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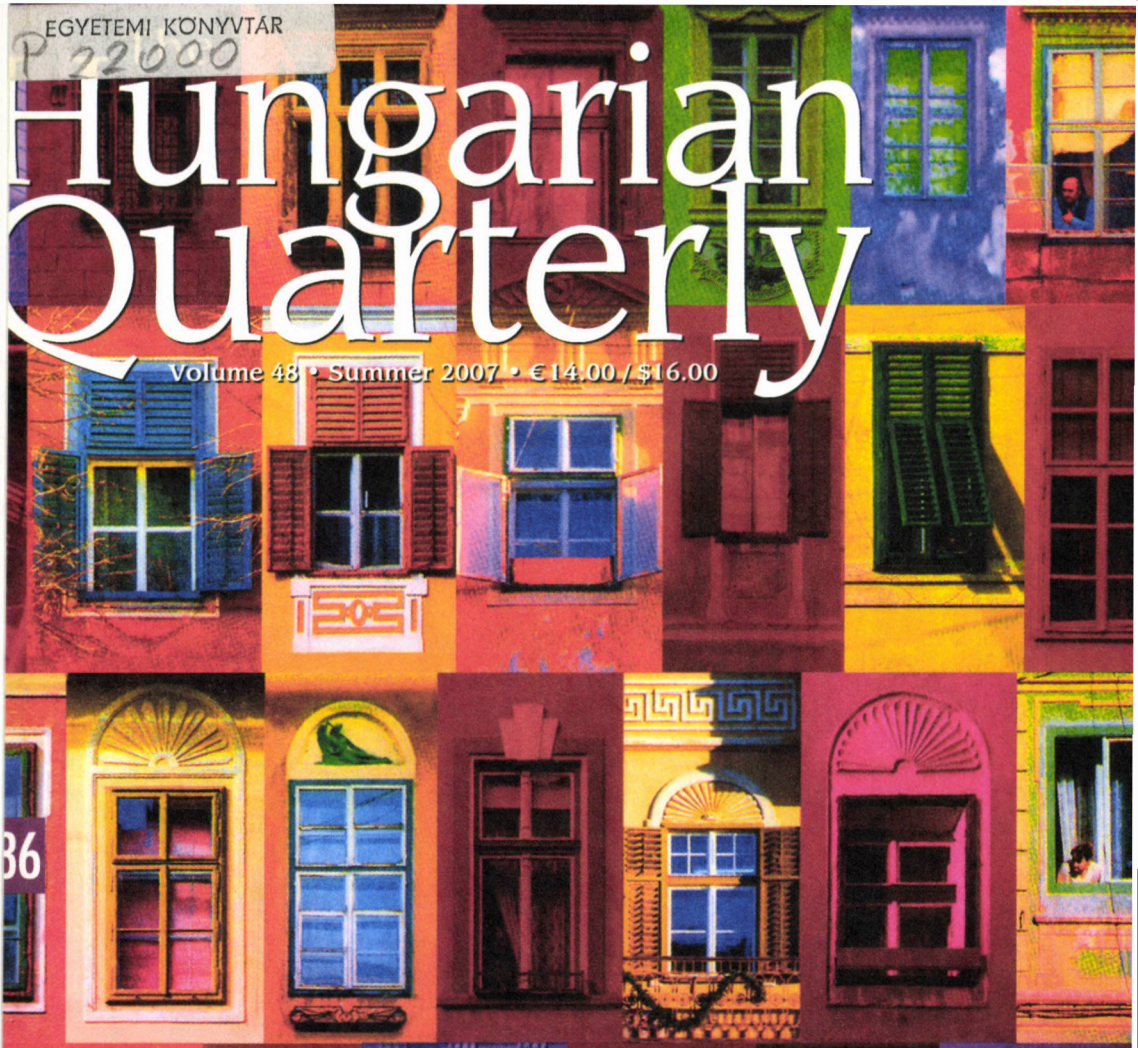

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A photo and video project by PÉTER SZABÓ

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Zsófia Zachár, Editor

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BUDAPEST

Cover: *From* Hermannstadt, Porträt einer Stadt in Siebenbürgen *by Hermann and Alida Fabini.*
Back cover: *Sándor Márai on the balcony of his Krisztina Town apartment around 1942. Photograph by Sándor Bojár.*

Ágnes Nemes Nagy

Kassák Sketches

Kassák owned a copper-coloured pigeon. A strong bird, sturdy, even its eyes were copper. It had come into his possession through some special pigeon-breeding establishment and palpably occupied no ordinary position among the master of the house's other pigeons. That was evident from the way it posed, all stuck-up, at a table edge, with marvellous streamlined roundedness. Its neck. Its breast. The lower belly as it petered out precisely in an elongated parabola. It reminded me most of all of a semi-abstract sculpture of hammered copper on which there is "not a superfluous scrap".

The moment I stepped closer, it pecked my right arm so fiercely that it drew blood.

"I told you not to touch it," Kassák fumed.

"A domestic pigeon tolerates that," I fumed back, because I was not used to behaviour like that from animals.

"It's not that sort of domestic pigeon," he rejoined.

This was his favourite pigeon, of course. As soon as the wild creature resumed its stiff immobility after delivering the peck it did not stand out from the room's

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Ágnes Nemes Nagy

(1922–1991) was a poet, essayist and translator. After the war she and her husband, the critic Balázs Lengyel, founded Újhold, *a literary journal, which was banned in 1948. Unable to publish, she translated and taught in a secondary school. Her translations include work by Corneille, Racine, Molière, Victor Hugo, Saint-John Perse, Rilke and Brecht. Selections from her poems have been published in translations by Bruce Berlind, Hugh Maxton and George Szirtes. A selection from her essays was published by The Mellen Press in 1998.*

Lajos Kassák

(1887–1967) was the one-man Hungarian avant-garde movement in poetry and the arts. Selections from his poetry and prose have appeared in several issues of this journal, including his finest and most famous long poem, written in 1922, The Horse Dies the Birds Fly Away. *Overruling our own practice, we reprint it on pp. 6–20 of this issue in Edwin Morgan's version. The poem tells the story of a journey, or walk rather, to Paris in 1909, which transformed Kassák, an uneducated working-class lad, into a poet and artist. Kassák's status as poet, prose writer, painter, graphic artist, editor of many journals and theorist of the avant-garde stands undisputed in the history of Hungarian modernism. His poetry influenced the work of major poets like Attila József, Miklós Radnóti and Ágnes Nemes Nagy.*

furnishings. The pictures and streamlines of Kassák's environs. It just posed and gazed with those red eyes. An irate museum object.

It took a fair while before I managed to unravel the two axioms that formed the point of departure for Kassák's art. The one was to obliterate everything that had gone before; the other, to create new things that in no ways resembled the old. The analogy: as in society. These had long been commonplaces of literary history in respect of the intentions of the avant-garde. Ah yes, but it's one thing to be acquainted with such matters and quite another to be confronted by the sixty-year-old avant-garde on the street. To be sure, it was hard going for me to accept that Kassák actually wanted what he declared he wanted.

All manner of things followed from his principles. For instance, that in his eyes a poet who wrote rhyming verse was not a bad or obsolete versifier but a coward. Or a reactionary. How many times did he say, in the early days of our acquaintanceship, on occasions when we clashed: "Have the courage to ditch established forms." I need hardly say that I took not the slightest notice of that injunction. I was a child of a different time, different circumstances; the antithesis of courage and cowardice resided in quite another location inside me than did that of rhymed-unrhymed. I considered his principles of prosody to be simply a sign of his one-sidedness, a case of overhasty dogmatism. If he had demanded the opposite from me, I would have looked on that the same way. It was a long, hard job for me, weighing up his axioms over and over again, to grasp that it was not as simple as that.

They had indeed discovered something at the fin de siècle or the beginning of the present century. But what? It is not easy to answer that. Modern art? That is to be far too general. Free verse? That's a piffling detail. A new world? Romantic playing with words. At all events, more of their impossibly grand—one might say cumbersomely grand—designs were fulfilled than anyone could have thought. After all, it was they who embarked on what, almost a century later, is more or less the lingua franca of poetry.

Kassák loomed in my life like a phantom classic car. It was as if a Ford automobile of 1900s vintage had slowly pulled into our street. It was not his modernity that first impressed me but his antiquity.

Then again his novelty. Old—new, new—old: how often I turned that antithesis over in my mind. But why was I turning it over so late in the day (in relation to the clock of world literature), in the late Forties and early Fifties?

I shall try to answer that first of all in my capacity as a private person. The reason is that it was then that I realised I could no longer write in the way I had done up till then. It happens to every poet several times in the course of her or his life. In my case it occurred after the initial youthful élan and the first unquestioning volume, and that just happened to be—*post hoc ergo propter hoc*?—in the early Fifties. I started groping blindly for tools, words; it was above all the spaces between words that came to hand. And that went on bit by bit until, one way or another, I had built up for myself a form of poetic diction into which I was able to cram the maximum amount possible of ellipsis. To start with, I only expatiated on associations, tinkered with dropping form;

then, emboldened by that, I tore up the rational links, eliminated the self of the author, omitted subject and predicate. Around a decade and a half later it turned out that I wasn't exactly setting the world on fire. The poetry mainstream had carried on flowing behind my back, and when I was able to face up to it again I found, with a touch of astonishment and delight, that I both resembled it and yet didn't.

About what did I not see eye to eye with him? His axioms. I never felt that his obliteration of the art of the past was either necessary or feasible. Anyway, my life would not be worth a button without Sophocles or Csokonai. I also looked askance on his idea of "totally new" art. Not that he meant it like that. He continually astonished me with his intellectual appetite. He was seventy-six years old when he demanded that I give him the low-down on the alexandrine, its structure, history, everything possible.

The zest—that I did grasp. The power of the deep-rooted eruptions, the social and intellectual fervour, shone through despite the forty-year age difference, the disagreements, geological eras. He could not strive for less than what he wanted.

Then there was his renowned obstinacy. A turn-of-the-century proletarian, a pencil-wielding foreman, chorusmaster for innumerable isms, even at eighty years of age he was as hale as many thirty-year-olds, somehow reminding one of the lions that, in Rilke's phrase, "know no decline".

What was the basic relationship between us? Kassák impressed me. I noted that feeling all the more as fate decreed that it would not bless me with it too often. I knew him for twenty years, from his sixtieth to his eightieth year. During that time I had plenty of opportunity to become acquainted with his sovereignty, with the way an old person resists temptation. The temptations of old age are not less than those of youth. Who knows how much time one has to rebel against the world. Or to what end. But he, the perennial rebel, never posed himself questions like that. He couldn't give a damn about his own age, because at any time, whatever the situation, he only ever sought to find salvation in his own way.

To put it another way: he was able to renounce things. It was this, this first and foremost, that was impressive about him. He did not renounce things because he was an ascetic; he wasn't, he had the same desires for one thing and another, for worldly good, for fame and fortune, as people (writers) generally do. And how greatly he was still able to delight, at the age of seventy or eighty, each time he gained some late token of recognition! That late delight, that vitality, too, was no trivial lesson for those who knew him.

But the point on which I was closest to him I cannot even put a name to. It was the kernel of his individuality, a kind of steadfastness, the untarnishable sameness of old metals. It is no use my trying to define it. All I know is the response to this quality: I esteemed Kassák. Beyond differences and similarities, beyond disputes and human interaction, let me say it again, doffing my hat: I esteem him. ❧

(1975)

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

Lajos Kassák

The Horse Dies the Birds Fly Away

A ló meghal a madarak kirepülnek

Translated by Edwin Morgan

Now I heard time neighing I mean it parrotishly spread its wings
I say gapingwide red gate
with my lover black diamonds bricked into her face and
trailing 3 children
in desperation
we sat under factory chimneys
we knew tomorrow the winding lines
ho zhoop ho zhoop
and she said my Kashi I know you're going off and for me it's
shrivelling on the daïs and modelling for mister nadler's
cacocanvases
what else
what else
the lord god lets pretty women slip out of his mind
already the demichrist the woodcarver is here
young reeking with truth not to be put down
tomorrow we'll be over the hungarian border
well yes h'm yes
what else what else
the city flew past
squirmed to and fro and then reared up
I saw my father's crumpled straw hat floating over the chemist's

---

Edwin Morgan

(b. 1920), since 2004 the Scots Makar, or Poet Laureate of Scotland, has translated poetry from many language including more than two dozen poems by

Lajos Kassák

(1887–1967) the important writer, painter, critic, editor and theorist of the avant-garde. For his services to Hungarian literature Edwin Morgan has been decorated by the Hungarian government and awarded the Hungarian PEN Club's Gold Medal.

frosted glass
to the holy trinity statue and back
ah well the old man dreamed I'd be a chaplain at 21 in the parish of érsekújvár
but just ten years earlier I fed on smoke in the workshop of mister sporni the locksmith
and now the old man very seldom came home to us
and soon my well-planned future was soaked in and pissed out with his beer
he fell in love with an old cleaner
his hair dropped out he had no friends but gypsies
25 April 1909
I was ready to walk to Paris with the woodcarver
the hick town squatted in its puddle and squeezed its accordeon
on saint Christopher I must take my sings off you you will never be your father's son
a drunk sobbed crocodile tears
as I propped up the wall of the Golden Lion inn
I felt everything was at an end
a red railway-track ran through me and bells rang in the towers
pigeons tumbled above the roofs
no they galloped with the suncart
the new franciscan bell just about sang
he who prepared for sleep should brighten up the lead bars
the hours are spectres on white sheepdogs
I felt everything was at an end
vintners and haberdashers shut up shop
good friend go back to your children go back now
the wheels have stopped turning back
man casts his milk-teeth and stares into the emptiness where life devours its own tail
into the emptiness
oh jiramari
oh lebli
oh BOom BOomm
but the ship bobbed us along like a pregnant woman
and behind us there was at least someone manoeuvring the scenes into place
this was the first slashed-across day in my life
torches and bottomless pits flickered inside me
papagallum
oh fumigo
papagallum

coppery birds crowed in bands of twenty on the bank
the hanged were swaying from the trees and crowing too
now and again we got glances from the brooding corpses
in the river-bed
but we were 21
the woodcarver's chin sprouted an ugly frizz of pink
bristles
otherwise we lived all right
but for the diagonal of our bellies
it was useless though we tightened the screws the oxen
made off again and again into the stubble-fields
and it was all we could do the scrape our eyes off girls'
ankles
at times like these I always gave vent to cries like
cymbals
Vienna saw us sleeping rough 3 days
then finally we wrenched ourselves out of ourselves what
is civilization after all
you smear yourself with a glaze of enamel and start
shuddering
at the lice
well what are family ties
you eke out your umbilical cord with silk ribbon
well what's the worship of god
you take on fear to get shot of fear
we nailed the highways to our soles and the sun was with
us in space on his golden seven-league-feet
believe me the elephant is not bigger than the flea
red is not redder than white
and if we really went, we went
ahead only on kamaralogos if we set up the scales when
were we ever better off
and then our eyes were opened
and soon we were deep like the black wells in mining
country and so we continued
13 angels walked ahead of us
on foot too
and sang for us about our youth
we were already well-tried tramps with tame fleas in
our armpits
we enjoyed fruit from the roadside ditch
sour milk
and jewish community funds

and we had brothers round us oh from everywhere
wonderful skins like brick a world's languages on their
lips
each had his special smell
and some had been planed to the bone by kilometers and
others came with milky mouths from their mother's breast
the roads lay under us in white quilts
the telegraph-wires jerked tight and wrote
mantras on the sky
at night we glimpsed the flowers blooming between women's legs
but we were vegetarians and misogynists
and dragged ourselves through Passau
Aachen
Antwerp
the woodcarver grew splinter-thin and his beard pure ginger
poems and hajura forests began to spring up in my head and
swam twice across the light-rivers
in front of us the rats on their big rafts festooned with birds'
eggs and trouser-buttons
letters from my lovers were waiting for me in post-boxes
but I knew nights were worst for lice
so I got to work on my poems then and they streamed
from my head like some golden-fleeced flock of sheep
these are certainly the most timorous put-upon creatures
but let someone stick the slate behind his ear
the startled shutters roll down
this is our life
at all the stations customs-officers stamp our hearts and we only
swim further away to where
dawn is
in fact it would be more sensible if everybody dealt in
sweet tree-roots or glucose
ration the world you live in
no trouble for us to leave it behind 50 kilometers a day
in tunnels on hill-crests and in soundless german forests
we notice the fresh dung smell of the fields
the mountains swivel round at times and the trees shiver in the
wind like zithers
the trees what are they but pregnant girls
but look closely—the boundary—stone and they are pregnant girls too
in a low voice they confess to each other:
if he leaves me I'll kill myself
yesterday I was hemming nappies with gold thread all day

little angel she'll be christened I'll hang cherries of diamond
in her ears
or perhaps all they say is:
every man's but a lame dog
the mountains are arched right over us now
and still the giant snake gulps down the sun with a smack
I'll come to be a poet someday
well then let's swing the rattles anyhow what's the cause
of the fuss but miss anna's tantrums
yesterday I sent home a couple of poems to independent hungary
and again we dropped back to Stuttgart
we sat at the beggars' table ate jam tarts
and a styrian peasant's heart gleamed down from the rafters
mass was celebrated by the SALVATION ARMY in the courtyard next door
flutes and clarinets were shrill under the stars
we saw the young mothers bowed over by the yellow glass owls
o lamb of god who takest away the sins of the world
the demichrist began to get going again in the woodcarver
and was determined to speak at all costs
shut your great trap the styrian peasant shouted
as he shoved his heart under our very noses
look at it 7 rusty daggers went through it
7 lies my lover told me my dear brothers
see this green border here on the right
it's the last mark of my master's teeth my dear brothers
I am 26 and my life has been as pure as the morning dew
in winter I was all day sweeping the yard
in summer I brought in the happy crop
hey ai-yy man's fate is like the
all eyes were opened and behind the walls we saw the world
change its cloak
budapest-paris-berlin-kamchatka-stpetersburg
the woodcarver was drunk by this time and sadness seeped from
his eyes like something from gutters
the cries kept making for the corners to snuff their flames
swear you'll put faith in nothing now except the magic
power of neat long-john elastic
I demanded out of the blue
and I saw my voice approaching from the neighbouring courtyard
I am a poet
after all I know
the lanterns burn well because twice turatamo
and full of paraffin

