kosztolányi's, arguing that the ivory tower is a more human place, with fresher air, than the office of a political party. And Kosztolányi declares somewhat haughtily: *homo aestheticus sum,* though the opposition, which sounds so seductive, between *homo aestheticus* and *homo moralis* is at times no more than a delusion. So much for Kosztolányi. Márai knew this quite clearly, and though he was never a member of any party and never joined any political or literary movement, group, or society, at decisive moments he spoke out, politically, with commitment, for he knew that he had to forewarn his nation. At the time of the budding of fascism, Márai did become a *homo politicus* and remained one to the end of his life. One of the high points of Hungarian journalism is his "Messiah in the Sportpalast", in which he memorably catches—as an anxious outsider—the ominous mood of the crowd, silent, then howling with the speaker, at one of Hitler's 1933 speeches. It is a warning, an appeal to his nation—to the extent that this can be done in a newspaper report. It was a primal experience for Márai and he returns to it in *Jelvény és jelentés* (Emblem and Meaning, published in 1947), the fifth part of his cycle of novels *A Garrenek műve* (The Work of the Garrens). But he spoke out to no effect, his nation did not take heed—the fate of the 600,000 Jews dragged off from Hungary in 1944 speaks more loudly than anything else about this historical deafness. Márai's 1945 journals, recently published from his surviving manuscript, reveals that it was the wounds inflicted by Arrow Cross Hungary, and not just those inflicted by Muscovite Communism then coming to power, that persuaded him to leave his homeland as soon as he could. The homeland he adored, but which had become such a monstrous child.

(Fervor and* Faust*) How did he travel then? Clearly not as he had said, somewhat impudently, in 1927, in the preface to *In the Footsteps of the Gods* (two suits, one hat for the tropics, and a slightly battered copy of *Faust*), but we must remember that Yorick, Sterne's alter ego, had but half a dozen shirts and a black pair of silk breeches. He carried an ability to be thrilled, enthusiasm and awe in his luggage. But when he boarded that train in 1948, he discarded it, for the *éducation sentimentale* that had been tailored to him, Sándor Márai, and him alone, had reached its conclusion. But *Faust* he still had with him, and the exhortation which every great travelling writer must take to heart: "*Just reach into the wealth of human living! / Each lives it, those who know it are but a few, / And grip it where you will, it's gripping too.*"* ❧

* ■ Translated by Walter Arndt.

Sándor Márai

In the Footsteps of the Gods

A Novel of a Journey
1926

(Extracts)

Sándor Márai was 26, a rising star as a journalist, a columnist for several newspapers in Hungary and abroad, when he travelled to the Near and Middle East from March to July of 1926. The articles he then wrote for the liberal daily Újság *appeared in 1927 in book form, under the title* Istenek nyomában: Egy utazás regénye *(In the Footsteps of the Gods: A Novel of a Journey). The accompanying photographs, presumably taken by the author himself, were left out of the second, revised, edition published in 1937. The stops on this journey were Marseille, Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey and Greece.*

Márai was a supremely gifted travel writer. Even after the passing of eighty years his vignettes are as alive as if written today: fresh, pertinent, of great political insight and, all too often, prophetic. The book maintains throughout a balance between reportage and the personal, and the last chapter, a letter written to a fictitious addressee in Paris, raises issues that were to preoccupy Márai throughout his long life. Among the deities of the ancient Orient he seeks answers to the questions haunting Europe after the nightmare of the First World War: do the ancient gods survive in any manner, do they have any relevance for the generations to come? It is a travel book of profound resignation that remains pertinent to this day.

People at Prayer

The most powerful image the European traveller brings back with him from the East is the sight of people at prayer. In the morning and evening, in crowded squares, open fields and on bits of land beside the railway line, people fall to their knees, touch their foreheads on the ground, cross their arms over their chests, and pray, as the trains and cars go hurtling by. Sometimes they will kneel before a shop window, or in the very jaws of a street otherwise indistinguishable from its European equivalent. Everything we make so much of here, everything we pride ourselves on, the whole civilisation of electric light and blaring horns, they find quite natural to take up and use without the slightest dismay or surprise. Where their lives do take on a different dimension from our own is in the sheer intensity, the danger

even. And the essence of the whole, dangerously complicated bundle of questions about where the real concerns of East and West lie can be found in the way they pray.

I saw frequent examples. Setting aside the dignity that characterises most religious practice, with these people there is something almost indecent in the way they worship. But this is only my feeling; not theirs. There is something, to me, quite indecorous in that falling to your knees in public, in a modern street, something I find impossibly ostentatious, demeaning and insincere. For them, however, it is the simplest, most natural, most sincere gesture in the world. The image of western man nowadays is of someone in a hurry, just as once it was that of a man holding a book. The image of the oriental is of a man at prayer.

In Cairo I look on in alarm as people pray on street corners, and am struck by the power of this image, the sense of danger it gives off. The man sees nothing, hears nothing, spares not a glance either for me or for the street and its clattering trams and hooting cars. Slowly he bows from the waist and touches his forehead on the ground. His eye stares straight through you, his ear takes nothing in. People step to one side and move on round him. No one takes any notice: it is simply an Arab at prayer. A westerner, if he prays at all, will move out of sight of other people, and is deeply uncomfortable when confronted by the oriental believer prostrating himself. The man at prayer possesses something which the occidental has begun to lose: absolute faith. The westerner has his cerebral cognitions and his doubts; the oriental has his God. People in the West, who took their deities from Asia, have now for the most part, and most importantly, nothing left but their denomination.

In the morning I make my way between the cool rows of pillars inside Jerusalem's mysterious Mosque of Omar. A dozen Berber women sit in a corner, praying. One of them sings out a *sura*—a verse of the Qur'an—and the others quietly and rhythmically repeat it after her. From a short distance, the whole thing is like a sort of wailing dictated by a machine. I find myself in the cool shade beside a wall of rock, listening to the rhythmical wailing, and suddenly realise that this same rock is the one on which was built the dark, blind, fanatical faith of hundreds of millions of believers. And it is borne in on me that we westerners have no such rock on which to build our castle, our fortress of cold, cruel, absolute faith. This feature stands at the centre of the Mosque of Omar—the Dome of the Rock—the mysterious stone wall of the Muslim world, as sacred as the Ka'aba stone in Mecca, fearful, ancient as humanity and the Earth itself. This is the sacrificial rock on which Abraham was to slay Isaac as an offering to the Lord, but it is also the rock of Mohammed, the rock from which, for Muslims, the magic steed Buraq carried the Prophet up to heaven. This same fenced-off, yellow block of cliff at the centre of the Mosque is the Holy of Holies, the Abode of Mysteries, the Castle. Into the rock face has been chiselled the symbol of the God whose name can never be pronounced. Here once stood the Ark of the Covenant. It is the navel of the Earth, from which the prophets disseminated the seeds of their strange and complicated faiths into the world. If ever war breaks out between East and West—between religion and civilisation—it is on this rock that the new prophet will raise the sword

of Mohammed. And once the names of Allah and Mohammed are cried aloud in this mosque, people in Europe will learn again how to pray.

People at prayer... I have seen them in the open air and in temples, in processions and alone; I have heard the wailing of their dervishes, and have gazed entranced at their fierce, dumb obliviousness as they take leave of the world and step between moving trams into the presence of God; I have seen them pray in simple, spotlessly clean shrines, most of which were as plain and unadorned as the religious laws proclaimed from their pulpits. Between the styles of Islamic doctrine and the Mosque of Omar there is not a murmur of conflict.

The oriental, when entering the presence of God, removes his sandals. I remain standing before the Rock of Abraham, still in my slippers, my mind filled with theories, doing my best to avoid attention and keep out of his way. Of my ever following him, there is not the faintest hope.

(...)

Next, the Jordan

I meet the Greek family whom I have got to know from descriptions by earlier travellers, and stare in amazement at the stuffed hyenas and jackals that the head of the family, whenever he feels bored at night, blasts into oblivion here among the willow trees on the banks of the Jordan. I sit with them, in a shepherd's hut made of reeds, drinking Munich beer, while the paterfamilias plays the Greek national anthem on his wheezy gramophone in my honour, and seeks to ply me with little bottles of water from the river, reckoned here to be the truest and kindest of all gifts to send to the faithful back home. And here I sit, smoking a cigarette, in a shepherd's hut on the bank of the Jordan.

According to tradition this is where the prophet baptised the Redeemer. It is the only ford across the Jordan, so who could doubt, and why should they, that this is the very place? It is also where John dined on locusts, which is explained by the fact that nothing tastier chooses to live here. I gaze at the willow trees, and the yellow water of the river, thinking how altogether improbable it is that, at four in the afternoon, I am drinking Munich beer, listening to the Greek national anthem, and smoking a cigarette on the bank of the Jordan. Twenty minutes by car from here, in Jericho, stood the winter palace of Herod, the last great tyrant of Jewish history, where Salome danced *that* dance, for which Herod, the old-fashioned man of the world, rewarded her with the prophet's head on a platter. I would love to see Jericho: the chauffeur says no, it's too far out of the way and, he swears, there is nothing there worth seeing—a filthy Arab village is all, and the dancing place was closed long ago. All the same, I don't often come this way, and I do want to see Jericho...

Half an hour later I am in Jericho, with darkness already falling. I come across an inexpressibly rare and precious drink: water—clean, cool spring water, not from a cistern, real spring water that bubbles up before my very eyes in the oasis,

where there truly is nothing else worth seeing. But after the Dead Sea saltlands it feels good to see palm trees again, dense, lush vegetation, and houses inhabited by Arabs who are actually plump. There is a street here, and even a café, with Arabs playing chess and smoking outside: so there is indeed a high life in Jericho, after six in the evening. Around the spring they have constructed a basin, in cement, where people can partake of the rare and interesting beverage, and there are tents beside it containing benches. The whole place is like a pleasure garden. It's just that no one seems to be enjoying himself. On one of these benches sits a woman, as any bored woman might, towards evening, in a bathing place beside a spring, when she has nothing better to do.

She is wearing European dress: yellow shoes, flesh-coloured stockings, black skirt and blouse; no hat, but in her hand there is a parasol. With it she is leaning forward and scribbling in the sand. As I enter she looks up nervously, sees the car and my companion... stands up, comes over to us.

"Where are you from?"

"Hungary, France."

"Oh!" the face brightens. "And I am from Łódź! "

A European woman, Jewish. Attractively dressed, in the context of Jericho, a young woman with a pleasant face.

"What are you doing here?"

"I live here with my husband and child."

"There are Jews living in Jericho?"

"No, just us three."

"You came from Łódź?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Three years ago."

"My God, what does one do all day, for three years, in Jericho?"

The woman sighed:

"The café," she says, with a wry smile, gesturing towards the adobe house behind her where the Arabs are playing chess, "It's ours." We came here as *chaluz,* but my husband couldn't get on with all the socialism in the *kibbutz* and we didn't have enough money to buy land."

Then, with a mixture of energy and resignation:

"We aren't socialists, we had our own shop in Łódź... but someone advised us to come to Jericho—there was no café here and no Jews. We've been here for three years. We haven't the money to get back to Łódź, so we have to stay..."

Her eyes flash, full of longing and excitement, at the car, and then at us: real people, from Europe, people who came on a ship, danced on the ship, wearing real clothes, reading newspapers, visiting one another, talking together, hearing about things, able to go to the theatre, to mix with one another,—Oh, Łódź, Łódź: Łódź of the ghetto! what kind of homesickness cries out for you, in Jericho, in this most Jewish of lands, where the palace of Herod once stood? What sort of

homesickness weeps here for you, Łódź, for "the shop", the respect, the streets where you can show off a dress, and buy new yellow shoes? Yes, there is such a homesickness. Even for Łódź.

"Don't go yet," she says faintly, almost huskily. "My husband will be home soon... a cup of coffee..."

She is close to tears, her lip is trembling. You can see how, on this Saturday evening, she put on her best clothes and strolled across to the spring, an act of spleen by the pleasant-faced woman from Łódź, sitting on the floor with her sunshade, poor thing, trying to amuse herself, and thinking of home, and the life that sometimes drives people to places like this, and of her youth, which she would have to fritter away here in Jericho, day after day, among Arab peasants, where occasionally a car might pass through with English ladies, leaving dust and perfume in its wake... and then back to nothing, just Jericho, the camels, the Arabs —oh, this life!

But we have to go: because the road is winding, complicated; because it is already evening and I have no faith in the Arab driver's ability. Indeed, young woman, such is life, perhaps one day you will get back to Łódź.

I never saw anyone watch a car drive off like that.

*

Then back to Jerusalem, up on the hill. Mosques, domes, palaces, crescent moons, crosses, fortresses gleaming in the twilight. A short rest beside Bethany, in an indescribably peaceful spring garden, the garden of Mary and Martha, who on just such an evening received a visit from a Guest, who softly told them stories... The peace and calm are wonderful, but my ear still buzzes with that innocent cry of despair in Jericho, in which there was as much intensity and passion as in all the trumpets of Joshua. How many problems there are, for all sorts of people—so many problems! We all have a homesickness for somewhere or something. It's only God who knows where He is, and should be.

The settlements

Wire fences

When I arrived in the country, it was spring. Everyone, natives and foreigners alike, approved of my choice of season. Spring is a festival everywhere, but especially so in Palestine—a brief, magnificent festival, when the bald hills of Judea and Galilee are covered in a species of improbably red poppy. These are the venerable slopes of Mount Sinai, down which Moses brought the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments for his people—who had meanwhile cast themselves the image of a golden calf. Every April the ancient mountainside is lit with scarlet flames—the burning red of the Palestinian poppies—and wherever the car travels on the national road the orange groves are in blossom. For a fortnight now the whole country, valleys and uplands, will be fragrant, charged with their distinctive, sometimes quite unfamiliar, festive scent, and the pageant is sustained the length

and breadth of the land: from Nahallal to Jerusalem, from Haifa to Nazareth, the terrain is smothered in poppies and orange groves in blossom. The weather is mild, not quite as warm as on one of our cloudless spring days at home. At times like this the country really does make you think of the Promised Land. For an hour or two every morning, when the sun bakes down on the orange groves and sends the first clouds of perfume drifting over the valleys, this modern Canaan truly does seem a Land of Milk and Honey.

People are working in the fields: an Arab walking behind his ox, and a Jew wearing a sports cap and driving a horse and plough. The Arab and the Jewish peasant are at one with the green of the land; the distance between their properties is no more than a narrow stream. But between them lies an entire world. What divides them is the wire fencing.

People told me: under Turkish rule land registers were unknown in Palestine. Palestine was in Asia, the Arab nomads were an Asian people, and the Turks couldn't be bothered with all that scribbling. For decades the Holy Land was administered under the palm-tree system, without a land register in sight. You needed only to be aware that Ahmed's holding extended from the two low palm trees to the round well, where Ali's began, which, as every child born under Mount Horeb knew, ran as far as the tall date palm to the right; and all was well in this most ordered of worlds. When Ali died, his son settled the question of inheritance with Ahmed's son, it was all done very amicably, and the matter of boundaries was not an issue. Should any differences have arisen, they would simply have beaten each other over the head. And thus they lived, in this most ordered of worlds, for a thousand years.

Then, in that thousandth year, the Turks cleared out (lamented even by a large section of the locally-born conservative Jewry, on account of the supposedly tolerant administration, the so-called "ideal" corruption, that characterised their rule) and under the British protectorate the Jews came marching in. Ahmed sold his land for a good price to the Keren Hayessod. Ali didn't sell; he waited. A great many Alis didn't sell their land in Palestine. The Jews prepared a record of their newly, and expensively, acquired holdings, drew up topographical maps (laying the foundations for the future land registry) and finally, to make quite certain, hammered stakes round their new properties, dug the odd trench for good measure, and sealed off the whole area with wire fencing.

"See: this way, what is mine is mine." There could be no mistaking the boundaries.

But this wire fencing is an affront to the Arab eye.

They were used to the palm tree system. It might not have been as effective, but it was much better suited to the oriental mind, with its tendency to laxness and taking the long view. The wire fence—this sealing-off of property—came as a disconcerting, sobering statement of ownership, upsetting and disquieting for the Arab temperament. Here was something new, something they would have to get used to: that the land, which stretched on forever, could be fenced off by a newcomer into little squares; that he could write it down in a book.

It will take centuries for the Arabs to come to terms with the revolutionary significance of property law. It could well be that by the time they have done so all the land will be Jewish-owned, and there'll be no further need for wire fences.

But at the moment, a whole world divides the Arab from the Jewish farmer. A world of feeling, of mentality, purpose, language, social origins. And yet they live on the same land; for both it is ancestral; both drive the beasts of ancient tradition before their plough. Both are equally at home, working the land by the sweat of their brows. But they are separated by issues and obstacles that are timeless.

Among them, the wire fencing.

(...)

A Quiet Day in Damascus

The hotel window looks out onto the garden. The room itself reminds me of a cell, but the sun comes clamouring at the window so strongly that by dawn I am woken by its rowdy brilliance. I open the casements: sun, sunlight, radiance, and from the garden the full-blown spectacle of early summer blazes at me, the fruit trees already casting black shadows in the dawn light. Never was such a summer garden at the beginning of May!... Nor indeed is the hotel entirely Spartan. There is, for example, a Persian rug beside the bed... True, instead of a mattress I have a straw palliasse; there is a profusion of flowers on the table, and a great many fleas in the bed. (Athens is said to have more, and Naples the greatest number in the whole world.)

A dignified Syrian brings me breakfast under a tree in the garden. I learn that the night was "quiet", a regional expression denoting that no one has been butchered in the inner city. The hotel, according to the waiter, falls outside the slaughter line: when the Druze decide on a little friendly butchering, they confine themselves to the outlying suburbs.

"And tomorrow night?" I inquire.

No, he doesn't think there'll be any butchering tomorrow night. The French haven't bombed Suwayda for three days now, so there's no reason for the Druze to attack. Considering what they might get up to, the Druze are punctilious in observing the protocol of these attacks. On the fourth or fifth night following a French bombardment, a band of horsemen will charge off to the outskirts of Damascus, storm a few suburban houses or one of the less well fortified French guard posts under cover of darkness, massacre for half an hour or so, set fire to houses, and within the next thirty minutes have disappeared back to the mountains. Following this, the next day the French will send aircraft to Suwayda to drop a few bombs. Whereupon the Druze, some four or five days later, will scurry down from the hills...

And this has been going on for two years now...

Thus the Syrian war. It has rarely come to a pitched battle. I sit in the Damascus garden under the plane tree, staring at the breakfast and remembering how, over

the same meal in Paris, I used to read the telegram-style headlines in the newspapers: *Bloodbath in Damascus... During the night, marauding bands of Druze tribesmen carried out acts of butchery in the outer suburbs and set fire to the Arab quarter... Damascus in flames.* This I read time and time again, often over breakfast. In Paris the news always excited me; here in Damascus I remain unmoved. What's wrong with these people, to make them want to slaughter in this calm and brilliant sunshine?

After breakfast I'll go and have a look at Damascus, and the bloodbath.

Damascus is the archetypal great Eastern city, offering the most spectacular memories to the traveller. It is the Orient: pure, almost completely unspoilt. By day, you sense a hint of that life moving warily in the streets. Of its three hundred thousand citizens a third, the rich and the moderately well off, have fled, many to Palestine, many to Beirut, many just to the countryside closest to hand. The Muslim poor of course remain behind, as do one or two religious dignitaries; the highest ranking public officials have wandered off to Beirut. Today the famous large bazaar is empty. A few traders stand around in their booths proffering worthless items or small daily necessities. There is little competition, and the prices are fairly high. In a great many places they work in Egyptian pounds, as does the hotel. In peacetime, the city has direct links to the Far East; now its usual mighty throng of traders and visitors is completely paralysed. Its famous (and infamous) shops, the elegant boutiques selling fabrics, silks, knives, inlaid furniture, enamelled bowls, are all closed and boarded up. In all Damascus I managed to visit just one of those fabled bathhouses of the East, with their mosaic pavings. The rest were shut. In Damascus, not to resist a horrific pun, the only baths the locals take these days are in blood.

The streets are silent, bare. The festival is over and the guests have plucked the garlands from their brows. What is missing in the city, the thing that makes you forget the filth of the houses, the rubbish in the streets, the thing that infuses colour and movement into the bald, dusty squares and the lifeless *souks,* the dark, narrow streets of the bazaar covered in boarding and canes, is the vitality of the East—the busy idleness, the brisk lethargy bustling to and fro the whole day lest it betray the fact that it has nothing to do—and the spontaneous delight in colours, the cheerful ostentation of gaudy rags, in which the camel driver and the rich equally take pleasure. As for the slaughtering, I never quite managed to discover the whole truth, since every time word of these atrocities gets round, the response of the locals is to regale you with blood-chilling, tear-jerking horror stories, in which the terrible details are given special emphasis and enlivened by loud lamentations, suckling babes torn from the mother's breast and grandfathers impaled on swords.

Coming as I do from Europe, none of this is particularly new or strange to me. The Druze, this wild nomadic people as I have got to know them from the tales I have heard, conduct the slaughter with the traditional short sword. They know nothing of mustard gas, mortars, tanks or hand grenades, and they have no planes. Their cruelty, in a word, is old-fashioned, and does little to impress

Europeans. But for the citizens of Damascus, that humble, devout community, it is quite enough, and anyone who can has already left the treasured city. Now, only the poor remain; and the French Foreign Legion.

*

I am no particular expert on the military virtues, but seeing the work of the French Foreign Legion has not been without interest. The division currently based in Syria came from Morocco, from the Riff theatre of operations. This bunch of men, quite unlike any other in its composition and mentality, was shunted directly from one conflict on to the next. To such men it can be of absolutely no consequence whether they will die the next day fighting Riff Kabils, the Druze or Senegalese negroes. They are equally ignorant about their enemy and without interest in the struggle. They are inspired by neither patriotic or military slogans. To them it is a matter of supreme indifference whether the France under whose flag they fight is victorious or bleeds to death. And certainly it would require some strength of imagination for a bunch of unfortunates scrambled together from all the countries of the world to work up any enthusiasm for a war against the Druze, in the presence of whom so many of them must feel like gaping tourists. And yet the Legion fights and, it is usual to remark, fights very well. Its men are everywhere in Damascus.

Patrols are seen continuously. All routes leading to the outer suburbs are sealed off with wire and sandbag barricades. More sandbags and armoured cars protect individual public buildings. The troops are encamped in tents around the city, or in makeshift barracks in the central squares. In the canteens, where wine is available, I hear them speaking Italian, Russian and German, one of them with a splendid Viennese accent. A fair number are very young. Their faces show physical fatigue and general unconcern. A few shady-looking characters are to be seen among them, but for the most part they are boyish and simple. There are plenty of Slav faces, plenty of blond Germans. Here in Damascus, I am told, there was a spot of bother with the Germans. The Palestinian border is very close, with the nearest German Consulate to be found in Haifa, and a good number of them took the opportunity to desert under its protection. Escape is always on the agenda. They put up with things for a year or two, but after that the majority try to escape at any cost. Most are caught, sentenced and thrown into the fort prison. If they offend again, they spend the rest of their lives in Biribi—the disciplinary battalion.

The Legion's officers are the cream of the French army. Chosen for their intelligence, they are humane and fair-minded, all from good families, thoroughly well-bred. The sergeants are the lowest curs in the whole organisation, little tin gods with dog-whips, sadistic modern pashas strutting among their charges like animal tamers. Against their orders there is no appeal. For disciplinary reasons even the officers are required to stand aside and not interfere in their system of training. True, these non-commissioned officers rarely die a natural death. The Legion's discipline is strong, but the mentality of the men, discipline apart, is one of unwavering casual indifference. A legionnaire might serve three years under the iron regime without

reproach and still have no hesitation in beating the sergeant to death with the butt of his rifle, should the opportunity arise. Attacks on officers by the rank and file are less frequent. But where is the military discipline that can genuinely restrain such men, thrown together as they are from Moscow, Vienna, Munich, Budapest, New York, only to be beaten to death in the interests of France, in Morocco today, Syria tomorrow, and Indo-China the day after that... or God knows where, or why?

Five-man patrols are out on the streets. Steel helmets, bayonets, barricades, machine guns: a state of permanent war. Every house in the city has a garden, and most gardens have a secret nook where insurgents lie hidden. Sometimes the householder is aware of his guest, sometimes not. The Druze are the lesser enemy; the greater one is invisible, the seditious mood of the mob that has come to prevail in every city of the East in recent years. The patrols, the Legion, defend Damascus from the Druze; but sometimes an outsider might get the impression that they are defending Damascus from its own people.

The French governor comes here for a few days every month. The visit is supposed to reassure the local population. They throw up a couple of houses here and there in the suburbs, in the long rows of burnt-out streets. There is little point. Whatever they build by day can be swept away by morning in the fire that breaks out night after night... The city is sultry, silent, paralysed. Naturally, martial law is in force. The war zone claims other victims too. For a simple act of theft—the national occupation of the lower orders in Syria—the penalty is death. But this type of punishment isn't always taken to its full conclusion, or it would soon carry off the remaining population of Damascus.

*

It is now afternoon, and rain is falling silently on the mute, stifled, paralysed city. In a Parisian-style café some officers sit around chatting. Where is the real Damascus; where can I hope to find it? Where are its artists, its traders, its *imams,* its tramps, comedians, tyrants, sages, beggars? An oriental city with not a beggar in sight, because there is no one to give! When the ill-starred French General Sarrail threw the delegation of Druze leaders off the dance floor, that one foolish, kid-gloved gesture suffocated one of the loveliest cities of the East, and brought fire and sulphur down on its peaceful houses. It is impossible, quite impossible, to grasp, to make any sense at all, of the things we Europeans do in this world. What business has the Legion in this place? Where is the law, human or divine, the League of Nations mandate, the Papal Bull or Patriarchal Beard that can justify the French waging war in Syria? Who can comprehend, or explain, this silent, stifled Damascus? Look in the empty streets, and into the faces white with rage, where every movement bespeaks hatred, despair and contempt. What is Europe doing here, what does it want of them, why does it choose to bless them with its tanks and flying machines? And what would happen if these crowds ever stirred themselves and in one concerted single blow struck back at us Europeans in our homelands, with our ridiculous houses, our tanks and treaties, and drove us from

a world where, through our greed-fuelled, avaricious, wickedly cruel behaviour, we have totally forfeited their respect? "Islam prescribes the sword..."

After six in the evening, crowds are assembling in the mosques. This is the only time you see people in the streets. The minarets begin to chant, in thin, shrill voices. Inside, packed close together, the poor kneel on mats. I don't know the prayers, but I know that they have some sort of bearing on Europe.

The Foreign Legion, aeroplanes, barricades, bayonets. Always and everywhere. This is the flower of our knowledge, this is our human mastery. It is a disease, leprosy. There is no escaping it, it leaps out at you wherever you go, in Paris and Damascus, changing guard and flashing its bayonets. What sort of life is this, what sort of gods watch over us? I leave this place utterly ashamed. Nothing can excuse this, and there is so very little to hope for. ❧

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Márai the Journalist 1921–1936

A Selection

"There was a period of thirty years in my life when, every day, between two cigarettes in the coffeehouse, I would dash off one or two of these little sketches for the daily papers," recalled Márai, whose huge journalistic oeuvre, a significant part of it in German, has only recently become accessible as library archives are explored.

The 1920s and 1930s were the great years of his journalism. From 1919 to 1923, Márai, who was bilingual in German and Hungarian, lived in Germany; he then moved on to Paris, where he remained until 1928. He was a correspondent of the prestigious Frankfurter Zeitung, *but also wrote for other German and Austrian papers and for the daily* Újság *in Budapest, which sent him to Berlin in 1933. There he closely followed Hitler's accession to power.*

Márai regarded the feuilleton as a form of literature, its "antechamber". As he put it: "And what bravura there was in the Hungarian press at that time, the sheer virtuosity displayed by the very best writers of the age, describing the everyday and the transient with the very lightest of touches, so that the reader would suddenly glimpse something enchanting, weighty and eternal in the most fleeting of subjects."

The Fountain Pen

A fetish is always stronger than the critical faculty. It exists because of our need for love. Love gives us life, and the object of my love is that pen. We are old friends. Occasionally I've left it on other people's desks, but it never strays. I always find it again, it comes back to me. It is a slim, gentle pen, and the nib is well worn-in. It leaves a loose, dishevelled impression on the paper, expressing my personality. We've done a lot of work together. Sometimes it has dragged itself slowly and painfully across the page, as if lame; at others it has done the writing for me. I've grown used to the swoops and flourishes it produces without my having to direct it: I might be writing with my eyes closed and brain switched off. At times, when the work was a mere compromise and unworthy of it, we positively hated each other, worker and instrument.

This particular pen was made of gold. I thought a great deal before deciding to purchase it. Why this gold pen? Why such a pen at all? Then, having bought it, I didn't touch it for ages, I carried on using an old pencil and just stared at it apprehensively. It was too formal, self-important, pompous. It had to be filled with a particular sort of ink, requiring a special tool for the operation. Any ink other than the one officially prescribed made it ill, brought it to a complete halt. It had a delicate stomach, and would accept only what agreed with it.

We became friends over a letter. The letter was to a stranger, and had to be written in ink, so I took out the fountain pen. It bowed, all obedience. After a few strokes it was like a well-bred filly: I didn't have to lead it; it wasn't stiff, scratchy or stubborn, like so many steel-nibbed pens. It surrendered itself, made no fuss about the shape of the letters, did everything just as I wanted.

I've got used to it, damn it, I thought: a gold pen—literature. Nothing good will come of this.

But with time came mutual trust. We came to know so much about each other. We had some fine adventures together, carousing through the night in rumpled, disorderly collaboration. It saw my every weakness, noticed whenever I shied away or strayed from my work, and gave me devoted help with certain mule-like verses which required weeks of labour. There were also months when I never set eyes on it. It lay in a drawer, I on a bed. But it knew all about me. It wrote asking for money, and in pursuit of women: no particular reason. That's how significant a pen can be in a man's life.

Come this spring, I hadn't seen it for ages.

Who needs a pen in spring?

We had no contact whatsoever.

Then this happened. Standing in the street outside a stationery shop I had a sudden attack of conscience. I went in, and bought it some of the special ink. Back home, I searched for the pen in the drawer. It was covered in dust and shame. I cleaned it thoroughly, fed it, polished its delicate gold tongue with loving slowness. Do start working, please!

It squeaked on the paper, got stuck, tore at the surface, then dragged itself wearily on. I polished it, to no avail. The stem, the soul, or whatever delicate little tube dwelt inside it, would not communicate with the paper.

I became anxious. I gathered it up, went down to the river and had a long walk. It was summer; all was at peace. Gazing across the golden fields, I took stock. I felt thoroughly ashamed. To be living in the world, like this.

Tomorrow I'll start work, I thought.

And the pen?

Back to the city. I knew a street with a shop that repaired pens. I went there. A man let me in. Very cautiously I showed it to him.

"There's something wrong with this pen," I said.

He picked up his glasses, and held it up for inspection.

"In what way?" he asked.

I considered what to say to him.

"I can't write with it. You must examine it!" I urged.

He studied it carefully, then bent over a piece of paper with it. The pen faltered wearily between the letters. It wouldn't write.

"The nib is worn out," he said decisively. I must have looked at him very strangely, because he shrugged his shoulders:

"These pens get exhausted. I can't make it strong again. Sometimes they need a rest."

"And I can come back to you later?" I asked with a deep sigh.

The expert listened in silence.

"That depends very much on the pen," he replied cautiously. "They're easily damaged if you don't treat them properly."

I thanked him.

It would be nice to go travelling somewhere. ❧

17 July 1921, Kassai Napló *(Kassa/Košice)*
9 August 1921, Jövő *(Vienna)*
21 September 1921, Leipziger Tagblatt *(Leipzig)*

Monism

In the centre of the coffeehouse, where the din is at its most intense, a man sits at a solitary table, immersed in his work. At six in the afternoon the noise is considerable. This is when the pensioners and office workers arrive, the hyenas of the evening papers, who compare the day's news in the different news sheets and hunt down the minutest details of road accidents. The man sits entirely alone: before him a glass of mineral water (the philosopher's beverage), paper, ink and a pen.