what biting misery was in me I wanted to give something to
these wretched
people
but the stars had already left guard-duty
the 13 angels are probably snoring now with their mouths open
on the attic stairs
my lord god
the bugs are marching down from the walls in red battalions
we should all rub salt on our nose
see how brief life is
but after all we'll be tomcats yet on the fire-walls of paris
hushaby baby hushaby so
the man falls asleep
so the verticals become horizontals
and vice versa
and ink-children skip down from the sky
come with me come through the garden
over there on the river-bank Mary rocks her son to sleep
we must all snap the bolts over our minds
my memories go phosphorescent on the floor in puddles of yellow
in the corners the rucksacks opened up and started barking at
me like crazy things
I cradled the whole garden in my lap like
Mary with her son
and further down look
here are the good man-fridays with their 1 1/2 marks
sighs glaze
flowers flower
ah well here you are too
I and you
I
on you
won't you lock your knees over me
little woman my
own silver salamander
parrot
frogging of my life
fruit-tree
plucked-out star
ah no ah no
we should all twist the glass stoppers
the hours quit their starcoops
and the elephants swing towards the east with their long

corky trunks
the first sound I heard was a gramophone bawling from the suburbs
the woodcarver had to stay in bed this morning
I think I've had it he said I think I've had it
the beggar-queen stood with an enormous washing-up basin over her head
the bonehead cuckoo emerged from the clock with his humble becks and bows
I think I've had it the woodcarver cried I think I've had it
and everyone saw death
passing twice through the room
but why must you leave us my brother
why
you have not yet driven the herd home from the meadows
you have not yet lit the lamps in your yellow hair
and in your eyes too the serpents all lie asleep
oh never mind the kitschy coffeepot that bit the housemaid's navel
and now the two of them lie pregnant
I think I've had it the woodcarver shrieked I think I've had it
and the houses leaned towards the church in a long slow rhythm
a single creamy foal poked its head through the window
and whinnied
who'll buy my coat I also said
5 crowns going gone for 5 crowns
and suddenly the mountain roads began to rush down
so to go
once more to go
I have not seen the poor woodcarver since that time
for all that we were the best of friends and his nocturnal
beard glowed before me like the burning bush
2 weeks I wandered alone
I was sad as an old donkey and I
washed my head in every puddle
I would have washed away my memories which had sunk dreadful claws in my brain
and it's true they brandished black banners down towards the river-banks
but which bank which bank
I felt I shared banks with a headlong river
rich only in green frogs and stunted palms
because by then I was a poet inoperably

in regular correspondence with my lover
and I knew if I sliced my chest out would pour pure
gold from my heart
these belgian peasants what makes them such scruffs
these chauvinist brutes what do they know yet of the ways
of the world
I can stand in the midst of them to no end
not one of them can see my forehead star
I was like the 7 orphans
but for all that the winding lines met in me here
here I met szittya who arrived from zurich and was bound
for chile as a self-appointed guru
I really did think he would come to something
his ears had gone scabby in the strangest way
we sprawled about the antwerp quays and he harangued the
cotton-bales and
sprat-barrels
fellow-citizens he sang out fellow-citizens
rabbits are the most prolific fowl and the mills are
smuggling rat's-teeth in among the corn
still you know they grind just the same and this is not
pointless
what are you afraid of you useless creatures
my words were flaring already in the meadow flowers
an end to those who need a point of rest
in the morning we set off towards the sun we made for
god's wayside inn
lilies unfolded in my wretched mind
it is true in the morning we set off towards the sun for god's
wayside inn
in the thatched barn we shall drink lacrima christi and
plum brandy
oh but there's always one crocodile that slides down into
all good folks' fate
and he who came from the zurich hostel and was bound for
chile as a self-appointed guru
got a dose of clap this night in the seamen's brothel in
the rue de rivoli
and the card-castles collapsed silently
fences rose around us like those you see in the zoo
21 times in succession I called up to the sky
latabagomar
o talatta

latabagomar and finfi
the discs rotated without interruption
craftsmen's black hands should be sawn off
the cabinetmakers thrust out every knot from its place
the locksmiths cannot fit their bolts
no surprise if our cages disintegrate one day
look how Isabel has lost one of her gloves too
oh well why on earth should anyone worry about us poor miserable three-eyed things
birds flap over the houses and fly off to other countries
szittya forgot the key of the new religion left it in the changing-room
and that first day he cried and cried for it like a child
then he spread vaseline on his ears and we went away towards brussels
like people who had been robbed
we gave up everything in the knowledge that time alone would understand us
oh it will never let us fall from its embrace
in the evening we were already sitting at the long tables of the mansion du peuple
and we smoked straight belgian tobacco
saw vandervelde walking across the hall to the socialist secretariat
other well-known leaders were dealing new playing-cards in front of the cashier
the place was a gigantic reservoir brimming with a mush of men
blue-eyed russians betrothed to the revolution
oil-rancid dutchmen
prussians
wiry montagnards
magyars with droopy moustaches
pathetic garibaldi-clansmen
everyone but everyone was here who was down and out and whose home
had no bread
some shoulders held up the sleepless skyscrapers of new york
some eyes had hatred leaning redly out of them
look how the world's strongest energies move out from the station
hurricanes are roaring
telephone wires are screeching from the heart of moscow

tovarishch smooth your dress at the piano
we are threaded by waiters with black soups
knots of proletarians are seen outside cinemas
the man in the cooperative hands out his tickets in tens
dogs scurry up the split-toothed walls and sing like old women
somebody said down with the oligarchy
and suddenly:
rome
paris
tiflis
stockholm
samarkand
and the mines of the ruhr
can you hear the little town-hall bells of munich
in florence the pigeons sleep on the apostles' shoulders
everybody knew god's hour must now be near
the skin of fanatics twitches faster than the seismograph
and every one of us is scratching
tovarishch smooth your dress at the piano
up
up
oh if I could now latch onto my lover's diamond eyes
the salamanders have set sail beside the central lamp
szittya was already lying in the red pools asleep
as beautiful now as a young bulldog
even in an hour there are many ways of getting rich
supposing we were sharp like say a camera
but man is always the hermetic one and worlds he never feels
wheel past over his skin
at midnight we went to the petit passage and the russian
meeting
a blond tovarishch spoke he was just like a child
his lips bloomed with flames and his hands flew like red
pigeons
are we not all descendants of dostoevsky's possessed
we bit off for ourselves the seventh head of sentimentality
and wanted to bring everything down in ruins
oh Russia land under a curse
who could see your helpless pain if your star-branded
sons would not
europe spits at the asian in us
but for all that we are the ones to climb the peak
certainly the astrakhan baker girl or the st.petersburg whore

will one day give birth to the new man
russia is pregnant with revolution's red spring
but the steppes of russia are slow and loath to bloom
but russia is like the land that has never been cultivated
help then
brothers
luckless sons like us of europe
help help!
and we watched his head burst into flames beneath his old cap
we all set in his palm
three cheers for Russia! long live! zhivio! three cheers!
then a hump fell off from my back
frost-flowers blossomed on windows
and szittya who was to become police spy and agent-provocateur
kissed his russian coat
I'm as pure as a child
he said—if I didn't have the clap I'd go to tsarskoye selo
and kill the tsar
this was one night we kept off the brandy
we washed our feet and put love out of our minds
a hungarian printer who later got 12 years for revolt took
cards and told the
housemaid's fortune
and we sang softly sang far-sounding
at last then at last
the time has come and we are mature like grafted trees
and we thought the gold flags of march were deployed above us
the swans perched up on swings and gave a two-tone laugh
on edward square I yearned to offer myself for the table of
the poor
but dawn found the belgian police coming after us at very
first light
there were no baedekered strangers gathered at the pissing
statue
those squalid streets actually thought themselves in paris
the golden-scrolled town-hall mocked at us
as we took our chained hands in the pouring blue
down the steep stairs
in front of the iron-hooped potato-roasters
through tavern swill
through the morning stench of fishmongers
miserable tramps herded together by the law and about to see
god die in them

in the rue mouffetard we met the whores
I was happy
it pleased me greatly that at daybreak they could look so
beautiful
their chignons leaned into the leaning whitewashed wind
a diamond veil hid the sun peering at them from the fire-walls
ours was a saintly vigil all through the night
and now their cigarettes made me wet my lips
wish I could scratch my back groaned szittya
who not so long ago was a messiah bound for chile
somebody waved a white sheet from a balcony
the blond russchild came into our minds the one who
lived on flames
like marinetti futurist god
and loved russia with more than a son's love
now they throw him over the belgian frontier and one
blue morning he'll hang in front of the kremlin
help then
brothers
luckless sons like us of europe
help! help!
what am I but a plain-minded poet there's an edge in
my voice that's all
what good is it to stick the tumaronian witch with a
paper sword
12 days we sat in the vagrants' detention-barracks which
reeked of mice
105 of us in a single hall
day and night
night and day
at night we dreamed of highways and we squashed bugs
in the morning we got warm water at midday cold porridge
and all day long we had to pray aloud
unintelligible belgian prayers with the bearded guard who
was perched up on a high platform
like some idol
then we were driven to the french border in dark green wagons
I found 9 sorts of birds' eggs in the nests
my lord god
here comes paris
of which I have heard resounding wonders
and which is still unknown to me
I know the french coat-of-arms has a red cock in it

I know french soil is blessed with girls and arts
at crack of dawn zola's peasants were swimming on silver guitars
the seine deposited its blue bodies on the grassy bank
szittya talked about dunajec the hungarian teacher
violin virtuoso now in the chat noir
9 lovers he has alien french girls war-horses from
the franco-german war
I glanced through my notes I have now seen 3004 christpictures
I found 9 sorts of birds' eggs in the nests
I shooed off 2 cows at liège
therefore
I was 300 kilometers from paris
and above our heads parrots went about on crutches
O PARIS!
PARIS!
endre ady saw you naked and guillaume apollinaire
simultaneist poet was born over your bloody rubble
we felt pretty sure we had the smell of pilgrims
and every day we walked 60-70 kilometers
and approached the shadow of the iron tower
buy our blisters we called out to the people
buy our blisters kept in excellent condition
if you pierce it with a fine pin you don't get the aftertaste of burning
the french all in all are not unlike the belgians
bavaria has the decentest of the dummkopf brigade
it could be good malt beer got them that way
it could be also that in fact christian philosophy set on sealing-wax in them
our necks were forever burdened with the swollen lachrymal sacs we had swinging there
like a brace of heavy salty cowbells
for days we lacked lodgings
oh why did our mothers give birth to us if they were unable
to set a house on our back at the start?
a jailer otherwise a shoemaker
pushed us half a day into the straw
out of yellow pipes with lances pliers and russian pikes lice
paid us visits
but this was nothing
we slept on our faroff moonswing to flutemusic
somebody sang and sang above us

YOU ARE MY TWO INDEX FINGERS
and we had morning coffee round the skirt of the shoemaker's wife
who remarked I had very nice hair
and on closer look I was like a lad called igor
who drowned himself in the seine 20 years ago all for love of her
that black coffee mulled about priestlike in our bellies and I promised
I'd send her a picture postcard from Paris with
two clasped hands and a pigeon billing and cooing on it
PARIS O PARIS city of fine suicides
and who knows why
and I shall never forget her voice
she cried through the whistle of the customs-officers
and laughed through the electric horns of the city
laugh then you fool
can't you see you're snug in a gold-nest of life
Paris is dandling us boy said szittya and completely forgot his clap
once I even milked angels' blood from the stars here
compared to that my mother's milk was sodawater
pin up your wings
tomorrow we're going to GRIZETTE
tomorrow we'll be slipping oysters over on the boulevard italien and we'll take a look at the electric birds
tomorrow we'll try the tuileries
and the star-bar
ah yes
yes
sad sad feeling the nails growing on my sick legs
pain oh
pain
I'm reached by miracles bearded and plasterless
2 x 2 = 4
briars spread everywhere
but modern horses have teeth of iron
and he who starts off in the morning can never be sure to get home in the evening
happiest of all is the reversible skin man
for who can look beyond himself
what we set up is set up
but what we set up has no meaning

the rivers will splinter in shreds if they have to hurry
gentlemen can hardly walk on two legs like sparrows
we know women leave their husbands
the monkeys examined their backsides in mister goldmann's
mirrors and have absolutely no complaints
say I could play chess
yet I'm really good at nothing
sliced pig-shanks sit on shopwindow merry-go-round
I saw paris I saw nothing
my lover waited for me pregnant at angyalföld station
my mother in her poverty was already a lemonhead
I could have laughed in front of them but embarrassment
took over
for I had two pairs of trousers on and no underpants
certainly the poet can either construct something that
pleases him
or he's at liberty to collect cigar-stubs
or
or
birds have devoured the voice
yet the trees went on singing
this is already a sign of old age
but it means nothing
I am LAJOS KASSÁK
and our heads twist up for the flight of the nickel
samovar.

(1922)

Tim Wilkinson

Rom Wasn't Built in a Day, Either

Endre Kukorelly: *Rom. A komonizmus története*
(Második, javított, bővített kiadás) (Ruin: A History of Commonism. [2nd, revised, enlarged edition]). Bratislava, Kalligram, 2006, 189 pp.

"The first and only previous edition of this book was published... years ago... It had a steady sale though a small one; and in preparing a second edition the wishes of the buyers ought to be considered... Sometimes the footnotes disagree with the text above them... I was surprised there was so little of the book I should prefer to change. My attitude in writing it was that an honest man erected the ignoring of 'tact' into a point of honour... etc., etc." I could go on, but this is not Kukorelly justifying a second edition of his book: it is actually the preface that William Empson wrote in 1947 to a new edition of *Seven Types of Ambiguity,* that classic of literary criticism.

It so happens that the very first bit of my own writing to appear in *The Hungarian Quarterly* (*HQ* 160) was a review of four books, among which were what we now know were the first edition of Kukorelly's *Ruin,* then subtitled as "A History of the Soviet *O*nion", or "Ur*n*ion" as I now choose to render it ("Ur" in the sense of original or primitive, as in Urtext), and also—this is pertinent—Péter Esterházy's *Harmonia Cœlestis* (Celestial Harmonies).

Ambiguity is built into the very title of both these utterly fascinating works. The Hungarian word 'rom' normally means 'ruin', but it also acquired a separate existence as the name chosen by the poet Mihály Vörösmarty for a quite spurious (Magyar) deity in a narrative poem entitled *"A Rom"* (1829–30). That connection is made absolutely explicit in Kukorelly's choice of this short quotation as the epigraph for the entire volume (old and revised editions):

Tim Wilkinson,

Yorkshire bred, has been translating from Hungarian since a spell in Budapest in the early Seventies. His translations have covered historical, cultural and sociological topics relating to Hungary and, increasingly, Hungarian literary works. Of three novels by Imre Kertész that have appeared in the USA and UK, his new translation of Fatelessness *was awarded the 43rd Annual PEN Club/Book of the Month Translation Prize for 2005 and in the UK was runner-up for the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize 2006.*

De azonban győze Romisten
however Ruin-God/the God Rom prevailed
(Mihály Vörösmarty: *The Ruin*)

The poem starts: *"Where the sun grows languid on Shiva's endless desert sands / And the tides of peaceful Lake Aral subside without a sound..."* A few lines further on (but still part of the opening sentence) comes a short passage that is used as an epigraph to old Chapter 13 (about the 1956 revolution) and new Chapter 23 (about the value of a Hungarian passport at border crossings in the West):

Where gloomy was the appearance of the Sun when it came up,
And gloomy when it went down, seeing no living thing around
Whither the oldster shuffled off with heavy feet of lead,
What was illumined before leaves behind nothing more
To wonder at—that is where Ruin wished to dwell,...

A lot has changed over the intervening period of getting on for seven years, and I feel it is worth outlining what is the same and what has changed.

To begin with, in its first incarnation, *Rom* was a pocket-sized book of 122 pages in a stiff card cover, comprising 22 numbered chapters plus a Coda. The new edition is hardbound and about double the length, now having 30 chapters plus a Coda. The expansion is most noticeable in the numbered notes supplied in a single section at the end of the main text: whereas there were originally 54 notes running to 10 pages; now there are 145 notes running to 35 pages. As far as I can tell, virtually all of the old text is still in the new edition, with perhaps at most cosmetic changes, but the new text has not simply been tacked onto the end. It has been fully integrated, so that there are some old "chapters" with new material as well as some (almost) completely new "chapters". As a result, the old and new "chapter" numberings do not correspond.

To take just the excerpts that have been translated for this issue of *HQ:* the main text of Chapter 1 is unaltered from the first edition, but Note 1 (Letter from Munich, 21 March 1989) has been reshaped, with a quote from the final volume of Márai's *Diary* (1984–1989) being dropped altogether and Notes 3–5 being new. Chapter 3 is essentially unaltered, though it has acquired an epigraph from Camus (the quote from the author's mother was already there) and Note 4, for example, is new material. Chapter 14 is entirely new; Chapter 15 was formerly Chapter 10 (unchanged); Chapter 22 has the quotation from Nietzsche added as an epigraph but is essentially the old Chapter 17, unchanged; the Coda now incorporates the old Chapter 22, which was entitled 'Foam', and radically expands it under the same title (a second part, under the title '666' is carried over unaltered).

Obviously, it would be boring to continue, but I think that is enough to justify the characterisation of the book as a "second, enlarged edition". I shall look at the

"revised" bit shortly, but anyway what is of far more interest to potential readers is whether that significantly alters one's reading of *Ruin*.

The paragraph that I wrote about the first edition seven years ago still largely holds up:

> The uncomfortable message [...] that few of us can escape a share of responsibility, however slight, for the evil that is done in our times, applies equally to Endre Kukorelly's *Ruin,* though here the confrontation is with the shades of a more recent past. The wry twist of the long 'o' in the book's punning subtitle—'A History of the Soviet Onion'—has nothing to do with vegetables, or at most only decayed ones: in the Hungarian language it has connotations of 'antiquated', 'obsolete', 'clapped out'. The decrepitude of the Communist's material world is the least of the targets of the 23 laconic, mostly untitled homilies, bearing various dates between February 1987 and April 2000. They are incandescently scathing and unforgiving reactions to its sheer spiritual bankruptcy, as sparked by Kukorelly's recollections of events in his own life—childhood; the obligatory spell as an army conscript in the wake of the Czech events of 1968; a three-week holiday in the fabled West (London, Paris) in 1978; visits to the Soviet Union in the early 1980s—but more particularly a wide range of illustrative texts. The deepest scorn is directed at fellow-travelling writers, with the biggest punch being consigned to a ghastly 'Coda'. Under the ominous mark of the number 666, this responds to a line from a 1950 poem by Zoltán Zelk, then one of the most servile lackeys of the Stalinist regime *('Comrade, what else should I weave into my song'),* by assembling a series of short verses concerning a death sentence passed by a "people's tribunal", a prisoner's reflections, a search for contraband in a peasant's barn, and a wife's letter to the military authorities enquiring about the fate of a husband condemned to death in 1949. The anger is so all-consuming, not even sparing the author himself, one is left wondering how any identity could survive it.

The Zelk quotation has now been moved to form one of the epigraphs to Chapter 8, which is a prelude to some anecdotes about life for a boy in Hungary of the Fifties and early Sixties, including the mysteries of Cyrillic lettering:

> See-see-see-pee, trots out Pásztor in the Russian lesson and looks up from his book. The language book for eighth graders. Es-es-es-are, our Russian teacher, Mrs Kirschner, would murmur to herself, fabulous breasts she had. All my classmates fancied them too. Pásztor's real name was Pásztuh. He also fancied Mrs Kirschner.
>
> Es-es-es-are, says Mrs Kirschner. You can barely hear her. She turns round, sideways on, really cracking, the turn points them up even better.
>
> And her face is quite different.
>
> She looks out of the window. Or wherever. Utterly weary, numb, indifferent. Pozhalsta, she says to herself, and Pásztor repeats: Es-es-es-are. Good, so now read! See-see-see-pee, Pásztor reads. Nobody laughs.
>
> I don't recall us laughing.

In other words, any punch that may have been lost in sheer, stripped-down savagery is more than made up for by the sustained irony, which makes repeated reading hugely rewarding.

The '666' nevertheless gains added dimensions. Thus, the section following Chapter 5 in the new edition is not Chapter 6 but Chapter 666, and its first epigraph directly quotes its source (if anyone is wondering): *Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred three-score and six* (Rev. xiii.18), this being coupled with an apposite quote from Dostoyevsky's *The Devils.* The chapter in question is a sharp review of Hungarian literature and writers in the first two or three decades after the Second World War, centring mainly (though not exclusively) on pieces published in the June 1966 (6/66) issues of two representative literary magazines: *Kortárs* ('Contemporary') and *Új Írás* ('New Writing').

The old Chapter 6, incidentally, is Chapter 9 in the new edition, with the only change being, significantly enough, that its last sentence appears in the original German *(Der Menschen Worte verstand ich nie)* rather than the translated form ('But human words I've never understood'), from which some may recognise the source as Hölderlin's poem "Da ich ein Knabe war", which Kukorelly draws on in, for instance, the 9 x 9 poem cycles of his 1998 masterpiece *H*ö*l*d*e*r*l*i*n.*

It is perhaps becoming clear that one of the things Kukorelly has done increasingly over the last decade or so is to accrete to and expand the scope of the lives that are recounted in his œuvre. To take a simple example: 'bananas' are mentioned in passing in Note 2 to Chapter 1, but more significantly in Chapter 25.[1]

> I remember the bananas. If I write it down, I have it, the memory functions, it's more the imagination that is lacking. The thing with the bananas was that, as a rule, there were no bananas, but sometimes, no knowing why, a batch would be shipped in. Why of all things there were no bananas, or why there were no bananas when there were oranges, was a mystery; perhaps it was on health grounds, on account of the vitamin intake, they reckoned other kinds of vitamins were necessary. There were people who concerned themselves with vitamins, they assessed the situation, and that's why there were no bananas, and this yes-there-are-no-bananas was Commonism.

Those consignments of bananas also feature in *H*ö*l*d*e*r*l*i*n:*

> Once, during the mid-Eighties, I queued up for roughly an hour and a half for bananas in the subway passage at the Western Train Terminal. I just mention that, it doesn't belong here.
>
> True, it was just the once, and after that not again.
>
> The queue came to a halt, though I had almost reached there, because they had run out of produce, but they were going to bring some more, supposedly; I'll wait it out now, I thought.

1 ■ A translation of Chapter 25 (11 December 2006) may be obtained from the Hungarian Literature On-line website (accessible at www.hlo.hu).

If I've waited this long.
Then I'll stick it out now.
It was bitter, particularly towards the end, my shoes were letting in water, as best I recall, and I didn't really know why I was standing there, why I was sticking it out, but what did it matter.
The whole lot, by and large, freezing and shivering.
All because I had started then couldn't desist, and all for bananas, or whatever.
They actually did bring a largish batch, whilst I stood in line for bananas, literally.[2]

The comparison with the availability of oranges will surely remind many Hungarians of the weekly magazine *Magyar Narancs* (Hungarian Orange), which in itself is an allusion to Péter Bacsó's celebrated film *The Witness* (shot in 1969 but not on view to the general public—and then mainly in suburban cinemas—until after it won a prize at Cannes in 1981). In one not-so-far-fetched skit, the Hungarian orange turns out to be a lemon (in every possible sense), with the punch line "It may be a little sour, but at least it's ours!"

Of course it is all very well being able to mine black humour of this sort in retrospect. I know it wasn't quite so funny for my father-in-law, for instance, who lectured on biology at the College of Veterinary Science in Budapest during the Fifties—that is, until he was kicked out for lecturing on Darwinism at a time when the absurd claims of Lysenkoism (which is in part what Bacsó was parodying) were becoming de rigueur. And that is to say nothing of the millions who died in the USSR, China, etc. etc. as a result of the catastrophic brutality with which Stalin, Mao Zedong etc. etc. enforced this particular dogma. Just to make it clear, Kukorelly does not spare them any blushes. Chapter 10, for instance, uses some telling quotes from Dostoyevsky's *The Devils* and Camus' *The Plague* to underline this.[3]

The interweaving of Kukorelly's works applies at least as much to his most recent prose magnum opus, *Fairy Vale,* or *Riddles of the Human Heart* (see the slightly dyspeptic review in *HQ* 172). In Chapter 4 of this (translated in *HQ* 175) one finds:

... My parents worked for their money.
We work and something will come of it—that was the basis on which they did it, only nothing came of it, that's the problem. That's the basis. Enough became of it for them to bring back from the market two kilos of blood oranges, really tasty, and they didn't tot up afterwards how long they had squatted in the cotton dust showering out from that bobbin-winding machine for those eight oranges.
In the fine fluff that uniformly coated the flat. Bananas were not to be had, and a good job too...

2 ■ 'X. L Rückkehr in die Heimat' in: *H*ö*l*d*e*r*l*i*n.* Pécs: Jelenkor Kiadó. 1998, p. 97.
3 ■ A translation of this (11 December 2006) may be obtained from the website for the on-line magazine *Eurozine* (at www.eurozine.com).

Likewise, the bicycle belonging to cousin Pali that is mentioned in Chapter 3 of *Ruin* is clearly the same one on which the narrator rides around in *Fairy Vale.* The links can be made, and the reading experience is the richer for it, but the one work is not actually dependent on the others, and there is little in the way of repetition of incidents or anecdotes, at most illumination from a different angle. What I am suggesting is that there is now quite a substantial, and still growing, body of inimitably Kukorellyian material which supplies an increasingly precise critical appraisal of life in Hungary (or eastern Europe) over the last 60 years.

As I suggested with my reactions to the first edition of *Ruin,* one should not regard the criticism as pertaining just to former 'Commies'. Kukorelly makes it very clear, on repeated occasions, that "we" is meant virtually all-inclusively, including himself. Which sort of brings me back to Esterházy. He had the very distressing experience of finding out, shortly before *Celestial Harmonies* came out in Hungary, that his own father had worked for much of the post-1956 period as an informer for the secret police, as related in *Javított kiadás—melléklet a Harmonia cœlestishez* (Revised Edition: An Appendix to Celestial Harmonies; see *HQ* 166). Kukorelly's own hunt for the old surveillance files on himself is the subject of Chapters 26–27. Maybe it's just my imagination, but I detect a hint of ironic cross-reference in Kukorelly's wording of "second revised and enlarged" edition...

Still displayed on the front cover of the jacket (in the best possible taste) is a small black-and-white photo of what I take to be a rear view of a Pobeda saloon—the car on the back seat of which Péter Esterházy took such a diverting ride in *Kis Magyar Pornográfia* in the early Eighties.[4] I don't know whose idea this was, but since Hungarian book designers so rarely get any acknowledgement of their often witty and thoughtful contributions, let's say it originally came from István B. Gellér and for the second edition—a shot seemingly of the same car outside the same dreary block of flats from a slightly different angle (my flabber is being duly ghasted at the thought)—Tibor Hrapka.

Not that readers from the West have anything to be smug about (see the encounters that came the author's way during trips to France, Scandinavia and England, as in Chapter 22, for instance). Nor, of course, can one forget the now legendary reports that a string of distinguished but mostly fellow-travelling writers produced after having lived in the lap of luxury during their guest visits to the USSR (or See-see-see-pee, Pásztor would have it). Gide's account of his 1936 trip, when the Great Purge was reaching full swing, is exemplary in the worst possible way (see Chapters 12, 13 and 16). The brushes Kukorelly had with admirers of Kádárist Hungary in youth hostels in Marseille (Note 3 to Chapter 1) and London (Chapter 22) are tame by comparison, but the sad thing is that similar characters still seem to get away with it in the cradle of the Enlightenment (France and Scotland can argue that one out).

4 ■ An English translation was published in the mid-Nineties under the title *A Little Hungarian Pornography,* though "A Concise—or even Comminuted—Pornography of Hungary" is nearer the mark (KMP = CPH = Communist Party of Hungary).

Perhaps finally, on a personal note, it tickles me no end that in Note 5 to Chapter 1 Kukorelly now works in a reference to my extremely modest earlier reference to his book as being one of "a total of 16 articles about it [the first edition] appeared". By chance I happen to know that the text of this note has been recycled from a longer piece by Kukorelly that ended up being published as "Nine Passages on (Literary) Criticism in Hungary."[5]

It is even more pure chance that within 150 words of my own name I note the name of a great-uncle of mine (maternal grandmother's older brother), who, to put it at the blandest, was something of a literary critic. I had nothing to do with him (nor he, most decidedly, with me), though it is likely that his adopted son played a key role in getting me a post as an (English) language sub-editor at the Central Research Institute for Physics (KFKI), Budapest, in 1970 and thus sliced through the Catch 22 in which to get a work permit in Hungary one first needed a residence permit, but to get the latter one needed to have a work permit...

Since the Institute (for experimental purposes) operated a tiny atomic reactor, the premises, located on Széchenyi Hill on the western outskirts of Buda's Twelfth District, had to be guarded. That function was discharged by civilian militiamen wearing those characteristic padded jackets:

> A militiaman was called a *pufajkás*—a padded-jacket—because he wore a padded-jacket, but a stoolie did not hang a stool around his neck. Frank and sneaky, that's the (vast) difference, (vastly) greater than that between a hapless blackmailed and a voluntarily zealous squealer. Not by law but according to morality. Because that's how we became socialised, how we learnt from one another not to do that.
>
> That's the thing that won't do under any circumstances, and if a person does it nevertheless, *you feel shame on his behalf.* But what does he do meanwhile? (Chapter 28, pp. 131–132)

One of my small but very conscious pleasures was that of being able (obliged) every workday to walk into this high-security site. I was also very conscious that my efforts (and, the more fool I, I actually did work on things I was supposed to) were giving support and sustenance, in some intangible way, to the enemy. So I do sense very personally what Kukorelly is driving at with his "you feel shame on his behalf."

And is it just me who catches another light hint at Kertész ("I yet again clearly heard the sour note of the cor anglais..."):

> ... the essential point is that we should remember, know and remember, that somebody—anybody—should feel shame on our account and (possibly) for us.[6]

5 ■ In: *The New Central and East European Culture,* ed. Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, Carmen Andras, and Magdalena Marsovszky. Aachen: Shaker Verlag, 2006, pp. 227–235. That title, incidentally, was "trimmed down" from "666 999: Nine Passages on Criticism"), where the '666 999' clearly reflects today's text-messaging culture, while the piece was also shorn of its four epigraphs, among which was *All things, all things, all things I know.* This helped me to nail down the source (Richard Wagner, *Götterdämmerung*) of a quotation used by Imre Kertész in his "Sworn Statement" (see *HQ* 163).

6 ■ Imre Kertész: *Kaddish for an Unborn Child.* New York: Vintage Books, 2004, p. 11 and p. 27 and *passim,* respectively.

The value of *Ruin* lies in the way it touches off such further thoughts, especially regarding one's personal accountability. Which is salutary.

Since I have already mentioned a couple of other contemporary Hungarian writers, let me just point to that opening sentence of Chapter 1 ("If you get on your bike in an East German village by the name of Wiepersdorf, not very far outside Berlin, and you set off on a surprisingly well-maintained forest path..."). To my ears the tone is reminiscent of an iconic short story—a single sentence—that Péter Nádas wrote in 1972:

> If one night a person turns off Rákóczi Avenue into Klauzál Street and encounters nobody, halts and then goes on, and the windows all around are dark, ... he can be sure that around eight minutes later, opposite the darkened Music Academy building, he will get to where Kertész Street crosses Mayakovsky Street, and in that fine grimace it will seem as though we have discerned a new certainty of a higher order.[7]

7 ■ Péter Nádas: "Út" (Path), in: *Minotaurus,* Jelenkor Kiadó, 1997, p. 474.

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Endre Kukorelly

Ruin: A History of Commonism

(Second Revised, Enlarged Edition)

Extracts

(1)

Tell me, my dears, which millennium are we in?
(Boris Pasternak: *About These Poems*)

If you get on your bike in an East German village by the name of Wiepersdorf, not very far outside Berlin, and you set off on a surprisingly well-maintained forest path that is not marked on maps, all of a sudden you will come upon the remains of an evacuated Soviet military base. Like in a fairy tale. Even if it isn't that.

But the ruins of a former Soviet base. Not something one can tell fairy tales about.

This is not a history book. Let's say a book of stories. I won't be able to tell it anyway, that's why I am making every effort, then through that effort the language will tell this and that in my stead. Will tell, pass over, avoid, manage somehow.

Since the end of the Second World War, for roughly forty-five years, there were one million Soviet troops permanently stationed around Berlin. At least so the innkeeper in Wiepersdorf reckons. As far as he knows, that's what he's been told, because obviously he hasn't counted them himself, nor the years either to my way of thinking, why the heck would he. Nobody there was counting, not even the Soviets, or rather they plainly counted, a record was kept of everything, but badly. There's no doubt they miscalculated, because they did not count well, that's why there are these ruins. This heap of ruins wherever you look, just set off in any direction you fancy. 1 million, let's stick with that round number. That many nullities.[1]

I haven't commie-bashed it all out of myself. I can't really do it. I wrote about this once,[2] about Communists and those who banged on about Communism, the régime, what it means to me, what it was and what has remained, what I was then, what stayed in me, in the first and very last moments when one could commie-bash so much that it wasn't worth it. In truth, I didn't even get going, I forgot before I learned how, now I ought to find out, and, what's more, find out what it relates to. The *mould* in which I lived for circa forty years and which broke up, vanished in a trice, vanished from the memory[3] in such a way that only the imagination can assist. Exaggeration, fairy tales.

Marches, for instance, that was how it began for me, I didn't know any labour-movement songs at all. It would have been good to know them, but I didn't, that was fairly tough, frustrating, so to say. It came out on those children's holiday jaunts to the Pilis Hills, at a camp at Mount Fat. We had a sing-song round the campfire, tiny-tot nursery-school comrades, and they all knew those songs, all except me, though I would have liked it a lot, a whole lot, to have known them, but I didn't. The *Ycssetoff into the countryság váriat their head,** where did the others learn that?

From their mummies? *Warszawianka* as a lullaby? *To the Barricades? Avanti popolo, bandiera rossa?* We didn't learn them in choir practice but sang right off, as we went along, every kid could whistle them, but not me. Me being the exception. The tune, yes, painful, triumphal music, I committed the tune of the Soviet national anthem to memory like a shot, then, because I paid attention, the lyrics as well.

More or less, that is to say, *welded forever to stand,* etc. *united and mighty,* there were still a good few blank spots in the body of the lyrics, but where on earth had my schoolmate Gábor Takács got it from in the first place? *Si—i-i ng to the muvverla-a-and, home of the free-ee, bu-u-u-warkof pe-ee-eplesin bru-u-u-therhood strong,* which really is splendid, only from where did he come to know it? It never did come to light where from.

Of course they were Communists, that's where from, born that way, *von Haus aus,* and I was left out of that. To be on the outside is really crummy. Lousy, no denying it, you don't like it, scary, you just can't understand why you of all people were left out of *everything.* I can remember arguing about Communism with my godmother one afternoon at Christmas, that too was crummy. Chilly.

Icy.

I'm outside, all the same, could it be that on that side? The far side as seen from here? If not with them, then where and with whom? My father stares nervously into space, says nothing, by now does not so much as peep, my mother is looking at her spouse, you can see that she is concerned for him, fears something. She sometimes interrupts, or not so much that as keeps on saying that I should put a sock in it. Hush now, son! She gets up from the table, goes out, returns, sits down opposite me, okay, she says, that's enough, give it a rest, but I wouldn't give it a rest—quite the reverse. I can hear her voice.

Troubled. I can hear it even now. She was afraid of something, but like that, that much, there was no need by then. Though there was no way of knowing it at the time.

She gets up, takes the dishes out to the kitchen, comes in again. Quite unnecessarily.

Comes in and goes out.

Just give it a rest, once and for all, understood?, she says. But why? I won't!

Why do I have to give it a rest, just because I'm right? Could it be that they've no doubt landed well and truly on the outside, and it's because of them that I too

* ■ Endre Ságvári (1913–44) was a leader of the illegal Young Communist movement in Hungary, killed while resisting arrest by the Hungarian police.

am stuck there? Due to their hopeless pack of nonsense? It's clear, what they all say, my godmother, Aunt Loli and her lot, the whole family, for the most part it's sheer nonsense. Or wickedness. They're simply evil. There are no gentlemen.

No gentlemen at all, because what would make anyone a gentleman compared with anyone else? One unfortunate compared with another unfortunate. What's so good about us having thousands of acres of land when others have nothing? How can one put up with that? Why would God allow that?

Why would there be a God?

My godmother's husband was commander of the troops garrisoned in Budapest around the turn of the century, which is why the family was forcibly resettled. All my family were forcibly resettled in the early Fifties, packed onto a lorry and carried off to some village by the River Tisza. Forcible resettlement means along with your belongings, as you can take one thing and another with you, they pack you up onto the back of a lorry, transport you to a village and move you into the house of some total strangers. My godmother taught languages, English, German, French, and after the war Russian too, a high school Russian teacher she was, that's what they lived off, when they were allowed back.