He is drawing an exact circle, probably with the aid of the glass, onto the paper, and all the signs suggest that within his composition this circle represents outer space. Has it been commented before that nothing is easier to represent symbolically than outer space? A cow is much more difficult. As always, it is the detail that causes problems. Within the circle of outer space he can now draw, freehand, a smaller circle: this is the Earth. From the Earth, a bold, pitiless line carries a beam up to the edge of outer space, and at its peak, somewhat rakishly, he places a triangle. This must be the most important sign, the transition between the Wheel of Zoroaster and the Beast, the Sign of the highest secret of the world order, a bit like the swastika. Inside the triangle he writes algebraic formulae, each letter being squared or cubed; then, yielding to a whimsical and piquant impulse, he traces a root from the completed design. Having reached this point, he jerks his head back to study the work from a distance, one eye closed and lips moving wordlessly. It pleases him.

This gentleman is a Monist, I learn from the waiter, who had it from the man himself. He is retired, and occupies himself solely in this pursuit. Every evening between six and eight he comes into the coffeehouse, asks for and reads through all the newspapers, then spreads out pen and paper before him and sets about solving the riddle of the universe. His plan is the simplest of all: he will set it out in a coherent formula, seeking a common denominator. It won't be easy. God himself managed it only once.

But the intention is without doubt a noble one. He is the only person in the whole coffeehouse, or indeed a much wider patch of country, the neighbouring streets and district, some several kilometres across—the only one of all the inhabitants of the houses, the sole individual concerned with reducing the riddle of the universe to a unified equation. It must be a dreadfully hard task. The waiter assures me that he has been working at it tirelessly for years. Occasionally, when he happens not to be busy, he will stand behind the man and stare thoughtfully at the drawing, racking his brains. Sometimes a second pair of eyes can spot what has been missed. Then, before the solution has a chance to enter his brain, the waiter dashes off for a half-brown, leaving the solitary customer sitting there, poring over the riddle of the universe. From time to time he will wet his dry throat with a pear-flavoured mineral water. Occasionally something will enter his mind, some small detail that might move the problem closer to a solution, which he inserts into the equation with a flowing stroke of the pen. It seems that all goes well up to a certain point, then he gets no further. He is knocking with his pen at the gate of secrets. I too would be glad to help him: perhaps he has only to cube the number whose square root he has been trying to find, or to square where he merely multiplied, and everything will become clearer. The greatest enterprises sometimes turn on such errors of calculation... Or perhaps, if he placed the triangle not on the edge of outer space but at the centre, the answer would suddenly appear.

Just as other men pore over their picture riddles, their crosswords, their games of patience, so the Monist pores over his mystery of the world. There is in him something of the child who wants to measure the ocean with a watering can, and something of the pensioner who is bored and sets out to devise a puzzle from the mystery of the universe for the newspaper supplements; but there is in him too the sort of stubborn determination that seeks to understand the law of gravity from the thud of a falling apple. When you get to the stage where you can take an interest in why the world exists, and hope to explain it in the form of diagrams, the level of narcosis must be very high. Most people only reach the point of wanting to know what is possible, materially and socially, in the visible and observable world. In Budapest only the very smallest number of people busy themselves with—of all things—the mystery of the universe. People concern themselves with selling trousers, and if they ever do take up their pens it is to do their accounts or write letters of complaint. This hermit of the coffeehouse, sitting there beside the cash desk with his mighty riddle, utterly remote in time and place from any real-world problems, like some Dervish on the Ganges, far from the worldly sources of passion

and suffering, looking for the root of something that probably has no surface, is himself, in his ceaseless struggle to reach his goal, an eternal symbol of Humanity—and thoroughly disliked by the proprietor, because he sits there for such long periods and consumes so very little. Every coffeehouse proprietor hates Monists.

And what would be the result if he did succeed in reducing the riddle of the universe to a common formula? The equation would probably be extremely simple. Only the mechanism of a wristwatch is complicated. Larger contrivances, such as outer space, are simple, transparent. It seems quite probable that the whole thing is just a few bits of clever trickery. If he does ever solve it, he'll be very disappointed. ❧

15 August 1928, Újság *(Budapest)*
18 August 1928, Prágai Magyar Hírlap *(Prague)*
22 August 1928, Brassói Lapok *(Braşov)*

Just a Mistake

Paris, June

A crowded mid-day funeral outside the church of St Philippe du Roule, with patriotic overtones. They are burying Ernest Berger, the unfortunate cashier at the office of *Action Française,* murdered by a madwoman, Maria Bonneson.

The event was profoundly shocking. The unhappy Berger had been employed by the monarchist newspaper for just two years. He was still a young man, and left a wife and two small children, with a third on the way. Berger was a quiet individual, an insignificant clerk, in no way involved in politics.

At noon, as he was leaving the Metro on his way home—the family were getting ready for a Whitsun trip and Mme Berger had already packed for the journey—he was suddenly shot. He never saw his assailant. He collapsed, and died a few hours later.

The assassin escaped unnoticed into the crowd. At six in the afternoon a woman in a high state of agitation reported to the police headquarters and asked to be arrested. She was the culprit. Her name was Maria Bonneson and she cleaned for a woman who lived on her own. After protracted questioning she maintained, in some distress, that the moment she read in the afternoon papers who the victim of her attack was she had rushed down to the police station to announce her mistake. She did not know this M. Berger, she definitely didn't mean to kill him, it was an error; she had meant to kill M. Maurras, who also had a beard, or M. Daudet, the leader of the monarchists. But she had made a mistake, and she begged a thousand pardons.

She had made a mistake, she said, and she sincerely regretted doing it. That poor woman, the murderess kept repeating, that poor Mme Berger, she felt so sorry for her, and she had two children, the poor thing! That same afternoon, Bonneson insisted, when she read the news in the papers, she became incredibly upset and went straight to the police to give herself up. It was all very unfortunate, she had made a mistake. The police thought it unlikely that the woman was an

associate of Daudet's declared enemy the anarchists; more likely they were dealing with a lunatic, some exalted creature seeking to compensate for her troubled life by this dreadful act. In her handbag they found five centimes and a revolver; in her room a collection of trashy novels, love letters and, much more to the point, piles of newspapers of both left and right persuasions; nothing else.

A cleaning woman from the South. An elderly individual who set out after her day's work to buy a revolver with her last centime and assassinate M. Maurras. She made an error, and killed an insignificant minor clerk instead. You can only beat your head in despair.

But mad? No madder than anyone else; no madder than Daudet himself and the whole right-wing French press. For an entire month the evening edition of one nationalist paper appeared with leading articles which in plain, unvarnished terms instructed patriotic young men to have their revolvers about them at all times and shoot Caillaux if they got the chance. I have kept several examples of these incitements to murder. The bullet might miss the target, but the sentiments that put weapons into the hands of murderers never did. (Charles Maurras was himself the subject of criminal proceedings for several days, after one of his articles in *Action Française* declared M. Schrameck, the Minister of the Interior, to be outside the law, and called on his royalist followers to assassinate him.—Ed.)

It was a mistake, naturally. Just a mistake. Society no longer sheds spinsterish tears over such happenings. The times call for action. When their day's work is done, cleaning ladies take their revolvers and set out to murder politicians whose views differ from their own. Schoolboys sit in judgement on blood feuds, pass death sentences and carry them out. The fifteen-year-old Philippe Daudet goes off to kill his own father, the police shoot the boy in self-defence and make it look like a suicide. Not long ago, when I expressed my outrage over what was happening in Bulgaria, a French journalist said to me: "I don't understand what you're so excited about. I lived over there for some time, and I can assure you that since the war the time bomb, the gallows, the dagger and the revolver have been the usual instruments of political agitation down there."

But for a murderess to shrug her shoulders and offer "Sorry, it was a mistake..." is in a class of its own. Had she found the real Maurras (some of whose editorials were quite charming – though the woman knew little about him beyond what such articles can ever reveal about their author) then it would of course have been all right. The error, it seems, could be put down to one person's momentary thoughtlessness, which, on another occasion, a different cleaning woman might rectify.

At the funeral of Ernest Berger, armed with cudgels and rubber truncheons (those traditional tokens of grief on such occasions), stand the patriotic youth of France. Their duty is now clear. This is a military parade around a coffin. You can read in their faces that they know nothing of forgiveness, only the demands of the hour and the mood of the times. And should it come to the worst, well, you know, at moments like this, my God, we all make mistakes. ❧

18 June 1925, Frankfurter Zeitung *(in German)*

The Messiah in the Sportpalast

On the night of the Horst Wessel commemoration Hitler speaks in the Berlin Sportpalast. People who have neither seen nor heard him will perhaps never fully understand the significance of the profoundly ominous mind-set that has developed in Germany since the war. The reality—Hitler's version of reality and its full implications—goes far beyond anything you might read in the newspapers, or imagine. Here is that reality, drawn from the life.

1

Hitler rarely speaks in Berlin: it is Goebbels' hunting ground. (Goebbels, moreover, like almost all of the leadership, suffers from serious paranoia, refusing, for example, to speak outside the capital unless the local party officials guarantee him an audience of appropriate size, with fee to match.) The Sportpalast holds twenty-five thousand people. A ticket costs one mark. The event is sold out days in advance.

At three in the afternoon of the meeting advertised for eight, the migration towards the horrific concrete sheep-pen is under way. For hours on end the Bülow Strasse underground pours uniformed Nazis and members of their families onto the street. The doors are supposed to open at six, but by then the faithful have somehow managed to occupy the floor and all the gallery seating. Arrangements are in place for surviving the long wait ahead, mothers of families have prepared sandwiches and thermos flasks of coffee, and the crowd sits, hour after hour, patiently munching away. At six, groups of Nazis parade into the hall. Today's will be a great, truly representative meeting: every single Nazi regiment has sent its chosen delegates, and now four thousand, I am told, of the 226 SA, the *Sturm Abteilung,* come marching in, in full uniform. This uniform—leggings, riding breeches, brown shirt, with unit number and emblem on the lapel and peaked brown cap with chinstrap—is by every impartial canon of taste the ugliest and most repulsive garb that any fanatical militarist ever dreamed up, or more precisely, stole from the dress code of foreign armies. But in Berlin, where even newspaper sellers like to kit themselves out as war veterans, it is admired.

A detachment of storm troopers is now stationed around the huge podium. On it stands a long table, covered by a white cloth on which a forest of laurel wreaths and huge, many-branched candelabras await the party leadership. Other troops are positioned around the walls to cordon off the hall, and one especially prestigious unit forms a double line at the entrance, creating a long, narrow path to the podium. I think of William Tell —*"Durch diese hohle Gasse muss. Er kommt"**—and know how he felt.

* ■ *"Durch diese hohle Gasse muss er kommen* (*"Through this ravine he needs must come."* The words of William Tell before killing the tyrant Gessner in Friedrich Schiller's *William Tell,* Act III, Scene 4, translated by Theodore Martin, The Heritage Press, 1952). Márai changes the quotation to refer to the Führer with the sentence: *Er kommt*—He is coming. [Ed.'s note.]

Outside the Sportpalast the arrangements have a warlike character. An area half a kilometre long has been sealed off by the *Schupo,* the green-uniformed *Schutzpolizei* (Security Police), using armoured cars, and two-man patrols with rifles and other weapons, are busy checking the identity of arrivals. Only those with tickets, and the press, are allowed in. To foreign journalists the Nazis are stiffly polite. I show my credentials, more storm trooper types clear a path for me through the crowd, and I am seated in front of the podium, where, for good measure, one of the faithful is placed beside me to explain anything I might not understand. (This is the "ordinary Nazi", in civilian life a barman in a beer-cellar on the Olivaerplatz, whom I sought out the next day and interviewed. More of this at another time.) The Nazis in the hall are on the whole very polite. It's always like this, with these sort of people. If they're not actually murdering you, they're almost pleasant. You just have to choose the right moment to meet them.

At eight, news arrives—signalled by notes on a horn—that the cars carrying Hitler and the rest of the leadership have left the Kaiserhof Hotel. They are still a long way off, but the Nazi units stiffen to attention, the audience—all twenty-five thousand people—leap to their feet, and the munching and chattering are silenced. The *Führer* may still be far away, but every nerve is paralysed by the approach. The eyes of twenty-five thousand people gaze, as if hypnotised, towards the door through which the worshipped figure will soon appear. Then short, sharp, brutal words of command are barked out from every side—a barracks sound, which all ears drink in with deep pleasure. Enter the standard bearers, precisely 226 of them, with huge red, white and black flags emblazoned with swastikas, to stand in a semi-circle behind the podium. A section of the party leadership, almost eighty representatives of the Reichstag, among them Prince August Wilhelm (also in Nazi uniform), take their places beside the white table. Spotlights now pick out the entrance. And thus we wait, for half an hour. The tension is almost unbearable. Twenty-five thousand people, audience and SA troopers alike, stand stiffly to attention, faces turned to the entrance, while Nazis with red-cross armbands work non-stop, ferrying those who have fainted out on stretchers. The crowd appears not to notice; it seems this is a perfectly regular occurrence.

At half past nine the loudspeaker bawls out, *"Der Führer kommt."* Twenty-five thousand people raise their arms and roar back: *"Heil".* When I hear this roar, I instantly understand the Nazis' success. Only dervishes howl in this way, and those in mortal despair.

2

The howling has no end. It goes on and on, an inarticulate roar. Then, ahead of the Leader himself, his personal bodyguard, the SS, bare-headed in dark-blue uniform, make their way between the lines of troopers, followed by the most illustrious members of the party, among them Goebbels in mufti, and finally Hitler himself, in uniform, bare-headed, followed by more of his guard. Up on the

podium, the inner circle. Flashes of magnesium light, photographers leaping up and down, and little girls in white presenting bunches of roses to the Messiah, who strokes their cheeks and, in almost the same motion, directs the flowers on to one or another of his aides. It is a vision, a faded reproduction from 1914. For the most trusted disciples, the reward of a few, perhaps three or four, shakes of the hand. Prince August Wilhelm, for example, is merely third in line. Imagine the effect on the supposed 'mind' of this mass audience as, with its own eyes, it sees the Leader favouring a royal prince, third in line, with the briefest of handshakes, then almost pointedly ignoring him.

Hitler is forty-six.* A vegetarian, slim, abstemious. Everything about him, the shape of his head, the mouth, the forehead half-covered with a fetching lock of brown hair, the way he moves his hands, is strikingly effeminate (supposedly ascetic). He takes his seat at the centre of the podium, rests his head in his palm, takes no notice of the rabble or the military parade, stares stiffly ahead. He sits likes this for ages, a full quarter of an hour, while the music plays: first the National Socialist march, then—in memory of Horst Wessel—*"Ich hatt' einen Kameraden",* with twenty-five thousand people bellowing out the words. He glances at no one. He just sits there, deadly serious, "lost in reverie". Perhaps he is thinking of his country's fate, perhaps grieving for the memory of the young man who died. When the music falls silent, he shades his eyes with his hand, bows his head, and remains in this posture for several minutes, motionless.

"He is deep in thought," my Nazi minder whispers to me. His face is twisted with excitement.

In the hall there is a deathly silence. The silence of twenty-five thousand people. You cannot hear a single cough. This is not politics, not a party meeting. This is religion, worship. Then, from all around the hall, the loudspeaker roars, a steady crackle like canon fire: *"Der Führer spricht!"* Hitler rises slowly to his feet, brushes the brown lock from his forehead, and steps up to the microphone.

3

The faces! As he speaks I study the faces of the leaders on the podium, the faces of the eighty representatives of the Reichstag. And what faces they are! Only two show any spark of intelligence: Goebbels—small, dark, cunning, energetic, with alert, knowing eyes—and Goering, President of the Reichstag, one of the old breed of Prussian military types. And then, watery, soulless eyes; blood-red, beer-bloated faces; close-shaven heads: third-class physical material. What can there possibly be in a head that gazes out at the world from eyes such as these? What confusion, what twisted obsessions? It's all a sort of fake-militarism, a counterfeit; and not just the uniform. The bearing, the tone of voice, the whole gallumping flashy style, is just a sham. This is the gutter, militarised, stuffed into uniform. This

* ■ Márai is mistaken. Hitler was then 43. [Ed.'s note.]

is the mob, saluting to orders, playing at soldiers for a bowl of hot soup. This is the rabble, standardised: organised stupidity, the herd instinct mobilised, brutishness hired and feed, the boor trained to obedience and roused by the issuing of a rifle. This is the typical Nazi face, one which only a thoroughly sick society could have dreamed up for itself.

A significant part of the audience consists of the elderly; the rest are mostly very young. Middle-aged men are few and far between, and I haven't seen a single attractive woman: such women clearly seek other kinds of amusement at this hour. However I have seen others of their sex, listening tearfully to Hitler in unspeakable excitement and dabbing their eyes with trembling hands. I am seized by the worrying sensation of having been locked in this hall with twenty-five thousand lunatics. It is not a pleasant feeling.

4

They already know the text. Tonight it's exactly the same: "I started with three hundred; today twelve million stand behind me. I am the chosen leader of fifty per cent of the German electorate—(not true)—tomorrow sixty per cent, the day after that eighty per cent; and one day I shall have a hundred per cent. (All this for the thirteenth year running, monotonously, always the same.) "In the Third Reich I will mobilise capital, I will give everyone work, I will wipe out the ancient enemy —(the Jews and the French)—I will purify the race: I am the leader." (verbatim). I cannot believe there are many sitting in the hall who would be surprised if he ended with, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." Clearly this is no longer a political faith. It is simply a faith. The Messiah is under no obligation to account for himself, only to make revelations. He appears, walking on water, and speaks.

Goebbels listens, with head raised. His is perhaps the only face in the building that betrays any sign of actually thinking. If this man ever says anything serious, what emerges will prove very uncomfortable.

5

What the Leader declares is familiar, commonplace. As he proclaims it, in this hall, it is probably convincing. Faith is everything. And besides, loudspeakers are very persuasive, difficult to shout down. The speech is one that you drink like boiling water. It has no taste or smell, but it is boiling, and it scalds.

In the courtyard outside, a sombre double line stands guard over the car park reserved for the top brass and the Leader. I don't wait for the meeting to end; I leave as soon as Hitler has finished speaking. The bodies of huge luxury limousines loom all around me. I've never seen so many mammoth cars. When it's a matter of maintaining status and dignity, the money flows freely enough from the coffers—and there's nothing left for actual running costs.

In the dead, frozen streets police order the rare passers-by to move on. A few steps further, and I am back on the familiar, lively night face of a Berlin thoroughfare.

The German population is large and of many different persuasions. Only one fifth listen—whether from conviction, calculation or in the throes of despair—to the Messiah who stands at this moment before his believers in the thick magnesium light blazing down on the Sportpalast podium.

This fifth will never reach sixty million, as the Messiah knows perfectly well by now. But this same fifth of the sixty million does immeasurable damage, creates real mischief, and is capable of causing unrest for many years to come: for Germany, for Europe, and for the world.

So long as this one fifth sticks together and holds fast, there can be no question of peace. I tell you, you should see those faces!... ❧

29 January 1933, Újság *(Budapest)**

The Barber of Basle

At one in the afternoon the barber ties the white sheet round my neck and starts lathering me up. The windows of his shop, on the first floor of a house with a high-peaked roof, look out onto the main square and the cathedral. He is an elderly, dignified man; he speaks in a deep, pleasant, voice, like an actor playing the paterfamilias. With his fingers around my throat, he rattles off the following:

"Are you French? Or Italian? Ah, Hungarian. We're very fond of Hungarians in Basle. I shaved my first Hungarians in this shop during the war, travellers they were, the few who could get to Switzerland in those days on diplomatic missions or for their TB. The trains were really slow, and their beards kept growing on the way: I had plenty of work. True, Germans came here too, and later on the French as well. For a while everyone came here for a shave. That's when I added another floor to the business. I was fooled by history. We shouldn't forget, the hotels were full of spies—there was a time when I could have got my living from them alone. During the war, I shaved spies all morning—some of them had season tickets; the locals came in the afternoon. There are still some around now, but not very many. If you go into the Stadtcafé after lunch you can see them sitting there, at the corner tables, playing chess and reading the papers. Do you know much about spies? Never got the hang of them, myself. They always get caught in the end, with the little things they buy from the tobacconist—a photo of the railway station, a postcard of the bridges—the sort of thing they seem to need. Do you like Basle? Right now, I don't. I've lived here for forty-six years, but right now, I don't like it. Borders to the left, borders to the right, and no money in between. Do you think

* ■ The day after this piece appeared, Hitler was appointed Chancellor. [Ed.'s note.]

there's peace and quiet here? Well, yes, perhaps, if you're just passing through... But if you'd been living here during this war; and this "peace"—things happening to the left, and things happening to the right, and nothing happening in between, that's when you start to doubt this peace. Here, there's everything you need to live: theatre, a covered swimming pool, museum, socialists, Nazis, patricians, French wine, wonderful music, a great library, religious tolerance, good bakers and, I'm told, even the occasional good whore. Only, there's no money. Did you ever hear the like? Money to the left, and money to the right, and in this little nook, not a cent. True, the banks are full of money, but it's all locked in steel safes for foreigners, and the foreigners don't come here, or not often, to take their money out or put it in; and if they do come, it's just to have a look. You can't make a living from that. And you can't make a living from emigrés. In the old days, emigrés were the one lot you could rely on. The state, or the Party, sent them money on the first of every month, like a pension. They were the best sort of people. Nowadays its just beggars, paupers. Two of them who come here I shave on credit. You never can tell. A colleague of mine, in Zurich, shaved Lenin for years. Here, you get the sort of Germans who've fled from the Nazis, Nazis fleeing from other Nazis, German émigrés from Paris fleeing from other German émigrés. Very hard to make them all out. But none of them has any money, that's the common denominator. Just lean your head back, please.

"I have millionaires coming to me,"—he adds with feeling, and finally, with a soft, whispering sound, pulls the blade across my throat—"millionaires, Swiss, natives of this place, the real old Basle patricians.There was so much money here, sir! Ten million, twenty million: good Swiss francs! You should see those lovely houses, the other side of the viaduct. That's where they live. And not a bent penny between 'em. I could show you my books: a real millionaire who owes me money. It breaks those people's hearts; they come here so humbly, in the afternoon, when they know I'm not busy, they sit there quietly, and I shave them on tick... What else can I do? I can't bear to see them running around unshaven; all those fine old people. These Basle millionaires, they sent the best part of their money to Germany, during the inflation, and then later on, when Germany was getting on its feet, they exchanged their Swiss francs for gold marks, they bought factories in Frankfurt and rows of houses in Nuremberg. They made ten per cent profit. I know one who bought a brush factory in Breslau, it's still his today, and doing very nicely. But he can't get the money out. What should he do? Where can he go? To Breslau? To be with the brushes? He was born here in Basle, his father was a millionaire before him. There are so many like him. There was a time when everybody was sending his money off to Germany. Me too. Would you mind leaning your head a little to the right?

"But that's not the worst of it. You know, everything comes through this way. As soon as things get bad at home, or they get hurt, they all come running here. They nip across the border, drop in on me for a shave; they get here at night, they've no money, their eyes are bloodshot, they're in a right state. Do you think

there is peace here, real peace? You're wrong. Germany is being transformed, France is in crisis, and here we are, living in a house over a passageway between the two. We get to hear about everything, everything gets to us, the total chaos going on all round us. Everyone unpacks his bags here, and we just look on and listen. That sort of thing gets you down. We're quiet, peaceful folk, we'd like to live in peace and die in our beds. But everything comes through this way. You can't get any peace. Its like having some deafening row, banging and hammering to left and right, people knocking houses down and building others; meanwhile we're living quietly here in this hunting lodge up in the mountains, like William Tell, and we still don't get any peace.

"What do you think? There'll be a war? Starting where? Paris? And people there, they don't think there'll be one? All the better. But if there is, you'll see, mark my words, we'll choose to stay neutral again. What do you think, is it worth an invader's marching up here into the mountains? We've got an army; true, it's small, but it's first-rate, and the mountains stop everyone. We wouldn't want to go the way of Belgium. We keep on good terms with everyone. You see, that Motta, he said yesterday, in Geneva, that we're friends with Italy. All right, so we're also friends with England, we like the Germans, the French are our friends, what else can we do? We're Swiss! What do you think? They'll leave us alone? As I see it, the question is: will they let us be, so we can still be their friends? Everyone? I tell you, we've already decided. We like the quiet life. They should just give us our money back and keep coming for the chocolate—the hotels are better than ever before, the service is first-rate, and the prices are fair. You don't think that's a good idea? What's that you say? That one day everyone will have to make up his mind, every German and everyone else, every single person will have to decide where his loyalties lie in Europe? It's impossible, in my view. That's not the way we do things. Our loyalty is to Switzerland. Eau-de-cologne?

"There you are, then; thank you, it was my pleasure. Delighted to make...," he says, and bows. "One franc, that's with the tidy-up. Do come again. Oh, you're moving on tonight...Ah well, perhaps another time, if you're ever this way. Here in Switzerland you never know what'll turn up next." ❧

16 October, 1935, Újság *(Budapest)*

The Fawn

Shortly after midnight, the fawn makes its appearance in the central room of the inn. With its halting, almost hobbled, gait it limps among the tables, then stands at the entrance of the long corridor, listening to the music, its head up, gazing around. It has come from the kitchen, where they keep it for mysterious reasons: as a distinguishing sign of the inn, an emblem, something wonderful and rare, a unique attraction. It is kept partly instead of the more usual dog, partly as a sort of dumb clown of the establishment. By midnight everyone in the inn is rather tipsy,

and the women take particular delight in it. Some stroke it, others crow and cackle, while the men contemplate it with the expression of those who know, and comment, "two-year-old doe", or, "one-year-old buck", puff their cigar smoke in its direction and make friendly overtures to it. Others dredge up memories of their hunting adventures and launch forth into lying yarns. "Greetings to the fawn!" shouts a genially drunk civil servant from the end of the table, and for some incomprehensible reason everyone seated round it roars with laughter, the women in their hearty sopranos, waving scented handkerchiefs at the creature. Then a pot-bellied gent with a white beard calls out in a wine-sodden voice, "May all hunters get dead lucky!" and goes down on all sides as an amazing wit. Every night, after twelve, the fawn contributes in great measure to establishing a convivial atmosphere.

Because every night, shortly after midnight, the fawn emerges from the kitchen, when the rank breath from bellies in the throes of digestion, the smell of coagulated grease and the stench of stale tobacco have made the air in the rooms so thick it is almost tangible. Up to this point it has lain motionless, either in the kitchen or at the feet of the cashier beside the bar counter, soft as a ball of wool, as only animals in captivity—great snakes in their glass cages in zoos, and wild beasts in the cages of travelling menageries—know how. All animals, the domesticated no less than the wild, have the supreme gift of being able, when imprisoned by humans, to turn in on themselves. Lying thus, half-hidden at the feet of the cashier, the fawn is tiny—tiny and soft, as if wanting to disappear altogether, its little hooves gathered under its stomach, its head bent back to rest on its hind leg, the lights of its eyes almost completely extinguished. For long hours its whole being is withdrawn, its motionless body closed-off, mortally offended. But shortly after midnight it stirs itself, stands, looks around, and sets off towards the drinking rooms. What has it heard? Who has trained it to do this? In the drinking rooms the accordion snarls and screeches; the clients have gorged their fill and are now, in their own special way, celebrating existence with wine-fumed self-abandon, giving voice to such utterances as "tomorrow is another day", and "bring another half-litre", and "we shall never die." The inn is patronised by a respectable class of people. These people shed tears in the cinema when the innocent heroine dies and applaud when they read in the paper that the guilty have got their just deserts. The women all dress with decorous charm in the latest fashion, and the titles on the men's calling cards all indicate their importance. Almost everyone sports a watch, and everyone brushes his or her teeth in the morning. Some of them went to Naples and also to Stockholm last year on a shoestring and are now describing in loud voices how the waiter tried to diddle them, but of course they were smarter and got the better of him. Among them is one with a stag's tooth on his watch chain, another who "likes a good read before she goes to sleep—better than these stupid plays". There are those who show a lexicographic tendency and "would like to get this exactly right". Others witnessed executions during the war, and insist, "it isn't so terrible, you get used to it. It's

just a question of nerve, I reckon," and others again have been on a pilgrimage to Rome. After midnight they are all pleasantly drunk, and very talkative. Ah, but not excessively so, it is all quite proper.

And among them, shortly after midnight, the fawn appears. It passes between the tables, alert, scenting the air. On the edges of the tables there are geraniums in pots. Seeing the lush green leaves, it draws itself up and makes as if to graze, then has second thoughts and moves on. It wanders without purpose, does not fraternise, refuses the proffered bread crust, then stops at the door, its glance always directed slightly upwards, its head a little to one side, as if expecting a sign. A gentleman who has been dining on saddle of venison has a flash of macabre wit and calls out, "What, back already?" and this shaft of brilliance is met with peals of laughter. Someone else wags a finger at the fawn and barks out sternly, "I'm having you for my next meal!" and this idea also goes down extremely well. But the laurels go to the elderly gentleman in a white waistcoat and black jacket who, with a sudden rapid movement, raises his walking stick to his shoulder, takes aim at the fawn, and goes "Pow, pow!" before modestly adding, "missed!" By this stage the women are shrieking with laughter, the band is pulling out all the stops, the waiters are streaming in and out with freshly drawn beers and frosted bottles of sparkling wine, the glasses are all full to the brim, faces flushed and eyes clouded over. Everyone has acknowledged the fawn and instantly forgotten it. The glasses clutched in their hands are raised on high and clinked together; then they turn away and start to discuss more serious things.

For a short while it remains in the room, but no one pays it any attention. Such is its role, after midnight: it provides a momentary diversion for the guests, then it is free to go back to the kitchen. It is kept as a sort of low-cost entertainment item, something original and different, rather more than just a dog or a cat. It wanders about with its slow, limping step, listens to the music, and, from time to time, with an unhurried, very gentle fawn-gesture, leans its head to one side and gazes into people's eyes. Perhaps this is a special time of day for it—waking, after midnight, in the forest where it was captured, its usual hour for setting off for the spring in the moonlit clearing? Or perhaps at that moment, in the forest, it would still have been sleeping? I'm no authority on deer.

But when for a brief moment it catches my eye, I am forced to return its gaze. That compelling, indomitable force. Like a glass eye. People will tell you that all animals taken into captivity become neurotic. But this cold, indifferent, feral eye does not complain, does not acknowledge you, communicates nothing. It looks at you as at a star, without thought. Behind that eye is something numbed, coagulated: all understanding, instinct, any calm sense of the order and connectedness of things has become gelatinised in that cold, corporeal fawn eye. The intelligence that once sparkled in its depths has been killed: killed by people who show it affection and treat it as a pet.

The fawn has a good life in the inn. It shares in the life of the people there. Because of the curious turn its life has taken, it even participates in human

commerce, acting in its quiet, modest way, as the innkeeper's sleeping partner. Only its physical movements retain their indestructible purity and freshness. Degraded and forced into connection with humans, its primordial, incorruptible nobility as a Creature is seen in the way it turns to limp and gaze about, without purpose, to a rhythm whose inner tempo it can never forget. The fawn lives among humans, because that has been its fate. It lives between the cash desk and the dining room, among the glasses of spritzer and the mutton stews, the dining pensioners and the bit-part actresses who have ventured into the bar with their lovers. The fawn has no objective knowledge of that tangible web of life woven from the different noises, the sounds of slithering, munching and belching, where it lost its way amidst the rustlings of the forest; that's why it still, sometimes, raises its head and sniffs. The fawn can do nothing about its lot, and the people who take aim at it with their walking sticks, who offer it crusts of bread before ordering it for dinner, are similarly impotent. That's how it is, fawn. It's appalling, but that's the way it is. So why gaze around, with your unnerving, apathetic animal-sadness, as if you remembered something? Did you, a mere Creature, have any other contract with the world, with Fate, with God? Everyone gets a different deal, fawn. Here's to you, fawn. ❧

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Julia Gáti

Healthcare Under the Knife

There is no such thing as a perfect health system. At the moment, the German is undergoing a deeply unpopular reform; the French, adjudged by the WHO in 2000 as the world's best, is switching from a social insurance base to tax funding. The Hungarian, like the British, provides universal coverage to all its nationals and legal residents. They are similar at least in two respects: neither can finance the demands placed on them, and their services are endlessly complained about. Naturally there are differences too: except for organ transplants, Hungarians, unlike the British, have not had to put up with waiting lists. On the other hand, the "tipping" of medical staff has become routine, if not obligatory, in Hungary. ("Gratitude money" is handed over usually before, sometimes during but, at the least, after any routine medical procedure.) Also, since there are no waiting lists published, queue-jumping is endemic in areas—cardiology, rehabilitation and, for a few years now, CT and MRI scans—where the demand is too great for the available specialists to meet.