Not to Budapest, they were banned from there. Those who had been forcibly resettled were banned from the capital, their homes were confiscated and functionaries were moved in in their place.

My maternal grandfather was an engineer, technical superintendent at the Budapest Municipal Electricity Works, but he was born in Klagenfurt and his native tongue was German; he was very happy about the Anschluss and was a great fan of Adolf Hitler's speeches on the radio. After the war he became a manual worker, a foreman in the electrical repairs section at the nationalised Ganz-MÁVAG works. Foreman of a socialist brigade, with a real brigade logbook, one of those scrapbooks, an album in which the proles would paste theatre tickets and the photos that had been taken of the works celebrations on November 7th. My mother was an upper-class Buda girl, and before the war was preoccupied above all with attending balls and sorting out beaus, there are photographs of her in a stack of issues of *Theatre Life.* Rather pretty she was. By the time I was born she was working at the pig abattoir.

First the abattoir, then the salami factory, while at home, after regular work, she and my father would knit pullovers. The whole evening, until after midnight. The machine would be going, rumbling like a tractor, the seaweed spilling out of the yarn. It wasn't seaweed, that was just the name we gave it as a joke, but the dust rose up in a regular cloud.

Night time too, it would be seeping out then as well. Despite the noise abatement act.

My father had been a professional army officer, a lieutenant, commander of the 1st company, 1st battalion in the 3rd Székesfehérvár infantry regiment, one of the so-called partisan pursuit forces in the Briansk Forest in the Ukraine. He was severely injured, shipped out to Germany and became a prisoner of war there,

returning home to Hungary in 1946, and after his uncle's liqueur factory, where he worked, was nationalised he was unable to find a job for a long time. All his cousins were army officers.

Landowners, farmers, officials, that sort of thing. Gentlemen.

If that says anything.

Gentry, members of the bourgeoisie, the Magyar-Christian upper-middle class squirearchy. That makes it hard to commie-bash, in my book. Not easy.

Actually, it really ought to be up to *them,* the commies themselves, to make a start, to take care of all this, each one his own, shouldn't it? No, because everybody, seeing that he reckons it would not occur to others, which really is the case, everybody takes care of other people's business, sees to others. At our house, for instance, the Thursday evening card games were incessantly mixed in with rather trite, though perfectly justified analysis of conditions. They vilified the régime, especially Uncle Miki and Auntie Loli. Mum too. Infuriating.

It infuriated me. Reactionaries.

Which incidentally was Comrade Révai's terminology[4]: a reactionary is anyone who is not a Communist. Well, definitely not after all that, to put it mildly! At the time I could not have had the foggiest what I was unhappy about in all this, but if sometimes, if only just once, they had catalogued their own errors, selfishness, stupidities and shittiness before getting at others, then right away I would have had nothing to get angry about. Because that was up to them, only it never occurred to them.

My father did not slag the Communists. He skipped those stratospherics, he had nothing to chip in, he kept tabs on the rubbers, added up who had won. Two fillérs a point. Not that his opinion differed in any way, diverging from the others, not at all, but holding himself to a higher standard, it was more out of modesty that he didn't. He let it all wash over him. I don't think either that commie-bashing is a question of standards, everything is legitimate, every barely articulated temper,[5] but it is still better to get away from it on these occasions. You understand, but you're not happy with it, and how could you regard what you're not happy with as being right?

Why, did those songs appeal to me? *Though death and painawai tus, against the ene mywe must go.* It's just a question.

NOTES[0]

0 ■ With slight exaggeration, as I shall only give approximate references as they come. Certainly no page numbers. Maybe that will succeed in not overstating things. By which I do not mean to suggest that I invented all this, more that people do not necessarily hunt down everything. At bottom, this book is after all about me, like it or not: about an unsuspecting child, an adult child, about a child's concerns, the child's family. I am no Kremlinologist or Sovietologist, obviously there are plenty of people who can portray this whole Communism thing more comprehensibly and clearly, who respond in full to the questions implicit in the

subject. "A good author, who truly has his business at heart will wish that someone comes along who makes him unrequired by representing his subject-matter as understandably and clearly as possible and fully answers the questions that are implicit to his subject" (Nietzsche). Maybe the author of this book is as good.

1 ■ "000000 Spaces: for the not-as-yet-realised," Miklós Erdély.

2 ■ Letter from Munich, 21 March 1989.

"Because it's not possible to saunter out of reality with a Latin supplementary exam."

(Géza Ottlik)

Dear Hungarians, I think I'm going to defect. I have decided that I'm not going to inure myself any longer. It's just not possible. I kidded myself, saying the regime, Commonism—let's give it a cosy name—anyway the thing in which I am living may be the worst, but at least, and here's the rub, it keeps me on my toes. It duly sobers me up, it forces me into a position from which one can see all round, see the terrain. It frees one from childish extremes, teaches one to be glad about even small things, does not allow one to grow lazy, there's no dying, at least I'm still living, even if there's an almighty pong, though on the other hand there can be no great surprises—at worst it will just get even pongier. It almost forces self-irony out of one, our dangerous illusions, we squeeze it out like a teenager with his zits. It's painful, but in a nice way. A possibility of not postponing my quest of truly important things until later, till after the never-to-be-sorted so-called social questions. That it is possible to avoid the puddle, one does not necessarily have to lap it up and dunk in it for the hereafters. Because even though there may be no salami and no freedom, there are hereafters, every hereafter is given why it is worth it, there is existence, I exist in it, it exists in me. I thought I had steeled myself, and moreover genuine joy over a few pounds of harmless bananas.

Break. In the break I go out into the kitchen and eat a banana of normal consistency.

I have just noticed that I have already used the verb force twice. Surely, at least. Surely not!

Not after all, dear friends, come on now, this is all bluff! *Me myself.* I haven't inured myself, just worn away. Wearing away, not growing stronger, not preparing, but one becomes, on the other hand, more stupid, it's true. A distinct growing dumber, everything forgotten compared with what was knocked in to me once and for all time. A however much, but a totalitarian regime, however much, but it cripples, under a burden—it occurs to me in connection with bananas—a palm-tree does not grow. It could be that it relates to the palm; the palm-tree grows, but then that's palms for you, isn't it.

In short, we have borne the unbearable. There was no need to, and now it's all the same, that's how it was. It's not all the same at all.

No, because no one who has lived in a totalitarian regime can point to one tiny detail on himself that has not been tormented and broken. Or have I already mentioned that? Only until its acknowledgement. It is better to acknowledge

than not, and I shall immediately get down to what follows from that. I shall do that now.

What follows is that we would be well advised if we were to shut our traps a little. The Young commie—non-Young commie, Party member—non-Party member, at-least-one-time compromiser.

Not a one-time compromiser. Because if you lived here, voluntarily at that, when it comes down to it; if you had to address anyone as comrade out of conviction, or against your better judgement; if you petitioned or accepted anything from the extant, the existing, my modest proposal, dear Hungarians, is that you pipe down in a hurry.

A story during another banana break. In 1978, my friend Count László Haller and I, wending our way to the youth hostel in Marseille by bus, had some one-time French commie working men slap us admiringly on the back, comrade-this and Kádár-that, purely because we had come from Hungary, whereas the hostel manager, a dyed-in-the-wool anti-pinko gentleman, since we got there after the place was locked-up, snidily comraded us as he sent us packing. Because of where we came from. The good old Frenchies did not know—any more than us, in our anger—how right they were. To be sure comrades, we're comrades, my comrades. Just so many—to use Zinoviev's term—*Homo sovieticus.* Even those who aren't, even if I avoided or got out of it (membership, being recruited as a grass). I've done no wrong, and I have. (Since) I've done no wrong, if I have.

Because there's this little relationship that operated, I entered a relationship, even if on my part it was nothing more than defensive, withstanding, survival—even then. My relationship to Commonism. There goes innocence, dear children, in plain English we're fucked up.

Well anyway. I'm fed up with the fact that everyone in this land whines and moans, it has to be taken off anyone who is crying. I'm fed up with the uncontrollably erupting profound fear and loathing that marks the zero degree of understanding and sympathy. They way people yell at one another like new-born babes at the world. I'm fed up with those prating wise guys, the sneaky but underhand, the terrorists of various complexions, aggressively scaredy-cats, unable to give their voices a rest, unreflecting, incapable of self-irony, frustrated, seeking compensation in looking down their noses at others, the self-conscious blockheads and hysterical hipsters, self-important as a bunch of nursery-school kids. Enough of them, because for one thing it offends one's aesthetic sense. For another, it offends my ears, so cut the crap, as it were.

And last of all—at last!—as I mentioned, I'm worn out, I don't know about you dear kiddies, that's our little Commonist past, we wore one another out, that's for sure. I've had enough of them, from now on I wish to live in a *society,* that is the clear will of the people, where there is a basic gob-shut-position, none of this hurly-burly. Monitoring noise pollution, better smells, passionate, friendly non-agreement, serious arguments over the happiest questions. A calm creative atmosphere, suitable conditions for preparations for the Olympics. Normal football

matches, a normal selection of cheeses and newspapers, a European *thingy,* with salary. Where the girls cherish blue stockings and change knickers every day. There are gentlemen, everyone's a gent—except for the ladies.

Dear children, the time has come to bring these lines to a close. If you have left off, send word, and until then, I wish you a speedy recovery, get better soon. If not, then so be it, I don't want to look wiser than the next person, for all I care, only leave me in peace! Because until that happens I'm not here. I'll be in a deep sleep, the telephone off the hook, I've instructed the staff not to disturb me. I've left the building, defected, died, I've been buried abroad—By-ee.

3 ■ The cynical Communist programme of forgetting the (Communist) past was supplanted by the enthusiastic Communist programme of totally erasing the (pre-Communist) past. *"They are ordering that we mutely forget, forget, / They want to stifle in forgetfulness / The still living pain"* (Aleksandr Tvardovski: 'The Right to Memory'). It's a doddle, I have no trouble forgetting.

4 ■ They were big on terminology, slogans, expressions. Newspeak, sawdust and invention at one and the same time. Take "peace offensive", for example. Of an Unusual Stamp (Stalin: *We Communists are people of a u.s.*), which is droll, but only droll *now. Uchitsa, uchitsa, uchitsa, Lenin*—learn, learn, learn. The wavering middle-peasant, self-criticism or a bit of work, *malenki robot,* were not a bit funny. Or kulaks. Soviet troops temporarily stationed in our country—now is that funny or serious? Left-wing (and right) deviationism, depending, those who couldn't keep up with the shifts in current policy, which often changed from one week to another, were the deviationists. Sectarian would often be pronounced sectorian. There is the hen that lays the golden egg, class warfare, a struggle on two fronts, antagonistic class enmities, self-confident proletarians, Communist writers' session, platforms, distortions, cadres, functionaries, talk through, opportunists, committed, (un)partylike, party meeting, party collective, clerical reaction, Brezhnev doctrine, vigilance, decadent pessimism, enemy of the people, the achievements of the revolution (just about anything), friendly Afghani (or just about any) people, lapdog (Tito). Intervene. Rotten (just about anything imper'alist). Overbidding (the party's crimes). The constant undeviating struggle for the partiality of literature. Fellow traveller (in Hungary the rural writers, in the USSR those outside the party, who are only to be seen to later on). Socialist realism (according to Sholokhov—he said it in Budapest in a somewhat tanked-up condition—the devil knows what that is). Petty bourgeois, schematic (Gábor Goda: *The p.b. aesthetic with its demagogic clap-trap seeks to degrade our socialist phraseology into s. grist*). The enemy's trap, seasoned old comrade-in-arms (Márton Horváth: *How could Béla Balázs, the Communist writer, our s.o.c.i.a., have fallen into the e.t.?*). A semi-doctrinaire, semi-philistine who, in politics, followed in the wake of the bourgeoisie, that's Plekhanov in the view of Lenin in *The State and Revolution.* Socialism in one country (Stalin) versus permanent revolution (Trotsky). The revolutionary character of the mundane, which is from István Király. A party poet is a guerrilla fighter (not a regular soldier), it occurs to György

Lukács in connection with Attila József in 1945. The abuses of collectivisation have the effect that around ten million peasants died of starvation during the 1933 famine. A struggle against individuals pursuing an antisocial way of life, so that Brodsky, for instance, was sent into exile for five years in 1964. Public danger work-shyness was a legal category in Hungary until the 1989-90 democratisation. 5 ■ A little word of caution, because there will be some of that too. There are plenty enough nastier solutions that would not appeal even to my mum, and I'm not angry. There's no feeling of exasperation in me, after the first edition: *Rom. A szovjetónió története* [Rom: a History of the Soviet *Ur*nion. Pécs: Jelenkor, 2000.] A total of 16 articles about it appeared (from Ákos Szilágyi, Zoltán Onagy (2x), György C. Kálmán, Gábor Zoltán, Bianca Iványi, Dóra Péczely, Éva Harkai Vass, Zsolt H. Toóth, László Bogdán, Tim Wilkinson, Péter Szirák, Béla Bodor, Péter I. Rácz, Gáspár Gróh, Péter Rácz). Although there was a degree of chilliness around it, as I had expected, with commies finding it too commie-bashing, but not enough so for commie-bashers. I shall now say a little bit about two of the reviews. For there is a, let's call it a genre, a product of the (not just *that*) régime: the reviewing of a literary text in line with party-political considerations by way of literary criticism. There was a time when it amounted to a denunciation, though nowadays it is little more than a simple pronouncement, not quite so calamitous, PR and GG pronounce that the author is not PC. I don't come up to scratch. Of course, they consider there is such a thing as literature, and fair enough, yet here, according to GG, "*it is about more than literature (but that is a natural consequence of choosing this subject*)." The language "*acts as the vehicle*" of the idea. I won't continue. "*If the same motif is not treated a hundredfold by different artists, the public does not learn to get beyond its interest in the content*" (Nietzsche: *Human, All Too Human*). I would be more inclined to say it does *not* learn not to, but no matter, it won't learn anyway. Well, let's see, I think for the most part I'll just cite from them, and then at some point call it a day. PR: "*he launches into a restrained 'I'm-no-Commie-basher' sort of Commie-bashing.*" Me, that is to say. GG: "*Commie-bashing gets on his nerves.*" Mine, that is to say. Commie-bashing is "anachronistic, insofar as Big Brother as a country is a lion that snuffed it close to ten years ago, and putting the boot in is, to say the least, nothing more than tedious," writes PR, though it should be clear from the book's title alone that it is not about Big Brother. "*On the other hand, of course, it would not be anachronistic if we were to gain insight, here and now, into its continued existence in souls, reactions and social formations, but that is not really the goal he sets himself.*" Yet that is practically the only goal that is set. According to GG, I haven't noticed "*that it was not only the latter-day Vizys who Commie-bashed here... nevertheless it is they who give the opportunity for branding Commie-bashing.*" The 'Vizys' here are my own much-loved family, like 'the gentility' in Dezső Kosztolányi's 1926 novel *Anna Édes,* and here, just as in "my" book, they reap their (un)deserved reward. Yet in this connection, though, mention is made of suddenly vehement and brazen Commie-bashing by the "beneficiaries of the old regime". Why is no "*mention made,*" enquires GG, about the acolytes of the dictatorship who did it "*not on principle, but*

through concrete benefactions of a concrete genocidal regime"? But what mention should be made of them? In the end, though, an accord is reached between Why-I-Commie-bash and Why-I-Don't-Commie-bash: *"he examines and judges these travel diaries with the eyes of today"* (PR), and *"The wisdom of hindsight is suspect to me"* (GG). Today's eyes? Well, yes. But wisdom? *"Soviet propagandists steered the entire world,"* but I no longer recall which of them wrote that. Must be kidding. No way. It was not just the *"genteel middle classes"* that they didn't, nor merely citizens relying on their taste (GG: *"Now taste, what kind of question is that?!"*) The ivory tower was immune. Those populists who thought things through, in their own way, both on the right (Dezső Szabó) and on the left (Zoltán Szabó), or shall we say a Lőrinc Szabó, who undoubtedly did not think it through. With certain intellectuals who *"have no inkling of the problems under which the world is labouring today,"* as Oszkár Jászi wrote to his friend and pupil Imre Csécsy in 1947, the situation was a lot worse than that. For there was an inkling; it was that much worse. They could not *all* have been so *"naïve"* (PR); there was no need to speak up *"out of necessity"*, they had to have some inkling, it's just that they didn't want the inkling. *"I can't tussle, incidentally, with a world view that I already progressed beyond 25 years ago."* Thus Jászi, the best example of precisely that being his own work, *Hungarian Calvary, Hungarian Resurrection,** which by 1947 was already a quarter century old. And accord is also reached on the matter of the book's language. It's incorrect to use the double-accusative *'eztet'* (PR: *"he simpers"*; GG: *"a false note"*), on top of which there are some scurrilous expressions—not nice. When all is said and done, that's decent of them: party politicizers standing guard here over the (my) language.

(3)

> *I'm feeling so homesick!*
> (My own mother, a Pest inhabitant, in her typical deb voice on the No. 47 tram passing over the Danube to Buda on the Freedom [formerly Franz Josef] Bridge)
>
> *At the beginning of the plague they had a vivid recollection... but... their imagination failed them. During the second phase of the plague, their memory failed them, too.*
> (Albert Camus: *The Plague*)

The statement that *that lot took everything we had away from us* means nothing to a small child. Slowly, minutely, all at once—everything. That lot, i.e. the commies, but then who are they? My father's great-aunt, her husband was a retired colonel, was forcibly resettled to a village by the name of Boconád near the small town of Heves, my cousin Pali was not allowed to attend a grammar school. As a forced-labour soldier he was put to work in a stone quarry; he defected at first

* ■ Published in Hungarian (in Vienna) in 1920, with an English edition published as *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Hungary*. London: King, 1924 (2nd ed. New York: Fertig, 1969).

blush in 1956, or rather second blush because first he *took part*—only after that. He defected to Germany.

The bicycle on which he trundled up to Pest, for the events, he left in our cellar, in the wood hole. It's a marvellous old, solid, indestructible iron-frame, we took it out to the plot of land in Szentistván Settlement where we had a holiday house, it became the family machine, and I used it to cycle down to the Danube.

They were not deported from the country at the end of the war, like more than three hundred thousand other ethnic Germans, for Franz Werner was neither here or there, the old boy having been a Hungarian army officer, after all. So, Magyar to the core, in other words, but he Magyarised the name to Monostori when he was awarded a hereditary knighthood for distinguished service before the war. Between 1945 and 1950 Hungary's ethnic Germans, as a collective punishment, were packed off to Germany in their tens of thousands. A third of them children and the elderly. Including more than sixty thousand children under twelve years old. They were bunged into cattle wagons, then off with them, a familiar scene already practised on other Hungarians—splendidly broken-in wagons, they were.

My cousin Géza, who fought in Corvin Passage in '56, defected—if it is now again permissible to use that *(eztet*)* word— to Argentina. He had a fairly weighty reason to do so, for anyone who had held a weapon in their hands was hanged by the Kádár regime. Argentina, however, seems not to have worked out, so he emigrated to Australia, then, with that too not proving right, in the mid-Eighties, leaving his family behind, he moved back home. To Hungary. Due to his terrible, unbearable homesickness.

Unmanageable homesickness. He could not bear not to. So was it finally alright for him here, at home?

Sure it was.

In no time at all he was dead.

Father came home one year after the end of the war from an American POW camp in Germany, to which he had been transferred due to the severity of his wounds. He and a fellow officer clung on to the roofs of railway wagons, and if the train was going in the right direction, they would stay on it, and if it wasn't, they would scramble off, that was the general idea. Back home he was screened, then they offered him a job at the military academy but he preferred to demobilise in view of his wounds. Because he'd had enough.

He'd already had enough, but my Uncle Joe was taken over into the new army, where he taught until 1949, only being arrested when the first class of trainee officers had passed through. He was arrested on the academy's premises, and in full view of his students dragged across the courtyard to be bundled into a car, exactly as you see it in films. Not so well-oiled.

The way it was done was his boss linked arms with him in friendly fashion, they sauntered up and down the corridor, then two ÁVÓ men jumped out from one of

* ■ See end of note 5 to Section 1.

the classrooms.[1] He was released from Kistarcsa in the autumn of 1956, worked at a glass grinding works, that was the trade he learned, if memory serves me right, Uncle Joe ground glass tumblers.

He never spoke about those things with anyone except his wife, and when his wife died shortly afterwards, he recounted no more tales. Kistarcsa or wherever the hell it was. A forced-labour camp.

Uncle Joe, the one whose army unit, an entire company, went over to the Russkies while they were retreating on the Eastern front. He didn't see one of them again: not one of them returned from captivity.

Father was given a formal discharge from the army after the war, receiving a few forints in back pay and being made to resign his rank. After that came the nationalisation of all sorts of family property, I won't go into it here, and he was unable to find a job.

For a while he was unable to find any job, but eventually that too was sorted out and he was given work. The *that lot took everything we had* amounts to their taking away his past, his habits, his lifestyle. What he had learnt, what he had become accustomed to, much that was fine and much that was not so fine, and now that's how it will always be.

At the end of his day's work, the worker heads for the house of culture—that kind of outrageous doltishness was left. *Library work is a theatre of war. The enemy will do everything within its power to get workers to read pulp fiction and pornography.*[2] They, the Russians that is, are not going to leave here, Father said, I should take a look at them, travel there, I would understand why. Not that it's of any importance.

Of importance to understand them.

However long they stay, that's how much chance they have, but that is why they will do *anything,* they have enough strength for it. And everything will be destroyed, and what they build on the site of the destruction, that too will eventually belong to the destruction, and how. It will break down, run out, be shattered by frost, closed down, clapped out, only their machine guns with the drum magazines will not become clapped out. They really were not shattered by frost. If a road surface cracks, they don't bother to repair it, for them it's just fine as it is, maybe that pothole will come in handy, they don't even step across it or avoid it, they simply go straight through it, what's to understand.

Or not understand. Not for fun, they bump into it more just on a whim, there's a huge jolt and that's it. A tank trap. Later on, it so worked out that I made it several times to the real existing Soviet Union with my friend László Haller.

The broken-down, frost-shattered, clapped-out soviet *Ur*nion.

Conked-out soviet. Closed-down soviet. We squeezed onto a Moscow trolley bus, clung on on the rear platform, then came the potholes. Squeezed against one another, the Russians stood around amicably, with the jolting they would shoot up to the ceiling, not at all for fun, nobody had fun or got angry, in point of fact it was comical. The endless patience[3] was almost comical.

In point of fact not so comical. The Russians, according to Nikolai Berdaev, are a people at the end of history, it is not sure, here in the trolley bus, that the people knew that, nevertheless it seemed as if they did know it. By and large, this end was transferred over to us Hungarians, here at home.

Sadly I had no desire to leave, my father announced to me. In essence by chance.

Like everything.[4]

Just like everything in the world, more by chance than not. He wasn't paying attention, maybe that's why he said it the way he did, during supper, where's the saltcellar and meanwhile I'm bringing in the soda siphon. What am I supposed to say in reply? I was just on the point of asking, then didn't ask after all, it was not the sort of thing we talked about. In truth, what did we talk about? Making a habit of despair is worse than despair itself, so says Camus. Should I say to him bravo, wonderful, come old chap, *there are already some magnificent examples, Imre Muszka, Hungary's best lathe operator, fulfilled around 230–270 per cent with his new norm,* you did the right thing, why indeed would you have left?

If it comes to that, why on earth did you return to Hungary from the POW camp? So that having once been released from the one it should be straight, double quick, into the other? Into being where *at the gate to the Uralski Heavy Industrial Works a whole row of artistic portraits immortalises the factory's Stakhanovites. First in line is a portrait of Viktor Terentevich Ponomarev. This famous gearbox miller undertook to fulfil 40 years of the norm within the period of the five-year plan.* Did you get into the swing of things in 40 years?

Uncle Ernő's family, by the way, or rather the womenfolk, Auntie Clara and my mother, were the ones who hit on the idea of having signs tattooed on the children so they would not be exchanged, on the grounds of better safe than sorry.

So they should not exchange us if we were resettled.

The street's inhabitants are awakened from their morning slumber by the sound of labour-movement marches. The radio's cars arrive and there is already a huge crowd waiting in front of the apartment blocks under construction. They work in accordance with the so-called continuous production system. The first hour: 10,200 bricks! Second hour: 11,273! By the time the 8-hour shift is over a new record has been set: laying 77,000 bricks in the form of a mass of 209.8 cubic metres of wall, over a length of 140 metres. There is a huge storm of applause to greet the winners.[5]

They hit on the idea that the tattooing should be done by Uncle Ernő. Uncle Ernő had been the medical officer in my father's battalion on the Russian front. In the end we all stayed, we were not carted off, there was no tattooing. Nevertheless, for a while every evening my parents used to pack things so as to be ready for the off. For a while the.

The.

NOTES

1 ■ ÁVÓ (Államvédelmi Osztály, State Security Department), later ÁVH (Államvédelmi Hivatal, State Security Office), with headquarters at 60 Andrássy Avenue, which had formerly been the HQ for the wartime fascist Arrow-Cross militia, and just two doors away from my primary school. Its head was Gábor Péter.
2 ■ *Ötéves tervünk: béketerv* [Our Five-Year Plan: A Plan for Peace], Ministry of Popular Education, 1951.
3 ■ *"Anyone who turns towards the end in order that, out of infinite impatience, he should bring off something before it 'would come of its own accord', who wishes to get to the world's end, whatever the cost, in the final analysis that person is turning his back on 'another world', and instead of creating 'another world' is condemned to making a pile of ruins from this world."* Ákos Szilágyi: "Orosz Apokalipszis [Russian Apocalypse]," *Magyar Lettre Internationale,* 33.
4 ■ The outcome was essentially accidental, writes Deutscher (*Stalin: A Political Biography,* London, 1949) about the upper hand that Lenin's faction won at the Second Congress of the Russian Labour Party in 1903. After the voting at the Maison du Peuple in Brussels, under Trotsky's chairmanship, they won a two-vote majority over the Martov faction. That is why they were called the Bolsheviks. That is the reason for all this. Is that the reason for all this? Lenin uses the word *accidental* in *The State and Revolution:* "such a meaningless and ugly term as 'Bolshevik'... it expresses nothing other than the merely accidental fact that... we were in the majority." However, the main difference, according to Eric Hobsbawm (*The Age of Empire 1875–1914.* London, 1987), was that Lenin's comrades were better organised, more efficient and more reliable. *"Citing Karl Kautsky, the acknowledged authority of Marxist theory, Lenin stubbornly repeated that middle-class intellectuals, Marx, Engels and others, had brought socialism into the labour movement from outside. That proved that it made no sense to trust in the 'innate' socialism of the masses. The Party needed to be a body of the elect... a vanguard that did not flinch from resolute and disciplined actions."*
5 ■ *Szabad Nép,* 31 August 1950.

(14)

> *The fact that the USSR interferes is a quite different matter. They don't interfere with 10% efficiency, they can do much better.*
> (István Szirmai. Minutes of the October 1963 meeting of the Politburo of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. Subject: how radio jamming can be made more effective.)

At least there weren't portraits in Moscow.[1] Hung up everywhere at all times. Lenin in official places, but not in butcher's shops like Marshal Tito in Yugoslavia. Admittedly with Yugoslav butchers you could also get meat along with the Tito vegetable dish on the side, but in the Soviet Union there wasn't any meat

either. I saw plenty of Dzhugashvilis in Georgia, they would be religiously plastered on the windscreens of lorries, more out of nationalism than internationalism. I don't recall now whether that disturbed me or angered me, or whether I just found it droll, indeed relished it. I can't recall whether the Soviet Union interfered when I was visiting it. It disturbed and angered me, but I relished it and it amused me. I was *in it.* A few excerpts from the first pages of my diary for 1982:

Friday, 1 January, Moscow. Plus 5–6° C, rain, we slip around in the slush, they don't even try to clear it. I manage to pick up some champagne in ulitsa Gorkava; we're going round to Wahtang's mate's place, Aftandil, a mathematician who collects seashells and snail shells. We got to know them in Sukhumi last summer. They're a bit odd but somehow they've managed to lay hands on all kinds of grub, typical Georgian open sesame. While they show off their snail shells the chap and his wife squabble about whether Stalin wrote his works single-handed or got assistance. Yes he did! No he didn't! Did!

Didn't!

Did! His wife, who is probably not Georgian, reckons he did get help, Aftandil gets pretty worked up about it. Surely he didn't marry an Abkhaz woman? Wahtang is also upset but then she isn't his wife, he doesn't interfere. On the good side, I had honeydew melon and drank so much coffee that I had a job getting off to sleep last night.

Saturday, 2 January. I wake up then drop off again, and that goes on till 2 o'clock in the afternoon. We slither along to the Troitsky Cathedral, incredibly wonderful. In incredible surroundings. On the way back we take a proper look at the onion-domed churches in front of the Rossiya Hotel. In the evening the Bolshoi, a ballet evening with Bartók's *Wooden Prince* (Anisimov as the prince, Luzhina the princess, Bylova the fairy), *Death of the Rose* to the slow movement of Mahler's 5th Symphony, with Plisetskaya, and Rodion Schedrin's *Carmen Suite* (with Plisetskaya, Barikin, Radchenko). We sat a bit off to one side.

Monday, 4 January. In the morning off to the police to report my arrival. They are not open, however. But I have to report in. A café called Lira, self-service, they even have salmon sandwiches. There is virtually nothing and yet virtually everything, both at once. It has become frigging frigid, we warm up in the Melodiya record shop, I bought a stack of LPs, they are almost giving them away. They stink something awful, not the records but the glue they use to gum the sleeves together. The plan is for us to have lunch at the Dom Zhurnalist, and by the time we have walked there I'm perishing. The restaurant is closed, *sanitarnyi den,* sanitation day, they have put up a small notice. Which I pinch. I'm frozen solid, taxi over to the Intercontinental Hotel, a fresh sense of there being everything to be had, salmon, caviar, fried fish, champagne—for two hundred roubles. A teacher's monthly starting salary is 90. In the loo Wahtang asks if I need a woman.

Tuesday, 5 January. After a tolerable amount of queuing I check in at the police station. On the way back the tram ran into something and we had to get off, so we made our way into the centre on foot. Taxi from Magazin Leningrad to the Bolshoye

Pirogovskaya, where we're going to see Mrs Bulgakov. She shows photos; everyone else enjoys it but it bores me and I'm glad to get away from the poor old dear. His first wife, that is, not Margarita. In the evening again at the Bolshoi, we have fifth-row seats: Khrennikov's tiresome incidental music to *Much Ado About Nothing*—much ado about nothing. Beatrice danced by Vlassova. In the interval champagne and a caviar sandwich. I haven't seen as much ballet in my life as I have now. Nor eaten as much caviar.

Wednesday, 6 January. Off to the Hotel Ukraina with Lado, who wants a pair of sunglasses. He can't, though, because only foreigners are permitted to purchase goods in the Beryozka shopping chain, which is where we come in. So Lado can have his sunglasses. I take no part in the transaction but read Bulgakov's *Morphine* in the lobby. In the end they didn't buy any sunglasses, but he did buy a few cans of beer. A beefsteak for lunch, the usual luxury in a sea of nothingness. A jitney to Kalinin prospekt, a bookshop, where we acquire a guidebook to the Caucasus for 75 roubles. That's three weeks' pay. Wahtang is waiting in front of the National, a taxi on to the Dom Zhurnalist, a Bulgakov-style Massolit,* absolutely everything, because there's even coke, and where there's coke there's everything. In the evening to the Taganka for *The Master and Margarita.* Seats are sold out for years ahead but we are admitted, in part because we are Hungarians, like Lubimov's wife, and in part out of Commonism. Shcherbakov and Shatskaya in the title roles, Smekov as Voland, Sapovalov as Pontius Pilate.

Thursday, 7 January. Minus thirty and there's barely any heating. I decamp to the kitchen and light the gas stove; if it were up to me, I wouldn't budge from here. I go out to buy grub, but the nearby Magazin had just shut so I was left looking for another in a dreadful blizzard. There's not a sausage there but two queues, one for chicken, the other for frankfurters of a rather dodgy colour, but the queue isn't moving at all, the shop assistants are sedulously doing some administrative paperwork, so I go. Eggs haven't been seen in Moscow for months. A sandwich snack at Lira, the Druzhba bookshop, then the National, it's Rashid's birthday supper. Mounds of caviar. Rashid recounts how on one occasion he was caught in some infraction of the rules in the Metro, whereupon the policeman told him not to behave like a Hungarian.

Friday, 8 January. In the morning to the Hungarian shop on Dorogomilovskaya. It has been ransacked bare: they can't get any stocks because of the snowstorm. Cans of Yugoslav ham, salami, chocs, that sort of thing—a very heaven for the locals. In GUM there's an astonishing crush of people, you can't get near a counter. The rumour has got about that there is Ponds face cream in stock, all Moscow is in a frenzy. I buy three jars for four roubles (or was it four for three?), I too have caught the bug. I have no idea what the Ponds is to me. It's in stock. One wants it because it's in stock. I pop into TSUM, and it's not in stock there. There is such a thing as a consumer society and a society that's simply gagging to consume.

Saturday, 9 January. We have a look at the Borodino Cyclorama. It was boring, the old trout who was the guide went into the details in an irritating singsong, and

* ■ Acronym given to the largest literary association in Moscow *(The Master and Margarita).*

there was no way of getting out. Once you have paid. So why did you. Or even to move closer, because then they'll tell you to keep still. The woman explains, the people stare at her, not the picture, and when she stabs a finger the people look in that direction. Not anywhere else. Then back at the woman, whereas I'm watching this and exploding instead of enjoying it. [I think I enjoy *now* what was exasperating me *then*, but this is now and not then. That is continually happening to me. That's what this book is about. The "all"-knowing, more or less extinct posterity.] From there on to the Tretyakov, getting off at the Dobrininskaya metro stop when it ought to have been at Novokuznetskaya, all the way to Pyatnitskaya. Rublev icons and Russian old masters, but the modern section is closed, instead of which they have an Armenian painter's portraits of Lenin and Brezhnev in something like ten gallery rooms. We have supper in the National—35 roubles for three, I won't go into what. Stroganov. Smirnov. Indeed, Gorchev. Half an hour happy sliding home in a Zil taxi from Metro Dynamo.

Sunday, 10 January. After some typically Russian dawdling around, we set off at getting on for noon, Kropotkinskaya metro, Yaroslavl railway station, and from there by *elektrichka* (half a rouble) to Zagorsk. Not unduly cold, blinding sunshine, snowed-in landscape, but when it's time to get off the fact is that in practice one can't get off. The thing being that the moment the carriage doors are opened those waiting to get on don't wait for us to get off but swarm inwards and push us back. They even climb in through the windows to get a seat, and it's so astounding that I can barely react. Not that there's much choice in the matter besides pushing back, so that's the game—they push inwards and I push outwards. First of all the Troitse, the Holy Trinity Monastery, Rublevs, there's mass going on, we stroll around a park, the Uspensky is shut and so too the Dukhovskaya, an icon museum, applied art (Riznitsa), into the Trapeznaya (restaurant), to the Cathedral of Saint Sergius of Radonezhi, this too *sluzhba*—a mass going and therefore we don't go in. Late 17th-century buildings, wonderful colours and shapes, crunchy evening snow, snow sprinkling down in the lamplight, stillness, fir-trees—that sort of thing. We bought some eggs.

Monday, 11 January. I wake up late, the museums are closed, pure luck, so I sit at home, the gas stove going in the kitchen, and read. I bought a Hungarian daily, the *Népszabadság,* Taróczy and Günthardt won eighty thousand dollars in Birmingham. Meeting with L. around noon at Metro Sportivnaya. While I was waiting I counted goods lorries: thirty of them, four of which were closed, six apparently transporting produce, one carrying cardboard boxes and wooden crates, another two lengths of wooden ladder, the rest empty. That means 18 empty. That ratio is the soviet *Ur*nion. L. came along. Courting in Russian—*ukhazhivati.*

NOTES

1 ■ *"And from the Party's window Rákosi's image: / He looks reassuringly and smiles across at you."* **Ferenc Juhász.**

(15)

B.G.: It's all an immense theatre.
I.K.: But who's the spectator?
B.G.: Obviously, God.
(Boris Groys & Ilya Kabakov: *The Communal Apartment*)

If late in the evening of Saturday, September 18th, 1981, you had been endeavouring to get home from the Bolshoi Theatre (a performance of *Boris Godunov,* with Gergyanikov in the title role, Morozov as Varlam) and boarded the No. 49 trolley bus at the Moscow Metro Universitet stop, pushing aside the crowd to get at the ticket-punching machine, you slip your two-kopeck coin into the slot, give the lever a god tug, tear a piece off the end of the strip of ticket that pops out like bog paper, hang onto a pole and, wiping off a palm-sized area of a window that has become begrimed as black as soot, for want of better you start looking at the series of indescribably run-down Soviet prefabricated blocks of flats, all of a sudden you will find you have made it into the collective. Into inimitable Russian Communism.