Prior to 1945, no more than 10 per cent of the Hungarian population was covered by the three health insurance companies. Many doctors combined working for them with private practice. The health insurance companies prohibited gratuities and in private practice doctors charged according to an agreed tariff. In the years 1948–1950, the newly installed Communist regime took health insurance into the state sphere and thus established universal access to medical care. The population's health had deteriorated during the war, the hospitals and doctors' surgeries were swamped and health institutions were short of funding in the Fifties, when heavy industry was the top priority. The shortages that hallmarked socialist central planning were quick to appear in healthcare, too, and the custom of "tipping" to obtain preferential treatment and a better standard of care inevitably followed.

From the beginning of the twentieth century—when international statistical comparisons became meaningful—Hungary lagged behind Europe in terms of average life expectancy at birth. It then stood at 37.3 years; in comparison, it was under 35 in Spain and 40 years in Austria, co-partner in the Monarchy. Hungary came closest to western Europe during the first half of the 1960s, when public medicine had vanquished contagious and infectious diseases and significantly reduced neo-natal and infant mortality. Today, due to compulsory antenatal care and provision of services for new-

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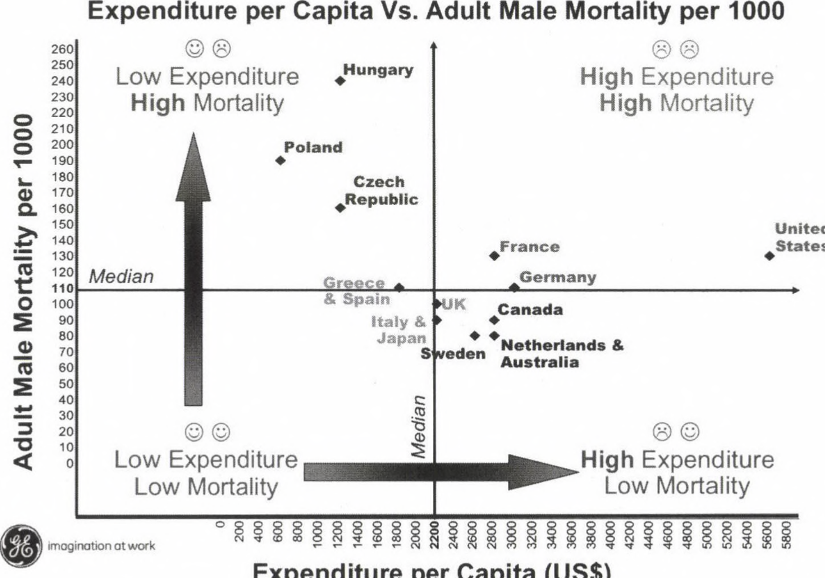
born babies through district nurses, along with the compulsory inoculation of children, Hungary holds a respectable position among the thirty states in the league tables published by the OECD, which it joined in 1996. The figures for neo-natal and infant mortality are close to the OECD average.

The late Sixties, however, saw a change that was dramatic and unparalleled in peacetime. Whereas life expectancy had risen from year to year from 1945 on, the reverse was now observable; due primarily to a substantial increase in the mortality of middle-aged men, life expectancy at birth went into continuous decline until 1993. A system established for the effective prevention of acute infectious diseases was ill-equipped to deal with chronic illnesses for which prevention and screening should be a priority. Nor did the Hungarian healthcare system have an answer to widespread alcohol abuse, smoking and obesity. Over the last decade, cardiac care provision has improved and there is growing access to state-of-the-art medication and surgical intervention. At last, some change can be perceived in dietary habits, too—to the extent that mortality from cardiac arrest has been halved. Even so, Hungary still heads the OECD table for deaths due to cardio-vascular diseases per 100,000 persons. The position is much the same when it comes to cancer: Hungary doggedly holds on to first place in the OECD tables. In the United Kingdom 182 per 100,000 persons die of cancer each year, in Hungary that figure is 243. Most victims are claimed by lung cancer and other tumours of the respiratory tract. This is closely linked to smoking—Hungary is second in the OECD league table, with adult smoking at 34 per cent—and to an average alcohol intake of almost 13.5 litres per head annually. The combined effect means that the incidence of tumours of the oral cavity and lips is conspicuously high.

Less well known than the mortality figures is the fact that, in terms of GDP, healthcare expenditure in Hungary—state



Source: "How Long Do We Want to Live and at What Cost?" by Lisa Kennedy, GE Healthcare European Media Summit, London, 5–6 September 2006.

and private funding taken together—is only a fraction short of the OECD average. In financing public health and preventive medicine, Hungary almost heads the field: only Austria provides more treatment in hospital per 1,000 persons (see Diagramme). The statistics in themselves, however, throw no light on why the figures for costly hospital care are so high, and why Hungarian citizens on average consult a doctor at least 12 times a year. (Is this because the general state of health is so poor or because treatment is so ineffective?) Hungary's inadequate social services have a bearing on the figures: the dearth of home care provision means that elderly patients are occupying acute hospital beds. Apart from that, anyone can visit a general practitioner or specialist whenever they wish, without restriction or financial burden.

The momentous changes of the Nineties were not accompanied by any attempt at substantial organisational reform in the healthcare service. While governments changed at four year intervals (2006 saw a sitting government re-elected for the first time), and while all experts, regardless of party allegiance, were agreed on the necessity to overhaul the structure, neither right- nor left-wing governments dared to cut the Gordian knot, fearing public protests and lobbying by special interest groups, not to mention social tensions and unpopularity. There has been minor tinkering in the domain of fiscal responsibility for care provision, as well as attempts—none too successful—to alter the structure by reducing the number of acute hospital beds and shift more towards chronic care beds. Although most Hungarians, thanks in no small measure to vigorous campaigning by—oddly enough—the political right, are apprehensive about the privatisation of healthcare and, especially, of hospitals, there has been steady, if slow, headway in privatisation since 1990.

As a first step, general practitioners are no longer employed directly by local government but are now individually contracted to the country's single health insurance fund to provide care for those registered with them. Dental care operates similarly and is now predominantly provided by private practitioners. Ten years ago, pharmacists were given the chance to purchase the state-owned pharmacies they worked in; without exception they availed themselves of the opportunity. In hospital care, it is primarily in the technologically-driven areas that private capital has made the greatest inroads; 90 per cent of dialyses and one-third of diagnostic imaging (CT, MRI and PET scanning) and laboratory testing is now outsourced to the private sector. Of Hungary's 170 hospitals, just two are privately owned and these are negligible in respect to both size and throughput. The main development over the past four years has been that local governments have been trying to keep their loss-making and ever-harder-to-fund hospitals going by handing over their running in the longer term to private companies. To date, around half a dozen large hospitals in the provinces have entered into agreements of this kind, and this route looks to be both practicable and successful.

The private contractors who work in hospitals (e.g. supplying laboratory tests, CT scans, cardiological interventions such as angiology, etc.) operate in one of two configurations. One such is to enter into a contract directly with the health insurance fund to provide the service at an agreed rate, subject to performance targets and restrictions on volume. Thus, for a CT scan the insurer pays the same amount whether the machine used is owned by a private company or by the local authority hospital. The hospital may enter into a contract directly with the private provider, so that it is paid by the health insurance fund and pays off the contractor from the monies received. As far as private practice in its classical form is concerned,

when a patient has a private appointment (this applies mainly to dentists), the health insurer does not remit any of the costs.

The task of slimming down a healthcare system that was wasteful in its overall functioning and ill-adapted to changing needs was left to the second term of the Socialist-led coalition government under Ferenc Gyurcsány, re-elected in April 2006. In less than six months the Minister of Health put five bills before the National Assembly and the government displayed unprecedented political resolve to have them passed into law. The aim of the restructuring all this legislation kicked off is to reduce the geographical inequalities, both qualitative and quantitative, in access to healthcare. Today most hospitals are geared to meeting medical needs over a wide spectrum; however, data demonstrate that care should be provided by specialist centres, with state-of-the-art equipment. In such hospitals, the chances of survival are practically doubled for heart attack victims, for instance, and the survival rate for stroke victims is 30 per cent higher.

Another goal is to reduce the number of hospital beds and improve standards with the money saved. To this end, it is necessary to create more facilities for caring for the aged and for treatment at home; a whole range of examinations and treatments can be supplied perfectly well on an out-patient basis or by day surgery. The alignment to the needs of the elderly is warranted because with the expected increase in life expectancy, more treatment and care will be needed during that increased life span. In 1995, the over-60s comprised 14 per cent and the under-19s some 27 per cent of the total population; by 2050, those proportions may be almost reversed. The number of hospitals will have to be reduced for reasons of sustainable development and cost efficiency. At present Hungary's provision of hospital beds per 10,000 inhabitants is some 30 per cent above the European Union average, and whereas the number of hospitalised cases in most EU countries is stagnant, in Hungary it is actually growing. Even so, as many as 25 per cent of available hospital beds are unoccupied at any given time.

Under changes in effect from 1 January 2007, healthcare provision in Hungary will be on four distinct levels. Of the current total of 170 hospitals, 39—seven of them in Budapest—have been designated as centres of excellence. These centres will dispose of the highest level of specialist medical expertise, offering round-the-clock emergency care and equipped to the highest possible standard. District and regional hospitals that cater for the less serious but more common diseases will now be able to contract with the health insurance service to obtain funding for half of the available beds (the centres of excellence get the other half). How these are to be distributed within a given region depends on decisions taken in March 2007 by councils made up of the local authorities in that region. The number of available acute beds is due to fall from the present 60,000 to 44,000, while the number of chronic beds will rise from 20,000 to 27,000. One major priority is the further development of outpatient centres, as well as the introduction of quality and quantity controls on the work of general practitioners—in other words, to ensure that medical care should be provided at the adequate level.

For most hospitals all these changes will mean closing down departments, pruning revenues and, in some towns, complete closure or "downgrading" to chronic care institutions. That the country should be up in arms about all this was to be expected. Since the vast majority of hospitals are owned by local authorities, and each is one of the biggest, if not the biggest, employer in its locality, substantial numbers of auxiliary workers, as well as doctors and nurses, are likely to lose their jobs. Even large national institutions that are still state-owned and

By-Passes: The Costs of Machine-Gun Diagnosis

Mrs L.S., a 74-year-old pensioner, developed a cough in November 2005. The fits of coughing would start at two o'clock in the morning. In late July 2006 her problem was diagnosed: she was suffering from gastric reflux. In other words, the top sphincter of her stomach did not close properly. From November to July seven doctors in out-patient clinics passed her from hand to hand, for two routine complete and two specific blood counts, three lung X-rays, two sets of tests for allergies, an ECG, an abdominal ultrasound examination, one bronchoscopy and one examination for gastric ulceration, two pulmonary function tests and one endoscopic examination of the stomach including biopsies. The seven doctors prescribed around a dozen and a half different medications, the bulk of which ended up in the patient's dustbin.

The cough would not go away. Finally a consultant of her acquaintance admitted her to hospital. Mrs L.S. spent eight days in a three-bed room; she had no complaints about the doctors, nurses, the meals or conditions in general. In those eight days a further complete blood count was done, as well as another lung X-ray and another bronchoscopy. She was then scheduled for endoscopy, but the consultant was on holiday. She therefore had to wait a further fortnight for this (at home), but then a biopsy was taken again. The final diagnosis: she was suffering from gastric reflux. During her last four days in hospital she did not see any doctor at all, and nurses just occasionally, but then she was "only" coughing so she didn't need their attention. On leaving she did not forget to provide a modest "gratuity", because she really was grateful: the coughing was finally quelled by the medicine she was given at the very end of it all.

Documentation of Mrs L.S.'s case-history was supplied to Attila Molnár, Deputy Head of the Financial Department at the National Health Insurance Fund, who commented that the lady was lucky to have her calvary end in a sound diagnosis. He was unable to work out the specific costs as those would depend on the "reported performances". That applied particularly to hospital care. The average cost to the Insurance Fund of a medical consultation for one patient, excluding incidental costs, was around Ft2,000 (€8). In these terms, the above-outlined examinations would have taken at least twenty consultations.

As far as routine examinations are concerned, there are guidelines that lay out the length of time that the results of any test or examination are considered valid and the repetition or frequency of the tests, depending on the illness. A diabetic, for example, may need to have blood sugar level checked several times a day, but a cough does not justify the quite superfluous repeated general blood counts. Attila Molnár supposes that the doctors of Mrs L.S. must have initially suspected a pulmonary or bronchial complaint, and on those grounds the repeated blood counts were not justified. Lung X-rays are also valid for a certain period (except in the case of malignancies). Where diagnostic procedures involve visual scanning (e.g. X-rays, CT scans), there may be no written finding as such, and the scan itself is not allowed to leave the institution where it took place, but if the next doctor is in any doubt, then he or she is free to consult the preceding colleague. As Molnár sees it, the case in point highlights two typical problems. One pertains to medical uncertainty and defensive medicine. If the symptoms are not clear-cut, then doctors have a tendency to order a whole battery of tests, just in case they throw up something. I call this 'machine-gun diagnosis'—one sprays the bullets all about in the hope of hitting something. If nothing is turned up, then the patient is "referred": let someone else carry the can. The second problem is the drive to maximise income. It is better if one makes a diagnosis oneself, rather than accept someone else's opinion, because that way one improves the performance of one's own institution. Even better, admit the patient as an in-patient—that too helps to boost income. I can say with absolute confidence that the lady's condition did not require her to occupy a hospital bed for a diagnosis. I can also see that there was no question of treating her. The aim of the reforms is that no payments should be made for providing a hospital bed when there is no genuine attempt to intervene therapeutically.

(From the press)

By-Passes: The Disability Benefit Scam

Rózsi and Marika. Two middle-aged women, one had qualified as an agronomist but was now a shopkeeper, the other made pasta for sale. The two of them were key figures in one of the biggest bribery scandals of recent years, which took place in Miskolc, Hungary's second city.

Ninety-three persons were suspected, including thirteen Miskolc doctors. The doctors were bribed in the hope of being able to draw the dependable monthly income that a disability allowance provides. Rózsi and Marika were the go-betweens putting patients in touch with doctors—for a substantial fee. Initially, potential clients came from the waiting rooms of doctors' surgeries; after a time the women's telephone numbers became widely known in the city. Their 'fixing' assumed a quasi-industrial scale in the years 2001 and 2002. Our own sources suggest that it was still 'business as usual' even after the police investigation was started; one of the accused even interviewed clients when already under house arrest.

In all, there were 211 counts of bribery, 100 of trafficking influence, 53 of forgery of official documents, 63 of fraud and 324 of forgery of personal documents. The police have questioned almost 800 persons and legal opinion has been sought in 115 instances. It has been established that around Ft7 million in bribes changed hands, while the state has been defrauded of 93 million (about €365,000). Those sums, however, were just the tip of the iceberg. The police had uncovered pointers to a good many more instances, but they had been unable to obtain evidence of these within the time available. As it is, they had submitted to the county prosecutor some 15,000 pages of written evidence to back their recommendation to prosecute.

It is unclear exactly when and how the whole affair began. According to a senior physician at Saint Francis's Hospital in Miskolc, for many unemployed men in their forties and fifties in those slump-stricken areas of north-eastern Hungary, obtaining disability benefits is often the only way of securing a regular income until they reach pensionable age. Although a 50 per cent disability brings in little more than Ft20,000 per month—about €80, disability assessed at 67 per cent or or more means the allowance is calculated on the basis of the claimant's length of employment and previous salary: in some cases this may come to Ft100,000 per month. (For 100 per cent disablement the claimant is entitled to a full pension.)

Getting yourself written off as disabled is accepted in Miskolc as an everyday escape route out of the slump. After the change in regime, it was Party apparatchiks who were the first to present themselves at hospitals, and they were followed by the officialdom of bankrupt state enterprises. Local panel doctors who were trying to be helpful would sign for people who were in serious financial difficulties to receive

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under ministerial supervision will not escape the slimming-down, which in some cases is going to mean amalgamation with other units. They too are seeking to preserve their status and professional privileges by bringing all possible pressure to bear on the distribution of capacities.

One of the measures is going to directly affect patients' pockets. Medical care that hitherto has appeared to be "free" at the point of delivery—paid for by social security deductions, with any deficit being made up from tax revenue—will be subject to charges. A token fee of 300 forints (little more than €1) will have to be paid per consultation with a general practitioner or specialist, with this money going directly to the individual doctor. An identical fee will be charged for each day spent in hospital. Many fear that even this modest charge will prove a major burden for the chronically ill and/or the elderly, those likely to be in most need of frequent medical attention. The government has pledged that all children under 18 will receive medical care free of charge, while for those in receipt of social assistance the charge will be only Ft100. Emergency care and screening will remain free to all. The

sick pay then send them off to hospital for further investigations, saying that the thicker the patient's file, the more likely he or she was to secure a disability allowance. As the practice spread, it was inevitable that people should come along who saw a business opportunity in all this, and it did not take them long to locate the doctors who were ready to cooperate.

The two women had no healthcare qualifications but they managed to build up a highly lucrative business. The procedure was the following: the two women might have eight, ten or fifteen people waiting to see them at a prearranged time in the hospital car park. Those patients would be told to bring along the results of previous medical tests and Ft30,000. Out of that the two women deducted Ft5,000 each and the remaining Ft20,000 was slipped in among the documents. One of the women would then escort the whole group to a chief consultant, knock on the door and send them in with a farewell "We're here, doctor". The consultant would then arrange for the patients to have the necessary tests. There were even individuals who on paper were in-patients at the hospital but who in fact were at home. They were differentiated from other patients by an asterix in the nursing records so meals would not be ordered for them as they were not actually occupying a bed.

The departmental head and his deputy were questioned by the police. They claimed in their defence that the sums of money they accepted were not prepaid bribes for medical examinations but 'gratuities' for treatment received for which they had not done any favours. The investigation indicated that Rózsi and Marika were in direct contact with three of the assessment board's administrators, who would always know to which doctor the client's file should be handed. The younger and healthier the individual seeking disabled classification, the higher the price that had to be paid. As the go-betweens used to put it, it was costlier the more the medical assessor had to have his palm "greased".

"After a while, the ramifications of the affair became incredibly complex," says one officer who has been involved in the case. "The names of other hospitals and new doctors kept on coming to light as the strands spread right across and even beyond Miskolc. We were under immense time pressure because the law requires an investigation to be concluded within two years of an individual's first interrogation after being charged with an offence, otherwise the charge has to be dropped. We had to wait months to get some expert opinions and were afraid that all our work would have been for nothing so we did not take in more institutions and doctors. The evidence recorded on those 15,000 pages is just the tip of an iceberg."

(From the press)

ending of "free" provision of medical care is intended, first and foremost, to have an educational role. The hope is that patients will learn that it is not worthwhile turning to a doctor for every trivial complaint, as provision of service does have a very real cost and value. The consultation fees will constitute a legal (and taxable) source of income for doctors which, it is hoped, will help squeeze out the practice of "tipping".

Another educational intention—the discouragement of waste—lies behind a measure that requires patients to pay a dispension fee of Ft300 forints per box of medicine prescribed. (One quarter of the money for medicines paid by the insurance fund is to cover those medicines that incur no charge to the patient.) The government is seeking to rein in what it sees as the unmanageably high and ever-escalating costs of medicines, burdening both the health insurer and patients. For many years it has been hotly debated whether the level of consumption of medicines is actually high or low. Soaring figures might be justified by Hungarian life expectancy, trailing behind other OECD countries. Still, 2,500 tons of

The Grateful Patient

It is one of the most popular social pastimes in Hungary and it is called "How much to put in the envelope". Players—either at home or already in hospital—try to guess how large the sum of money that they slip into the doctor's pocket should be. In the case of elective surgery the deliberations would start at home, well in advance of the appointed day, with a string of friends and acquaintances being grilled in the hope that they can shed some light, either because they themselves underwent surgery not so long ago, or because they have a doctor in the family, or simply because they are generally reckoned to keep themselves au fait about such matters. The point of interest is that no-one is able to give a sure-fire tip, but at least the range of error is narrowed. Before making a final decision, it is always worth listening to the bids that are suggested by patients who are currently in the hospital as some of them will be returning "guests" and so count almost as insiders. The removal of kidney stones by an experienced, reliable but not top-notch surgeon in one of Budapest's hospitals would in this way come to something like Ft30,000 (about €120, around the minimum monthly wage in Hungary). It is important that the amount should not be less than others give, because that downgrades the donor; it is also important that the doctor should remember how grateful his patient was if one has to return to see him again.

With decent doctors that sum just puts a smile on their faces, because they treat their patients to the very best of their ability whether the patient is grateful or not—at most they will smile more or less, their manner will be more or less pleasant. Well-known professors or top consultants running hard-pressed departments in high-demand specialities (e.g. cardiology, rheumatology) leave nothing to guesswork: the tariff for even the simpler kinds of interventions can easily be one-and-a-half times the minimum wage, while the sky is the limit for more complex affairs. Just how much it will cost if a patient seeks their beneficent care, a bed in their ward, or an expensive diagnostic procedure they will not be shy about disclosing. Gynaecologists too belong to this magic circle, and they function essentially as if they were in private practice, with set tariffs (while they work hours that are already paid for and in facilities funded by the national health insurance system). There are, of course, more discreet techniques as well, and junior doctors have those down to a T. They pretend that paying any attention to a patient is a special favour, as though the use of certain medicines, procedures or tests was out of the ordinary. Then, of course, the horror stories also go round by word of mouth, just like the appropriate gratuities. A general practitioner tells a female patient who has just been scared to death over a diagnosis of early-stage colorectal cancer exactly how much, down to the nearest forint, she will have to pay to have the necessary treatment (radiation and chemotherapy) started immediately along with the number of weeks she will have to wait if she doesn't want it started immediately.

J. G.

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medicines are thrown away every year. Sums set aside for hospital care are low compared to money spent on medication. Hungary is at a historical turning-point in 2007 as preliminary budget forecasts indicate that funding for hospital patients is likely to be exceeded for the first time by subsidies allocated to medicines; these subsidies may amount to €1.6 billion (to which a further €600 million spent on subsidies for therapeutical equipment for patients should be added).

Total spending on pharmaceuticals has nearly doubled over the last five years, even though the prices that manufacturers are allowed to charge have remained unchanged or increased by no more than a few per cent. The overspend on the budget is continually mounting, and in 2005 hit almost €400 million. The government is therefore imposing unprecedentedly severe restrictictions on the drug manufacturers and distributors in order to curtail their marketing; it has also imposed price

cutbacks proportional to the growth in sales alongside obligations to refund any future overspends. Currently there are 2,800 qualified doctors working as "medical detailers" for pharmaceutical firms; their job is to present newer products to prescribing doctors. The registration fee of €60 that they have hitherto had to pay for a permit to present products will by 2008 have been jacked up to 5 million forints (nearly €20,000) per person, with €4,000 to be paid by the representative annually. That measure alone could impose additional costs of almost €4 million on Gedeon Richter, the largest Hungarian pharmaceutical manufacturer, assuming it does not sack the 230 doctors on its sales staff.

Another change will take place in the pharmacies themselves, which up till now have enjoyed a monopoly position, with only one pharmacy per 5,000 inhabitants being licenced. The restriction on numbers will be dropped, and when it comes to opening new pharmacies in busier localities, those offering a greater range of services and longer opening hours will be favoured. Pharmacies have also lost their monopoly on non-prescription medicines: these are now available from supermarkets, petrol stations, etc.

In its efforts to rapidly make up for the backlog of necessary healthcare reforms accumulating over the past decade and a half, the government is also having to grasp the nettle on the key issue of financing. Here the question is whether the country should retain a single national health insurance fund or should switch to a system with several competing health insurance companies providing health care cover. Both options have support, even within the governing coalition, and there is no way of telling which is going to win out. One thing is certain: the current several hundred thousand "freeloaders" who are estimated to be receiving healthcare but pay no health insurance contributions or are not entitled to such care in some other way, e.g. through a gainfully employed member of the family, will in the future find themselves excluded from the system. They will then have to decide whether to take out health insurance or pay as they go for any treatment they may receive. ❧

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INTERVIWEW

Why Men Die Young in Hungary

Mária Kopp in Conversation with Eszter Rádai

In absolute terms, more Hungarian men of working age now die annually than in the 1930s. This disturbing fact was recognised in the late 1980s. Similar findings have been reported from the other countries of the former Soviet bloc. A bare quarter of a century after Mária Kopp embarked on her then pioneering research this is now referred to as the East and Central European health paradox.

Professor Kopp personally had to confront an array of hindrances under the Kádár regime, not least of which was being refused a passport that would have enabled her to travel to conferences in the West and present the findings of her work in epidemiology, psychophysiology and clinical psychology. Since 1993, Professor Kopp has been Director of the Institute for Behavioural Science at the Semmelweiss University for Medical Sciences, Budapest. She continues to work on the interactions between body, mind and environment in connection with the aetiology of disorders of physiological homeostasis as well as the socio-geographical component of psychosomatic illness.

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Eszter Rádai: *May I start by asking you to clarify what is meant by the East and Central European health paradox?*

Mária Kopp: It is a very strange interconnection that emerged by the late 1980s and is experienced only in East and Central Europe and not encountered anywhere else. As living conditions for the population as a whole have improved, the mortality rates for middle-aged men over recent decades, far from improving as would be logical and expected, have actually worsened.

You and your colleagues were the first to notice this, back in the early Eighties.

I was always interested in how people's psychological state was related to their health. After qualifying as a doctor I went on to study psychology. I was very fortunate that, right at the start of my career, I joined a team at the Teaching Hospital of Psychiatry under Professor Pál Juhász, who at that time was investigating the possible causes of what was called "collective farm neurosis". He had first encountered this syndrome in Csengersima, a small village in eastern Hungary, on the border with

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Romania. Csengersima was a place where depression, anxiety and alcoholism had previously been unknown, but just a few years after the forced collectivisation of agriculture in the early 1960s, one person in three was diagnosed as suffering from a mental health problem. I myself was engaged in that investigation from the beginning, and when Professor Juhász began to study the connections between mental and physical health in the general population, I became involved in that work too. When Professor Juhász died, I took over this research with my husband, Árpád Skrabski. It continues to this day.

We carried out the initial survey in 1983, starting with a cohort of 6,000 people. This was increased to 24,000 in 1988, and it was 12,600 in both 1995 and 2000, and then roughly 5,000 in 2006. Everyone was interviewed for at least an hour and was presented a questionnaire. This helped us to examine the correlations between social status, lifestyle and various psychological and health factors. My husband was trained as a computer engineer before he turned to sociology, so we were among the first to carry out detailed statistical analyses on computer databases covering large samples, which is the reason we were quick to get results that could be evaluated quantitatively. Over the intervening years, behavioural scientists have corroborated this unexpected and disturbing finding in other countries of the Central and East European region and initiated their own research programmes at one centre after another. It is nowadays accepted that one may justifiably speak about this as an East and Central European health paradox.

But is it not natural that, at a relatively high level of modernisation, with growing standards of living, one should find a slowing down or halt in the trend of improving general health and increasing average life expectancy? Isn't the explanation that the countries of East and Central Europe have reached that stage in recent decades?

No, that's precisely why it is a paradox. What has occurred in this region is the exact opposite to what is found everywhere else in the world. Now, it's true that once you reach a certain level of development, it is not quite so clear-cut that health indicators will improve in step with improvements in economic conditions. In the USA the health indicators are relatively poor, especially in those states where there are particularly large differences within society. But, interestingly, this is seen not just among the more disadvantaged but also among the best-off. Even then, however, the correlation still holds that health indicators get better in some respects as living standards improve. What has happened in Hungary and in the non-Muslim states of the former Soviet Union is precisely the opposite: from the 1960s until the mid-1990s there was a fall in the mean life expectancy of males, while at the same time—in Hungary up until 1988–89—the economic position of the population as a whole was improving. Everywhere in the former Soviet bloc, then, the correlation went into reverse. That is to say, the positive change that was occurring in regard to living standards was leading to negative consequences for middle-aged men in particular.

How widespread is this in the region?

The same was observable among Poles, Czechs and Romanians, but it was in Hungary that the process reversed the earliest, switching from improvement to deterioration, and it is in Hungary too where it went the furthest, and the country's mortality rates are still very bad. The only reason that we cannot "boast" about having the very worst indicators is that far more worrisome processes have

kicked in, after a slight time lag, among the Russians, the Ukrainians and in the three Baltic states. Still, it is a shocking fact that according to the latest data from the Central Statistical Office, more men in the 50–65-year age group are dying annually today in Hungary than in 1930.

That was at the very beginning of the Great Depression. Is the trend holding, are things still getting worse?

The deterioration was especially severe until the mid-Nineties; since then a slight improvement has been detected, but we are still not back where we were in the 1930s. In other words, in absolute terms, more men are dying today, and only about 60 per cent of men are reaching the age of sixty-five. Among the less skilled, the figure is even worse, barely 50 per cent; one in two of them dies before he is sixty-five.

And women?

Mortality rates among women are much better. Eighty out of every hundred women now reach their sixty-fifth birthday. Even here, though, there is little cause for rejoicing. If we compare ourselves to neighbouring Austria, for example, during the Sixties the mortality rates there were worse than in Hungary but now they are far better. There 82 per cent of men reach the age of sixty-five, for women the figure is not far off 100 per cent. The worsening trend was also perceptible in most of the other former socialist countries during the Nineties, but their indicators are now improving. The exception is Russia itself, where they are still a good deal worse than here, though quite how bad we don't know because of the unreliability of earlier statistics.

To what degree is the Hungarian average pulled down by the growth in its very poor, low-skilled and predominantly Roma population, or by widening differences in wealth and income?

The correlation is clear, and it does not apply just to the Roma. Our research shows that the health indicators are as bad as they are, not because of any ethnic factor but because of the huge educational handicaps the Roma face. This is an area, incidentally, in which there has been a particularly big change. Mortality statistics showed that higher educational attainment conferred no advantage in the Sixties—one had the same probability of dying prematurely; indeed, being better qualified was often a distinct disadvantage. Today anyone who has not completed their secondary school education is twice as likely to die before the age of sixty-five as someone who has passed the school-leaving exams.

We have found that the decisive factor is chronic stress, encountered when someone feels unable to overcome problems, to find a role. That is intriguing, because having to face major challenges, to overcome difficult circumstances, is not harmful in itself; we actually need these impulses both physically and mentally.

But only if we are able to cope.

Yes, and that may be the reason for the relative protection enjoyed by the more highly qualified: they are able to meet challenges that loom as insurmountable obstacles for someone unqualified. Nowadays, the mental state that accompanies the threat of unemployment plays a decisive role in premature death, but it is much less of a threat to a more highly qualified person than to someone who is less skilled. The real question here is why is the same threat a lesser risk factor for women? Why does it not have such severe consequences for their health?

Is the absence of qualifications a risk factor for them too?

We have been looking into that over recent years. There is no question that higher educational qualifications also offer women a degree of protection, but the correlation is much less marked than for men. When it comes to mortality due to malignant tumours, the position is actually reversed: higher educational qualifications actually put women at greater risk of dying prematurely because of these illnesses. But this only holds for women, and only for deaths due to certain kinds of tumours.

Has any explanation been found?

We started a special project in our Institute to examine gender-dependent differences. We came to the conclusion that the expectation that women should fulfil multiple roles, and the chronic stress associated with this, can lead to increased demands on the immune system and that heightens the risk of certain malignant tumours.

Does that correlation hold for cardiovascular diseases?

No.

Even though it is the leading cause of mortality among men?

Yes, but with cardiovascular diseases there is no question that higher qualifications mean better protection, and more so for men than for women. One of the teams at the Institute has obtained a very intriguing finding in this regard: the mortality rates from cardiovascular diseases among women doing "men's jobs" is very close to that of men.

Then let's look at the possible reasons for the differences between men and women in terms of health status and mortality rates.

The chief reason seems to be that Hungarian society is still tradition-bound. Men feel that the responsibility for their family's standard of living is theirs alone, even though the wife is generally also employed. Indeed, these days it is the woman who usually pulls the family out of a sticky situation should the husband be laid off work. However, that sense of responsibility seriously threatens men and is a factor inducing chronic stress.

Is that not the case in other countries?