You have made it in that you will be tapped on the shoulder, and as you turn round someone will reach out several kopecks toward you.

Clearly he wants a ticket, no doubt about it, and, fair enough, you are not strictly speaking a conductor, you still drop the coins into the collecting box, crank the handle, tear off the bit that winds out, hand it over to the joker who tapped you on the back, and you are just about to turn back when what happens is you don't, because all at once two others are stretching out their money at you, indeed, not just stretching it but plunking it right into your fist.

Not their own money either, they're just relayers, the kopeck is coming from the back, frankly impenetrable nether depths of the trolley bus, they pass it on from one to the other and you are the *konyets*, the end, because you are standing next to the ticket spooler. That's Commonism.

That is what they are participating in. You, on the other hand, take part by being among them, by co-operating with them, you can't stay out of the collective. That, if nothing else in the world, they instantly sort out for you. They squeeze you to them, push their backsides against you, breathe on you, and you, having no other choice, squeeze back and breathe back. You are all squashed together, you can stand without clinging on, you are holding one another (back, but let's just keep that back in parenthesis), you don't even have to hang on. Or get off.

As a matter of fact you can safely let yourself go. You can't get off the trolley anyway, for why get off? You'll be released by death, and if you get off nonetheless, you will be departing, in a certain sense (for them certainly) you will die, there will be a minuscule (it will take a good eye to see how tiny) absence, even if that absence will be instantly plugged.

Someone else will be cranking the contraption in your place. Tugging at, indeed shaking it. Under coercion, of his own accord. Eagerly. Or not eagerly

because he is too tired, though this is surely the basis, the norm, the starting-point. The idea of not doing so doesn't even arise, of hold your trap, let me be, because he would rather stare out of the window, *be himself,* he will decide for himself whether he is going to enter the collective, this social game, because he has already got on—the trolley bus.

He could just as well go by foot. Along ulitsa Gorkava, that's fairly broad. If you walk down ulitsa Gorkava, a freer and easier matter, there's plenty of room, though all the same don't let yourself go completely because a herbert will come up to you and right away the question will come up *u vas spichki yest*—got a light? As if he couldn't bear it—not without a cigarette, but without you.

Not without you specifically, more without the communal business, and it's not that it just seems *as if* he really can't bear it. He (something inside him) does not allow you to let yourself go and make yourself conspicuous by being so separate from him, that's what this *u vas spichki yest* means, and I don't know if he does smoke, well okay, then he hasn't got a match on him, so that gives him an opportunity to ask, or else he doesn't have a cigarette on him, in which case he's asking for a cigarette, but what if he doesn't smoke? Then there will always remain the chance of him being asked, and he'll give it if he has any, and if he doesn't, that comes to the same thing, then it's the not-giving that features. If he stays among others, always in the collective, it's that (not anything of his own accord) which makes him Soviet, simple coercion, that's why it is never just like that, of his own accord, he won't accept any collectivity.

Of course, why should he, or rather when, where for crying out loud, where will he have room to do that? A tough role. Theatre, act is all he can do, nothing held back inside, what's inside does not stay, an outward-turning, continuously departing immanence, he has no method for holding back, his other part is so totally closed off, that is why it is *uncommonly* good in front of the public, a strictly decent-good sort, and if he is left to his own devices, with no supervision, unmercifully bad in relation to that good.

He'll surely tear one ticket off, maybe even three, but it's not sure that he won't smash up the whole device single-handed on the spot. He'll keep a tight hold on himself, otherwise a pile of rubble. He let's you in straight away, hands over everything and misunderstands everything. The musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* is the greatest work of art of the century, a philosopher declares, Vadim by name, dead seriously, the way Russians generally make declarations.

He drops to a basso profundo voice. I no longer recall why or what the reasoning was, we had just emerged from the Hermitage. I had made Dim's acquaintance in Leningrad on 1 August 1974. We dialled him up from the street, a mutual acquaintance had given us his 'phone number and he had immediately invited us over for supper in their place, a *kommunalka* or communal apartment.[1] A single room with a hallway, kitchen, toilet and whatnot shared with total strangers, and that whatnot, including the most intimate family secrets, is immediately recounted. They are right now, and this is still truly the biggest secret, they are going to emigrate to Israel. That's for starters.

I first met him an hour and a half ago.

It was *obligatory* to drink until they had recounted everything, and I mean everything, and it was *impossible* to go home. Nothing was to be left out. We *had* to sleep there, in that single room.

It was clean, though. *Everything, obligatory, impossible, had to.* We were drinking pure alcohol, which is no joke. In compliance with a solemn ritual. Not at all funny, it simply lyses you, nothing complicated about it, no pardon, and the worse the situation the more apocalyptic the faulty circle of solutions. In my opinion that doesn't exist any longer.

That is to say, pure alcohol no doubt still exists, I mean in my opinion merely that kind of offensive, self-sacrificing, cruelly visible, continually operated, immediately taking over from and totally baring and obliterating one another, clinging onto one another, and wherever possible enthusiastically misunderstanding, profoundly hellish, profoundly Russian sociability. That forced communality crashed to splinters in seconds, with nothing to replace it, nothingness is left. In place of total restriction there is total unrestrictedness. *"The Russian people finds itself in the worst possible condition, because in the course of our losses we have lost the obligatory, saving cohesion and thereby the consciousness of place in the country."*[2] Any kind of community has become impossible, including community and its designators too. The word itself. Not clapped out but deleted. The time will come when they will write it on a clean slate.

I don't know incidentally what one ought to check out, what's up, whether they are still passing on kopecks in the trolley buses. Or not, because the kopeck is no more.[3]

NOTES

1 ■ A large, at one time middle-class apartment allocated to several families—as many sub-apartments as there are rooms. Ilya Kabakov: *"The* kommunalka *is a superb metaphor of Soviet life: life is impossible in a* kommunalka *but equally no other sort of life is possible because it is impossible to move out of the* kommunalka. *Other forms of Soviet life, such as the prison camp, are nothing else than various manifestations of the* kommunalka." Boris Groys: *"For me total intellectual and creative alienation and the contrast of a kind of primordial–physical co-existence was always incredibly exciting. In essence, all Russian unofficial art is nothing other than a kind of entire* kommunalka." (from a Hungarian translation that appeared in *Magyar Lettre Internationale* No. 33, 1999).

2 ■ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

3 ■ It is, and they do pass them along.

(22)

Many too many are born: the state was invented for the superfluous!
Just see how it lures them, the many-too-many! How it devours them, and chews them, and re-chews them!
(Friedrich Nietzsche: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*)

Work was in full swing yesterday at the 'Glory to Stalin' agricultural co-operative too. Tuesday saw the ceremonial opening, in the capital of the Chad Republic, of the Soviet scientific station that has been established for tracking man-made satellites.
(Newspaper clippings[1])

In 1976 I spent two months travelling in the West. That's how we said it, it's all West, just as they are. One was allowed to travel to the West every third year, that was what they hit on, of all the mystic numbers three was the one they picked. If you received a written invitation, you could go every other year. When it comes down to it, I don't know why I stayed in Hungary.

I don't know why I came back to the country. This state. *The drilling machine factory is renowned for precisely fulfilling not just planned targets for the month or decade but daily ones as well, and a cookery school has opened on the 15,000-hectare Bólyi State Farm in order to make the works canteen food tastier,* back into language like that. An obligatory, fictive, highly formalised artificial (one might say literary) language, reduced to variations on a few dozen structures, out of which the parts jut out like the glass shards on top of the concrete walls of a well-guarded garden. To a language *in which no one at all has the right to drag in reality, and which strives invincibly towards absolutism.* Or was there something else besides?

When you set off for the West suddenly, all at once, you are left incredibly on your own. *Vas County overfulfilled its house-building plan, the County People's Control Commission verified.* You have no money, the colour of your passport proves to be dangerously hideous, and you don't understand what people are saying. You haven't the least idea. Even if you have money, you have none, even if you understand a bit, you understand nothing, uneasiness sets in, you are preoccupied with that.

You compensate for the uneasiness. At the frontier they take you aside from the word go, obviously because of the colour. Do you know what it feels like when the others are waved on, go on, just carry on, and you are the only one that is called over. Taken aside.

Purely because of your colour. A dark-blue passport, and maybe it's only you who sees it that way, in reality it is blood-red and dripping. In a London youth hostel your bed is surrounded by people staring admiringly at you, with Stalin's name cropping up repeatedly with great enthusiasm, French proles janoskadaring, slapping you fondly on the back, because it has come out where you are from. It comes out at once.

Why does it come out at once?

According to them, you are comrades; you don't understand that, and you would prefer not to understand why you look so different seen from somewhere

else. Paris, mid-September 1976, portraits of Mao Tse Tung on walls everywhere. He has died and they're mourning him. Mourning Mao in Paris.

Yet even then it was possible to learn, wasn't it, that masses of people had been executed in China under Comrade Mao? Five million died of starvation between 1946 and 1952 due to the "agricultural reform", one could hear about that. And the tally of people who died during the "Great Leap Forward" in the early Sixties is put at between 20 and 43 million.

"Put at between", fantastic numbers. The 1966-76 "Cultural Revolution", the starvation of Tibet into submission, things like that—pure fantasy. *"Where we had boggy swamps rice is now planted, and our health is good, / Because the wily fish have eaten up the mosquitoes' brood."*[2] House walls in Copenhagen pasted all over with placards, the lineage of Marx-Engels-Lenin continued by the Stalin-Mao left wing, half-neatly overlapping one another, a Mao nose bit sniffing the scruff of Stalin's neck, and that in turn Lenin, that's how Danish commies imagine the development of mankind from caveman to workers' militiaman.

It may have been in Stockholm that I saw the same in Swedish. *Millions upon millions of people in China know Li Fu Lian. The Chinese girl with the laughing black eyes and hair swept straight back who was among the first to receive the distinction of being honoured as a Hero of Work. The working woman who is in the vanguard of the Chinese textile industry recounts her life as follows: "The greatest experience of my life was to meet with Comrade Mao Tse Tung in person on two occasions. My heart was pounding heavily when Comrade Mao Tse Tung stepped over to me and proffered his hand: 'I greet you, Li,' he said with a smile, 'the help that you give means a lot to us.' The second meeting happened recently, when I travelled to Peking to attend a conference as a delegated people's representative. "I greet you, Li,' said Comrade Mao Tse Tung very pleasantly, 'I have read a lot about you in the newspapers.*[3] That miraculous inanity. All-pervading drivel. Is it good?

Can anyone take it?

A German boy gets home from school, where he's learning Russian, attending with Russian kids, and he tells his mama how dumb the Russian kids are, they're only interested in *matrioshka, pirog* and *burattino.** I heard the story from a German woman.

What she did then, she relates, was to spread the world atlas on the table and point out to her son. First Germany, a fingertip-sized purple splotch, then the three palm-spans of dark red blot signifying Russia, and she asked the boy do you think only dumb people live in a place that big? An authentic story.

Only something is not right. Or else I didn't understand it, in which case I don't want to understand it properly.

Take away, wind, this greeting
To the good female friends.
Long live all our good workers
Who relieve one another!

* ■ Nestling dolls, pies, marionettes.

Because yes, indeed, the people who live there are all very stupid. Clever people don't live there; even the clever ones are stupid, the cleverest too. And stupidity is bad. Bad like a hot but calamitously cooling *pirog* in ulitsa Gorkava in January 1978, and a lot worse than that. Bad, ugly, dangerous, that many stupid people in one place are damned dangerous, and there's no way they are not stupid because they live in the country where that is the rule. Where the rule says the ugly is beautiful, the bad good, what they call the truth is untrue, it's that simple. Bad. Bad and bad.

What's up with us, I'll tell you straight,
Counting turn and turn about.
Combine in Kirivabad,
Woman shock workers by the hundreds,
There's a combine in Nuka too,
No lack of shock workers either.

Woman workers by the hundreds in combines, seen like that it's not so bad.

NOTES

1 ■ Taken from *Szabad Nép,* 9 July 1950 and a 1969 issue of *Népszabadság,* on the reverse on articles that were thought important at the time.
2 ■ "Éljen a barátság. Azerbajdzsán mese" [Long Live Friendship: an Azerbaijani tale], transl. Endre Vajda, in: *Szovjet népmesék Leninről és Sztálinról* [Soviet Folk Tales about Lenin and Stalin], ed. István Kormos. Budapest: Ifjúsági Könyvkiadó, 1953.
3 ■ *Szabad Nép,* 31 August 1950.

Coda

Foam

Right then! (M. D.)

If something is of no interest, then entirely not. Political or suchlike things, social. *Is that a good word here? It doesn't sound stupid?* Pretty girl, very bright. Very pretty, she knows pretty well everything about what interests her. German literary theory and fashion magazines are what interest her most of all. The Soviet Union, Communism, things like that are of no interest, so little so that she has a hard time getting the words out. She can't pronounce them, and that's not because she's fooling around, but really. *The so, the s, dammit, the soviet union, was that right wing then or left wing? What wing? What wing were the Commonists on?* Meanwhile she is almost dropping off to sleep. *The left wing, is that right? If I turn this way, that's to the left, isn't it?* She shows which way is left in her book, just out of politeness, for my sake. Meanwhile she's curling her hair, it's so thick that it stands up by itself. Which way according to her? According to me?

USSR immense Futurist zone

canned

for one thing archaic, for another it devastated, corrupted the community

the ruin conserves, whoever lives here takes it upon himself and bears the brunt of this whole absurdity, yet somehow still gets by in the timelessness

hush, decay, Gogolian, amidst brutal types, amidst the traces of civilisations

this disaster is reality, a scene of grace for victims and nature

a wall at school was covered all over with pinned-up pictures of Pioneer heroes, we venerated them as saints because they were capable of murdering their mother and father if they did not believe in the revolution

the whole thing was dead prole, with all the horrors and depths that means

on a school trip to Brest I had a look at the memorial to those prole kids, it was winter, blinking freezing, red neckerchiefs tied to a grille in a dark cave, *unheimlich*

many little hearts pound, a red colour in the icy winter, among the iron bars

I was already a little aesthete back then.

in Moscow we looked at the dead Lenin, in Kiev at the mummified priests, sheer necrophilia, which reminds me that this is a basic topos in Sokurov's films, and in Vladimir Sorokin's *The Sky-Blue Tub of Lard* Stalin and Khrushchev screw one another

it would have been good to have saved all those school essays, us changing the Sahara into a paradise, Lenin being fond of pirog and ice-skating, the evil West threatening us, wanting to nuke us, the bluebird of Communism takes wing

I was at Pioneer camps, in Vladivostok, in Odessa, in the Crimea, and heaps of stories come to mind, but I'm tired and you must be bored

you aren't bored?

see Aleksei German's classic film *Khrustalyov, My Car!* I don't know if it was a good thing to be part of the CCCP, for me in particular it was of no interest

the anarchy was good, the chaos, the sharper life, real winter, viscera

in ninety-four and ninety-two the chaos was so bad I thought it was the end

I was a university student, no eats, everyone sloshed, no electricity, from the window of our room I looked out onto a dark hill, the rubbish was smouldering all the time

the ring on the gas stove in the kitchen was burning full blast, but no-one was cooking

which reminds me that at a camp in Belgorod some Russian kids burned their Pioneer neckerchiefs in eighty-five

the camp was surrounded by forest, we didn't dare go over there because an old flasher lived there

we walked down to the village, there was nothing, the people sat the whole day on their doorsteps, spitting out sunflower seeds

they were awfully nice, but we drew back, that is those of us from Ruthenia did, there was something viscerally deep-down important about the whole thing, because everything was shitty, but still we cried a lot when we came away from there, a total mystery

in the students' hall life began at night time, everyone was so puppet-like, getting on quite happily on their own, one guy, I remember, would stand for hours

under the fluorescent light in the corridor, tossing bits of gravel into the white lampshade until it dropped and shattered

the doors were constantly being broken in, the windows too, but nothing was taken

then it was over

other people, older than me, could write a whole epic out of the roughest stories, I wasn't in the thick of it, and besides I'm not a keen observer

I'm in Beregovo now, the secretary is munching away next to me

as a six-year-old in the drawing class at school I produced a many-headed being, a reptile or dragon, and I showed it to the teacher, telling her that it was god

the old biddy went all rigid, wondering where I could have heard the word and roundly ticking me off

I don't understand it either, at home they only used to scare me with Jack Frost

as it was we would have Christmas and everything at home, but we had to keep quiet about it at school, so much for God

there was a time when it was impossible to get bread, during the Eighties, I would be queuing up around noon, that's where we would play until four in the afternoon, I was a child

there were plenty of times when the big, dark-green lorry would only come late in the evening, then the queue would break up and everyone race to the front, the shouting would start

the elbowing, that's what we called it

if you weren't sharp, for instance you fainted due to the clammy pressure from the hulking grown-ups, or you lost your place and couldn't bore your way back in

I was barely able to bore my way back

or someone fetched me such a clout that I would run home bawling, but that didn't happen very often, I always stuck it out

or I was already at the front, but there was an iron pole, you'd be pressed up against that, I would chuck up

it would have grown dark by the time I got home, the bread was sticky with spew, it was no time to be finicky

there was also a turnstile by the porter's desk at the students' hall in Ungvár, you had to go past that to get in, so anyway the female porter, a big, burly red-haired nutter with gold teeth, she had been a prison warden before, along with her woman friend, a lezzie with a moustache, alcoholic sadists they were, just for fun they would often push the metal arm back into my stomach, and then they would roar with laughter, they enjoyed doing that

they enjoyed degradation, it was sheer ecstasy for them

the uni lecturers were dumb baboons, alcoholics, psychopaths, all stinking, they all wore dark glasses and flashed the teeth as they sang out the teaching material for the lesson in the Russian style.

Gomerrr, says a drag-queen teacher, meaning Homer.

drawling, singing out

I would read, or else write in my notebook, creep, pisspot, shithead, fart

creep

creep

then there were the scrap iron collecting drives, we gathered loads of iron in the school yard, all sorts of things, just so our team would be first

we collected iron the whole day, hauling the handcart around

the gym apparatus was also made of iron, one of the bars was set high, I would hang on to it until I dropped

from really high up, it gave my back a bad bang

I was alone in the school yard, I was scared to say anything at home because I always had to be strong, no whining allowed

because the CCCP is a hard place, no snivelling

one has to walk, put up with the weather and their wacky sports clothing, pump iron, drink, eat crap, look at their stupid mugs in the offices

the train station is a long way off, I would set out at dawn, let's say, it's winter but I'm not freezing yet, the snow covers everything, my footsteps echo because the ground is boggy and I'm completely myself

the train station is a gigantic, draughty building, no immediacy, completely lifeless

deserted

nothing

Vasily Chapayev and the Nothingness

I'm leaning against the big green tile stove, crows outside, the train is packed, I'm standing between two coaches, squashed between others

there's no window, only an iron door

once they trapped a chick's head in there

er, there's quite a lot of us here now, I can't write like this

me in particular, though I did think that this would nevertheless somehow be OK, I rebelled, but purely for reasons of temperament

I always said to myself pee, poo, spew, fart, and I scribbled over the pictures of heroes in books

that apart, we lived in a wonderful house, walnut furniture, concert grand, Persian rugs, quite good paintings, fantastic books, no Soviet stuff

my ma was an upper-class dame, though people still saw it as being natural that Communism was the sole possible reality, I don't get it

no doubt they were cracked

today I'm going to buy myself a black fur-lined cap and gleaming white earrings to go with it ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

András Bán

So Near, Yet So Far Away

Péter Szabó's Photo and Video Project

With the arrival of warm early-summer weekends, festivals come hot on one another's heels. It was no different last year, when the Chain Bridge, whose graceful lines are considered by residents and visitors alike as one of the capital's emblems, was closed every Saturday and Sunday during June. By the heads of the bridge, on both banks of the Danube, one musical event followed another in an atmosphere of excited children and sizzling sausages. On the bridge itself was displayed a series of photographs—the blown-up pictures that together make up Péter Szabó's photo and video project entitled *Background—Have You Ever Been To Budapest?*

The photographs hanging from the real bridge's suspension girders showed a view of the Chain Bridge in its full floodlit glory, with people standing in front of it smiling or awe-struck. The pictures were in pairs. One colour photograph was of simple, somewhat rustically attired folk with the Chain Bridge in the background; the pair was a black-and-white photograph showing the circumstances under which the other picture was taken. From these pairs, it turned out that the Chain Bridge in the colour shot was not the Chain Bridge after all. The photographer had made trips to Hungarian villages, taking with him a portable background—a huge photograph of the Chain Bridge—in front of which he positioned his subjects.

The strollers on the real bridge no doubt took the whole thing as a bit of a joke until, on reading the captions to the photos, it dawned on them that most of the people in the photos were Hungarians who had never set foot in their capital city. Very likely, no one could possibly have photographed people like them on the Chain Bridge. In Péter Szabó's shots it was the Chain Bridge that had "come to look them up". At this point some viewers would have felt shame and the pity.

The individual photographs, indeed the project as a whole, were not posed; the pictures were set up as simply as was possible, with the photographer

András Bán
is a critic who has published widely on contemporary art.
He lectures on visual anthropology at the University of Miskolc.

unobtrusively present. All this may have prompted some passers-by to wonder whether this was indeed art, since it was not characterised by any special style that called for explanation, it didn't require one to go to a gallery to see it and, moreover, it was free. All of which takes one into the very essence of contemporary art, and more particularly the realms of public art.

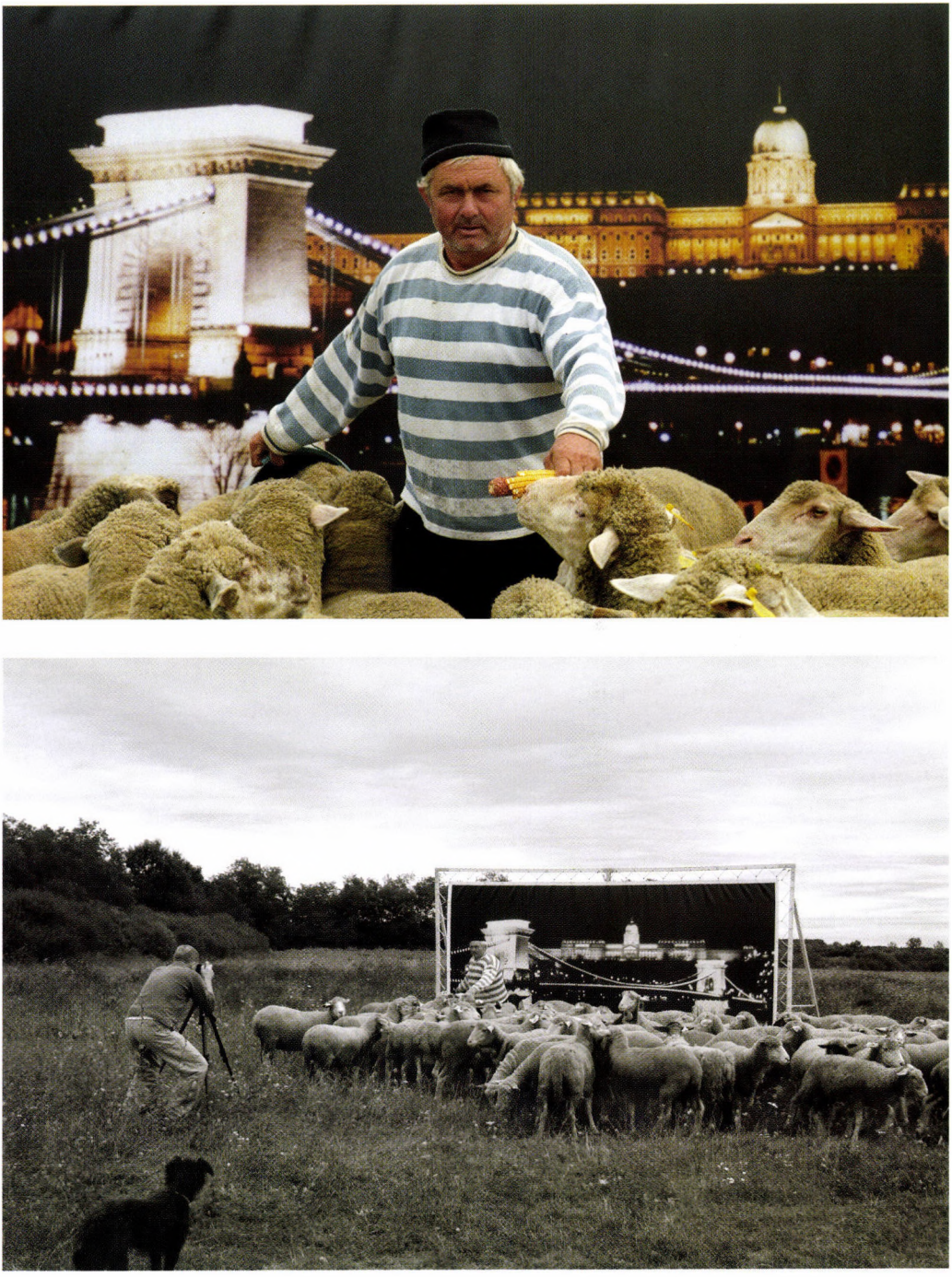
In recent years, a number of such projects have been staged to use public spaces as a way of making a direct approach to onlookers. Their main features may, perhaps, be summed up as follows. To start with, the artists usually employ readily available means such as photographs, videotape, everyday materials, even their own bodies, rather than the traditionally approved and "alienating" media such as oil paints or marble, which call for a certain technical preparedness. The works may be immaculately realised, flawless, but the artist never puts himself forward with obtrusive displays of craftsmanship, compositional skill or arch knowingness; he takes it as read that this is his job—he knows what he is doing. It is also typically the case that the creators pick as their "topics" matters that relate to both their own and the viewers' shared everyday experiences, and therefore—most importantly—open up a range of approaches. By comparison, the larger part of the milestones of modernism, not to speak about huge and exciting but visually "empty" canvases, simply did not communicate what their content was—at least not to simple viewers who were not steeped in the metalanguage of this form of art. Who but the experts would have dared to pronounce an opinion about the aims of a work, its significance, the dynamics of the pictorial elements, the compositional tensions, the colour contrasts? This is not so with some of contemporary art, which allows, indeed positively encourages viewers to have their say, to speak about the work in a manner that matches their personal sphere of interest. Thus, a contemporary artist's work may very well be amusing—unlike the hushed, reverent tones that are regarded on proper when commenting avant-garde masters.

Background, then, is a coherent, carefully thought-out and implemented project. Péter Szabó, now 37 and trained as an engineer, is an artist who does not look on the creative element alone as being part of the work but also on things that have customarily been considered a burden: he has mapped out, in both a conceptual and technical sense, how his ideas will reach the viewer, how he is going to display his work on a specific site and in other media. Most importantly, he wanted to show the chasms that can separate people even though they live in one country, speak the same language and draw on a shared set of symbols. The starting-point was thus his search for a dialogue with those who live on the fringes of society. His idea was to track down people who had never visited Budapest either because they had not been able to afford it or because the thought of being in a big city was daunting or because that's how things had turned out—whatever the reason. In villages on the borders of the country, he did indeed manage to find subjects who fitted the bill. He adopted a well-tried method that

was used a century ago by travelling photographers: he toted around a backdrop that allowed his models to make believe they were fulfilling an unachievable dream or overcoming a longstanding fear. Whatever the case, cultural barriers were broken through.

Szabó carried out the project on his own except for the occasional helping hand of a local. In addition to the photographs, he also made videotapes in which the individuals who appear in the pictures say something about their world and their image of the capital in general, and the Chain Bridge in particular. These video narratives, too, open up a possibility of a dialogue, of understanding, by leading the viewer into personal worlds that are, each in its own way, whole and admirable. The photographs, on the other hand, point up their remoteness.

Besides portraying tensions that exist in society, Szabó's work—the series of photographs and the manner in which they were displayed—also touches on some quite basic issues concerning photography. By its very nature, photography is concerned with distance, with what separates and what connects over space and time; for precisely that reason, it is an accurate and profound metaphor for interrogating society. Twenty-five years ago, Benedict Anderson introduced his notion of the nation as an imagined community—imagined because the members of any given nation may not know everyone else, but still hold a conviction they are all living the same social reality and so are bound together by communal ties. With those enlarged photos on the Chain Bridge, Péter Szabó hoped to remind passers-by that right then, albeit anonymously and in another place, there were fellow countrymen with similar needs, desires, values and symbols; that the people appearing in the blown-up photographs belonged to the same community as the people viewing them. That was reason enough to take and present the photographs. But then they also pose questions for anyone who interprets them, forcing them to conclusions that touch on the reshaping of mundane reality, on the individual lives that are ensconced in them and on their intrinsic values. ❧



Bertalan Szőke (b. 1951), Kisvarsány.

István Kerényi (b. 1995) and Róbert Kerényi (b. 2003), Besence.

Mrs Imre Lőkös (b. 1903), Alsószuha.

The exhibition on the Chain Bridge.

Lajos Parti Nagy

Kenyans

Short story

Bella Wrights makes no bones about the fact that, at first sight, she mistook them for a women's basketball team, a none-too-pretty but strong team, except that there were a fair number of handsome males as well, or how could she put it, bull-ostriches, and anyway they themselves had passed themselves off as that in response to her enquiring look.

And would I be so kind as not to shake my head, that's not the sort of thing one could make up, that a person is an ostrich, unless it was so. Anyway, this is the plume, be my guest, proof, he plucked it out in secret from the tail of one of the females, because ordinarily that sort of thing, plucking out, was right off limits for them, plus the feathers could fetch money too, quite a tidy sum at that. A domesticated ostrich was no joke, a breeding pair would cost at least twenty thousand euros—plus VAT, naturally.

Yes, indeed, they had explained everything to her, one after the other, they must have sensed in her the bond they had in common that bridges over appearances. They had the time, they were standing around sipping coke in the park in Hévíz, the younger ones were on the swings; they were waiting for the bus and for some reason that loosened their tongues. They span a yarn about their different types, the blue-necks and the red-necks, also the African blacks, to say nothing of those who were not purebreeds, so they were uniform only in outward appearance. To their eyes everybody in this here Europe looked the dead spit of Bella Wrights, at least to begin with.

No one should get away with the idea that it was easy for them to overcome the fear they generally evoked with their unfortunate size, though, for they were decidedly docile, having only a one-pound brain in their heads—exactly the same

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Lajos Parti Nagy

(1953), poet, writer and playwright, is one of the most influential innovators in Hungarian writing today. The short story above was published in A fagyott kutya lába *(Leg of a Frozen Dog, 2006), a collection of short stories written over the last ten years and reviewed by Miklós Györffy in this issue on pp. 122–126.*

as a Hungarian hen, only it came with a body a hundred times bigger, like. So they weren't too bright when it came down to it, which was why they couldn't do much in the way of making statements to every Tom, Dick and Harry—that's what they had Joe Kasznár for, their spokesman or agent, who runs the farm to everyone's satisfaction, it was just that right now he was off looking for a driver for them.

So, you live on a farm, do you?

Right, a farm or commune. You can pay a visit, with an omelette shindig, ostrich hootenanny and video thrown in.

They had it made here, near Lake Balaton, most of them were agreed on that, the climate was to some extent like that in Kenya—they happened to be Kenyan settlers, by the way, if anyone wanted to know. Their flesh was entirely cholesterol-free. It had the colour of beef but a taste closer to that of veal, says one of the younger layers, sitting on the swing, and blushingly adds that the West has gone quite crazy for them.

Oh, but then that means you get the chop here, the simple and logical statement slips from Bella Wrights's lips in the Hévíz park.

That's right, they replied, and they weren't the least bit put out about it being raised, they just nodded that, too right, they would be getting it in the neck, much as with a pig killing, at least as far as the technology goes, with ostrich liver sausages, ostrich knackwurst, ostrich saveloys, or whatever they were called, only not trotters—oh, and not brawn either.

But there were ostrich-killing feasts, for instance, which were celebrated rain or shine.

To be frank, this new home of theirs, here in Europe, was still a tiny bit new to them, but they had heard that it was new to us too, to Hungarians. The main thing was that the native kitchen culture was the same, at least as far as cuts go, though they were basically here for breeding: as trailblazers they were not being kept for their meat, although if anything should happen to them, of course, no two ways about it, they would be turned to good account. But barring accidents they had a chance of living out their threescore years and ten, which is more than could be said of the natives hereabouts, because ostriches don't smoke, are vegetarians and teetotallers, and don't destroy themselves like humans do.

Bella, Bella, you've dreamed all this up.

No chance, honest to God, and see here, just look at this feather, the dead spit of the one on Pál Tomori's alleged battle cap in the Balaton Museum at Keszthely. It's antistatic, dancing girls and charwomen kill for them, and without them, without ostrich plumes, the Carnival in Rio wouldn't be worth a crock of sheep pellets.

Apart from which, just bear this in mind, if you please, every egg of mine will fetch one thousand two hundred US dollars, this Mrs Tomori whispers into Bella Wrights's ear, and with her being a layer, if it is not unseemly to talk about such things, over the course of forty years she would lay anything from thirty up to seventy eggs. Each one weighs over three pounds and her omelettes were the dead spit of those made from hen's eggs.

Our omelettes, an uptight male chips in, but they are all pretty disciplined, proper military even, they all carry these knapsacks with their fodder, then white trainers and a golf cap. They had come to make a coach excursion, off via Nagyvázsony to Balatonfüred, to take a look at the Tagore promenade there, then on to Badacsony, where they had also taken their turn in the chorus line with a little Kenyan Swan Lake, as they were a dance group just by the by, and this was their reward, a few days taking the thermal waters at Hévíz, along with the family.

They weren't sure if the nice lady happened to know that each rooster among them has two layers, and even so, as she could well imagine, it was necessary to keep the families separate or there would be too much having it on the side. The ostriches had picked that up here, that European expression, anyway there would be too much merry hell being caught, and if one bears in mind that an ostrich cockerel is eight feet tall and weighs over three hundred pounds, well, you can understand that two of them clashing make belling stags look like child's play by comparison.

To say nothing of the fact that brawling simply did not pay. They had roughly ten square feet of skin that could be processed, so it was not a good idea to rip that to shreds, because one of those, freshly skinned off, would fetch at least eight hundred euros. It yielded the sort of leather that leading fashion houses, the Guccis and Hermes', would turn into motorcycle jackets.

Any Harley Davidson biker would give his eyeteeth to wear one of our skins.

And anyway they were in a position to say that brawling didn't pay, because they were docile, though if there was a spot of bother, they had a kick like a mule, only harder. Just come by sometime, why don't you, and try a spot of 'strich-riding—that was the word for it. They were the horses of the future, it would not be going too far to venture.

But then if, after all, put it this way, if deep down they really are birds, Bella Wrights asks, don't they ever get the urge to fly?

Oh dear me, with tushes as big as theirs that just wasn't on, replies the young lady who was referred to as Mrs Tomori, linking arms with her hubby, isn't that so, my angel?

Well, there's no getting round it, the stern and astute-faced cockerel puffs his chest out, people say about us, if you please, that as birds we're more like horses and as horses more like birds, therefore ostriches are close relations to Pegasus, QED. And that's a fair point. As far as the subject of flying goes, though, you've hit on something. There's always the odd dreamer who gives it a go, but where's that going to get him. All they do is break their legs and so get themselves slaughtered, so it's not worth the candle.

Scraggy-necked, bald old coots, on swelteringly hot summer evenings, let's say, will swap unofficial yarns about how they flew in, exactly like storks, but those are tall tales, strictly for the birds, a wise ostrich will just smile, the cockerel by the name of Tomori waved his chip bag dismissively. That's the way things are, Mags. Eggs we come into this world, eggs we leave it. At this the entire bunch of

ostriches congregates there, in the Hévíz park, nodding their heads, their eyes bright.

Writer, they breathe in an undertone. He's our up-and-coming author. By his own quill, like Pelican.

Then, when that little fellow in the jodhpurs and golfing cap comes along with the driver and blows his whistle, they all just race for the coach so no one would be left behind, given that it was impossible to escape anyway.

With a phiz like this, madam?

We wouldn't make it even as far as you would on the savannah, they say to Bella Wrights by way of farewell, and chug off towards Keszthely. ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

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Len Rix

Oliver's Return

The Subtle Artistry of Antal Szerb

It was a matter for some celebration last year when Antal Szerb's publishers finally reissued his *Oliver VII*. This charmingly wayward novel has been out of the public mind for far too long. Written in a steadily darkening period of its author's life, in an already dark period of Europe's history, it is a hymn to joy, a glimpse of a more innocent world made all the more subversive by its shrewdness, its clear-eyed freedom from illusion, its generous transcendence of everything that is mean, life-hating and cynical. The tale of a bored king who plots against his own throne and ends up impersonating himself in exile, it slipped into the world, appropriately enough, under cover of a nom de plume—in fact posing as a translation—and it has challenged interpretation ever since. It is unashamedly playful. It touches on questions of philosophy and morality while reducing the reader to gales of laughter. Indifferent to questions of political correctness and intellectual fashion, it evades every category into which the critic might wish to fix it. And it has paid the price, spending decades in near-total oblivion.