Not everywhere. In Norway, for example, Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland, who was the country's first woman prime minister and who went on to be Director-General of the World Health Organization, brought in equal rights legislation which has had the effect of increasing life expectancy not only for women but also for men. In Norway there is no difference between men and women in risks attributable to levels of education, perhaps because men there are taking on many of the far more variegated and richer tasks that women used to do. In Hungary it is the other way round: many women seek to be more "male" than the men, and that may explain the paradox. Our studies have demonstrated that the average Hungarian male perceives anyone else's success, including that of his friends, as a sign of his own failure. For him, rivalry is a further major risk factor.

Do women compete less?

Women compete every bit as much and yet they don't make themselves ill or kill themselves on that account, because they don't take things so much to heart—and I mean that quite literally. In their case a considerable protective factor lies in the fact that their self-esteem is not determined solely by their career, financial success or social recognition; women operate in a much richer social context. For them social contacts are more important, to give just one

example, and they are much better at them—though that in itself, like the differences in male and female scales of values, is a consequence of social expectations.

I read in one interview you gave that for women social networking, gossiping for example, may also be a protective factor.

Yes, women are able to pour their hearts out, to share their feelings with others. The same cannot be said generally of Hungarian men, unlike southern European males, who enjoy much better health indicators than might be expected on the basis of their economic situation—one might term this the South-European health paradox. This probably has something to do with their lifestyle: in Mediterranean countries the menfolk sit outside on a café terrace, chatting and arguing. In Hungary, sadly, a man only starts talking when he has had a lot to drink, flops onto a friend's shoulder and loosens his tongue. Acquired inhibitions are themselves risk factors.

Behavioural research has drawn attention to the cardinal role of relationships in the workplace, stress at work, and the presence or absence of a willingness to cooperate on the part of colleagues. How does the Hungarian workplace fare in this regard?

Very poorly. This is a major concern, since it is precisely the working-age population that should be relieved of stress. The workplace has a defining role in shaping a person's mental and physical well-being. That is why every year since 1999, the European Union has put the subject of the consequences of stress-induced illness and depression on the agenda, and has placed special emphasis on stress in the workplace. Right across the Union huge economic damage is done by the loss in productivity that stems from friction and uncertainty in the workplace. So it's not just out of any goodness of the heart that they concern themselves with the matter—it's in their direct economic interest. That was what lay behind the 2001 directive regarding the responsibility that management bears for the mental and physical well-being of their staff.

Hungary is now a member state, so in principle that applies to us too.

It ought to apply in practice; it is just as binding on management as safety at work. Previously it was only negligence concerning safety that could be prosecuted; nowadays bullying and creating or fostering an adverse atmosphere in the workplace can be prosecuted—in Britain legal action has been taken in a number of cases. In Hungary nothing along those lines has occurred. But the fact is that a hostile boss can trigger a chain reaction. Staff naturally are not going to trust a boss who does not trust them, and so a vicious circle is set up in which the working atmosphere becomes ever more poisonous, and it ends up with people making life hell for one another.

This year (and there is good reason for that) the American Psychosomatic Society will be holding its annual conference in Budapest—only the second time, after Barcelona, that it has been arranged in Europe. I shall be delivering the opening plenary address, on stress in the workplace. We have now completed a follow-up study. We went back to those whom we questioned in 2002 and re-interviewed all who were willing to be re-interviewed. Quite a number had died during the intervening period: close to ten per cent of the men in the age group of 40–69 and around three per cent of the women. When we then looked at predictors for mortality we found that uncertainty over job security played a decisive role in our sample. What I am saying is that stress at work is a very important predictor for a depressed mental

state, and that it is correlated with premature death. Depression is commonly an outcome of chronic stress and is accompanied by impairment, even complete loss, of a person's ability to work. It is frequently caused by uncertainty about job security and an adverse working climate.

Can we expect any improvement now when downsizing and wholesale restructurings are on the agenda in Hungary?

There are changes that can and should be made. To start with, if something is laid down in an EU directive, it ought to get attention. Restructurings and cutbacks should be carried out humanely, if for no other reason than because of the considerable economic losses entailed when people sustain mental or physical trauma and are not fit to work. Our Institute has organised skill development courses for the young unemployed. Even if they have achieved nothing else, those who attend have at least had the chance to network with each other, to create a pact to help each other, and are reassured that they have the ability to overcome difficulties. In the Netherlands a large number of clinical psychologists are doing such work, because it is recognised that mental breakdown entails huge losses.

What are the prospects for the disadvantaged, those who are being left behind economically, those who are most at risk?

The only model we know is to intervene with pre-school or elementary school children and to work with them in small groups in order to bring out whatever abilities they possess but previously had no opportunity to express. Only work with small groups is effective for skills development. If teachers who are currently out of a job as a result of the cutbacks in education were so employed, there would be a payback on the investment even in the short term.

Are you saying that children coming from a background of multiple deprivation, particularly Roma children, should be taught in small groups, apart from other children?

I think it is highly advisable for children who come from diverse cultural backgrounds, Roma and non-Roma, to be taught together, but children from disadvantaged families should also get special attention in separate small groups to give them a chance to catch up. Let me say it again: our surveys have confirmed that the poorer health status of the Roma population and their above-average mortality rates are not correlated with their ethnicity, but with the fact that they do not possess even the minimal schooling that is required for finding a place in society.

If a Roma child enters a nursery school or Year 1 at an elementary school, and has never seen a story book, is unfamiliar with the language and concepts that other children already take for granted, then that child is immediately pitched into a state that behavioural science calls 'learned helplessness' or 'educated incapacity', which is a chronic stress condition and is inevitably linked to depression. The child who feels incapable of tackling tasks and overcoming obstacles that are in her or his way will find themselves on an irretrievable downwards spiral to deviance. I have seen as patients a great many Roma women who dreamed of their children becoming teachers or doctors, but to no avail, because without help those children are not going to be able to extricate themselves from the trap they are caught in, and the poor teacher is not going to be able to help if there are several children in a class of thirty who have never been exposed to what the rest are familiar with. That is why those children need to be handled separately, in smaller groups, until they have caught up with the rest. It's the way they do it in the Gandhi High School at Pécs, where my daughter has run a preparatory class of that sort. What she found is that the Gypsy

children there are incredibly quick in picking up computer skills—much quicker than other children. However, because of the baggage they are carrying, they need special assistance and more than average attention before skills like that can come to light. In Australia and the States, amazingly good programmes for early catch-up have been devised and they achieve excellent results. There, comparably disadvantaged youngsters are now just as self-confident as their white classmates, their self-esteem is just as strong, and they are able to achieve results in building careers that would have been inconceivable earlier.

To revert to the East and Central European health paradox, there is one positive development since 1988–89: the suicide rate in Hungary has fallen. Has behavioural research come up with an explanation?

That is again an intriguing paradox. A lot of people are looking at possible reasons, but so far they have not come up with anything truly convincing. What I suspect is that we may be witnessing much the same phenomenon as the peaks in suicide rates that followed major historical traumas, except in reverse. Perhaps we shall be confirmed in a belief that the change that occurred in 1989–90, the change in regime, was a great liberating experience for Hungarians, at least temporarily, and that is why the suicide rate has fallen in absolute terms. The improvement is truly striking: 2001 was the first year in which the Hungaian suicide rate fell below 30 per 100,000 inhabitants, whereas not so long ago it had been as high as 45 per 100,000. That "less than thirty" is still very high, but the improvement has been huge.

Could it be that in a democracy it is permissible to publicly express our loathing of anybody, including political opponents, to blame them for all our frustrations?

Well, that too may be part of the explanation, because, you see, suicide is an act of aggression against oneself, whereas the turning of that aggression towards each other has now assumed truly tragic dimensions. Going back to your question though, some people explain the drop in the number of suicides by suggesting that, sadly, alcohol gets to them first. Hungary now heads the list for premature deaths due to alcoholism—with Moldavia the runner-up, by the way. It's not an opinion that I share, but even I have to concede that Hungary is very badly placed in the matter of 'slow suicide'.

Which means?

Self-destructive habits, like alcoholism, smoking, unhealthy diet—the traditional risk factors. They do play a role in premature death and the generally poor health condition of Hungarians, but at most they explain 40 per cent of it. Smoking among men has shown a slight decline, though it has increased among women, particularly young women. Educational level was a major influence on the proportion of smokers among men, but not among women; a very high proportion of female university students, for instance, are smokers.

The change in alcohol consumption patterns presents a much bigger problem than that, though, and among men above all. From having been a nation of healthy wine-drinkers, we have now become a country that consumes poor-quality spirits. The real question, of course, is why anyone would drink. There are almost always psychological factors in the background. What is the reason for anyone passing their days in a bar? Why? Because they are frustrated, for instance; because they are unemployed and it is the only place where they can find company. But health policy in this country acts as if it does not recognize this. Projects are launched to work out all

manner of grandiose projects, but meanwhile the network of institutions that have been charged with maintaining mental health are progressively being run down. Nowadays our institute is virtually alone in offering a free outpatient clinic for psychosomatic disorders.

In 2001, the World Health Organization published a report on mental health to which I was asked to contribute for this region. The report concluded that mental illness is the gravest threat to people under the age of 45 all over the world. Which means that it is the main issue from the viewpoint of the social burden that it imposes. What do we find? Hungary once had a superb network of institutions that have now been run down on the pretext of reorganising them. Outpatient clinics are now so badly under-financed that they cannot even cover their running costs.

How could that happen, given that the correlations are self-evident?

Well, that is something you should be asking the politicians in charge of health policy rather than me. The fact is that anxiety, depression and alcoholism are also the most common causes of incapacity for work among young people in Hungary. I do not know what is behind this altogether shortsighted health policy. It looks as though there is still a stigma attached to mental illness in Hungary. It's something we'd rather repress, something we do not discuss. ❧

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Géza Jeszenszky

Was Failure the Only Option?

Charles Gati: *Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt.* Washington D.C., Woodrow Wilson Center Press–Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 264 pp.

With the socialist-liberal coalition winning the general election in April 2006, it was to be expected that the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution was not going to be a straightforward ceremonial event. Even if there had been an honest squaring up to the crimes of Communism in Hungary, it would still have been hard for former revolutionary fighters and their descendants to commemorate 1956 alongside members of the successor party to that which had provoked the Revolution, had helped to crush it and had presided over the merciless retribution.

Less than a month before the anniversary, a speech by Prime Minister Gyurcsány to Socialist MPs was leaked, and that led to a deep political and moral crisis. As a divided country looked back on its past, nationwide commemorations were marred by demonstrations and police violence. Old questions, such as who 1956 belongs to, once again became timely. Does it belong to the "reform-Communists"—disillusioned ex-Communists—or was it a popular uprising, an epic of the overthrow of Communism? The heroism that Imre Nagy displayed during his imprisonment in 1957 and 1958 and his consciously accepted martyrdom are beyond dispute, but how did he perform during the dramatic days that followed 23 October? It must never be forgotten that Moscow, that is to say Khrushchev and the other Soviet leaders, double-crossed and overthrew a lawful Hungarian government. But why, at a time when the Kremlin had publicly broken with Stalin's heritage and advocated peaceful coexistence, did they come to that decision? Could events in Budapest have taken a different course and could the assault launched on November 4th have been avoided? And not least, did the West, and especially the United States, do everything they could have done? Might there have been a way, short of unleashing a Third World War, of averting the brutal crushing of a Hungary that was in the process of liberating itself?

Traditional views of history would say that history can only deal with events that actually took place. Hugh Trevor-Roper, the Oxford historian, took issue with this:

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was Minister of Foreign Affairs (1990–94) and Ambassador to the U.S. (1998–2002). In September 2002 he resumed teaching history and international relations at the Budapest University of Economics (Corvinus University). He is also a Visiting Professor—teaching the history of Central Europe—at the College of Europe, Warsaw-Natolin, Poland and the Babeş–Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár), Romania.

> At any given moment of history there are real alternatives, and to dismiss them as unreal because they were not realised is to take the reality out of the situation. How can we '*explain* what happened and *why*' if we only look at what happened and never consider the alternatives, the total pattern of forces whose pressure created the event? [...] History is not merely what happened: it is what happened in the context of what might have happened. Therefore it must incorporate, as a necessary element, the alternatives, the might-have-beens.[1]

A huge literature has accumulated on the Hungarian Revolution; since the regime-change a substantial part of the confidential papers relating to it have become accessible to researchers. Through published documents, memoirs, monographs, overviews and all possible kinds of professional literature, it is now possible to know just about everything about the background to the events, the thinking of the participants, what lay behind the major turning-points. The young Budapest journalist of 1956 who, under the name of Charles Gati, became an acclaimed historian and political scientist in the United States, has drawn on both earlier and more recent scholarly works, painstakingly searched the archives of Hungary, Russia and the USA and has interviewed those participants and eye-witnesses who were accessible to him. The result is a concise, readable synthesis that will dispel any illusions we might still entertain about 1956.

His book by no means avoids emotion while rigorously meeting the demands of objectivity. At the launch of the Hungarian edition,[2] János M. Rainer, a recognized authority on the history of 1956, claimed that Gáti's lively and provocative account constitutes the first serious revisionist version to appear so far.

Gáti's key, and truly revolutionary, thesis is that, if Imre Nagy had been a more competent leader during the days of the Revolution, if the revolutionaries had been capable of moderating their demands, and if America, instead of mere rhetoric, had responded more vigorously and firmly to events, then there would have been a realistic chance of the Soviet Union holding back from intervention. Had that been the case, Hungary could have acquired a more moderate Communist regime, somewhere between what Gomulka initially attempted and what Tito achieved.

The book, superbly and persuasively written, outlines its main contentions in the first chapter before proceeding to present the political career of Imre Nagy as a revolutionary *malgré lui.* Gati confirms that Nagy, demonstrably a faithful Communist during the full quarter of a century that he lived in the Soviet Union and cowed during the Stalinist purges of the 1930s, was indeed an informer for the secret police (though the allegation that he was involved in the murder of the last tsar's family is groundless). This was the source of his contacts among the powerful. Mátyás Rákosi and the other members of the 'four-in hand' (Ernő Gerő, Mihály Farkas and József Révai) looked down on and despised him (though Gati does not say so, this was presumably also on account of his peasant background) and every now and then managed to relegate him to the background. After Stalin's death, Nagy's not being a Jew made him an ideal choice as Hungary's prime minister in the eyes of the Kremlin. Gati is good at picking out how internal feuding within the party, both in Moscow and Budapest, governed the ups and downs of Nagy's fortunes, and

1 ■ Hugh Trevor-Roper: *History and Imagination.* Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1980, p. 7. Cf. Eric Hobsbawm: "Looking Forward: History and the Future," *New Left Review* I/125, January-February 1981.
2 ■ Charles Gati: *Vesztett illúziók. Moszkva, Washington, Budapest és az 1956-os forradalom.* Budapest, Osisirs, 2006. 268 pp.

how the once reliable Muscovite had, by 1955, toughened and become deservedly popular in his own country.

> By supporting and then dropping Nagy, the Soviet leaders awakened Hungary's intellectual elite and united it against Stalinism, paving the way for a furious challenge to the Soviet empire. By stifling within system reform, the Kremlin made revolution all but inevitable; by removing Nagy from power, the Kremlin made him the coming revolt's only conceivable, if altogether unlikely, inadvertent, and—sad to say—ill-equipped leader. (p. 67)

Gati provides a good summary of the details that have emerged in recent years concerning the line taken by the Kremlin after 1953; in the light of these, it becomes easier to understand the changes of tack shown by the Communist leadership in Budapest. For a Western or young Hungarian reader it will seem almost incredible how, even after the death of Stalin, the choice of who should be leader in a Soviet satellite state such as Hungary should be largely determined by internal feuding and shifting tactical alliances in the Kremlin. The people who put Nagy in charge in June 1953 were more or less the same as those who attacked him on 8 January 1955 for his "petty bourgeois" and "anti-Party" conduct. Keen as ever to outdo Moscow's bidding, Rákosi's faction went so far as to expel Nagy from the Hungarian Party; in so doing they set him up as a hero around whom a growing number of disillusioned Communists gathered. Before long the Moscow "line" altered again, and advocates of a political thaw gained the upper hand (the Geneva summit, the ending of the occupation of Austria and its re-emergence as a sovereign state, rapprochement with Tito—all testify to that); this led to Rákosi's dismissal, but the ensuing duumvirate of Gerő and András Hegedüs (the latter as the newly appointed prime minister) was only a cover. Instead of calming the tense situation, it triggered an outburst of anger that metamorphosed into an armed uprising. If there is anybody left who still needs to be convinced, the book demonstrates that it was disenchanted Marxists and Communists, the members of the Petőfi Circle, who inspired the broad climate of opinion in favour of change. Given that this was taking place within the framework of a totalitarian dictatorship, the initiative could only have come from within, from within the orbit of the Party's intellectuals. In that connection, it is important to point out, what is seldom said candidly (indeed, a subject of heated dispute even today) how Jews in Hungary acted between 1945 and 1956. I share Gati's view: "If they are to be blamed for bringing communism in [and one may add that this was not up to them in any case], they should surely receive credit for bringing it down." (p. 134) And the rider that he adds is legitimate: most "average" Hungarian Jews, like other Hungarians, were wary, afraid and largely passive throughout this era; "average Jews" contributed little either to the rise or the demise of communism.

Two chapters contain many new details uncovered by recent research about the events in Washington, Moscow and Budapest that led up to the Revolution. The author provides a succinct, fifty-odd page history of the "thirteen days that shook the Kremlin" (to borrow the title of Tibor Méray's book), though it has to be said that this takes no account of events outside the capital. It is not new, but the general public may not be aware of the process that led Imre Nagy, who in the days immediately after 23 October was still "a prisoner... of his own Communist past" (p. 150) and who spoke of a counter-revolution (though he was opposed to the intervention of Soviet troops), to declare a week later, on 30 October, the restoration of multi-party democracy. His close supporters (and subsequent fellow martyrs) had a big part in this, and the thumbnail sketches of these figures that the book offers are one of its

major strengths. Even more important is what Gati relates about the number of insurgents, their background and their thinking, based on the most recent publications (especially by László Eörsi and László Gyurkó). Their numbers (around fifteen thousand armed combatants) was not substantial; however, in effect they had the whole country behind them. Within a couple of days the state and party apparatus throughout the country collapsed without offering any resistance, so on that point I cannot agree with Gati's comments about people being found on both sides of the barricades. As regards public sentiment, there were no two sides. It was a tiny minority of party functionaries and the ÁVÓ security police, no more than a few thousand, at most tens of thousands, who—primarily on account of their past and the crimes that they had committed—were ranged against the whole country, the entire Hungarian nation (including those cut off by frontiers). It was the voice of the people that was relayed to parliament by their delegations, and their appeal was likely to have played at least as big a part in persuading Nagy to make his about face at the end of October as the arguments of his immediate associates, such as Miklós Gimes, József Szilágyi, Tamás Aczél, Ferenc Donáth, Géza Losonczy, Miklós Vásárhelyi and Szilárd Újhelyi. In a radio address on 28 October, Nagy identified himself with the aims of the "broad, democratic mass movement", proclaimed a ceasefire and announced that agreement had been reached with the Soviet government on a withdrawal of Soviet military units from Budapest. On 30 October he announced the end of the one-party system and the formation of a cabinet based on the coalition parties of 1945. It seemed that a miracle had occurred and that the Revolution in Hungary was victorious. Or so the whole country believed, including the writer of these lines, then a 15-year-old schoolboy who, after joining the protest march to the statue of General Bem that kicked off the uprising, turned up at all the main locations; who looked down the barrel of a Russian machine gun that was levelled at him; who stepped with a shudder over the lime-covered corpses of dead Russian soldiers; but whose most indelible memory is of the sheer joy and happiness that could be seen on everybody's face after those announcements at the end of October. The joy was legitimate: two of the most prominent Soviet leaders, Mikoyan and Suslov, in negotiations with Nagy and Zoltán Tildy, the former Smallholder Party leader, had agreed to all of the sixteen points demanded by the revolutionaries on 23 October; in addition, a communiqué issued by the Soviet government on 30 October promised to place relations with "the other socialist states" on a completely new footing of equality and state sovereignty. The sensational statement also included an acknowledgement that the Soviet Union was prepared to discuss the matter of its military presence in Hungary.

It has been known for some time that one day later, on the night before 31 October, the Soviet leadership, with Khrushchev at the fore, changed its mind and decided to occupy Hungary and install a puppet government. That decision was unquestionably influenced by the Suez Crisis that blew up on 29 October as the armies of Great Britain, France and Israel moved against Egypt, but the decisive factor must have been a fear that the collapse of the Communist regime in Hungary, quite apart from the enormous loss of face that it would entail, might set off a chain reaction of protests against the equally loathed Communist governments in other satellite states. The Hungarian government was informed by the following day that fresh Soviet units were crossing the country's frontiers. Nagy had no illusions: the disappearance of Kádár and Münnich, two less compromised prominent Communists, could only be taken as a bad

omen. His declaration of Hungarian neutrality later that day and then, after the news of the military encirclement of Budapest and Soviet ambassador Andropov's lies, the announcement on 3 November of the country's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact were two last desperate attempts to avert the threat of attack. The fact that Khrushchev received unanimous backing in a series of lightning visits that he paid on the Polish comrades at Brest, on the Romanians, Czechs and Bulgarians in Bucharest, and on Tito on the island of Brioni—indeed, he was urged by them to intervene militarily against Hungary—has also been known for some time. Gati cites as a final crucial factor the continued in-fighting for power within the Soviet leadership, and the opportunity offered to Khrushchev to counter any accusations of being too soft. He also suggests that if the insurgents in Budapest had not entertained "illusions about their courageous insurgency forcing the Soviet Union to retreat", if Hungary had not rejected the one-party system, and if Imre Nagy had been more in charge of the situation and been able to check outrages such as the siege of the Party headquarters in Republic (Köztársaság) Square and the ensuing lynchings; then perhaps the Soviet Union would not have started its aggression on 4 November and "the revolt might well have succeded" (p. 220). The author claims that there were other factors, too, in Moscow and Budapest that might have helped events to take another, more favourable course.

Painfully interesting though this hypothesis is, I am not the only one to consider it unhistorical. Gati is quite right that those who took up arms were not only young; they were also—as in all modern revolutions—mostly uneducated and unskilled workers (p. 157). It would indeed have been hard for any well-informed, educated person to believe what the brave young boys (and girls) of Budapest, with their primitive weapons, believed. Entirely worthy of admiration as they were, they did not have any realistic chance against the Soviet superpower. It is easy to understand how, under the influence of early successes against a Soviet army that viewed them as a counter-revolutionary rabble and was unprepared for guerrilla fighting in a city, the political demands of the insurgents became so radicalised that they no longer sought merely to ameliorate the system but to transform it. In this regard they concurred with the supporters of parties that had operated in Hungary's short-lived multi-party democracy (1945 and 1947) before they were banned and persecuted, and which had been resurrected in a matter of days. In many cases, these people had been released from prison or internment during Imre Nagy's first term as premier; they now exercised their newly won freedom to reject not only communism but socialism in all its varieties. Nobody, however, wished to see a return of the Horthy regime. If one wants to put a label on the goals of the masses, then social democracy and Christian democracy would be the two poles around which the mushrooming number of political parties defined themselves. The Revolution swept the Communist regime aside, and all Nagy did up until 30 October was to acknowledge and legitimise that fact. The idea that Nagy and the whole Revolution might have been able to limit itself, that there was no necessity for it to run to demands for multi-party democracy and complete independence from the Soviet Union is simply unrealistic. Even if he had been more forceful and resolute, Nagy would have been unable to contain public feeling. Even supposing that he had succeeded in putting on the brakes, it is highly unlikely that this would have mollified Moscow. After all, it was precisely the lessons of 1956 that stopped the Czechs in 1968 where, according to Gati, the Hungarians should have stopped in 1956: a programme of democratic socialism with a human face that did not defy Moscow—but to no avail.

When the Solidarity movement in Poland carried through a 'self-limiting revolution' in 1980-81 by battling only for the social demands of the workforce, leaving the political élite in place and not trying to break free from the geopolitical cage, a Soviet leadership that was a good deal more enlightened than it had been in 1956 was unwilling to allow even that. Given these subsequent examples, I would hazard a guess that insofar as Imre Nagy would have wanted a "Big Compromise" amounting to a milder form of communism, of the form advocated by Gomulka and, later on, by Khrushchev himself, that truly would have spared a few hundred lives. On the other hand, the one-party system and the ultimately ruinous economic policy would have been left intact, and it is far from certain that the Communist dominoes would have fallen as they did 33 years later.

For an alternative that was not realised in 1956 but stood a realistic chance, one has to look not to Budapest or Moscow but to Washington. In a volume that was published to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Revolution, the distinguished British historian Hugh Seton-Watson, son of R.W. Seton-Watson (Scotus Viator), who was so critical of the Hungarians before and after the First World War, expressed his doubts:

> Contributors to this book rightly emphasize that there was no contingency planning on the Western, especially American, side for revolution in an East Central European state and that the diplomatic representatives of the Western allies has virtually no contact with the Nagy government. We must ask ourselves the question: Could nothing have been done? I have spent many hours in the last twenty years discussing this with British and American diplomats, journalists and even a few politicians; and all have insisted that nothing could have been done. And yet I confess that I am not convinced. Of course, American military invasion of Hungary was not possible, still less a nuclear ultimatum to Moscow. Of course, formal diplomatic notes could achieve nothing. But was it really impossible for the United States government, using all the private and public channels of communication available to it and all the means of pressure at its disposal, to have convinced the Soviet government that the consequences of invasion would have been very much more unpleasant for it than the consequences of letting the Nagy government, which was in control of Hungary, stay in power until a settlement, acceptable to all parties concerned, including the Great Powers, could be worked out? The truth is that the United States government did not even try. Dulles revealed himself an empty demagogue. Nobody tried because everyone was obsessed with the presidential election and the Suez Canal.[3]

Gati, too, claims that Hungarian illusions are not solely responsible for the failure of the Revolution. His analyses of Washington's policy makes for the most valuable part of his book, and I have to admit that his conclusions have led me to modify my own earlier understanding.[4] Like most contemporaries and later commentators, I too was of the opinion that the United States could not be accused of abandoning Hungary, because military intervention on its part could easily have led to a world war or a nuclear catastrophe. Where I found fault with the Western powers was over their failure, once the Hungarian revolt had broken out, to delay

3 ■ Hugh Seton-Watson: Introduction. In: Béla K. Király and Paul Jónás (eds.), *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 in Retrospect.* Boulder, Colorado, 1978, pp. 5–6.

4 ■ Géza Jeszenszky: "Cserbenhagyott-e a Nyugat bennünket 1956-ban? [Did the West Leave us in the Lurch in 1956?], *Magyar Nemzet,* 16th November 1995, p. 10 ; "Did the United States Let Hungary Down in 1956?", in: Enikő Bollobás and Szilvia Nagy (eds): *The 1950s. Proceedings of the 2003 Biennial Conference of the Hungarian Association of American Studies.* Budapest: Eötvös Loránd University, 2005, pp. 39–44.

their long-planned invasion of Egypt, which completely overshadowed Hungary's plight. Above all, I found America's behaviour at the United Nations, which at the time enjoyed far greater prestige and power than it does today, hard to excuse.

Contrary to general belief (which the younger Bush appears to share), America and the Soviet Union did not divide Europe up at the Yalta conference in 1945. America would only have been able to halt the Sovietization of East-Central Europe that was completed in 1948 by using or at least threatening to use nuclear weapons, which the American public would never have accepted. But the Truman administration did guarantee Western Europe's security with its policy of containment and the creation of NATO. Even after Eisenhower's victory in the 1952 presidential election, the Republican Party, with its much tougher anti-Communist rhetoric and talk of "liberation", was unwilling to commit the United States to war against the Soviet Union and its allies. It failed even to envisage the possibility that a spontaneous revolt might break out in a Communist country. Gati's researches in the archives also support Bennet Kovrig's earlier claim[5] that any talk of "liberation" was no more than empty propaganda sloganising, that the U.S. government had no concrete plans of that kind. The American intelligence services were as good as powerless against Hungary's totalitarian police state, which goes some way to explaining why the reforms that were brought in by Imre Nagy in 1953 were accorded no significance. Gati presents a balanced view of Radio Free Europe (RFE), set up in 1951, and the impact it had on Hungary, bearing out Gyula Borbándi's findings.[6] RFE fulfilled the important function of providing trustworthy information both about the Soviet bloc and the free world, and it kept alive the hope that the "captive nations" would one day regain their independence. The station's Hungarian staff did not know, and thus listeners could not suspect, that the American government was not in the least ready to carry out the professed objective of overthrowing communism. "Inflated rhetoric" with "no underpinnings in policy" (p. 111) are the harsh epithets that Gati applies to the Eisenhower administration's policy in Eastern Europe; it is no justification, indeed it only makes things worse, that they themselves believed their anti-Communist rhetoric would produce the hoped-for and promised result.

Thanks to the US Freedom of Information Act, Gati had a chance to study official files that are still classified as confidential. These confirm that America, far from having done anything to prepare the way for the Hungarian Revolution, was in fact caught totally unprepared. Gati discerns three major defects in United States Hungarian policy in the Fifties. Firstly, while it flirted with support for an extension of Titoism to Central and Eastern Europe, this was found not to be politically attractive enough and so was discarded. The result of this was that RFE's Hungarian section, in accordance with instructions from the State Department and the CIA, continually voiced support for radical demands. Second, America failed to appreciate Imre Nagy's importance and, indeed, still set no store by him even after the turning point at the end of October. The gravest fault of all was the failure of American leaders, while the Revolution was in progress, to turn to the Kremlin with any meaningful proposal that was worthy of consideration. Eisenhower was worried that the Soviet Union would respond aggressively if it

5 ■ Bennet Kovrig: *The Myth of Liberation. East-Central Europe in U.S. Diplomacy and Politics since 1941.* Baltimore, 1973; idem: *Of Walls and Bridges. The United States and Eastern Europe.* New York & London: New York University Press, 1991.

6 ■ Gyula Borbándi: *Magyarok az Angol Kertben. A Szabad Európa Rádió története* (Hungarians in the Englischer Garten: The history of Radio Free Europe). Budapest: Európa, 1996.

perceived that the tacitly accepted post-1947 division of Europe was under threat. After 23 October his main goal was to reassure the Soviet leadership that the United States was not going to endanger Soviet interests in Eastern Europe and was not seeking to overthrow the Communist regimes there. On October 27th, having first cleared it with the President, Secretary of State Dulles delivered an important speech in Dallas, Texas. He offered economic aid to the captive nations that followed independent policies, but he did not suggest that they needed to change their social system as a condition for such assistance: "The United States has no ulterior motive in desiring the independence of the satellite countries... We do not look upon these nations as potential military allies."[7]

Had the Soviet Union been well-intentioned and anxious for peace and co-operation, the speech might have provided a good argument for not intervening militarily; however, what Moscow's hard-liners read into it was a carte blanche offer to go ahead, as they would not have to reckon with an American intervention. Meanwhile the RFE's Hungarian staff in Munich went on with their confrontational propaganda with the blessing of their superiors, unaware that there was no political backing behind it and that America never had the faintest idea how the promised liberation was to be achieved. Left to their own devices, guided by their own feelings, it is no wonder that the station's Hungarian editors enthusiastically welcomed what they thought was the downfall of communism at home in Hungary.

Gati does not mention, however, that the U.S. National Security Council's directive NSC 174 stated that its goal was to destabilise the Soviet empire, but not to foment revolt and not to commit the American government to providing aid. It seems that this was never brought to the attention of either RFE or its listeners. Gati might also have mentioned that the Democratic Party opposition demonstrated more sensitivity to Hungarian expectations. Adlai Stevenson, who was then the Democratic Party's presidential candidate, urged the United Nations to step in on the side of the Hungarian Revolution. An editorial in the *New York Times* for October 27th suggested that there could not be a more clear-cut case for foreign intervention under the aegis of the UN. Obviously this had everything to do with electioneering, though it should be said that the Democratic Party has traditionally favoured a foreign policy based on principles.

It is true that the Suez conflict did divert attention away from Hungary, and it certainly undermined the solidarity of the Western powers, but that was not the real reason for their passivity towards Hungary. There were experts within the National Security Council and the CIA (Frank Wisner for one) who considered, and even went so far as to recommend, that military aid be given, but the logistic difficulties of doing so, Austrian neutrality and the line adopted by Hungary's other neighbours, all provided convenient excuses for doing nothing.

Gati does not deal at any length with events at the UN, though America's record there was no better. No response was given to the Hungarian declaration of neutrality. It was in vain that the so-called "Cassandra Club", an informal grouping of emigrants, a number of conscientious UN bureaucrats and official delegates, recommended that the emergency session of the General Assembly called for November 1st to debate the Suez question should also deal with Hungary's declaration of neutrality and the incoming news of Soviet troop movements. Dulles referred the matter for consideration by the Security Council. There Arkady Sobolev, the Soviet ambassador, claimed

7 ■ Quoted by Kovrig, *The Myth*..., p. 182.

that raising the Hungarian question was just a tactic to divert attention from the Suez crisis. He denied reports of Soviet troop movements and asserted that talks were in progress between the Hungarian government and the Soviet military authorities on the withdrawal of troops. The emergency session of the UN General Assembly on the Suez affair continued on the evening of November 3rd. News of the attack on Budapest and Nagy's dramatic appeal for help reached New York shortly before midnight. Dr Ronald Walker, the Australian delegate who chaired the session, moved for an adjournment and, at 3 a.m. local time, the Security Council began an extraordinary session. This was about the same time that Minister of State István Bibó, the only member of the Nagy government who stayed on in the Parliament building, was typing a Proclamation on behalf of the Hungarian government:

> Now it is up to the world powers to demonstrate the force of the principles contained in the United Nations' Charter and the strength of the world's freedom-loving peoples.

It was almost in answer to this that Henry Cabot Lodge, the US ambassador to the United Nations, stated: "If ever there was a time when the action of the United Nations could literally be a matter of life and death for a whole nation, this is the time." Then he addressed the Hungarian nation:

> By your heroic sacrifice you have given the United Nations a brief moment in which to mobilise the conscience of the world on your behalf. We are seizing that moment, and we will not fail you.[8]

In order to circumvent the Soviet veto, the Emergency Special Session of the General Assembly, following the precedent established over Korea in 1950, reconvened on 5 November and passed a US motion that Soviet troops be withdrawn and a commission be sent. This, however, did not alter the brute facts: Hungary's fate—to adapt one of Bismarck's classic sayings—would not be decided by votes and majority decisions but by blood and iron.

Hungary's tragedy, the continued resistance, and the ensuing flood of refugees may not have moved the Kremlin, but it touched world public opinion. Many volunteered to help and Hungary's "finest hour" redounded to the glory of the nation. Gati's book, published so far in Polish, Russian and Slovak as well as English and Hungarian, is not just a work of scholarship but, as for many of his contemporaries, also a matter of processing a life-defining experience. It will no doubt stimulate a rethinking both in Hungary and abroad, about the significance and outcome of the 1956 Revolution and also about any lessons that can be drawn form it. However justified it may be, condemnation of the Western democracies over 1956 is pointless, except for a timely political message. In 1956 the governments of the day judged short-term interests to be more important than riskier long-term policies. America did not attempt to roll back Soviet power because it overestimated the Soviet Union's strength and underestimated the geostrategic importance of Central and Eastern Europe. Gati's arguments, in many respects convincing, were preceded almost forty years ago by Robert Murphy, the experienced diplomat who was Foster Dulles' deputy in 1956:

> Perhaps history will demonstrate that the free world could have intervened to give Hungarians the liberty they sought, but none of us in the State Department had the skill or the imagination to devise a way.[9]

Solving political crises calls for both expertise and imagination. ❧

8 ■ Ibid., p. 203.
9 ■ Robert Murphy: *Diplomat Among Warriors.* Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964, p. 432.

János M. Rainer

Obsessed with 1956

András Nagy: *A Bang-Jensen ügy. '56 nyugati ellENSZélben*
(The Bang-Jensen Affair: 1956 in a UN Westerly Headwind).
Budapest, Magvető, 2006, 399 pp.

András Nagy has written an enigmatic and disturbing book about a chapter in Cold War diplomacy still uncompleted to this day. On Thanksgiving Day, 24 November 1959, two men walking through Alley Pond Park in New York discovered the body of a man shot through the temple. The dead man was the Danish diplomat Povl Bang-Jensen. Was it suicide? Was it murder? At first glance one might think Nagy's book is a thriller employing a historian's tools, but the mysteries by and large remain mysteries and there is no final revelation to bring relief to the reader. What is even more disconcerting is the language of the narrative, which operates with the tools of certitude, insinuation and ultimate perplexity—and masterfully at that. In places the reader is left gasping for just a small handhold, a sign that points in the direction of the truth—only to conclude that the truth is ultimately unknowable, as is made clear just about from the start.

The author's elevated, expressive style derives from his obsession with the subject hero of his book; this is an obsession he is plainly striving to implant in his readers, alongside his subject's own odd pre-occupations. He seeks to discompose, ruffle, startle—at least so I suppose—in order that we should get a sense of the helpless, tormenting turmoil that gripped Bang-Jensen during the final three years of his life following the late autumn of 1956.

The number of question marks that are strewn on the 330 pages of the main body of the text must total (though I have not attempted to count them) many hundreds. Questions are followed not by answers but by more questions; on top of this the author regularly questions his own assertions, and he signals from the outset that he is unable to give even a rough response to some of the questions he is posing.

Is this something a writer-historian should do? Do we need such a book?

The scandal about the death of this Danish diplomat resonated worldwide towards the end of the 1950s. Povl Bang-Jensen was the second secretary—thus not even the most important member—of the five-man support staff of the special committee set up by the United Nations in early 1957 to

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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.

present a report on what had happened in Hungary. By the autumn of that year, the committee had produced for the UN General Assembly an account of the events of late October and November 1956. The committee members were not able to set foot in Hungary, so aside from publicly available documentation (press reports, monitored radio broadcasts, statements by politicians, etc.) they worked primarily from the testimony taken from first-hand witnesses recruited from internationally known and also unknown Hungarian refugees—114 in all. Of these, nearly three-quarters requested anonymity as a condition for talking, due to fears that the Kádár regime might exact retribution on dependants and relatives who had stayed in Hungary. That report[1] is by common consent one of the key, and best, early records of the Hungarian Revolution. The responsibility for drafting it was in principle the job of its rapporteur, the Australian Michael Shann; in reality it was a collective job. Bang-Jensen, however, had a large hand in the final wording as well as responsibity for handling the committee's documents. It was he who prepared the confidential list of the true identities of all the witnesses, who were labelled with a letter code in the published report.

Debates on the Hungarian question raging in New York were followed closely by the Kremlin and its Hungarian "ally" from the time that the special committee was set up. The report touched on some very delicate issues; as an account of the events in question it would carry much more weight being issued under the aegis of and "authenticated" by the seal of the United Nations than all the white books, documentations, reports, analyses or polemics that had been published in the meantime. That credibility, however, could be undermined if any doubt could be cast on the person or background of the witnesses who had supplied the basic material. That was exactly what Budapest and Moscow attempted to do, assigning secret service agents to perform this discrediting.

The Hungarian secret service, despite the disorder into which it had been thrown during the Revolution, managed to chalk up a major success at precisely the time when the report was being debated. Miklós Szabó, in the late Forties active in the Smallholder Party and recruited as an officer by the state security office (ÁVÓ), had been assigned to duties in the West prior to 1956. He returned home, however, during the Revolution, moved back to Vienna and played a considerable role there both in the handling of refugee matters and in co-ordinating the political voice of Hungarian refugees before he suddenly disappeared from the Austrian capital at the end of September 1957. He resurfaced at the beginning of October in Budapest, where he held a press conference as a "disenchanted political refugee" and told some juicy stories in an attempt to smear his former associates, some of whom had given evidence used in the UN report. Szabó claimed that in fact he knew the names of all the refugees who gave testimony to the UN hearings. (The Hungarian "master spy" published his memoirs under the title *Csendes háború* (Hush-Hush War) in the mid-Eighties. Around the time of the change in regime in 1989, to some amazement, he appeared on TV as a leader of the Tenants' Association; nowadays he lives in retirement—and not so talkatively—in Budapest.)

In the wake of Szabó's "exposures" of the witnesses, U.N. officials, including Secretary-General Dag Hammarskøjld himself, began to show a sudden interest. Bang-Jensen was ordered to release the now famous list to the UN Secretariat. He refused and, instead, repeated earlier observations he had made

1 ■ *Report of the Special Committee on the Problem of Hungary.* General Assembly Official Records: 11th Session Supplement No. 18. (A/3592). United Nations, New York, 1957.

about the rudimentary nature of security measures in place. Bang-Jensen was suspended and later dismissed from his post. He was subjected to a string of humiliating procedures but, by way of protest, he burnt the list of names in early 1958 on the roof of UN headquarters. In late November 1959 he disappeared from his New York apartment, only for his body to turn up three days later in a park in Queens. His life had been ended by a shot to the head, a note in his handwriting was found on him. Although this evidence was disputed from the very start, the American authorities closed the case in double-quick time and the body was cremated; this, however, was too late to stop the birth of a legend about his death.

It should be emphasised that legends had already grown around Bang-Jensen in other respects while he was still alive. His earlier career had certainly not been lacking in the sort of colourful incidents that nourish legends. He made a deep impression on those who came into contact with the special committee, to the extent that it was obvious to all that he was the driving force of the entire investigation. Many people claimed to know that he had written the report and considered him to be the sole person within the UN's otherwise impotent institutions capable of acting energetically on behalf of the Hungarians. The names of the committee's chairman, first secretary and other members have long since been forgotten (and justly so: András Nagy's book is convincing on this point); only Bang-Jensen's name lives on. His memory is kept green in Hungary, where a number of books have dealt with the story, and one may safely predict that a film on him is likely to be made sooner or later.

András Nagy's book sets before us an obsessed man who experienced every situation in life solely in the highest moral terms. Under the German occupation of Denmark during the Second World War, the country's political élite generally took up a posture of passive acquiescence. Bang-Jensen and a few others *en poste* in America opposed the directives from Copenhagen, doing everything they could to demonstrate that Denmark (or at least a small part of it) was not prepared to sell out. And they succeeded: Hitler—as a result of the interventions of Bang-Jensen and others—failed to lay his hands on the Danish fleet or on Greenland as a jumping-off point for an attack on the United States. Strangely (or maybe precisely because of that) Bang-Jensen was not decorated at the end of the war: quite the contrary, he was treated more as unmanageable and slightly suspect—a reputation which was reinforced by the "crisis" of Easter 1948, when he was in receipt of intelligence that the Soviet fleet was about to start an action against Denmark. The alarm signals that he put out had both the domestic and foreign press up in arms and played no small part in inducing Denmark to join NATO.

In the autumn of 1956, by then working as a diplomat in the UN bureaucracy, he was again confronted by a matter that touched his most deeply felt values. Why was the United Nations not acting in a case where it was clear as day who was on the side of the values formulated in its charter as regards the freedom of nations, their self-determination, independence and democratic arrangements, and likewise who opposed these? Furthermore, a legitimate prime minister, Imre Nagy, had appealed to the world body, requesting support, both moral and active. During early November, Bang-Jensen could not understand why nothing at all was being done; later on, in 1957, by then working within the machinery of the special committee, he could not understand why nobody was acting in accordance with the dictates of their in-built moral compass. He had received information, informal messages from a variety of sources, that the UN had a number of Soviet agents among its

highest officials, who were successfully obstructing enquiries into the Hungarian question. For his own part, he did not consider the special committee's brief to be simply an exercise in writing history. To his way of thinking, the UN, as the supreme arbiter of moral conduct in international relations, was in a position to provide, at least in retrospect, assistance and protection for the vanquished and occupied Hungary, for identifiable groups and individuals there. Human lives were involved: in the autumn of 1956, Hungary became another Denmark for Bang-Jensen, or—much more to the point—his moral Denmark.

A range of approaches might be taken to portray Bang-Jensen's obsession. A psychological portrait, exploring inner paths and verging on fiction, would not have been alien to András Nagy, a noted playwright and author of essays and novels. This, however, he did not choose to do. Bang-Jensen's drama unfolded within a bureaucratic apparatus that, typically for the midpoint of the twentieth century, was hedged about by an ever-growing mountain of paper while decisions on many major matters were reached in the course of largely informal conversations. Nagy accordingly chose to tackle that mountain, but to refashion it with the help of literary devices.

He has an impressive familiarity with and self-assurance in handling his sources —and he has carried out a pioneering piece of detective work that professionals in diplomatic history should take their hats off to. Even historians who have an intimate knowledge of international relations may turn green with envy at the sight of documentary coups such as papers from the Diplomatic Archive of Serbia and Montenegro or from the Information Office in Budapest. (Even after 1989 few living persons can claim that they have managed to pick the locks on these places.)

András Nagy has not chosen to write a diplomatic history and has not been put off by the fact that another kind of discourse about his subject is now in fashion. He does not wish merely to draw attention coolly and politely to the fact that the UN, *pace* its laudable charter, was a major location for superpower rivalry and propaganda, and that consequently any hopes that the Hungarian public pinned on it were misplaced. The vantage point from which Nagy chooses to draw his picture is that of the occupied post-revolutionary Hungary, to which a fundamental injustice had been done; he does so because he wants to see what the Danish diplomat saw, and what gave him the moral stance from which he attempted to judge events and himself.

It is this commitment which provides the book with its inner tension, but this commitment also somewhat distorts the historical truth. We would all like to suppose that the Hungarian Revolution inspired sympathy everywhere outside the Kremlin and the Politburos of Bucharest, Prague and East Berlin. Sadly, that was far from being so, and the UN provides a telltale case-study. The Hungarian Revolution was more in the way of a highly embarrassing major glitch for a machine that, with Stalin and the Cold War at its iciest now part of the past, was readying itself for a new consensus—one that accepted the post-1945 status quo and was not preparing for war. The international peace movement, and the liberation of enslaved nations worldwide, were two complementary elements of the same rhetoric; within the UN bureaucracy, people were at most a bit more cynical than elsewhere, and a great deal more attentive to the platitudes of international etiquette. In the bloc-aligned, consensus-building climate of the mid-Fifties, there was really no place for a Hungarian Revolution that sought democracy, independence, neutrality on the Austrian model and socialism all at once. The not-quite-precisely formulated request that Imre Nagy made (he asked specifically

for a UN guarantee of Hungarian neutrality, at other times just for its recognition) and the response that it elicited (a deafening silence) spotlighted the embarrassment with which the Hungarian uprising was received in New York and elsewhere. That embarrassment left its mark on the activities of the special committee—oddly enough, hardly on its report, though András Nagy does point out the traces. Ultimately it became clear that in the incipient new consensus there was no more room for an individual like Bang-Jensen, who was anti-fascist and anti-Communist on moral grounds, than there was for the Hungarian revolutionaries. He was an anachronism, not unlike the Minister of State István Bibó, in his overcoat with missing buttons, knocking on the door of the American Legation on the morning of 4 November 1956 to appeal to the great powers to take a moral stance.

András Nagy presents this painfully instructive story in a very clear manner. However, there are places where the writer could have given more room to the historian, at others the historian to the writer. At some points, simply telling the blunt truth would have done no harm. If one of the most important contentions that the book makes is indeed that at least two deputy secretary-generals, Andrew W. Cordier and Dragoslav Protić, were acting as Soviet agents (whether wittingly or unwittingly), then that should be clearly stated at least once. And if that is the case, the connection ought to be made with the rather startling fact that even today the papers relating to Cordier's term of office as deputy secretary are still classified. The fact is that the bulk of the documents of the Special Committee on the Problem of Hungary had to be (and *could* be) smuggled out of the UN building and archives, only for the bulk of them to be kept under lock and key in Budapest and at the Hoover Institute. Statements by the refugees—the very people that the enquiry was all about—are in most cases not available for scrutiny to the present day. It ought to have been pointed out that the Freedom of Information Act allows even the confidentiality of Central Intelligence Agency documents to be lifted, and even memoranda of the General Secretariat of the Communist Party of the USSR have seen the light of day (and have been published in full), while access to UN documents remains conspicuously restricted. That being so, the author as historian should have given more weight to analysing a number of key documents, such as the report itself or the papers relating to Bang-Jensen's disciplinary hearing. Instead, as writer-biographer he was satisfied with the odd reference here and there. The reader will never learn whether the fake or genuine farewell letter found on Bang-Jensen consisted merely of the two sentences that are quoted by Nagy or whether it was longer.

It was perhaps not the historian so much as the writer who might have given answers to a few questions regarding the bounds of Bang-Jensen's obsession and his amazing trust in others. As early as November 1956, several Soviet bloc diplomats at the point of defecting paid a visit to him. If I understand correctly, they informed him that the world body was riddled at the highest level with Soviet agents. Six months later, two refugees whom he interviewed in London expressed similar suspicions about the Secretary-General. These two incidents are turning points in Bang-Jensen's obsession, bringing it home to him that he was operating in a hostile environment, awakening "terrible suspicions". András Nagy has followed the same tack as his hero, who at key moments in the story was simply unwilling to disclose to anyone what it was that he was so terribly suspicious about. He did not say anything even to those—and there were some—who were prepared to listen to him. He waited for a higher court of appeal, in the first

instance the UN Secretary-General and later the US President, but they were not prepared to give him a hearing. This is where high-minded unwillingness to compromise comes dangerously close to paranoia. Nearly five decades on, it is clearly difficult to produce a psychiatric diagnosis, but it is by no means absurd to make a stab at it. To what extent were Bang-Jensen's suspicions fed by information, no doubt startling in nature, and to what extent were they fed by inner voices that waxed and waned in intensity over the course of his life? The writer in András Nagy, always present in the way the story is told, might have ventured a bit further. The historian, however, cried halt: anything not backed by paper in the archives should remain a question mark in the narrative.

That goes for the story of Bang-Jensen's death as well, which confirms the general opinion. The circumstances being inexplicable, the diplomat must have been murdered by the KGB's men. Bang-Jensen himself was convinced while alive that they were out to get him because he knew too much and might talk. For many years he had repeatedly insisted that he would never take his own life, that possible news of his suicide should not be believed. The evidence on the circumstances of his death was ambiguous and inexplicable: nobody had seen him for days, and when his body was found his clothing was neat and he was freshly shaven. The body had almost certainly been brought from somewhere other than the place it was found. His stomach contained an undetermined brown fluid. Mysterious telephone callers gave the precise name and composition of a psychotropic drug before putting down the receiver. And so on and so forth: Nagy's tale begins and ends with the slapdash investigation and the follow-up several years later which clarified nothing. It does emerge from the evidence in the book, however, that Bang-Jensen never came clean, so his suspicions remained suspicions; by producing no evidence, he effectively cleared Moscow's name and soiled his own. Nagy hints every now and then, that even the KGB murder theory cannot be logically argued in all its aspects, but he steers clear of saying this unambiguously.

At any rate, is it possible to face up to all the aspects of such a story with the historian's tool-box? Is cool distance at all possible for an observer today? The 1956 literature started off with a wave of emotionally supercharged eyewitness accounts and was followed from the early Sixties by a more measured second wave of major analyses. In 1989 the regime against which 1956 had risen collapsed, but it was not a revolt that buried it. Western observers watched the attainment of all the things about which there had been so much talk with the same anguished incomprehension as bureaucrats within the UN administration had watched the events of 1956. Since 1989 books on 1956 have mushroomed, from passionate personal approaches to new, sober analyses of Cold War history. It is conceivable that a third generation of writers will be driven by the all-determining doubt that is the spirit of this post-modern age. A mystery, an unknowable secret, a document about everything and about the opposite of everything—and also the abiding absence of documents on what we hold to be truly important. The thrill and beauty of solving puzzles and the uncertain awareness of the impossibility of a solution. András Nagy's passion has dictated his judgements but they are constrained by the tools of the historian—and these tools are constrained by the passion. He has entrusted the rest to his readers inclined to ponder things, leaving them to their own devices with his question marks. These relate to Povl Bang-Jensen, to the '56 Hungarian Revolution and what came after, and even to the possibilities and the future of history-writing itself. ❧

Miklós Györffy

A Recluse and A Player

Imre Oravecz: *Egy hegy megy* (A Hill Walks). Pécs, Alexandra, 224 pp; Péter Esterházy: *Utazás a tizenhatos mélyére* (Journey into the Depths of the Penalty Area). Budapest, Magvető, 147 pp.

The short (less than four pages) title story of Imre Oravecz's new book is about a wooded hill near his birthplace in north-eastern Hungary, part and parcel of the landscape and of the life of those living there until it was levelled by someone, "a greedy capitalist", who "set his eyes on this oasis". "All of a sudden, someone comes along, takes a liking to it, has it destroyed and removed." Darnó Hill had been in jeopardy earlier, because of "brutal and mindless forest clearing". Now the hill has been levelled. "One explosion will follow another, the noise will be constant, the clattering and squeaking; the dust will rise and the diesel fumes; loaded lorries will thunder down village streets, house walls will crack and the wheels will squash run-over dogs and cats flat. And the monstrous hole will deepen, widen and grow; the trees will continue to topple; life in the forest will die, the game, the birds and the beetles will flee; not a stone will be left standing, and so it will go on until the hill has been consumed..."

Imre Oravecz is above all a poet. Since the early 1970s his dispassionate prose poems, eschewing traditional 'poetical' means, have expressed his unmistakeably individual voice. A genuine lone wolf, though followed with close attention by the professional community, he has recently been awarded the Kossuth Prize, Hungary's most prestigious award in the arts. His last, great cycle of poems, *Halászóember* (The Fishing Man, 1998), shapes memories enough for a full 'village novel', mapping the once intact and human world of his birthplace, the village of Szajla, with the meticulousness of an ethnographer. This new work, *Egy hegy megy,* is very close to that cycle, being a collection of short pieces that borderline on memoir, confession and journalism. Common to them is an open and personal touch, devoid of sentimentality and of depiction of atmosphere. Oravecz is clearly speaking about himself, his own life, his surroundings as they were then and as they are now; through these, he creates a heart-wringing documentary on our age, akin to what his previous collection of poems had achieved. Yet, it is not easy to grasp how he manages to do so.

There are some forty pieces in all, most are about the past and present of Szajla. Oravecz comes from a peasant family and has close and personal experience of the destruction of the peasant way of life over the past fifty years. Despite his decades in Budapest and years in the United States, he has maintained a close connection with his

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Miklós Györffy
reviews new fiction for this journal.

birthplace. After the death of his parents, he spent more and more time in his village from the 1990s on, until he and his wife moved back there for good a few years ago. While The *Fishing Man* is, as its subtitle says, "fragments for a village novel", the pieces in this new book might be read as fragments for an autobiographical novel. Typically, he writes about the family home, the old house and the new one, about various purchases and sales, changes to the yard and the garden, and the nightmares inflicted on him by bungling and swindling tradesmen when he tried to convert a former annex into a fully equipped family home. Here his method is clear to discern: with pedantic and, at times, strenuous precision and detail, he describes the topography, enumerating names of streets, fields and lanes, hills and waters, forests and pastures, and persons, as though the names themselves might say something to the reader. He seems to work magic by the simple naming of the inanimate and the animate; this is meant to transmit to his readers the images that evidently live in him. Although the connections in space and time between the many succinct details the text provides may only become clear gradually, their presence and personal immediacy start to work their magic.

What he writes on America are interesting examples of this. These portions of the text are remarkable precisely because they are in the context of the same life that produced the sociographically accurate descriptions of the tragic decline of the Hungarian village. The connection between Szajla and America goes way back in the Oravecz family; he himself left Hungary twice with the intention of settling permanently in the US. Eventually he came back, but has since visited several times, especially California, with his son. In "Last Night Spent on American Soil", for instance, place names and descriptions accumulate —just as they do in his accounts of Szajla. The beauty of camping out in the desert is evoked through the same linguistic magic he uses to recapture his memories of going bathing and hiking in his childhood.

What touches us above all else is the moral and environmental devastation that emerges from the descriptions and the fact that this devastation is being executed by the people on themselves and their environment. One after another, houses become vacant or fall in; any newcomers that do move in are mainly Gypsies who simply utilize what is left. The former gardens, orchards and vineyards are overgrown with weeds and undergrowth, the land is left uncultivated, despite the great levels of poverty and unemployment in the village. Theft and burglary are rife. Policing and the administration of justice are practically non-existent. Garbage engulfs everything. The hired worker is no good at his job, he takes on work simply for the money. If called to account for sloppy work, he may well assault his client, as happened to Oravecz. (After being criticized for the job he had done, a house-painter attacked him and broke his arm.)

Oravecz sees two catastrophes, the one intensifying the other, as the main causes of what has come about—the first was the collectivisation of agriculture under the Communist regime and the second was the 1990 'change of regime', which laid the country open to bare-faced robbery of state property and total irresponsibility, especially in the rural areas. It is the change of regime that he is really at odds with, since it has been taking place before his eyes, here and now, and because the politicians refer to it as some sort of renewal. True, in its own time, collectivisation was also spoken of as a form of salvation. He never speaks about politics, but he does not disguise his opposition to what is taking place around him. Taxes of all kinds are levied on the newly privatised forests and what remains for the proprietors does not even cover the

cost of the firewood they take from their 'own' forests. There is no running water in the village, and the contents of the cesspools (to be made of concrete for "the protection of the environment"), are dumped onto the fields a few kilometres away. The traditional peasant way of life is now history; what is going on now is the liquidation of agriculture and nature.

What drew Oravecz back to his village were primarily childhood memories and loyalty to the family heritage. But by doing so, by living the life of a recluse, he is also protesting against the mind-set in which a hill is no more than a heap of stones to be used for the foundations of motorways. Having led the life of a metropolitan intellectual and having been to America—and emphatically influenced by what he saw there—he can only imagine spending the rest of his life close to nature and in living contact with the land. However polluted, masterless, plundered and squandered the natural environment is, the ancient passion for cultivating the land is still a reflex that can be set to work in the garden next to his house. "We can hardly wait for the spring so that we could fill our vegetable garden with plants, make the plant beds, reckon and calculate, stick stakes, sow and plant, thin out and weed—so that we could start it all again." True, "while we feel tenderness and are deeply moved and anguished over what comes ... if we are no longer, and nobody wants it for love or money; if it is full of weeds, acacia wildings and sloe-bushes, when it will no longer nurture anyone and will be precisely like everything around us—bleak, orphaned, desolate."

Just as Imre Oravecz speaks emphatically as a private individual—not a word of writing poetry, his profession as a teacher mentioned only in passing—so too does Péter Esterházy in his new and short *Journey into the Depths of the Penalty Area,* his second book since the publication of his Revised Edition. For that matter though, as one never knows, not even meeting him personally, when and to what extent we are encountering Esterházy's private self or the writer's, and because *Journey* is about football, a cherished theme of his, in which irony merges with dignity and dignity is paired with irony, the two cannot be separated, and are thus not two, but one.

Behind the book stands the soccer World Cup last year, specifically a commission from a German magazine to visit Germany and to write up his impressions on the Germans. Seeking some sort of unifying strand, Esterházy confines his probings to football. "I shall pretend to believe it to be true that a country can be known from its football." As we know from his own writing, Esterházy was a registered footballer for many years (even when he had established himself as a writer, he played fourth division football for Csillaghegy, one of Budapest's green-belt districts.) "I, the Ich-Erzähler, come from a notable footballer family," he writes, referring to his younger brother, who played professional football at home and abroad and was a much capped member of the national team. (The book also points out that Márton Esterházy played for the last Hungarian team to make it to the World Cup finals, back in 1986. True, there they failed ignominiously, just as subsequent national teams have done during the qualifying group stages.)

Anyway, out of this commission came a book in German, published by Berlin Verlag, with this Hungarian version appearing months later when the World Cup began. A Hungarian reader may read the book in a different way than a German reader, if only because of its different language and, let us add appropriately, with home advantage. (How Esterházy's text reads 'away' is another question.) Also,

several portions of the 150-page text had already appeared earlier in Hungarian. Quoting from himself is nothing new for Esterházy. Indeed, in a chapter in *Journey...* the author openly admits that some passages and turns of phrasing, about "Berne, Puskás and the Golden Team" were inserted as fairy-tale-like formulae "often under German pressure". Berne here means the final of the 1954 World Cup, which the Hungarian team ought to have won, in all "justice" and for "the order of the world". This Hungarian team (the Magic Magyars) was the team of its era, considered to be unbeatable; yet, Germany won 3–2, even though they had been thrashed 8–2 (!) just a few days earlier by Hungary in one of the group matches. After their unexpected victory ("the miracle of Berne"), Germans could hold their heads high for the first time after the catastrophe of Nazism and the world war: *"Wir sind wieder wer"* ("At last we're not nobodies"). The Hungarians, and with them Esterházy, who was four at the time, lived through the trauma of the defeat in a mythicised form and cannot digest it to this day. They obsessively seek 'explanations' (if only the referee had allowed Puskás's off-side goal, if only Lantos had pulled his head away before Rahn's goal, and so on). Through his own devices, with his set phrases, the writer-footballer tries "to eliminate those 90 minutes from world history", in other words, rewrite history and award victory to the Hungarians *a posteriori.* In which case the 1956 Revolution and the demolition of the Berlin Wall do not happen and "the present writer is in prison (and obviously cannot be the present writer)."

This chapter is, then, not new to someone who knows Esterházy's work, but as a review in the weekly *Élet és Irodalom* says, citing Pascal: "Words arranged in various ways take on different meanings, and the meanings thus arranged in different ways affect us in different manners." It might well be that the tales of Berne, the hymns about Puskás, the anecdotal loan texts about fans, referees and the view from the touch-lines, will take on new meaning in the context of the memoirs of a "small-time footballer" and of a comparative study of Hungarian–German national characters—I shall leave that to the Esterházy scholars to expound on. My only comment is that, although I prefer the earlier texts to the new, interweaving them has resulted in a truly entertaining read, even a plot of sorts. After these memories of his youth, the author, now retired from football but awarded, as a writer, the Peace Prize at the Frankfurt Book Fair, makes for Germany, where he attends lower-division matches in Frankfurt and in Saxony, evoking his memories of the old GDR (*cf.* a notable and famous insert on the girls of the GDR). He then returns home, and at Hort (familiar from the name Horthy), where the Esterházy family was deported in the early 1950s, he bids farewell to the reader "from the touchline of a bumpy village pitch". But he is not really present there; he is more or less inside his book, in which "there will be a man who goes on and on telling his tales". *Journey into the Depth of the Penalty Area* is a farewell from a now paunchy writer—who, due to a hip replacement, can no longer run—from the gifted small-time footballer who scored freely from the left flank for the Csillaghegy team. ❧

Tibor Frank

Those Indomitable Magyars

Bryan Cartledge: *The Will to Survive: A History of Hungary.*
London: Timewell Press, 2006, xvi, 606 pp., 8 maps, 74 illustrations.
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Histories of Hungary in English have a long and distinguished history of their own. The pioneering endeavors of Ferenc Eckhardt (1931), Imre Lukinich (1937), Domokos Kosáry (1941), Denis Sinor (1959), and Ervin Pamlényi, ed. (1975) were continued in recent years by a surprising number of surveys. Péter Hanák, ed. (1988), Peter F. Sugar (with Péter Hanák and Tibor Frank, eds. 1990), István Lázár and Christopher Sullivan (1998), László Kontler (1999), Miklós Molnár (2001), Paul Lendvai (2003), as well as István György Tóth, ed. (2005) published (and re-published) a wide variety of single-volume summaries of the national saga—witty, entertaining or technical and based on one particular approach or on the work of a number of historians. In an era of multi-national federalism, there seems to be an insatiable appetite for what has been the national in history. It is interesting to see this resurgent interest in the national past at a time when the nations (at least in Europe) seem to fear losing their identities. As if looking into the mirror of the "glorious" past would offer solace for the uncertain present and the threatening future: perhaps it is a consolation to recognise that we did have a past, even if we are about to lose our national trappings.

All these authors and editors just mentioned have one thing in common: they were born as Hungarians. For them the journey into the past was a reflection of the self, individual and national: an exercise in a kind of collective autobiography, an analysis of the national persona, the self-portrait of an extended ego. It is rare in historiography, though by no means unprecedented, that foreigners feel tempted to write the history or the culture of another nation. Some of the most eminent histories of English literature were written by Frenchmen (Hippolyte A. Taine, later Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian); some of the best biographies of Adolf Hitler were written by British and American historians such as Alan Bullock, Robert Payne, and John Toland; the best Michelangelo scholar ever is probably the Hungarian Charles de Tolnay. There is something tempting to write about a country, a culture, an artist you know from personal experience and books, but not through your genes. You can eliminate the national idiosyncrasies, the semi-obligatory commonplaces and the elements of self-pity or self-adulation.

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Hungary has been fortunate to have had some distinguished foreigners, including a few Englishmen, who have devoted their talent and energy to books on this remote country. Edwin Lawrence Godkin wrote *The History of Hungary and the Magyars* (1853), Arthur J. Patterson authored one of the best books, *The Magyars: Their Country and Institutions* (1869), Sir Cecil Marcus Knatchbull-Hugessen (later 4th Baron Brabourne) presented *The Political Evolution of the Hungarian Nation* (1908), C. A. Macartney published *Hungary* (1934) and *Hungary: A Short History* (1962). The recent book by Bryan Cartledge (2006), *The Will to Survive,* adds what can be considered the most empathetic, best-written and most complete history of Hungary ever to come from an Englishman.

Trained as a historian in Cambridge and Oxford, Bryan Cartledge joined the British diplomatic service in 1960 and had a distinguished record as a career diplomat. He served in Sweden, the Soviet Union and Iran, held senior posts in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and rose to great prominence as a Private Secretary for Overseas Affairs to Prime Ministers James Callaghan and Margaret Thatcher. He returned to diplomacy in 1980 as British Ambassador to Hungary and finished his diplomatic career in Moscow as Her Majesty's Ambassador from 1985 to 1988. He was knighted in 1985 and, after leaving the diplomatic service in 1988, he became Principal of Linacre College in Oxford.

Sir Bryan has the double advantage of being a professional historian and a high ranking diplomat who spent long years in Budapest. He asked Mrs. Thatcher that he be sent to Budapest, and the Prime Minister was not appreciative of the request. She probably did not realize what her Private Secretary sensed already: Hungary was about to undergo great changes, and a spell in Budapest may turn out to be more than interesting.

Bryan Cartledge is a sensitive and sensible historian. He knows a lot about Hungarians and their history. He tells their story accurately, his scholarship is solid: his notes and bibliography alone take up more than 30 pages (pp. 538–570) in small print. He presents the facts and gives his opinions where he feels he has to. I particularly appreciate his courage in not refraining, here and there, from 'ifs' in writing history, though he knows well that they are a "taboo to the historian" (p. 10). "One of the great 'ifs' of Hungary's history", he argues, "is the question of how different that history would have been had Byzantium, rather than Rome, presided over the Hungarian conversion to Christendom; if Hungary, like Serbia, Bulgaria and Kievan Russia, had embraced Greek Orthodox rather than Roman Christianity" (pp. 10–11). This is a fundamental question of Hungarian history and the author knows full well that he tackles an issue which has intrigued generations of Hungarian and international scholarship. This is the issue of where Hungary belongs: to the West or to the East. Ever loyal to its well chosen theme, *The Will to Survive* suggests that the Hungarians "joined the family of Christian kingdoms, formally embraced the Western tradition of Christianity" and thereby became Europeans (p. 12). This is a major statement from an Englishman and a well placed recognition of Hungary's membership in Europe a thousand years ago.

The book plays with 'ifs' at a number of important junctions. When it comes to the battle of Mohács which the ill-organized and poorly led Hungarian army lost against the Ottoman onslaught in 1526, allowing the medieval kingdom of Hungary to go down in history, a bold question is put:

> Could this catastrophe have been prevented? Arguments over the rights and wrongs of Hungarian tactics at Mohács itself are surely irrelevant. ... The hard truth is that unless

> Hungarian society had developed very differently, the human and economic resources of the Carpathian Basin along with Transylvania would have been adequate for the defence of that relatively compact region, but of little, if anything, beyond it. The fundamental weakness of the Hungarian kingdom had been disguised at critical junctures by the outstanding abilities and courage of a few individuals, the two Bélas, Louis I and the two Hunyadis among them. But medieval Hungary's periods of ascendancy and expansion had alternated with troughs of misrule and internal division. If one of these troughs were to coincide with a challenge from a powerful and determined foe, the essential vulnerability of the kingdom would inevitably be exposed. (p. 79)

This is not only an adequate summary of the tragedy of Mohács, but gives evidence that the author understands the essential structural problem of Hungary's fate through the centuries, not just in medieval times. As the British historian Alan Palmer expresses it in the title of his excellent book on East-Central Europe: Hungary belongs to "the lands between", an easy prey of "friend" or foe from any direction.

The 'survival' motif as a central theme is therefore aptly chosen for this history of Hungary (though a version of it was used before in a comparable sense by the Austrian-Hungarian journalist Paul Lendvai in the title of his 1988 book on the Kádár era, *Hungary: The Art of Survival*). Bryan Cartledge proves to be a realist at every turn of Hungarian history. He recognizes how Hungary's fate has always been dependent upon, and even exposed to, the international political environment. Hungarian history, as he perceives it, is European history, rather than the proud national narrative often presented by Hungarian historians of the past (and sometimes even the present). When he assesses the failure of the war of independence under Prince Ferenc II Rákóczi between 1703 and 1711, he comes to the sober and sobering conclusion that

> If the Habsburg monarchy had been less well served by its English and Dutch allies in the War of the Spanish Succession, Rákóczi's independence movement might have succeeded in achieving at least some of its declared aims; but without a foreign ally of its own, more committed and active than France, its chances of success had always been small. For all its initial zeal and—until the fortunes of war turned against it after 1706—remarkable *esprit de corps,* the *kuruc* army was unlikely to prevail against the more disciplined and better-equipped Habsburg forces. (p. 127)

The Will to Survive offers a similar, and similarly international, reading of the tragedy of 1849 when the combined forces of Habsburg Austria and Tsarist Russia crushed a Hungarian war of independence (again). "Alone, Hungary could not yet hope to prevail in a confrontation with Austria, bravely though the *Honvéd* fought. In making his declaration of Hungary's independence ... Kossuth hoped to win international support for the revolutionary cause. ... The declaration, and the deposition of the Habsburg dynasty, gave a cloak of virtue to the Russian intervention and a pretext for the harsh Austrian retribution that followed Hungary's surrender" (p. 228). Nevertheless, Bryan Cartledge remains fair to Lajos Kossuth and his "political and human ideals" when he comes to the conclusion that "Apart from an excusable tincture of vainglory, his motives and political conduct were entirely selfless, his skills in leadership and organisation phenomenal. His passionate desire to secure a better future for his country and its people nevertheless blinded him to the prosaic fact, so well appreciated by Széchenyi and Deák, that geography and their shared history had condemned

Hungary and Austria to an unhappy marriage from which neither party could afford to seek divorce" (p. 228).

The author of this excellent book shows a particularly keen insight into the character and psychology of his heroes. When Hungary finally achieves independence in 1920, Miklós Horthy becomes Regent of Hungary (1920–1944), an admiral without a navy in a kingdom without a king. Sir Bryan's presentation of Horthy is a *tour de force* and deserves to be quoted at length:

> Horthy had an imposing and attractive presence. The office would also benefit from his virtues of personal honesty, straightforwardness, devotion to his family and modest lifestyle. Other aspects of Horthy's persona, however, augured less well for his conduct of high office. In place of an intellect, Horthy had acquired a small collection of *idées fixes* which predetermined his approach to any given issue. ... His nationalism, perfervid and blinkered even by Hungarian standards, blinded Horthy to the possibility of shortcomings, past or present, in the conduct of his fellow countrymen. Loyalty to his own class, equally, made him complicit in, instead of condemnatory of, the appalling crimes committed by officer bands during the White Terror. His sense of class exclusivity made him notoriously indiscreet, since there could be no secrets between gentlemen. Bitter hostility to Communism, understandable in anyone who had experienced or even witnessed from afar the mad months of the Kun regime, in Horthy festered to an extent that poisoned his view of Social Democrats and even of the urban working class in general. ... Horthy's anti-Semitism went hand in hand with his anti-Bolshevism; but it did not exceed the norm for his class and generation. ... Twenty years as virtual head of state inevitably increased Horthy's self-regard to the point of vainglory; but they also bred in him a degree of intuitive political sense, which on occasion served his country well. Miklós Horthy was often stupid, usually decent, rarely wicked; he was a true conservative, determined to restore the pre-revolutionary status quo and to arrest further change (p. 351)

This is a thorough, exact and balanced portrait of Hungary's interwar and wartime leader who despised, though cooperated with, Adolf Hitler.

There is an equally compelling rendering of Hungary's post-1956 leader János Kádár, the image of a major Hungarian politician whom Ambassador Cartledge came to know personally. Kádár, one of the most controversial figures of Hungarian history, the butcher of 1956 for some and the statesman with a legacy for others, is described as a man who

> possessed intuitive intelligence of a high order. His tactical skill, sense of timing and judgment of the limits of the possible in any given situation were remarkable. These talents matured with experience of leadership. He had a natural aptitude for the manipulation of subordinates, for dividing and neutralizing opposition. His aversion of personal publicity, the modesty of his private life, the simplicity of his preferred recreations... were undoubted political assets. The low-key, almost chatty style of his public speaking came as a relief to listeners sated with the formulaic Marxist rhetoric of his predecessors. He gave the impression, I thought when meeting him, of being a little surprised to find himself where he was—he had none of the decisive confidence of movement or speech that power usually confers, although he had by then led his Party and country for over a quarter of a century. (p. 485)

The British Ambassador in Budapest in the early 1980s tried to understand Kádár by comparing him to Rubashov, the hero of Arthur Koestler's celebrated novel on the Soviet show trials of the Thirties, *Darkness at Noon.*

> Loyalty and service to Hungary's Communist Party were to Kádár the highest and all-embracing good. Unlike [Mátyás] Rákosi,

[Ernő] Gerő and [Ferenc] Münnich, Kádár did not acknowledge an overriding loyalty to the Soviet Union; nor, unlike György Lukács and other Party intellectuals, did he see himself as the servant of Communism as an ideology, universally revelatory and universally applicable. Kádár's political motivation was more narrowly focused—on the HCP, and later the HWP and HSWP [various names of the Hungarian Communist Party from 1945 through 1989, T.F.], as the only true protector, or so he believed, of the interests and well-being of the Hungarian people. All other considerations, including those of morality and personal honour, were for Kádár subordinate to the interests of the Party. (pp. 485–6)

The Will to Survive is a rare combination of the scholarly with the personal and the readable. It will surely be read in and out of English-speaking countries when students of Hungarian history want a scholarly and accurate vision of Hungary's plight. Towards the end of the book the author quotes his last official dispatch from Budapest to London (probably 1983, though no date is given) which might well serve as a summary of his views of Hungary and its rather unfortunate history. A revelatory passage, and perfect summary for his book, this shows his understanding of, and sympathy for, a country where he represented Her Britannic Majesty for years:

> My colleague in Warsaw [Sir Kenneth James, KCMG] perceptively remarked, after only a few hours of a visit to Hungary, that the Hungarians are not a 'spiritual' people. He was quite right. The religion and culture of Hungarians is their nationhood. Their churches, their music, their poetry and their language are all, in one way or another, symbols of national survival and continuing national vitality. In a larger or more powerful country, this dominance of national sentiment might be distasteful, even disturbing. In a country two-thirds the size of England with a population only one-third larger than that of Greater London; a country which has been trampled on by, successively, Tartars, Turks, Austrians, Germans and Russians; a country which has lost every war it has fought in five hundred years—I have found the quality admirable and attractive. (p. 505)

The reader is referred to a seemingly large number of books and studies on Hungarian history, but most are in English (pp. 560–570). The problem is that not all good scholarship on the national history that has been produced in and out of Hungary has been published in English. This is therefore a bibliography which does not reflect the vast material that exists in languages other than English, preeminently in Hungarian. At the same time, the list points to, once again, the dismal failure of Hungarian and international publishing to translate more titles from Hungarian. There is never enough money, there rarely are substantial grants or projects in the realm of translation underway in Hungary. One can only hope that Hungary's membership in the European Union will expedite the channeling of substantial sums of money for this particular purpose. The question of survival for a small nation is also a question of it presenting itself internationally through translation. One should also expect a new generation of Hungarian historians to master the English language at a level where they can write or translate their own text in, or into, English. This is unfortunately not yet the case. With more Hungarian scholarship available in the international market, even a good book like this would inevitably profit.

Yet, from the impressive series of complete surveys on Hungarian history there are but a few which are scholarly sound, eminently readable, and convey a clear message of understanding. A well-balanced combination of distanced criticism and compassion, *The Will to Survive* by Sir Bryan Cartledge is probably the best of its class. ❧

MUSIC

Deborah Kiszely-Papp

"From My Memoirs"

An Autobiographical Sketch by Ernst von Dohnányi for Hungarian Radio, Budapest One, 6 p.m., 30 January, 1944.[1]

Ernst von Dohnányi's (1877–1960) association with Hungarian Radio dates back to the earliest days of the pioneer institution's operations in 1925, and during the next two decades it grew into a highly productive collaboration. The broadcasting studio became an important forum for Dohnányi's activities, first as a composer in 1926, then as a conductor, a pianist, and, from 1 February 1931, as its musical director. "The Golden Age of Hungarian Radio" is a phrase that could well be used to describe Dohnányi's achievements during his thirteen-year directorship, which are all the more remarkable given that the last five years of this period were marred by the increasing tensions, destruction, and hopelessness of war. He utilized widened accessibility offered by the medium of radio to launch educational programmes aimed at children and the lay public, while striving to balance the programming demands of the subscription-paying audience with the material needs of talented musicians in a country where performing opportunities were far from abundant. Highlights of Dohnányi's tenure include: a) the state-of-the-art, acoustically superior Studio 6 was designed and finished in 1935, after years of intense research and experimentation;[2] b) using his own cadenzas, Dohnányi played the complete Mozart piano concerti between 27 November 1941 and 30 June 1942 in a fourteen-part radio series;[3]

1 ■ First published in the original Hungarian. Kiszely-Papp, Deborah: "'Emlékkönyvemből'. Dohnányi Ernő előadása a Magyar Rádióban, Budapest I, 1944. január 30., vasárnap, 18 órakor". *Dohnányi Évkönyv 2003,* Sz. Farkas, Márta and Deborah Kiszely-Papp, eds. (Budapest: MTA Zenetudományi Intézet, 2004) pp. 27–45.

2 ■ See Szücs, László: "A Magyar Rádió VI-os stúdiójának építéstörténete Dohnányi Ernő főigazgatása idején" [The Construction History of Hungarian Radio's Studio 6 during E. D's Musical Directorship]. *Dohnányi Évkönyv 2003,* pp. 123–136.

3 ■ For complete details of this series see: Kiszely-Papp, Deborah: "Transcending the Piano: Orchestral and Improvisational Elements in Dohnányi's Piano Music" in *Pespectives on Ernst von Dohnányi,* ed. Grymes, James A. (Landham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005) pp. 85–111.

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c) the establishment, on 1 January 1943, of the Symphonic Orchestra of the Hungarian Radio (now the Budapest Symphony Orchestra), the core of whose membership was formed by the Radio's Salon Orchestra (founded in 1936, expanded in 1938). He then featured the ensemble in a series of public concerts beginning in October 1943, in which internationally renowned conductors and guest artists were scheduled to perform.[4]

In 1941 Dohnányi began to withdraw from public service in protest of the Hungarian government's discriminatory purging policies, and this process continued well into 1944, when, on the 11th of May, he disbanded the Philharmonic Society Orchestra of Budapest rather than dismiss members on ethnic grounds. As political conditions steadily deteriorated, the studio became the last bastion for his artistic activity in his native country. He remained active as a conductor and pianist even as late as November.[5]

By the 10th of November, Arrow Cross leader Ferenc Szálasi, who had set up a puppet government, appointed Zoltán Sámy as National Commissioner for Musical Affairs, who then announced drastic reforms in radio programming.[6] In all probability this was the last straw for Dohnányi, and shortly thereafter, on the 24th of November, he bade his farewell to Hungary. Even after he left, Dohnányi's works continued to be heard on the radio for several weeks.[7] With the resumption of radio broadcasting in early 1945, however, following the siege of Budapest, the long years of his blacklisting in Hungary began.

Dohnányi's reading of his memoirs on 30 January 1944 represented his verbal farewell to Hungarian Radio audiences. In addition to providing a firsthand portrait of the rich cultural history of late 19th-century Hungary, his account gave voice to the pain shared by so many who had become strangers in their own homeland in a war-weary, hopeless Hungary. Dohnányi concluded his presentation by asserting that his hometown of Pressburg-Pozsony (today Bratislava, Slovakia), could never again be the same as the city he had known in his childhood, an emotional yet prophetically realistic assessment of world events. Beyond this, Dohnányi's radio address bears unique musical significance: it was the only known

4 ■ Sources: Annual Program Report, 1943; 1943 Annual Report, 49th Business Year, Management and Board of Directors' Meeting, Hungarian Telephony and Radio Shareholders' Company. Budapest, 1944, Hungarian Radio Archives, Dept. of Written Documents; "A rádió a hangversenydobogón" [The Radio on the Concert Stage]. *Rádióélet,* 15 October 1943, XV/42, pp. 6–7.

5 ■ Dohnányi's radio performances during his final weeks in Hungary included mostly performances of his own compositions: Saturday, 4 November 1944, Op. 25 *Variations on a Nursery Song,* as pianist and conductor of the Opera Orchestra; Sunday, 12 November, conducting the Op. 18 *Pierrette's Veil;* Friday, 17 November, Op. 5 Piano Concerto in E minor, with pianist Károly Váczy (a recent graduate from the Liszt Academy, where he had been Dohnányi's student) and the Opera Orchestra conducted by Dohnányi; and Saturday, 18 November, Liszt's B minor Sonata (Dohnányi, piano). Sources for programme information: *Rádióélet,* 27 October 1944, XVI/43, p. 13; 3 November, XVI/44, p. 13; 10 November, XVI/45, p. 4.

6 ■ *Rádióélet,* 10 November 1944, XVI/45, p. 5. "Bemutatjuk a zeneügyi kormánybiztost: Sámy Zoltánt" [Introducing the National Commissioner for Musical Affairs: Zoltán Sámy].

7 ■ *Rádióélet,* 15 December 1944 (XVI/50), p. 9. Dohnányi: Violin Concerto [Op. 27, D minor]. Violin solo: László Szentgyörgyi. Directing the Opera Orchestra: Lajos Rajter, Budapest, 9 December 1944, 4 p.m. According to the available programme information, this was the last work by Dohnányi to be broadcast on Hungarian Radio in the composer's lifetime.

time in his adult life when he actually performed works from his childhood.[8]

The composer who for decades had excluded so firmly his extensive youthful output, ranging from the earliest experimental piano pieces to noteworthy and increasingly mature chamber works and even prize-winning orchestral works,[9] now gave the audience a glimpse of his creative origins.

While in London I had the good fortune to come across one of the two primary sources for Dohnányi's radio address, his working copy, in the British Library,[10] where it was erroneously catalogued as having been written in 1927. This 14-page typescript, with autograph title, marginal notes, and emendations throughout, also contains several handwritten numerical abbreviations in an unknown hand at the top of the first folio, including the date of recording (27 January 1944) and the date of broadcast (30 January 1944). Later, the correct date was further confirmed through the location in the Archives of the Hungarian Radio of the programme's documentation packet with the actual typescript from which Dohnányi read.[11] Contemporary announcements in *Rádióélet*[12] and other radio magazines offered further details, and an abridged version of the broadcast, illustrated with photographs, was published the following week as part of a series featuring the memoirs of distinguished artists.[13]

8 ■ In his letters to his sister Miczi (Mária Dohnányi), Dohnányi occasionally asked her to find and send him certain of his early compositions, although it is not clear whether his intention was to have the works performed, to show them to a publisher, or simply for personal study. Two such instances are recorded in his letters: "Please look for my composition manuscripts, you know, amongst all that 'stuff' on the bookshelf: my first compositions for violin and piano—some six pieces written in pencil, with only the first few bars of the first piece written over in ink. These are written on approximately 20 cm.-sized, horizontal staff paper. Also the original, Hungarian-sounding last part of my piano quartet (F-sharp minor) with parts, and my B-flat Major Overture." (E. D.'s letter to his father Frigyes Dohnányi, with separate section written to Miczi on the last page, Budapest, 5 February 1896, BL Add. MS. 50807A, f. 2v); "Also bring with you the Beethoven Sonatas (that little volume) and my manuscripts (both scores of the piano concerto) [referring to the three- and the one-movement versions of the Op.5 Piano Concerto in E minor], symphony score [Op. 9 Symphony in D minor] and the score of the string quartet (if that's at home) [Op. 7 String Quartet in A Major], and the parts of the Zrínyi Overture.] (E. D.'s letter to Mária Dohnányi, Gmunden, 30 June 1902, H-Bn Music Division, Dohnányi estate family letters, No. 100). This author's translation from the original Hungarian.

9 ■ The manuscripts of Dohnányi's juvenile compositions frequently bear crossed-out opus numbers, evidence of his continuing re-evaluation of those works composed prior to the Op. 1 *Quintet in C minor* for piano and strings (1895). For a list of his compositions see Kiszely-Papp, Deborah: *Ernő Dohnányi.* Hungarian Composers 17, series ed. Melinda Berlász. (Budapest: Mágus Publishing, 2001) pp. 30–36.

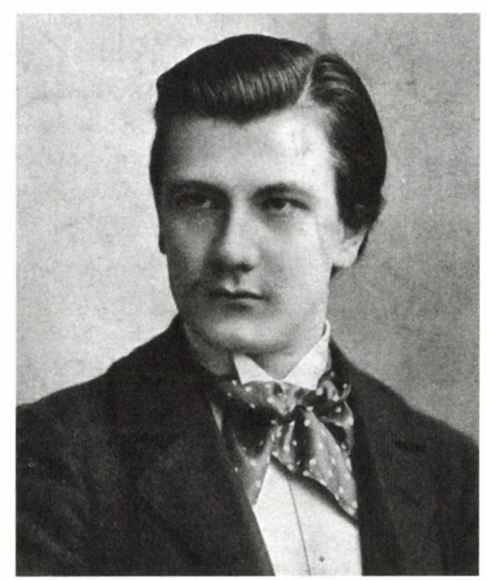
10 ■ BL Add. MS. 50807A, ff. 11–24. "Emlékkönyvemből. Rádióelőadás. Dohnányi Ernő" [From My Memoirs. Radio address. E.D.]. Typed, 14-page draft of Dohnányi's radio address with autograph title, corrections, refinements and added marginal notes in blue ink and pencil, including details of the works performed, durations of the spoken sections and an occasional rewritten sentence or added thought.

11 ■ Programme documentation packet 4402/18, "Dohnányi Ernő: Emlékkönyve" [E. D.: Memoirs]. 30 January 1944, Budapest I., 6 p.m. Director: László Böhm. Hungarian Radio Archives, Dept. of Written Documents. I am grateful to Tamás Sávoly for his assistance in locating the fair copy of Dohnányi's radio address in the Hungarian Radio Archives.

12 ■ *Rádióélet,* 21 January 1944, XVI/3, p. 26. "Vasárnap, január 30. Budapest I, 18 óra (6): Dohnányi Ernő emlékkönyvéből. Közreműködik Waldbauer Imre, Országh Tivadar és Kerpely Jenő. Rendező Böhm László." [Sunday, January 30th. Budapest I, 6 p.m.: From E. D.'s Memoirs. With Imre Waldbauer, Tivadar Országh, and Jenő Kerpely. Director: László Böhm].

13 ■ "'Az én emlékkönyvem', írta: Dohnányi Ernő. Részletek a január 30-i előadásból" ["From My Memoirs" by E. D.. Highlights from the January 30th broadcast]. *Rádióélet,* 4 February 1944, XVI/5, pp. 4–5.

Differences between the two primary sources are minimal. Unique to the fair copy used for the broadcast are the insertion of the short paragraph about the piece "Heda", a few added or altered words, and the crossed-out architectural description of his high school and its church. It is this text that is published here for the first time in English. The original spellings of names of people and places (e.g. Ferencz Liszt) have been preserved[14]. In addition, the autograph notes in the working copy which provide pertinent information about the pieces performed but which were not transferred into the fair copy, such as titles, durations, and keys, have been included here in parentheses or in the footnotes. In four places, crossed-out or rewritten sentences from the draft are also provided in the footnotes, because the content was deemed relevant and it could not be determined whether the changes were by Dohnányi himself or by the radio editor. Additional inflectional notations appear throughout the fair copy in the form of lightly underlined words and phrases; among those only the doubly underlined or strong emphases are indicated here.*



The young Dohnányi, c. 1894

From My Memoirs[15]

If in the autumn of our lives we recall our earliest impressions, it would be rare to find any person who would not describe his or her childhood years as among life's dearest memories. For with few exceptions these carefree, happy-go-lucky, playful years represent to us the very epitome of happiness, even to those whose childhoods were not devoid of some hardship. All the more for the child who was raised in a family atmosphere that radiated the purest harmony, which offered

* ■ In grateful acknowledgement of permission granted to reprint documents from the Hungarian Radio, the National Széchényi Library Music Division, the British Library, Florida State University and Dohnányi's legal heirs.

14 ■ For purposes of consistency, Dohnányi's hometown is referred to throughout his memoir by its historical Hungarian name, Pozsony.

15 ■ In the right margin of the working copy Dohnányi wrote in a column the following timing calculations of the pieces to be performed:

Violin, piano 50"; Scherzo (F# Major) 1'45"; Heda 3'; Quartett 11'; Romance 2'15" = [Total] 18'50" followed by timings of the spoken portions and finally of the sum of the two parts:

"7' – 8' – 10' – 45" – 30" = 26'15" + [music] 18'50" = 45'05",

which was the original estimated duration of the presentation.

a nurturing environment for the development of his or her talents and inclinations, a child about whom it could be said had been exposed to only the beautiful and the good: indeed such a person could be considered favoured by fate. For not only does what we experience in childhood affect our entire lives, it actually becomes the guiding force throughout our lives as well. And no matter what hand fate may deal us later, it can never deprive us of those bright memories.

When Hungarian Radio's programming director asked me to offer something "from my memoirs" to our dear listeners, what could be more natural than for me to summon up my most cherished memories, my childhood experiences. All the more so because these took place in a city of cultural and historical importance and value for all of us: Pozsony.[16]

Any person who knows only the Pozsony of today[16] could not possibly imagine what this city was like in the times before the previous world war. It could be best compared to Sopron or to the castle district of Buda. Today, where once the aura of an integrated Baroque city prevailed, one finds a noisy city mottled and defaced by six- and seven-storey skyscrapers.[17] The city whose population now numbers approximately 110,000 had, at the time when I lived my childhood years there, only 48,000 inhabitants. Some of these people were German-speaking and some were Hungarian-speaking. But even the German-speaking residents proudly proclaimed themselves to be Hungarians;[18] they were proud of the important role Pozsony had played in Hungarian history, and they proudly called their city *"die alte Krönungs-Stadt"* [the old coronation city]. The street signs were in German and Hungarian, and the theatre was likewise bilingual in that for half of the season a German company performed, followed by a Hungarian company during the other half. The official language was of course Hungarian, and this applied to the schools as well.

In this bilingual but nonetheless emotionally integrated city I was born and raised. My father was a teacher of mathematics and physics at the Royal Catholic High School. I inherited my musical talent from him. He was an excellent cellist;

16 ■ The words "but today a bleeding, painful wound" were crossed out in the draft.

17 ■ The phrase "of which the majority of the population now consists of foreigners who have never had any association with the city" was crossed out in the draft.

18 ■ The text "because the city had never belonged to any other country than Hungary. Even the German-speaking residents were proud to be Hungarian;" was crossed out in the draft. The figures mentioned by Dohnányi are correct. Dohnányi was born in 1877. According to the census of 1881, the ethnic character of the city was predominantly German, at a time when Hungarian was increasingly used by the more educated. By 1910, reflecting the willingness of the German population to Magyarize themselves, 42 per cent of the population of the city called themselves German, 40 per cent Hungarian and 15 per cent Slovak.

19 ■ On 18 April 1874 Liszt played with Frigyes Dohnányi in a concert in the main hall of the Pozsony Vigadó, organized for the benefit of the Sacred Music Society. Countess Mária Rossi also performed on this occasion: in addition to two songs by Liszt, she sang Rossini's "La promessa" and Braga's "Serenade" accompanied by Liszt at the piano, and joined in the latter number by Frigyes Dohnányi on the cello. See also: Kumlik, Dr. Emil: *Dohnányi Frigyes, 1843–1909. Egy magyar gyorsíró élete és munkássága* [Frigyes Dohnányi, 1843–1909. The Life and Work of a Hungarian Stenographer]. Budapest: A gyorsírási ügyek m. kir. kormánybiztossága [Hungarian Royal Commission for Stenographic Affairs] 1937, 18–20.; Legány, Dezső: *Liszt Ferenc Magyarországon, 1874–1886* [Liszt in Hungary, 1874–1886]. Budapest: Zeneműkiadó 1986, 23–24, 252–253. According to the latter source the date was April 19th. My thanks to Mária Eckhardt for her assistance with information on Liszt.

his artistry far surpassed that of an average amateur, which is why he often played in benefit concerts. On one such occasion he performed with Ferencz Liszt.[19]

Once, when I was three years old, my father was practising a gavotte by Joh.[ann] Seb.[astian] Bach prior to one of these concerts. I was so captivated by the piece that my father was forced by my continual nagging to play it over and over again. Another time, when my father was in a playful mood, he placed the bow in my hand, and with it I proceeded to play the rhythm of the tune up and down across the strings while my father formed the notes with his left hand. This was the first manifestation of my musical talent. Even so, for the time being my formal music education was limited to Sundays, when my father would play chamber music with the best amateurs in Pozsony or occasionally with professional musicians while I sat in an armchair and listened.

Thus, from a very early age I had the privilege of hearing a lot of good music.

Finally, during a vacation in Breznóbánya when I was six years old, my father, perhaps merely for his own amusement, began teaching me piano, although he barely knew how to play himself. For me this was the utmost happiness. I learned playfully. Actually, my entire musical education during my years in my parents' home was really more like a game, because they didn't try to make a prodigy out of me, nor did anyone think seriously that I would ever really pursue a career in music. I played music frequently, but even later, it could not be said that I practised regularly, or that I learned my piano pieces to perform them for others. Thanks to this "playful" way of learning, I became an excellent sight-reader. Indeed, to the consternation of music teachers, I must admit that my technique was developed almost entirely through constant sight-reading. When on occasion I was asked to perform, I would often select a piece to sight-read on the spot, which of course I didn't tell anyone. Once, however, I paid the price for this rashness. István Thomán, who later became my teacher at the Music Academy, once visited us when he came to Pozsony on a concert tour. When he asked me to play something for him, I selected an étude by Heller in the key of B-flat major. Because the first measure of the piece began with an E-flat major chord, and I had not looked carefully at the key signature, I played A-flats instead of A's throughout the entire piece. When Thomán brought this error to my attention, I was terribly ashamed. To make matters worse, when Thomán sat down to the piano my father remarked sternly after hearing a brilliantly played passage, "Now do you see the importance of scales?" At this I burst inconsolably into tears, and such was my distress that they were hardly able to calm me. This episode took place when I was about ten years old.

My father also began teaching me the violin at the age of seven. But I was not particularly attracted to this instrument, first because of the unpleasant, out-of-tune whining sounds that unavoidably result when initially learning to play the violin, and secondly, because a single-voiced instrument was never able to satisfy my interest in counterpoint. Nevertheless, I was able to learn the instrument well enough that later I could play second violin or viola in orchestras and chamber ensembles.

When I was eight years old I asked the Baby Jesus for music paper for Christmas, on which I started to scribble. Thus came into being my first composition: seven little pieces for violin and piano, which I played with my father to his great amusement. I shall now present the most comprehensible of the pieces:

Music[20]
(No. 3, B major)[21]

After this first experiment others followed. I composed little piano pieces with all kinds of titles: mazurka, tarantella, bagatelle, etc.

My parents also took me to concerts. I still remember well a concert by Rubinstein that I heard when I was seven years old.[22]

But it was not Rubinstein's programme, of which only Mozart's "Rondo in A minor" remains vaguely in my memory, and it was not his playing that made an unforgettable impression on me, but it was the face and profile of Ferencz Liszt. I had heard so much about Liszt as a child that the very mention of his name affected me like magic. Now I could see him! The concert was in the County Centre Hall. I was standing in the back between the wall and the last row, opposite the stage on which Rubinstein played. And to the left of the stage, next to the wall underneath two candelabras, stood Ferencz Liszt between two gentlemen. The tall figure of Liszt in his abbey's soutane and his markedly strong profile were clearly visible to the whole audience. I cannot remember whether he stood for the entire concert or only for part of it, but the entire scene lives so vividly before my eyes today that I could draw it if I knew how to draw.

Another experience I recall from around this time was a concert by the Meiningen Court Orchestra under the direction of [Hans von] Bülow. This concert also took place in the County Centre Hall, but all I can remember is that they played the Grand Fugue from Beethoven's string quartet [Op. 133] with a complete string orchestra.

20 ■ Dohnányi's notes pertaining to timings appear here in the draft on p. 5: "idáig 8 p, kb. fél perc" (No. 3, H-dúr) [up to here 8 min[utes]; [the piece] is about a half-minute long (No. 3, B major)]. Instead of the seven little pieces for violin and piano mentioned by Dohnányi, the autograph manuscript in the British Library (Add. MS. 50791, ff. 1–3v) contains only six untitled, undated pieces which appear to be the set referred to (see also the quote from Dohnányi's 5 February 1896 letter to his sister in fn. 8). Another account asserts that a little chorale entitled "Gebet" [Prayer] was Dohnányi's first composition, written at the age of six (Vázsonyi, Bálint: *Dohnányi Ernő.* Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1971, 15–16; Budapest: Nap Kiadó, 2nd ed. 2002, 21–22), although Vázsonyi's familiarity with this currently published source is proven by the fact that he quoted from it (p. 15; 2nd ed. p. 21). Further complicating the establishment of a clear chronology of Dohnányi's juvenilia is a note by the composer stating "legkorábbi" [earliest] on the first folio of a group of manuscripts in the British Library, Add. MS. 50790, containing piano and organ pieces, and another on the second folio: "legkorábbi szerzemények (7–8)" [earliest compositions, age 7–8]. This particular group of manuscripts begins with two short studies for piano.

21■ BL Add. MS 50791, f. 2r; the little piece is an 18-bar, two-part form. It is likely that Dohnányi played both parts of this selection alone on the piano, because at this point he had still not made reference to his colleagues who join him later in the broadcast.

22 ■ Liszt attended Anton Rubinstein's benefit concert for a Hummel memorial on 13 April 1885 in the main hall of the County Center in Pozsony. Frigyes Dohnányi also played the cello in the closing piece, Hummel's Septett.

Yet, since I was really only a child, I loved to play with my sister, who was one and a half years younger than me, and her dolls. With these dolls we created our own make-believe family life which could be wonderful indeed, with its continual development and constant variety. This kind of doll-playing stopped after I began attending high school. But my favourite plaything always remained the toy train, although unfortunately I never had the kind of beautiful trains that children of today play with. Even now I still like trains, having spent so much of my life travelling on them. Anyway, my sister and I got along well together, and I think that we were good children, even if we were occasionally a little naughty. At those times my quick-handed mother would immediately punish us. Even today I am grateful to her for those well-deserved slaps, but especially because after they were administered the offence was forever forgotten, and she never so much as mentioned it again to either my father or to us, in contrast to many modern parents who launch into lengthy moral explanations rather than give an immediate punishment, but then days and even weeks later are still shaming their children thus: "And remember what you did then, you useless brat!"

When I reached the age of eight a major change took place in my education. My father realized that he could no longer teach me the piano, and he entrusted my development to Ágost Forstner,[23] Pozsony's cathedral organist. I was very fond of the dear old phlegmatic Forstner because he never tortured me with such things as the correct hand position and the like, with which piano teachers often ruin their students' enjoyment of music, but rather he allowed me to play and develop naturally. Of course a bit of scale-playing was necessary. I also had to play études, but not too many. Nevertheless, aside from assigning lessons according to a progressive curriculum, his teaching was negative [unobtrusive] in the sense that—and I consider this even today to be the correct approach—he pointed out my mistakes, but he never said or showed that something had to be done thus. He never demonstrated, and I never even heard him play the piano, but only the organ in the cathedral.[24] Simultaneously with the onset of piano lessons, a change also took place in my schooling. Up until this time my mother had taught me the basic subjects, but now they enrolled me in a private school, where we were barely a dozen students in all four elementary grades under the guidance of a young teacher. The school must have been very good, for a year later I was able to pass the entrance examination into the high school, which I was then able to complete at the age of sixteen.

With high school the beautiful, carefree years of play came to an end. They were replaced by serious duties. And although my studies caused me no great

23 ■ All other sources list Károly Forstner as Dohnányi's first teacher: "Forstner Károly", Kumlik, Dr. Emil, op. cit., 79; "Karl Forstner", Dohnányi Ernő: *Message to Posterity* (English translation by Ilona Dohnányi; (Jacksonville: The H. & B. Drew Co., 1960) 6; "Károly Forstner", Ilona von Dohnányi: *Ernst von Dohnányi: A Song of Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002) 7; "Forstner Károly", Vázsonyi, Bálint: *Dohnányi Ernő* (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1971) 17; "Karl Forstner", Elza Galafrés: *Lives, Loves, Losses* (Vancouver: Versatile, 1973) 102, etc. Throughout this radio address Dohnányi consistently refers to his teacher as "my master".

24 ■ The Cathedral of Saint Martin. In both sources originally "in the cathedral".

difficulties, I couldn't take things too lightly because my father, as a teacher at the school, was immediately informed by his colleagues if I was not prepared in class, for—more often than not—I had not done my homework. They checked on me at home as well. My mother often passed through the children's room, and sometimes she would specifically come in to make sure that I was studying, so that she could tell my father in the evening that I had been a good boy. At those times I would mumble something with my head bent over the books, but under the books there was often music paper just waiting for me to fill it up with scribbling. Only thus was it possible for me to compose during my eight high school years all of the music that's sitting in this package before me. In addition to numerous smaller piano pieces and songs,[25] it contains two sonatas for piano and cello (dedicated to my father),[26] three complete string quartets and one that is half

25 ■ See Kiszely-Papp: *Ernő Dohnányi*, pp. 28–30.

26 ■ The titles of Dohnányi's unpublished works referred to below are given according to the composer's own catalogue of his juvenilia dated 1888–1896 (BL Add. MS 50808) if the piece is listed therein, and otherwise according to the title that appears on the autograph manuscript (the latter cases indicated with *): I. Sonate (G-dur) für Violoncello u. Pianoforte (1888), autograph MS: BL Add. MS 50792, ff. 1, title page, and 3–12v; II. Grand Sonate (C dur) für Piano und Violoncello (1889), aut. MS: BL Add. MS 50792, ff. 14–41v. Although his early catalogue is written in German, the use of mixed languages is characteristic of Dohnányi's childhood writing.

27 ■ I. Quartett (D dur) für 2 Violinen, Viola, u. Cello (1889), aut. MS: BL Add. MS. 50792, ff. 42–52; II. Grand Quartett. für 2 Violinen, Viola u. Cello (G moll) (1890), aut. MS: BL Add. MS. 50792, ff. 54–80v; III. Quartett für 2 Violinen, Viola u. Violoncello (A moll) (28 March–5 April 1893), aut. MS: BL Add. MS. 50794, ff. 18–31v; *Quatuor. Ernest de Dohnányi 1893 [D minor], aut. MS: BL Add. MS. 50794, ff. 34–39v. This last manuscript contains three movements, of which the third movement, "Tempo di Menuetto" was signed by the composer and dated 3 October 1894. Only this movement was listed by Dohnányi in his juvenile catalogue, under the year 1894: Menuetto für Streichquartett. D moll (see BL Add. MS 50808, f. 5v). The fair copy of this single movement, signed and dated 4 October 1894, is in the National Széchényi Library Music Division (H-Bn Ms. mus. 13.587), where it was originally kept in a box of miscellaneous sketches (Ms. mus. 3.275).

28 ■ I. Quartett (Fis moll) für Piano, Violine, Viola, u. Cello (1891, the fourth and last movement 1893), aut. MS: BL Add. MS 50793, which contains two separate manuscripts: a draft and the fair copy, the latter of which is the copy that was used for the 11 March 1894 world premiere in Vienna.

29 ■ Sextett für 2 Violinen, 2 Violen, u. 2 Violoncellen (B dur) (1893), aut. MS: BL Add. MS 50794, ff. 40–55v. This work was revised several times by the composer. The earliest autograph manuscript from 1896, entitled Streich Sextett, is located in the American Branch of the Dohnányi Archives, Florida State University (FSU) Warren D. Allen Music Library (MS 81). This is the version that won an honourable mention in the Millenium Royal Composition Competition that same year. Dohnányi had to submit his Streich Sextett by a deadline to be eligible for that event, but in several letters he indicated to his sister that he was still not satisfied with the work and that it required further revision. A later version of the piece was premiered in Budapest on 1 April 1898, but even as late as 1899 Dohnányi continued to complain to his sister that he was intensely busy with work on the Sextett. Presumably it was this further revised version that was performed on 2 February 1900 in Pozsony by the expanded Fitzner String Quartet, but any later manuscript has yet to be found.

30 ■ *Quintett pour 2 Violon, 2 Alto et Violoncello (G Major). aut. MS: BL Add. MS 50791, ff. 25–29. The manuscript contains two sketchily written movements. According to Imre Podhradszky's catalogue, the work dates from 1889. Podhradszky, Imre: "The Works of Ernő Dohnányi." *Studia Musicologica* VI, 1964, p. 359.

31 ■ Both sonatas date from 1890: I. Sonate. für Piano (A dur). aut. MS: BL Add. MS 50790, ff. 22–26r. The fourth and final movement is unfinished; II. Sonate (G moll). für Pianoforte. aut. MS: BL Add. MS 50790, ff. 29–33r.

32 ■ *Sonate (B-flat Major). aut. MS: BL Add. MS 50790, ff. 36–37v. One movement in sonata-allegro form, dating from 1890 (Podhradszky, op. cit.).

finished,[27] one piano quartet,[28] [one] string sextet,[29] one movement of a string quintet,[30] two sonatas for piano,[31] one sonata movement,[32] two movements of a piano quintet,[33] one overture for full orchestra,[34] a mass and other sacred compositions,[35] and even an unfinished opera.[36]

Every year the students of the high school organized an evening of recitations and music performances honouring the institute's director[37] on the eve of his name day. Although these performances were not intended for the public, there was always a good-sized audience present. Naturally I, too, was expected to perform. The first such occasion took place when, as a nine-year-old, first-year high school student, I played the piano part of Mozart's Piano Quartet in G minor [K. 478]. For another such occasion, as a sixth-year student I composed "Üdvözlő dal" [Song of Greeting] to my classmate Marcell Jankovich's text, which was performed by the school's choir and orchestra under the direction of my father.[38] Marcell Jankovich, the famous writer and politician, was an eighth-year student at the time.[39]

In addition to these high school performances I also participated here and there in public concerts. It was thus that I played Schumann's Piano Quintet

33 ■ *Quintett for two violins, viola, violoncello, and piano, aut. MS: BL Add. MS 50791, ff. 9–24v. Two movements, the first of which—when compared with other Dohnányi compositions from around the same time period—is exceedingly lengthy. The second movement, labelled "Scherzo", is unfinished. Dates from 1890 (Podhradszky, op. cit.).

34 ■ Ouverture in B dur für grosses Orchester (June-July, 1892). aut. MS: BL Add. MS 50794, ff. 1–17.

35 ■ From Dohnányi's juvenile sacred compositions, the following works were performed in Pozsony: Ave Maria (29 June 1891); *Missa solemnis in C* (8 June 1892); *O salutaris hostia* and *Ave verum corpus* (29 July 1893); and *Veni Sancte Spiritus* (4 September 1893). Dohnányi wrote details of the instrumentation and performance history of these works in his own catalogue, and particularly about the *Missa solemnis in C* (BL Add. MS 50808, ff. 2–5). His other juvenile sacred compositions include: *Pater noster* (5–6 October 1892) and *Kyrie (A Major, 1893). Autograph manuscripts for all of the above mentioned sacred works can be found under BL Add. MS 50796.

36 ■ *"*Die Bergknappen. Romantische Oper in zwei Abtheilungen.* von Ernst von Dohnányi. Text von Theodor Körner. 1891. Klavierauszug" [The Miners. Romantic opera in two parts by E. v. D. Text by Theodor Körner. 1891 Piano-vocal score]. aut. MS: BL Add. MS 50795, ff. 2–7r. The unfinished manuscript contains only the overture and the beginning of the first act.

37 ■ Imre Pirchala was the Royal Catholic High School's director during Dohnányi's years as a student there (1886–94), but according to the local contemporary press, the school also celebrated the name day of the former director, Károly Wiedermann, with a concert. See the first entry: "Dohnányi fellépése a pozsonyi főgimnázium ünnepen, 1887. jan. 28." [Dohnányi's performance at the Main High School of Pozsony's celebration concert, 28 January 1887] in: Gombos, László–György Horváth: "Dohnányi Ernő művészi tevékenységének sajtórecepciója. I. rész: A pályakezdő évek: 1887. január–1898. április" [Press Reception of Dohnányi's Career. Part One: The Earliest Years: January, 1887–April, 1898]. *Dohnányi Évkönyv* 2003, pp. 141–143.

38 ■ Dohnányi's "Üdvözlő dal" for choir, string orchestra, piano and accordian in D Major was premiered on 4 November 1891 at a school concert. The location of the autograph manuscript is unknown.

39 ■ Marcell Jankovich (1874–1949) author, politician, alpinist. His works include: *Úttalan utakon* [On Unmarked Roads] (Pozsony, 1903); *Sasfészek* [Eagle's Nest] (1906); *Az Alpesek* [The Alps] (1911); *Húsz esztendő Pozsonyban* [Twenty Years in Pozsony] (1939); and *Egy évszázad legendái* [Legends of a Century] (1940). Years later he performed in public again with Dohnányi when, on 3 April 1943 in Kaposvár, the two men participated in a "Felvidéki est" [Upper Hungary Evening], on which Dohnányi played his Op. 21 Sonata in C-sharp minor for violin and piano with violinist Ede Zathureczky, and Jankovich, then a government commissioner, gave a lecture entitled "Pozsonyi emlékek" [Memories of Pozsony]. BL Add. MS 50807A, f. 129.

at the age of eleven with, aside from my father, a string quartet consisting of professional musicians, of which the first violinist was Mór Unger, the father of the Music Academy teacher Ernő Unger.[40] The programme for that concert has been lost, but here in front of me is another that I have kept: "Programme for the Fourth Music Evening of the 'Song Association of Pozsony' on the 28th of December, 1890 in the City Hall Main Room with the gracious participation of Mr Ernő Dohnányi".[41]

Mr Dohnányi was thirteen years old at the time. For this concert, in addition to works by Chopin, Mendelssohn, and Liszt I performed one of my own pieces, "Fantasie-Stück",[42] and as an encore I played another original composition. Now I will play for you the latter, a scherzino.[43]

Music
(No. 6, F-sharp Major)[44]

The set of six pieces that I wrote a year later entitled "Heda" is much more mature. Every piece in this work begins with the notes H-E-D-A

thus: H- e- d- a

or thus: H- e- d.- a

40 ■ The concert took place on 13 December 1889; the other members of the Unger–Dohnányi String Quartet were: ? Jákob, II violin and Károly Hofmeister, viola.

41 ■ "A Pozsonyi dalegylet 1890. évi deczember hó 28-án, este 7 [és] 1/2 órakor, a városház nagytermében Dohnányi Ernő úr szíves közreműködésével tartandó IV. zene-estélyének műsorozata."

42 ■ The information in the concert program, according to which Dohnányi played his piece, "Fantasie-Stück Nr. 4" at the 28 December 1890 concert, does not agree with the information Dohnányi wrote in his juvenile catalogue. According to the latter, under the list of compositions for the year 1890, the second (D Major) and sixth (F-sharp Major) piece of the piano cycle *Sechs Fantasiestücke* were the selections performed by the composer at the concert in question (BL Add. MS 50808, f. 1). The concert program saved by Dohnányi's family (Scrapbook 1, 1885–1900, f. 8., FSU Dohnányi Collection contains a handwritten remark that Dohnányi played his "Fantasie-Stück No. 6" as an encore following his performance of Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody* No. 8. In the autograph manuscript (BL Add MS 50790, ff. 16–20), originally labelled "Op. 9. [no.] 4. 5 Fantasiestücke" (later he changed the '5' to '6'), the composer gave individual titles to certain of the pieces: No. 2, "Lied" and No. 6, "Scherzo". The autograph also reveals some changes in the order of pieces: e.g. the "Scherzo" played as an encore by the composer was originally the fifth piece of the set.

43 ■ Dohnányi here used the word "scherzino" to mean the type of piece, thus it should be interpreted "little scherzo". Although he composed a piano piece in 1888 entitled "Scherzino" (A minor, BL Add. MS 50790, f.14r), it is clear from Dohnányi's notes that the work he played for this radio broadcast was in the key of F-sharp Major (see also fn. 14).

44 ■ The duration of this piece was 1'45", after which "kb. 2 perc" [approx. 2 minutes] is written in the margin, followed by the note "Betét" [insertion]. The short section of text introducing the next musical illustration, excerpts from the piano composition "Heda", was inserted after the F-sharp Major Scherzino and contains the two little written musical examples. These later insertions do not appear in the draft.

Autograph manuscript of "Heda," folio 1 (National Széchényi Library Music Division, Ms. mus. 6.359).

If our dear listeners suspect that the name 'Heda' refers to a certain young lady, they are not mistaken. I will now play for you three of the six pieces.[45]

Music
["Heda", three excerpts]

It must have been around this time that my master started teaching me theory according to the method of Meyerberger, who had been a student of the famous Viennese, Sechter.[46] Meyerberger had been a music teacher and theorist in Pozsony, but I never knew him; he must have died before I was born. My father

45 ■ 'H' in continental Europe refers to the note 'B'. Two autograph manuscripts of the piano cycle "Heda" have survived: 1) the earlier sketch is in the British Library (BL Add. MS 50790, ff. 46-49v) and has a French title: "Pièces sur le nom 'Heda' 'pour Pianoforte composées et dédiées à la petite Heda de Pongrácz par Erneste de Dohnányi 1891" [Pieces on the name 'Heda' for Pianoforte composed and dedicated to the young Heda Pongrácz by E.D. 1891]; and 2) the later, definitive fair copy in the National Széchényi Library (Ms. mus. 6.359) features this title in Hungarian: "Heda. Hat zongoradarab a kis Pongrácz Hedának" [Heda. Six piano pieces for the young Heda Pongrácz]. Dohnányi listed seven pieces in his own catalogue of juvenilia under the year of 1891: "Hedwigiana. 7 Stücke für das Piano" [Seven Pieces for the Piano]. Here he also listed the keys next to the number of each piece, according to which the first and seventh movements are both in A minor. But because neither of the autographs bears any evidence of a seventh piece, it is possible that the first piece was repeated after the sixth piece.

46 ■ Meyerberger = Karl Mayrberger (1828–1881) was a conductor and professor of teacher training for the Sacred Music Society of Pozsony. He studied with the Austrian composer Gottfried Preyer (1807–1901), who had been a pupil of the Austrian composer Simon Sechter (1788–1867). *Zenei Lexikon,* eds. Bence Szabolcsi and Aladár Tóth, Budapest: Andor Győző, 2nd ed. 1935.

had studied composition with him. His method, rather than teaching generalized rules of harmony, required one to take inventory of all possible combinations of chord progressions and work each one out. I found these lessons to be terribly boring, and all the more so because I was already well past this point in knowledge. It pleased me much more when my master gave me organ lessons on the cathedral organ. It so happened that there was a big, beautiful organ in the Lutheran Church in Breznóbánya, where we usually spent the summers with my maternal grandmother. Playing on this instrument I was able to progress in my organ studies to such an extent that I even gave a concert, the program of which consisted of an original fantasy[47] and works by Bach, Mendelssohn, and Liszt.

My experience with the organ actually dates back to when I was a third-year high school student, for beginning with that year I served as organist for the Sunday worship services in the high school's church. That organ was an old instrument with a feeble, tremulous sound, yellowed keys on the lower manual, and some missing pedals. And if I tell you that from a total of seven registers only one four-foot, one two-foot, and one mixtura worked, then any person who is familiar with organs can imagine how the 'organo pleno' howled. Nevertheless, the organist was paid a yearly salary of five forints and four krajcárs from the interest of a charitable trust. These were the first wages I ever earned through music.

Perhaps it would be interesting for me to note that both my predecessor and my successor as the high school's church organist later became famous musicians. My predecessor, Ferencz Schmidt,[48] the prematurely deceased chancellor of the Vienna Academy of Music, is surely known to our audience. His very successful opera, *Notre Dame,* was also staged in Budapest at the Opera House,[49] his symphonies were performed here by the Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra,[50] and his

47 ■ "Fantasie für die Orgel", C minor (BL Add. MS 50790, ff. 52–56v). The autograph contains detailed registration instructions. The concert mentioned took place on 23 August 1892 in the Evangelical Church of Breznóbánya. According to Dohnányi's juvenile catalogue: "Für die Orgel in der evang. Kirche zu Breznobánya eingerichtet. Herrn Franz Reger, Organist in Breznob. gewidmet. Comp. August. Aufg. den 23-ten aug. [18]92 in der ev. Kirche zu B. vor einem kleineren Publikum" [Arranged for the organ in the Evangelical Church of Breznóbánya. Dedicated to Mr. Franz Reger, organist at Breznóbánya. Composed in August, premiered on the 23rd of August, {18}92 in the Evangelical Church of Breznóbánya for a small audience] (BL Add MS 50808, f. 4r).

48 ■ Ferencz (or Franz) Schmidt (1874–1939) Austro-Hungarian composer, cellist, pianist. He became professor of piano at the State Academy of Music in Vienna in 1914, then director of the institution in 1925, and finally chancellor in 1927, but retired in 1937 due to deteriorating health.

49 ■ Schmidt's opera *Notre Dame* (1904) had its Budapest première on 14 December 1916, and following that was performed there four other times through 11 January 1917. Information courtesy of Nóra Wellmann, Archivist of the Hungarian State Opera House.

50 ■ Schmidt's Symphony No. 2 in E-flat Major (1913) was first performed by the Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra on 23 October 1916 under the direction of István Kerner in a concert that also included Dohnányi's Op. 12 *Koncertstück* for cello and orchestra. Dohnányi conducted two later performances of this symphony on the 19th and 20th of November, 1922, dress rehearsal and concert. Further, Schmidt's work, "Variations on a Huszár Tune" was played publicly by the BPO under Dohnányi's direction on the 6th and 7th of December, 1931, dress rehearsal and concert. Csuka, Béla: *Kilenc évtized a magyar zeneművészet szolgálatában* [Nine Decades in the Service of Hungarian Music] (Budapest: Filharmóniai Társaság, 1943).

"Variations on a Huszár Tune" has been broadcast more than once from the Radio's studio. My successor at the organ in Pozsony was Béla Bartók.[51]

For some unknown reason the chamber music gatherings at home, which in due time I had grown to actively participate in, became a little less frequent. But in their stead I began to have more music-making opportunities outside of the home. On Sundays after the high school worship service I rushed to the cathedral, where the High Mass began at 9 a.m. The choir and orchestra of the Sacred Music Society of Pozsony, expanded to include amateurs, provided the music. Here I played second violin in the orchestra, or I would sometimes sit next to my master at the organ and assist him with registration. Masses by Joseph and Michael Haydn, Mozart, and Schubert were performed, in addition to those by the contemporary popular Viennese composers of sacred music. Liszt's "Gran" Mass was played frequently. Already in operation at the time, the Sacred Music Society of Pozsony first performed Beethoven's great opus, the *Missa solemnis* during the composer's lifetime. Since then it has been played at the cathedral every year on the Feast of St Cecilia,[52] just as every year Joseph Haydn's seldom-heard "The Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross" has been featured on Good Friday. All of this sacred music had an influence on me, and I, too, composed a number of smaller and larger works in this genre, including a mass in my sixth year of high school.[53]

The excellent József Laforest, conductor of the [Sacred] Music Society of Pozsony and of the cathedral, did a great deal to elevate the musical life of the city.[54] He also organized orchestral concerts at the County Centre Hall. I took part in these first as a listener when I was very young, and later played second violin in the orchestra. The repertory consisted of [works by] the standard Classical and Romantic composers, but new pieces were also presented. One such example was a performance of Bruckner's Symphony No. VII, for which the composer and a few of his friends came to Pozsony from nearby Vienna. I can still envision vividly his short, stubby form clad in an indigo-blue suit with trousers that were tailored a bit

51 ■ At this point in the text there follows a short, crossed-out paragraph: "One of the interesting features of the high school's church was its five-sided tower. The church itself was Gothic in style, but very simple, almost cold, as was the high school building itself, which in the Middle Ages had been a Convent of the Poor Clares."

52 ■ November 22.

53 ■ Dohnányi's *Missa solemnis* in C, composed for vocal soloists, choir, string orchestra and organ was premiered during the anniversary year of the coronation on 8 June 1892 at the Catholic High School of Pozsony. It was performed on three other occasions during that same month, including in local churches, and a fourth time on the 4th of September. The autograph manuscript in the British Library (Add MS 50 796, ff. 8–21) is sketchy and incomplete, and and a fair copy used in performance along with a set of parts, have thus yet to be found.

54 ■ Josef (or József) Thiard-Laforest (1841–1897) composer and leading musical figure in Pozsony during the 1880's and 90's. He served as director of the Sacred Music Society at St. Martin's Cathedral between 1881 and 1897. His significant oeuvre of sacred music includes a Requiem (1888), *Missa solemnis* in D major (1889), Missa brevis in C (1891) and Te Deum (1892). Lengová, Jana: "Sacred Music of Josef Thiard-Laforest (1841–1897)". Slovenská hudba No. 4 / 2001 (Electronic Library of Scientific Literature—Academic Electronic Press).

too short and a short coat from which, when he stepped onto the platform to acknowledge the audience's applause, he pulled out a huge, vermilion-coloured handkerchief to wipe away his tears of emotion.

But we undertook even bigger assignments. Once an entire concert program was devoted to Wagner's *Parsifal,* from which we played the Overture, Klingsor's magical garden scene with the flower-maidens' chorus, the Good Friday music, and all of the second half of Act I from the scene change to the end. I played second violin in the orchestra. The choir was that of the Song Society of Pozsony, a group that also organized its own concerts, the programmes of which included the great Romantic choral works that nowadays unfortunately have fallen so much out of fashion, yet are nevertheless beautiful. I remember hearing Schumann's *Paradies und die Peri* [Op. 50], which filled an entire evening and made a deep impression on me.

There was also no shortage of recitals by soloists. Because Vienna was so close, there was hardly an artist who didn't make the short excursion to nearby Pozsony. I'll only mention the most outstanding of those that I myself heard: the young d'Albert[55] had the greatest effect on me. His playing was colossal. Anyone who heard him later could only savour the remnants of what he had been. I also heard Reisenauer.[56] Among violinists I should mention Wilhelmj,[57] Sarasate,[58] [and] Ondricek.[59] Among singers I heard the greatest songstress, Alice Barbi,[60] and also Rosa Papier, who tragically lost her voice very early.[61] String quartet ensembles also frequently came to Pozsony, such as the Heckmann Quartet[62] from Cologne and the Hellmesberger Quartet[63] from Vienna. The Thern brothers,[64] who were originally from Hungary, performed frequently; however, their playing was entertaining rather than inspiring. To emphatically display their incredible ensemble playing, they would play pieces written for one piano in unison, but on two pianos, so precisely that listeners thought that they were hearing only one piano.

Another frequent guest ensemble was the Udel Quartet from Vienna,[65] who entertained the audience with humour in masterly style. All of these concerts took

55 ■ Eugen d'Albert, b. Eugène Francis Charles (1864–1932) German pianist and composer. Renowned student of Liszt. During the summer of 1897 Dohnányi studied in Bernried with d'Albert, to whom Dohnányi later dedicated his Op. 5 Piano Concerto in E minor (1897–98).

56 ■ Alfred Reisenauer (1863–1907) German pianist. He, too, had studied with Liszt.

57 ■ August Wilhemj (1845–1908) German violinist.

58 ■ Pablo de Sarasate (1844–1908) Spanish violinist, composer.

59 ■ Frantisek Ondricek (1857–1922) Czech violinist.

60 ■ Alice Barbi (1862–1948) Italian mezzo soprano.

61 ■ Rosa Papier-Paumgartner (1859–1932) Austrian mezzo soprano and voice teacher.

62 ■ Robert Heckmann (1848–1891) German violinist who established the Heckmann String Quartet, active in Cologne from 1881.

63 ■ Josef (or Joseph) Hellmesberger (1828–1893) Austrian violinist, founder of the Hellmesberger String Quartet, whose other members were Matthias Durst, C. Heißler and Karl Schlesinger.

64 ■ Vilmos Thern (1847–1911) and Lajos Thern (1848–1920). The Buda- and Pest-born Thern brothers piano duo earned fame thoughout Europe beginning in the mid-1860's.

65 ■ The Udel Quartet, a barbershop quartet that earned widespread popularity during the last two decades of the 19th century, was founded by the cellist and Vienna Conservatory teacher Karl Udel (1844–1927).

place in a very charming Baroque hall, the City Hall Main Room, before a distinguished audience. In other words, the royalty of Pozsony was always present: the Archduchess Izabella with her daughters and the whole of the aristocracy, which in Pozsony was very large. When later I played in this hall as a performing artist, I always experienced a strange and indescribable feeling that I'd never felt anywhere else, stepping onto that platform where as a child I had heard so many great artists.

I would also like to say a few things about the Pozsony Theatre. As I mentioned earlier, during the first half of the season a German company performed, lead by the clever director Raoul.[66] They also performed operas, and thus I became familiar with a large part of the opera repertory in Pozsony. For thirty-two krajcárs one could get a standing-room ticket, and if I got to the theatre early enough, I could stand in the first row leaning against a steel bar, which made standing much easier. The company consisted of young singers, some of whom later became famous. I heard operas by Verdi and Meyerbeer, and among these the seldom performed *L'Africaine*, and even operas by Wagner, but of course only *The Flying Dutchman, Tannhäuser,* and *Lohengrin* were possible. But Gounod's *Faust* was not left out, and I also saw Beethoven's *Fidelio.* Only Mozart was missing from the repertory; it seems that [his music] was really the most difficult. With the exception of *László Hunyadi,* the Hungarian company under the direction of Krecsányi[67] did not stage operas, but they gave all the more performances of classic and modern dramas; these, too, I attended diligently.

In closing, I would like to present to our radio audience a part of one of my larger childhood compositions, the Piano Quartet in F-sharp minor. What encourages me to do so is that the work was performed publicly in Vienna. The story of the Viennese premiere is the following:

During a number of summer vacations, my father would take us for several weeks to visit one of the landowners of Nyitra County, who played the viola and was an enthusiastic chamber music player.[68] Once the neighbouring landowner had a visiting guest, a painter from Vienna, who happened to hear my Quartet, which I had composed when I was a sixth-year high school student. The artist liked my work so much that he took the score back with him to Vienna, where on 11 March 1894 members of the Duesberg String Quartet gave its first performance

66 ■ Emanuel Raul (1843–1916) actor, stage director. He directed the German-language theatre company in Pozsony during Dohnányi's childhood years. With special thanks to Zita Burda, Theatre Archives of the National Széchényi Library, for her assistance in finding information about this man.

67 ■ Ignác Krecsányi (1844–1923) actor, stage director. In 1886 he opened the newly built theatre in Pozsony with a performance of Ferenc Erkel's opera, *Bánk Bán.* Dohnányi was merely nine years old at that time.

68 ■ Dohnányi is referring to Károly Haulik, with whom he performed a number of times in chamber music concerts, for example on 28 July 1888 in Aranyosmarót (Beethoven: Piano Quartet) and on 27 July 1889 in Léva (Mendelssohn: Piano Quartet). See also Szlabey, Melinda: "A Széher úti Dohnányi-hagyaték" [The Széher Street Dohnányi Estate] (pp. 143–144) and Kelemen, Éva: "Az Országos Széchényi Könyvtár Dohnányi gyűjteménye" [The Dohnányi Collection in the National Széchényi Library] (p. 156), *Dohnányi Évkönyv 2002.* (Budapest: MTA Zenetudományi Intézet, 2002).

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Sonntag den 11. März 1894, Nachmittags ½5–6 Uhr:

XXI. CONCERT

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August Duesberg (1. Violine)	Frln. **Anna v. Baumgarten** (Viola)
Frln. **Philomena Kurz** (2. Violine)	Herr **Adolf Nitsch** (Cello)

unter gefälliger Mitwirkung

der Concertsängerin Frau **Anna Platzenteig**,

der Violin-Virtuosin Frau **Teresina Schuster-Seydel**.

und des Componisten **Ernst von Dohnanyi**.

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J. B. Wallishausser's k. u. k. Hof-Buchdruckerei.

Concert programme for the world première of Dohnányi's Piano Quartet in F-sharp minor, 11 March 1894 (Florida State University).

with me, at the time an eighth-year high school student preparing for graduation. Now with my friends Waldbauer,[69] Országh,[70] and Kerpely[71] we will play the first movement.

Music
(Piano Quartet in F-sharp minor, I.) [Allegro moderato][72]

During that year the number of my compositions was fewer because I had to prepare for the final graduation examinations. The last larger work that I wrote in Pozsony was a string sextet, while the very last work composed there was a little romance for piano, with which I would now like to bid farewell to our dear listeners, and also to my reminiscences of Pozsony. In the autumn of 1894, I moved to Pest to dedicate myself earnestly to music. Later I only returned to Pozsony as a guest,[73] but I always experienced with a broken heart how different the city of today has become from the Pozsony that I knew in my childhood, which will never again return. ❧

Music
(Romance in F-sharp Major)[74]

Autograph manuscript of the opening bars of Dohnányi's Romance, BL Add. MS. 50790. Courtesy of the British Library Board.

69 ■ Imre Waldbauer (1892–1952) Hungarian violinist. With cellist Jenő Kerpely he founded the Waldbauer–Kerpely String Quartet, which was active between 1909 and 1946.
70 ■ Tivadar Országh (1901–1963) Hungarian violinist, viola player, composer. In 1927 he became the second violinist of the Waldbauer–Kerpely String Quartet; later he became the violist for that group.
71 ■ Jenő Kerpely (1885–1954) Hungarian cellist, a founding member of the Waldbauer–Kerpely String Quartet.
72 ■ The duration of the movement according to the notes was 10'30". See also footnote 28.
73 ■ Crossed out in the sketch: "Will this city ever be ours again?" [several crossed-out corrections] "Even if it would be, it would never again be the same Pozsony that I described, because that Pozsony can never return again." Dohnányi's statement that later he only returned to his hometown as a guest does not include his years at the Royal Music Academy (1894–97), during which he habitually went home for the summers, and even frequently for the next few years between concert tours, until his marriage to Elza Kunwald in 1900.
74 ■ The duration of the piece was 2'15". Romance für Pianoforte (F-sharp Major) composed January, 1894. MS: BL Add. MS 50790, ff. 60–61r. This is probably the same romance that Dohnányi played on 13 September 1894 for his entrance exam to the Royal Music Academy.

THEATRE & FILM

Tamás Koltai

Take Things As They Come

István Tasnádi: *Magyar zombi* (Hungarian Zombie) • Viktor Bodó: *A nagy Sganarelle és Tsa* (The Great Sganarelle & Co.) • János Mohácsi: *56 06, avagy Őrült lélek, vert hadak* (56-06, or Crazy Soul, Beaten Hosts)

In the dim and distant past, the theatre did not acknowledge copyright. Ancient Greek dramatists plundered mythology without the least scruple. Shakespeare blatantly exploited antique and contemporary historical sources; Molière could equally be said to have "pinched" material, to say nothing of Brecht, who certainly had no hang-ups about borrowing. "I take things as they come" is a precept that the majority of writers for the stage have followed, and until the twentieth century the idea that they should at least acknowledge their sources in footnotes would never even have crossed their minds.

A change came about in the last century—in candour, if nothing else. The precursors of Brecht's plays no longer went unacknowledged; reworkings came ever thicker and faster, to the point that they were recognised as a "new genre". The new philosophy was that the writer, in recasting old dramatic material, should convey the ideas of his age.

Some better or less well-known plays become victims, fortunate or otherwise, of posterity's passion for adaptation. István Tasnádi's play *Hungarian Zombie* is a very free adaptation of a famous satirical comedy *The Suicide* by Nikolai Erdman, a Russian writer of the Stalinist era. The action is set in a village household of the present day, or more specifically in its backyard, slap in the middle of which, emblematically, stands the privy to which the protagonist flees to get away from the world. (The outhouse has been a familiar topos of Hungarian literature since István Örkény's celebrated 1967 novella *Tóték,* which was published in English translation as *The Toth Family* in 1982.) The plot essentially remains true to Erdman's play. At the height of a mundane family squabble, Gáspár Blondin gets so worked up that he threatens to kill himself. His wife and a neighbour try to extricate the man, who locks himself up in the jakes, but their efforts are in vain. News of the impending suicide attracts the attention of a widening circle of curious neighbours, the type that will latch on to anything if they can scent something in it for themselves. A number of them, as in Erdman's original, strive to win the victim-to-be as a martyr for their cause and endeavour to talk him into doing the deed "in the public interest". Thus, the local mayor seeks to draw attention to the high price of meat; a poet from the capital, to the difficult situation in which literature finds itself; and a fading pop diva, by conjuring

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

up a totally invented affair, to herself. The key factor here, of course, is media coverage (an aspect that the Russian writer could hardly have anticipated), with an entire TV crew turning up in order to broadcast the suicide live. A pop trio that is appearing on tour nearby also turn up by mistake. Everything, then, is in place for that popular media event—the Suicide Show.

Tasnádi lends a bit more depth to the set-up by using his protagonist to cast light on nobler sentiments. Simple he may be, but Gáspár Blondin is alienated from the world, feels out of sorts, a person in crisis who is brooding about the meaning of life, though without success. His metaphysical fretting is brought on by surfing through television channels: he comes upon a ballerina (he made out the word "Coppelia" on the screen), an experience which awakens in him an inexplicable sensation, presumably an amorphous longing for a more transcendent beauty. Thus, in the very first scene of the play our hero seeks to escape not just from his nagging wife but also from the ugly, stultifying, humdrum realities of everyday life—all the things whose full scope and horrific primitiveness will only be seen later on.

In order to elevate his subject somewhat from one-dimensional naturalism, Tasnádi has elected to write the play in rhyming verse, just like a Molière comedy. This gives rise to an undeniably comic tension between the subject-matter and the level at which it is pitched; this is further heightened by the fact that the idiom employed seesaws between the crudest vulgarity and an ironic, standoffish intellectualism. The former tends to be more successful with the audience, and the author himself at times falls into the coarseness that he was seeking to avoid, indeed sought to attack when he wrote the play. The latter voice, that of the ironic intellectual, overwrites the text. At times the characters discourse with a degree of rationality and culture greatly at odds with what would be expected of them (for instance, in the way that they draw mythological parallels), which sets them in a more oblique, complex context, in quotation marks. This is not at all convincing, however, and the quality of the comedy as a result is decidedly uneven: in its light touch, its unforced, technical assurance, it bears the marks of Tasnádi's professional facility, but it also gets somewhat stuck at the surface of the ideas that he is professing.

Hungarian Zombie was premiered at the Hevesi Sándor Theatre of Zalaegerszeg and has subsequently been presented, under the title *Finito,* at the Örkény István Theatre in Budapest. The substantially revised text eradicated a fair bit of the wordy intellectualism and substitutes female singers for the ballerina as the television performer who sends Gáspár Blondin's soul into a spin. Accordingly, whereas in Zalaegerszeg a chorus line of dancing girls flitted into the action, in Budapest a soprano and a mezzo-soprano linked the scenes. Both of the directors—Bertalan Bagó and Pál Mácsai, respectively—devised appropriately breezy, fluent and polished productions that at times veered towards farce but essentially remained within the parameters of realist comedy. Whereas out in the provinces the target of the satire was hick provinciality, in Budapest it was metropolitan snobbery; correspondingly, the stage design and style of the Zalaegerszeg production sent up the conventions of the *népszínmű,* the nineteenth-century comedy of rural manners peculiar to this part of the world, while the Budapest production conformed to, and at times parodied, the Molièresque format. The main figure in both stagings undergoes a dramatic crisis, playing along with the game that is being enacted around his suicide, adopting the status of an outside observer, testing the behaviour of those around him before blackmailing the profit-seekers who are speculating on his death.

In the end he grows into an astute performer in the show that is being organised around his suicide, his inner energy and mystique making him unpredictable. The show in both places was a satire on commercial television, with kitschy sound-and-light effects revolving around the privy into which the star candidate for suicide withdraws. The day is saved—the show must go on—by the wife accepting the role of murderer. The satirical comedy turns into an absurd horror story. What ensues is a finale à la Molière: Mr Official strives as a *deus ex machina* to place a post-mortem positive gloss on events. The dead person, though, stays dead.

Young though he is, Viktor Bodó has already acquired an international reputation (at the end of January this year he had a production in Berlin). Now he has rewritten Molière's *Don Juan, or The Statue at the Feast* and staged the piece at Budapest's Katona József Theatre. For all that, *The Great Sganarelle & Co.* is no paraphrase, more a camouflage. Rather like the accompanying theatre programme, with its arsenal of cod documentation, replete with erotic snaps, society-page poses and concocted urban myths about the criminal underworld of the Fifties and Sixties.

Above all else, the production attests to an extraordinarily potent theatrical instinct, from the moment that an actor, a classic peruked conductor-clown prepared to wreak havoc, appears in the orchestral pit, all the way through to the orchestral finale, played (as on other occasions along the way) by certain members of the company. (Of course, there is no way of knowing if it really is them who are producing the music since they play like musicians miming to a playback; just to confuse one entirely, there is one occasion when one of their number sits in a prominent position with his saxophone lowered while a saxophone is clearly audible.) Throughout its duration, then, the piece fluctuates between the extremes of the real and the fake, the deadly serious and the deadly frivolous, the monstrously shocking and the cheekily side-splitting. Theatrical propositions are stated and then subsequently renounced, with horror turning into kitsch, and vice versa; violence is flooded in moonlight; *Melody d'Amour* is given a hard rock treatment; a jingle familiar from a well-known TV quiz show is followed by a Gypsy dance. The scenes are discrete but do not follow a linear plot, being linked instead as successive improvised "sketches" without any obvious core. Everything happens physically and gains its veracity from that; everything, however, is false, fake.

The play is set on a rooftop, or to be more literal, on a revolving stage set up like a rooftop. This is the stamping-ground or den of the central character, a libertine gangster by the name of Hodelka or Johnnie, who lives both in the world and outside it. There is no way of telling whether it is he who shuts the world out from his immediate surroundings or the world that has shut him out; at all events, except for one crony and one woman, everyone who depends on him in some manner has to come up and see him. There are a fair number of these characters: a policeman, a mobster, a business associate, a creditor, a resident who is looking for a cat, and naturally women from his past, present and even future; a selection process of some kind is also being staged, with girls parading as though on a catwalk, to demonstrate that they are worthy of favour, while another scene involves a (fixed) boxing match on which bets are taken. The house roof, in short, fulfils the role of both office and household. There are motifs from Don Juan to be discerned if one looks more closely, such as a disquisition on snuff; the crony Sganarelle, who, despite the play's title, is here called Sganauer (or rather 'Shopan', to spell it phonetically); a

Mister Sunday, or Monsieur Dimanche (Mr Serpentine here); the father calling Don Juan to account; the seduced women whom he breezily side-steps with various stories, such as one featuring leg cancer, and so on. Johnnie outdoes even Don Juan, at least in his brazenness (and mostly without Don Juan's veneer of rationality); his peculiar machismo is manifestly brutal. It involves one beating after another, a distinctly homosexual undertow as well as homosexual intercourse (even if this is not perpetrated by him, but on him, not that the world looks any nicer for that), and also direct or indirect murder, having someone jump off the roof, and so forth. Károly Hajduk, as Hodelka, makes his way with cruel indifference, casually and arrogantly, silently and on tiptoe, like some sort of ghost. His gaunt face displays no emotion or temper; his voice is able to switch in the same breath from a whisper to a yell, from laid-back to icily wrathful, without his showing any sign of physical or intellectual exertion. The relaxed, negligent posture hides a primed, razor-sharp torturer. One moment he is cooing over an infant in arms, but the next moment he is capable of anything—unpredictable. Rarely does one see quite such a genuinely frightening figure on a stage. His servant counterpart, the good-humoured, docile, independent-minded and accommodating Sganauer-Shopan, drawing on a similar range of gestures, manages to be both ingratiating and submissive at one and the same time.

Around them revolves a menagerie of forced labourers. A policeman, the father of one of the girls, starts off with menaces that soon become tears and ends up by leaving his pistol behind. The boss's rival henchmen, who differ only in which of them will have to jump off the roof. A gangster in a fur-collared overcoat who has great difficulty dragging himself to his feet but is red-hot on boxing and S & M. Shifty, mercenary types, and alongside them a gaggle of sacrificial female volunteers. The devout mother, babe in arms, genuine tears in her eyes, who is savagely humiliated. A working-class scrubber, in a sweatsuit bottom and flip-flops. A creature of animal impulses. A pariah who, blinded and physically broken-down, is bed-ridden for eternity. Finally, a lisping and screeching simpleton who, with a cry of "I'm back!", appears out of nowhere, lugging a plastic bag, then stays to the end to close the play and also the main character's eyes. That comes after the faithful Sganauer first slags off the apparently dead Johnnie—his head caked with blood, blankly staring—then, when his boss comes to and relapses again, dispatches him to the hereafter by breaking his ribs while giving him a heart massage. The simpleton then hauls him to an armchair that has no legs and there pulls the corpse onto his lap, but not before carefully striking Sganauer dead with a hammer taken from a sideboard.

What is not explicitly spoken is played out by the actors. Thus, it is not the play but the production which suggests that the world is a place of horrors, via a spine-chilling audiovisual montage portraying the "descent to hell". The high-pitched cry of an infant is heard coming from a pram, but this modulates into a distorted, low-pitched, monstrous voice, rather like in a David Lynch film, and this is followed by a diabolical cacophony before regaining its calm and turning into present-day chatter while a multitude of steel balls roll over the stage. Is that to be interpreted as divine judgement? What leap out of the performance are a despairing cynicism and a strident demand for salvation. The dreadful end is somewhat mitigated by frenzied music-making. The theatre ethos is gone. Perhaps something will come along to replace it.

János Mohácsi is also a writer-director, widely recognised as the outstanding talent of the generation now hitting their

fifties. This time he is not following his habit of rewriting a classic but draws his subject "from life" (though, as will be seen, the late-lamented István Örkény has also left a dramaturgical "fingerprint" on the performance). His subject is Hungary's 1956 Revolution. One of the many unfortunate events in the commemoration of last year's fiftieth anniversary was a playwriting competition, which had the grotesque result of stimulating a rash of substandard stage works. The best two productions were not in fact conceived with the anniversary date in mind at all. One of those, András Papp and János Térey's *Kazamaták* (Casemates), staged by the Katona József Theatre in Budapest towards the end of the last theatre season, was reviewed here (see HQ 183). The other is a piece self-explanatorily entitled *56 06,* which was put on by Mohácsi's team at the Csiky Gergely Theatre in Kaposvár in January 2007. That team—János Mohácsi himself, his brother István (also a writer) and composer Márton Kovács—have assembled for presentation on the stage some of the anomalies that have been witnessed in Hungarian public life since the political turning-point of 1989–90. In so doing, the banality of the daily grind is made to appear like some sort of demented mythology.

Kaposvár's "1956 piece", which carried the subtitle *Crazy Soul, Beaten Hosts* peers into the maelstrom which opened up in the wake of the tragi-grotesque farce that marked last year's anniversary. The commemoration on October 23rd 2006 was hijacked in shameful bad taste by an all-too-successful "rerun" of the original protests. Images that were more than likely quite inexplicable to most foreigners were carried by the world's media: the siege of Hungarian Television's headquarters; a demonstrator starting up a 1956 tank that was parked in the street as part of an exhibition; the mass rallies ending in clashes between protestors and police—all a faithful mirror of the sad fact that Hungary has not yet come to terms with its own past.

The Mohácsi trio have undertaken this process of self-examination. What they uncover is nothing new, but it is still fairly shocking. The descent to the lower depths of the well of the past is intended literally as a visual metaphor: the characters are let down on cables in open cages containing one or more of them. Dangling, swaying, lurching up and down, they speak the Mohácsi version of Orwellian newspeak for the 1956 anniversary, replete with official speeches, jeering and the chants of football hooligans. The "dumb talk" which was parodic when the Mohácsis used it in their adaptation of Schiller's *Intrigue and Love* has since passed into everyday language; theatrical overstatement has been superseded by the nonsense of reality.

Having alighted at the ground level of the past, we come up successively against three foci of conflict that are the subjects of three fairly long scenes. In the first of these, the goons of the ÁVÓ, the feared state security office of the 1950s, swoop down to turf out of their home a family that is about to have their son buried (a rag doll representing the little boy's corpse is tipped out of the coffin), and only at the end of various atrocities does it turn out that the heavies have come to the wrong floor as they had only been looking for an apartment which had a telephone. (This family—called the Toths, in overt homage to Örkény—will be encountered in several further episodes.) In Scene 2, the "Big Brother" complex unfolds with Kádár scuttling off to Khrushchev in November 1956 and being told "to do what he wants"—meaning "what we want", as Khrushchev puts it. This dependency is underlined by bonds that expand in time and space so as to touch on the feud between Kádár and Imre Nagy; on Béla

Kun, leader of Hungary's short-lived Soviet Republic in 1919, who as a refugee in the Soviet Union fell victim to the Stalinist purges of the late Thirties; Josip Tito, the independently minded leader of the post-war Communist party in Yugoslavia (who was called a "chained dog of the West" by his Hungarian "brothers" until a reconciliation was achieved in 1954); and other Soviet "brothers" of the time, such as Suslov, Mikoyan and Andropov. The third and most potent scene revisits a *topos* that is something of a Mohácsi favourite: the Hungária General Hospital, during the days of the Revolution, with doctors in the midst of chaos, panic and the reek of booze. Nurses are shuttling between surgery and running off revolutionary fliers; the strains of Beethoven's *Egmont* Overture; Imre Nagy's last radio address ("the Government is in its place"); a female doctor, an embodiment of the angel of the fight for freedom, who will not tolerate booze in her operating theatre but uses a penknife, an injection of petrol and electric current to murder an innocent man who, as a joke, was having himself photographed in his brother's ÁVÓ uniform. This scene is a horrifically absurd summing up of the Magyar soul as Mohácsi sees it: compounded of decrepitude and heroism, romanticism and narrow-mindedness, pettiness and magnanimity, self-sacrifice and monstrosity—the mythology of our madness.

The production intersperses the horrific burlesque of events in the public domain with private tragedy (the Toths lose their daughter when she is admitted to the Hungária General Hospital for pneumonia), but it is the impact of the former that defines the piece. Younger members of the audience will probably have a hard time catching many of the allusions. For instance, they might not be aware of the reality of a time when there was a chronic shortage of telephone lines (so a dwelling with a line was a real bonus), or may not know that a chained-up, barking man represents Tito ("Who's he?" they may well ask), or why the *Egmont* Overture has associations with 1956. (It was played over and over again by Hungarian Radio, in place of its regular programmes, when the Revolution broke out.) Nevertheless, the more perceptive of them may at least pick out and grasp from the bedlam the idea that aspects of 1956 in which politicians or teachers tend to invest false emotion can also be seen by sharper eyes as ghastly historical hogwash. The Mohácsi team are able to put this worm-eaten cavalcade across with amazing formal discipline. The pastel-shaded flower-pattern wallpaper of the scenery, with its fluorescent emblems of despotism, provides the necessary backdrop to open up a surreal space and an easy path for entrances and exits. The costumes—pale pink to denote the Soviet zone, for instance—are ironic masterpieces. Composer Márton Kovács, switching between his own music and Soviet martial songs, taps into a supra-real dimension. The actors are all versed in a common theatre idiom of tragic grotesquerie. Thus, Mrs Toth, on stepping over the country's frontier, as represented by the Iron Curtain of the theatre's safety curtain, looks back on the homeland she has left and freezes in mid-action, like Lot's wife turning into a pillar of salt. The Toth boy's eighteenth birthday is "celebrated" by hanging him—something based on well-known cases of the ghastly retribution wreaked by the Kádár regime (minors sentenced by the courts for capital offences would be held in prison until they reached the age of majority, when they would be hanged).

Zsolt Kovács plays the leading role of Imre Nagy as the martyred prime minister at the mercy of his own decency. At the end, János Mohácsi stages a fictional post-execution charade—this too, incidentally, is reminiscent of a play by Örkény: *Stevie*

in the Bloodbath.[1] In that, Kádár obtains an amnesty for Nagy from Khrushchev;as James Bond he is rescued by a black girl from a hail of bullets; Neil Armstrong steps onto the surface of the Moon with him; a priest friend digs an escape tunnel from the Château d'If to Heroes' Square in Budapest (where the ceremony prior to Nagy's reburial took place in 1989), and he marches along to the singing of a surrounding posse of Young Pioneers in their red neckerchiefs. Two removal men carry on a screen which is showing the 2006 siege of the Hungarian Television's headquarters, lest we forget where we are living. Then Imre Nagy, a wan smile of the blessed on his features, saunters out of the theatre into the open air, into immortality.

This is an instance where the theatre is not drawing on the past but is serving the truth by falsifying reality. ❧

1 ■ Published in English in *A Mirror to the Cage,* ed. Clara Gyorgyey, Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1993.

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Erzsébet Bori

Out in the World

Hungarian Film Week 2007

Csaba Bollók: *Iska's Journey;* Árpád Bogdán: *Happy New Life*
Györgyi Szalai & István Dárday: *The Emigré*

Csaba Bollók's *Iska's Journey* most unexpectedly ran away with this year's Film Week, pulling away from even the most eagerly awaited films. As a director who started in the early Nineties, Csaba Bollók was caught up in the financial catastrophe that struck Hungarian cinema when state financing disappeared. By the time the industry staged a recovery of sorts, his generation had to scramble for the limited financing available, in competition with younger newcomers as well as with the established older names. Given that they had had no opportunity to put down any markers, it is little wonder that Bollók and his fellows found the going tough. He was thirty-five when he made his minimalist first film (*North, North,* 1999) on less than a shoestring. However, the restraint and proportion evident in that first film may not be the key to *Iska's Journey.* Nor may it be true to say that Bollók has had it easy, since there was no pressure of critical expectations on him—we simply don't know what expectations he had of himself.

To put it as plainly as possible, *Iska's Journey* is a masterpiece. Iska herself is an ethnic Hungarian aged fourteen who lives in a decaying industrial region of Romania with her unemployed, alcoholic parents and sickly younger sister, Rosie. During Communist times the Zsil (Jiul) Valley was notorious as a privileged region of mining towns, with civic and trade union leaders whose fiefdoms flourished there. The mines are still operating there, but with a fraction of their former workforce, the factories are simply rusting away. Anyone who could, left the region long ago; those who couldn't, are stuck in the most abject poverty. Our first sight of Iska is of her at work "iron-picking"—scavenging for lumps of iron, rejected castings, anything usable, that the slag heaps, the blast furnaces and foundries have bequeathed to the landscape. (Iron-picking is now rife everywhere in the old heavily industrialised regions of Eastern Europe that went bankrupt after 1989. A string of documentary films has been made about the iron-pickers of Hungary and Romania, Poland and the former Soviet Union.) Scavenging for iron is dangerous and dirty and the work falls to those at the end of the chain, many of them children; scrap dealers are the middlemen who send on the material to the recyclers. Alongside the dealers' yards there is sometimes a boozer to skim off immediately whatever

Erzsébet Bori
is the regular film critic of this journal.

slim pickings have been earned. In Russia the whole trade is in the hands of local mafias, who charge the scavengers for entry into the areas where pickings are to be had. At least Iska does not have that to contend with, but she does have her fellow pickers: in the struggle for a bare living, they are all too ready to rob the weaker, usually the children and the elderly. At home she gets neither love nor security: her mother, ravaged by the drink in which she has sought escape from poverty, beats her black and blue and won't feed her if she fails to bring home enough money. In between beatings (or to escape them) Iska slips away and steals from the local shops or begs scraps of food from the mineworkers' canteen. Iska and Rosie are eventually placed in care through the intervention of a mysterious stranger and find themselves onto a good thing, being fed and looked after. Yet, when she is visited by her mother, Iska elects to go home with her. (Here we learn that she and Rosie had been taken into care after being caught breaking into a shop.) The mother is only prepared to take Iska with her, she does not even bother to see the sick younger child. Once home, Iska soon absconds with a boy from the home who has come to look her up. The two sweethearts spend a pleasant day loafing around the town and decide to go off to the seaside. First, though, Iska wants to say goodbye to her sister. In the end, the boy takes the train on his own. On her way to the station, Iska accepts a lift from a car driver and ends up in the clutches of white slavers. Our last sight of her is on the ship carrying her and other girls off to an unknown destination abroad.

A story like that should be unfilmable. It is almost impossible to eschew striving for effect, whether the approach taken is driven by emotion or by naturalism, yet Csaba Bollók has managed to avoid all the pitfalls. This is because of his documentary approach—this film hardly seems scripted at all—and almost total absence of any of the usual devices for relating or dramatising stories. (Major Hungarian documentaries such as Tamás Almási's *Barren* (on children iron-pickers) or Ibolya Fekete's *Travels with a Friar* (on a Franciscan in Romania who offers refuge and succour to children) make us aware of the authenticity of *Iska's Journey.*) The sense of a faithful reflection of reality is borne out by a wonderful cast, some amateur and some professional. The two girls—feisty, freckled Iska and puny, sad-faced Rosie—are "acted" by a pair of real-life sisters (Mária and Rózsa Varga), who come over as if a hidden camera had been tracking their lives. These two set an example for all involved in the film; the fact that they measure up to that must largely be put down to Bollók's self-effacement. Critics are often too willing to hand out accolades to the point that they become devalued, but this is not the case here. All the viewer has to do with *Iska's Journey* is to sit and watch. There is nothing that needs to be puzzled out or interpreted, nothing to guess and nothing to doubt.

The only reservation that comes to mind is the appearance of pimps and prostitutes at the end, with commonplace criminal aspects hijacking the film. Perhaps we are not so willing to confront the stumbling blocks our systems of child protection have to face. What to do when children, if given the chance, almost invariably opt to remain with their own parents or family, no matter how abusive or neglectful, rather than stay in an institution that can offer a secure environment? Or what about the dangers that attend adolescence, even for those from good backgrounds, and the regular failure of institutionalised care to cope with them. We may ponder whether the ending of Iska's story is banal or not, but the prostitution for which the girls on board the ship are bound is the most likely fate for Iska, only a couple of years younger than them.

Iska's story could almost have been hit upon by Árpád Bogdán for his first feature film, which tries to find out what happens to children in care once they step out into the wide world. The protagonist of *Happy New Life* is a 20-year-old Roma, two years out of care; his situation would appear enviable to many Hungarian Roma, in that he has learned a trade, has a qualification, a regular, full-time job and even his own place to live. What he does not have is a sense of his own identity, and the film suggests that this can be more insidious or detrimental than starvation, unemployment or homelessness. How can someone be fully rounded if he has no knowledge of his past, of where he has come from, or of who he is? Bogdán's film makes a number of assertions that should disturb those working in child care. He claims that someone born in the most wretched hovel and growing up in the direst poverty, without education or training and without a hope of getting on in life, has a greater chance of happiness than someone raised in a materially well appointed but sterile environment, divorced from real life.

The film's (unnamed) hero asks his former instructor for his records, but the documents are cold official jargon about an uncommunicative child who does not play properly with toys and is indifferent to other people and the outside world. There is not a word about his family or what has happened to his parents or siblings—or why he was taken into care. He has preserved dim memories of a young woman in a floral-print dress (his mother) and of police with dogs bursting in on the family—presumably the time when he passed into the state care system. Fifteen years later, his feelings of loneliness and ostracism have not diminished.

Few words are spoken. Árpád Bogdán (who scripted as well as directed the film) has emphasised the visual and the atmospheric through his cinematography, distinctive use of colour, editing and music track. The sterile flat in a high-rise block on a housing estate represents the bleak, grey, impersonal public spaces of the big city. Back in the Sixties this was a setting that epitomised alienation, but here it is something different: it is not his surroundings that the protagonist is alienated from, it is simply that he has always been an outsider. The utter hopelessness of his situation is such that he feels himself an outsider even in the welcoming warmth of Roma communities, whether at the home of a big-mouthed pal or amid the noisy swirl of a Gypsy knees-up. The one and only bond he manages to form is with a much younger girl who has been taken out of a home and is being fostered by his friend's family.

A story like this is hard for both the film-maker and the actor. Árpád Bogdán deals his protagonist a bad hand, but he does not spare the viewer either. This promising and ambitious director would do well to grow out of his Werther syndrome. He does have a sense of humour, and by the look of things his own career is very different from that of the hero of his partly autobiographical film. *Happy New Life* won the prize for Best First Film at the 2007 Budapest Film Week and was invited to this year's Berlin Film Festival where it received an honourable mention.

The idea that Bogdán might be under the thrall of youthful implacability was splendidly vindicated by some films from directors of venerable years, which display *joie de vivre* in abundance. Miklós Jancsó's creative energy seems undiminished, with *Ed's Eaten Elevenses,* the sixth film he has produced in a series that began with *God's Lantern in Budapest* back in 1998; Pál Sándor, who has not made a feature film for eighteen years, has now come back with *Noah's Ark,* while hope obviously also springs eternal for Judit Elek with *The Eighth Day of the Week.* There was also a notable return or renewal (indeed, a return to renewal) from Gyula Maár,

who has negotiated a happy marriage between the black-and-white cinema of Béla Tarr (who produced the film) with his own inclination to the abstract in *Fragment,* dedicated to the memory of Simone Weil and the great Hungarian poet János Pilinszky.

Another outsider is dealt with in *The Émigré.* The directing duo of Györgyi Szalai and István Dárday show the final years in San Diego of an outsider par excellence, the writer Sándor Márai and his wife Lola.* He had left Hungary in 1948 and refused either to return or to allow his works to be published there as long as the Communists were in power. Márai took his own life at the age of ninety, only months before Communism collapsed, after he had lost his wife, adopted son and brother (the film director Géza Radványi) in quick succession, and his isolation became too oppressive for him. At his advanced age, he might well have found it difficult to find a place in a homeland that he had last seen over forty years before, most especially in the delirious euphoria that swept Hungary in the latter half of 1989. Nor perhaps would he have found it easy to cope with the demands of the international success that his literary works have enjoyed since then.

If there is a common thread that links the films presented at this year's Film Week, it might be the distinct turning away from the particular and towards regional or even wider concerns. A recurrent gripe about Hungarian films has been that they are too self-absorbed, too inward-looking (which is not the same as saying they deal with local issues and individuals). For many years, even casting a foreigner in a Hungarian film would trigger angry debate and protests. There were some who refused to acknowledge István Szabó as a Hungarian film director once he had embarked on his trilogy on the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy with the Oscar-winning *Mephisto.* Now there are signs that this is very much a thing of the past: it is slowly coming to be accepted as natural that Hungarian films should be made with foreign actors or producers, ranging from *Children of Glory,* the film about the 1956 Hungarian revolution produced by Andrew Vajna, through *Iska's Journey* or the Márai film, to *Opium* (Best Direction) and *Dolina* (Best Script), the two most eagerly awaited films at the Film Week. I shall turn to these last two in the next issue. ❧

* ■ Márai has featured frequently in this journal, including extracts from his San Diego journals in *HQ 173* and from his journalism and travel writing in this issue.

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Look in the empty streets, and into the faces white with rage, where every movement bespeaks hatred, despair and contempt. What is Europe doing here, what does it want of them, why does it choose to bless them with its tanks and flying machines? And what would happen if these crowds ever stirred themselves and in one concerted single blow struck back at us Europeans in our homelands, with our ridiculous houses, our tanks and treaties, and drove us from a world where, through our greed-fuelled, avaricious, wickedly cruel behaviour, we have totally forfeited their respect. "Islam prescribes the sword"...

From **In the Footsteps of the Gods** *(1927) by Sándor Márai, pp. 56-66*

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