Even when not cocking a snook at the official morality of the times, it troubled those who genuinely wished its author well. Its apparently frivolous plot made it seem lightweight, 'experimental', a work so utterly different in kind from Szerb's masterpiece *Journey by Moonlight* (1937) as to amount to little more than an afterthought. György Poszler's admirable 1973 study[1], guided by Szerb's own brilliant essay on illusion and reality in the dramas of Pirandello, seems to have

1 ■ György Poszler: *Szerb Antal.* Budapest, Akadémiai, 1973.

Len Rix

was born in Zimbabwe, and studied languages before reading English at Cambridge, where he now lives. His translation of Oliver VII *will appear later this year, to join his other versions of work by Antal Szerb:* The Pendragon Legend *(2006) and* Journey by Moonlight *(2001) (for Pushkin Press), and* A Martian's Guide to Budapest *(*The Hungarian Quarterly, *Vol. XLVI, No. 180). In 2006 he was shortlisted for the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize and awarded the Oxford Weidenfeld Translation Prize for his translation of* The Door *by Magda Szabó.*

been the first to penetrate its more serious intentions. Poszler achieved this by reading it as combined parody of the picaresque and detective novels with a philosophical agenda deriving from Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* and *Henry IV.* But even he goes on to suggest that the novel's anonymous first printing may have reflected doubts in the author's mind about its value; and writing about Szerb in these pages (No 167, Autumn 2002), he chose to omit it from his short list of the writer's fiction written after *Journey by Moonlight,* presumably now convinced that, once the element of parody and the debt to Pirandello had been noted, it had little fresh to say after all.

Poszler had, however, shown a way forward for others. The comparison with Pirandello was both illuminating and calculated to make the most sceptical reader take the novel more seriously. Nor was the connection a fanciful one. Szerb was not only writing about the Italian around the same time as *Oliver VII* but, through some remarkable failure of vigilance, was allowed to make a short radio broadcast on his plays as late as 1943. Poszler writes with such verve and authority that his essay will doubtless continue to set the tone for some time to come.

But *Oliver VII* has never sat still for long in any critical box, or even the elegant combination of boxes he contrives for it; and the link with Pirandello, however suggestive, may in the end prove limiting. Whatever their common themes and intellectual affinities, Szerb's personality, temperament and vision seem to be of a subtly different kind. The question remains whether *Oliver VII* has other fish to fry than Absurdist ones; and whether, indeed, one of the objects of parody might not be Pirandello himself. Szerb's art is full of such surprises. It is the stuff of his vision and the key to his narrative technique.

There are of course other reasons why the novel might have been so long overlooked. To those untrained in the mental gymnastics of illusionism it might appear surprisingly slight. Szerb's tale of a bored king who becomes a trainee con man is certainly entertaining, with its sly wit, moments of broad farce and ingenious use of masks and disguises—but what does it all add up to? The plot is hardly realistic, the ending possibly sentimental. Those who come to it with high hopes after *Journey by Moonlight* might feel more specific reasons for disappointment. Certain themes, and the ironic manner, will be familiar, but they will look in vain for the darker spiritual questionings, the confrontation with inner demons, the brooding sense of psychological determinism of its predecessor. For many readers in the West, Hungarian novels are supposed to be gloomy, despairing and ideally a touch neurotic. *Oliver VII*'s benignly indulgent tone might come across as simply a retreat, a persecuted man's regression into wishful thinking. Any Hungarian book about a popular uprising that results in nothing nastier than a few quaint graffiti, the comic humiliation of a state official and a witty student prank, must surely have its head in the sand. Those arriving from Szerb's first novel, *The Pendragon Legend* (1934), might be less disappointed, but only because bringing lower expectations. *Pendragon* is, like *Oliver VII,* another tissue of parodies that masks its serious side with a deceptive air of frivolity. In both

narratives, the sheer entertainment and playful tone disincline one to look for deeper implication. Certainly, British reviewers of the 2005 translation of Pendragon were happy to celebrate the fun, the literary wit and the pace of the story, and generally left the philosophy to fend for itself. Will that be the fate of *Oliver VII* too, when Pushkin release the first English translation later this year?

In one sense, there would be something rather pleasing if that proved to be the case. The enduring popularity of *Pendragon* and *Journey by Moonlight* in their native land arose independently of political censors and learnedly-explicating professors alike, and this surely is a tribute to Szerb's gentle humanity as well as to his art. If we are to arrive at a full and balanced judgement of the writer—as the reprinting of *Oliver VII* now gives us a chance to do—we have to consider what sort of man he was, and what distinctive temperament drives his inquiry into the questions raised in his work.

The most obvious of those questions is of course about self and identity, a transparent concern in *Journey* but actually first broached in *Pendragon,* one of whose many charms is the malicious self-portrait of the author himself —scholar as clever buffoon. It is sharply, at times cruelly, detailed. The 'hero' of the novel, Dr János Bátky, is a footloose philologist from Budapest of about the same age as the author, around 30—old enough to think of an Oxford undergraduate as "young", but not too old to flirt with his sister. Before being caught up in his great "spiritual adventure" in Wales (he sets off hoping for a privileged view of some old Rosicrucian manuscripts, and ends up in the thick of a murder-mystery with supernatural happenings), Bátky passes his days in that venerable foster-mother of eccentricity, the Reading Room of the British Museum, pursuing his private interests in religious-historical and literary topics—just as his creator had done in 1929–30. Of course, unlike his creator, the man is a mere dilettante; but like him, for all his perkiness, he is also a bundle of timidity and self-doubt, with his diminutive stature, thick specs and occasional naivety. Helpless and hapless for all his learning, he is prone to bouts of morbid suspicion, and can be disconcertingly cynical. He does, to be fair, have some of the scholarly virtues: he is honest, sensitive, introspective, shrewd (up to a point), honourable in his own way, though capable in his private life of the most scandalous lapses. The portrait is at once cruelly personal and amusingly general, and at every point it underscores the failings and the spiritual dangers of his, and the author's, profession. The novel abounds with remarks such as: "Look here, doctor; I think you must be a little slow on the uptake. That's nothing to be ashamed of; it's not uncommon even in the best of scholars. You often find a surprising distance between abstract thought and common sense"—a remark which the entire plot endorses. It is a study in the folly, ambition, envy and vanity inherent in the academic life. So much then, for the soon-to-be eminent scholar who wrote it.

The question is, what lies behind this amusing self-mockery? With any writer of Szerb's obvious brilliance, answers to questions of meaning and purpose have

to be answered in terms of form and technique, and here we find an example of the special sort of admiring inattention Szerb tends to attract. Everyone notices, and enjoys, the many parodies incorporated into the writing: gothic horror, murder mystery, science fiction, Mills and Boon-style romance, and so on—an aspect that reviewers in Britain seized upon with particular delight, since many of the writers invoked are in fact English. (Szerb had a command of popular native fiction bordering on the reprehensible—he even took time out from his ruminations on Goethe to translate the comic novelist P G Wodehouse.) No one, however, seems to ask whether these parodies amount to anything more than a harmless bit of fun. But the moment we consider their function in the story, their purpose becomes clear. As the writing glides effortlessly from one level to another, scene after scene beginning in gothic, romantic or heroic-detective mode, only to dissolve into a blend of farce and gentle satire, the result is to expose the hero to different and wildly contradictory aspects of himself: indeed, to the multiple different selves of which he is a bewildered composite. There are many short passages in which this principle is shown in operation. In one of the more hilarious, Bátky goes in search of his German friend, the sexually omnivorous Lene, who has been abducted by gangsters. Setting out as the earnest detective, he looks for her first in her favourite pubs, where a few glasses raised in her memory reduce him to the maudlin ex-lover; he returns to their hotel, much the worse for wear, as the loudly confident extrovert, is chastised by his formidable landlady, and slinks off to bed 'cowering under the weight of her authority'. These absurd inconsistencies are more than a mere humorous device. 'Self', as Bátky experiences it, is a pathetic, often absurd creature, a disconcerting mixture of ill-understood promptings and wild improvisation, and always the prey of circumstance. In fact he has a whole repertoire of selves, each called into being by the needs of the moment. Terrified on one page, on the next he observes with an air of surprise: "I seemed to be acquiring a sleuth-like nonchalance." At one minute he is "filled with energy, and hard as steel," the next, he is " as excited and confused as a child left on its own by the grownups to wrestle with death and the Devil." This presentation of personality as fluid and impermanent reveals an unexpected dimension to the mocking self-portrait. It is not just literary styles that are being parodied here, but the illusory nature of the versions of self they serve to dramatise. In doing so, they undermine the conventional notion of 'identity' as a fixed and predictable blend of qualities and attributes.

The exact nature of Szerb's thinking here calls for more careful consideration than it generally receives. His revelation of the complexity, indeed unreality, of self serves a vision subtly different from anything in Pirandello. At a turning point in the novel Bátky describes the composite ego as a 'busy nonentity', whose tyranny is all too infrequently broken by 'those fleeting, transient' moments when we are 'akin to the angels'. We must consider the possibility that he actually means something by this. The tone of *Pendragon* may often seem frivolous, but Szerb was not a frivolous man. His diaries, or rather the selection of them published in 2001, teem

with painful self-examination and religious questionings. And indeed, when we look more closely at the novel, it is apparent that, for all the fun it has with the ghost story, gothic fiction and the whole wacky Rosicrucian enterprise, the book picks its way, with the very lightest of touches, towards the suggestion—ironic enough in itself—that the world is indeed shot through with spiritual possibility. As the Earl sits with Bátky in the closing pages, musing on the failure of his quest for eternal life—the perpetuation of self beyond the grave—the landscape is tinged 'from end to end with a gentle melancholy, a profound feeling of transience'; suffused with a 'glory' and a 'magic' that, in his despair, the Earl can no longer see. Of course it is Bátky, as narrator, who gives expression to this moment of deepening insight, even though, as we see repeatedly, it is a dimension of experience he temperamentally cannot connect with, as Szerb underlines in the closing pages, where he is reduced to little more than a scientific charlatan.

It is not altogether surprising that Szerb's critics should wish to pass over this side of the novel, and indeed of Szerb's temperament, reluctant to consider its presence when the idea of existential angst is so much more familiar and reassuring. It may seem improbable that anyone so formidably clever, and with so many grounds for scepticism, could write from anything remotely like a sustaining religious sensibility. But, for all his authorial tact and ever-lively scepticism, there is no question of his broadly religious turn of mind. Szerb had read Krishnamurti in his youth, had periods of intense piety as a young man, was a member of religious-historical discussion groups, and took an interest in all sorts of spiritual experience. He once said of his school friends (from the Piarist Gymnasium) that "the best of us became monks". Indeed there is much of himself in the character Ervin in *Journey by Moonlight,* the Jewish boy who converts to Catholicism and actually joins an order. Ervin, whose own 'mountain-peak-serenity' is itself subject to the occasional hint of authorial irony, is nonetheless a benchmark by which Mihály is judged.

It is Ervin too, who underlines for Mihály (the 'hero' of *Journey*) the insignificance of the egotistical self, in his remark that "we monks have no personal history". Szerb has been described as a man engaged, through his fiction, in a desperate attempt to forge himself a social and psychological identity. The situation is the reverse. Not only was he a man of the most endearing humility, but his aim is to deconstruct the very concept. His values lie elsewhere. The famous scepticism is never self-serving. It is rooted in an open mind, not a closed one. And however heterodox his Catholicism, and however restrained its expression in the novels, he is too finely attuned to what is loosely called the 'mystical', a term discussed in the opening scene of *Pendragon,* and of course a favourite word of book promoters summarising *Journey by Moonlight.* Even in that troubled masterpiece—a novel about 'spiritual dereliction' if ever there was one—there is a kind of lofty serenity implied in the poise, the ever-luminous intelligence of the narrator. The action is viewed, as it were, *sub specie aeternitatis.* This poise, or 'serenity', if that is the best term for it, will find even fuller expression in *Oliver VII.*

To understand what Szerb is quietly telling us in *Oliver VII,* we have to look not to external literary influences but to the way it continues to explore ideas latent in the two previous novels. Its almost dialectical relationship with *Journey by Moonlight* becomes apparent the moment we consider their broad narrative structures. Parallels are constantly to be drawn between the progress of the young king and what happens to Mihály. Both begin as 'unreliable' conformists, trapped in what might be thought of as the family firm; they are widely considered unsound, alarmingly 'capable of anything', but in fact are much more intelligent than they are given credit for. Both feel stifled by convention (neatly conveyed in the vast greatcoat poor Oliver has at all times to wear), both yearn for the 'real life' of the world 'beyond the fences' and both contrive to escape by characteristically devious means. Finding themselves in their author's beloved Venice, they head for its shadier underside in quest of unspecified 'experience'. Events force them to take stock of who they are, what they really want and where their loyalties lie. In the end, they are confronted with choices: between two women, and whether to return to the old life. Mihály, still trapped in his favourite role of sacrificial victim, meekly submits to being fetched home 'like a truanting schoolboy', and even on the train back to Budapest is seen staring out of the window, consoling himself with the thought that 'while there is life, there is always the chance that something might happen'. Oliver's return, by contrast, is a matter of principle, also in a way self-sacrificial, but on a quite different level.

The link between the two novels is signalled by constant hints and allusions. For example: when in *Oliver VII* the ever-cheerful Sandoval is taken through the 'narrow little backstreets' of Venice, he notices 'the water swirling blackly in between, as if still heaving with the forgotten corpses of past ages'—sentiments far more appropriate to the morbidly nostalgic Mihály. More typically these echoes are given a comic, indeed parodic twist. In Chapter XVI of *Journey* the hyper-imaginative hero is haunted by the sound of wailing from behind a wall: 'There was a profound, tragic desolation in the song, something not quite human, from a different order of experience' (it turns out to be the chanting of Syrian monks). This eerie and disturbing scene is replayed in terms of pure farce when Oliver's terrified Ministers take refuge in the Palace: ' ... from somewhere inside the building, they could hear an indefinable sound—rattling, yelling, and then dying away—that gnawed away at their imagination: the sort of noise cattle make as they approach the abattoir'. It is the ludicrous figure of Pritanez, who has been locked in a room, in circumstances of extreme indignity, by the scheming Major. Those who take a disparaging view of the novel will write this down as a lazy recycling of familiar materials. But for all its laid-back charm, this is not a lazy novel.

There is a special point to this subtle reworking, and it is a personal one. Behind the scenes, Szerb is quietly seeing off demons that haunted both Mihály and his own younger self. Beneath the surface of the 1937 novel swarms a vigorous underlife of private reference. Mihály, like Bátky, is very much an alter-ego of the writer himself. Szerb's widow left notes in which she identified the

original models for all the major characters—the ambiguous siblings Tamás and Éva, Ervin and so on. Nor was this the first time Szerb had written about this 'Tamás'—the aloof, pale, fastidious young man for whom Mihály entertains clearly homoerotic feelings, later transferred, not altogether convincingly, onto his sister Éva. In real life, at the age of 18, increasingly troubled by his feelings for a schoolmate called Benno Térey, Szerb wrote a short story entitled *"How Did Tamás Ulpius Die?"* In it, as Csaba Nagy[2] has shown, he attempted to exorcise once and for all the now disturbing elements in his love for the young man. The story commits in effect a double-murder, of the beloved person, now seen as a malign influence, and of the youthful Szerb himself: it is in fact a kind of joint suicide, one which finds its direct echo in *Journey by Moonlight.* The 1937 novel seems to suggest that he felt the need (both as a Catholic and a newly-married man, like Mihály, on his honeymoon) for an even deeper understanding of what happened, and perhaps a more thorough purgation. So steely is the intelligence at work that the issues are left, in the final chapter, clarified but unresolved.

It is surely a sign of his increased personal maturity, or at least self-acceptance, that when he treats the same material for the third time in *Oliver VII* the resolution is so different. Not only does the young king surrender the freedom and the 'uncertainty' that is his own definition of the 'real life', to go back to the Court, with all its oppressive ceremony, the burdensome greatcoat and the tedious round of speeches from platforms: bound up in that choice is the rejection of the 'other' woman he has not just come to love, but who has become in his mind almost inseparable from the 'true' one. For all the droll humour, there is both moral strength and unexpectedly moving dignity in the way the relationship is ended. Those who consider the characterisation of the book totally shallow might ponder the real complexity of feeling here, not least that of the girl, who sees more clearly than Oliver himself that she has been in some sense used, acknowledges the paradoxical sincerity of the king's behaviour, and continues to love, to feel pain and to forgive. Oliver, for his part, is capable of turning from her only because he has learned 'what it is to be a king': that a man acquires integrity only by doing what his situation requires. In this regard and others, the novel looks forward to the French existentialists rather than back to Pirandello.

Theatricals, roles and identity also featured large in *Journey by Moonlight,* and the difference in treatment is again instructive. Far from repeating itself, or merely restating Pirandello's insights, Szerb's thinking has again clearly moved on. In the earlier novel, the histrionic games improvised in adolescence shape the adult lives of all their participants, and Mihály's tragedy can be seen on one level as his inability to outgrow his preferred role of victim. This contributes much to the wry fatalism of the tone. In *Oliver VII,* a recurring metaphor for this is the theatre, and as always with this writer, the theme is presented in terms of form. If Alturia is the

2 ■ Csaba Nagy: "Ki ölte meg Ulpius Tamást?" (Who Killed Tamás Ulpius?). In: Antal Szerb: *Napló-jegyzetek 1914–1943* (Diary Notes 1914–1943). Budapest, Magvető, 2001.

setting for an *opera buffa,* Venice is treated so stagily that 'at times the whole scene seems to wobble', and the dialogue often reads as if written for the boards. The plot itself falls neatly into the five acts of classical drama, with the *peripeteia,* clearly labelled, coming in Act IV—and no sooner had Szerb finished the novel than he set about rewriting it as a play, entitled *Ex.* King Oliver—like almost everyone else of importance—plays many parts, but in a quite different spirit to Mihály. At every stage he keeps a watchful eye on what he is doing, considers the consequences and learns from his experience. Most pointedly, as already touched on, he rises above the confusion to accept the most challenging role of all, the one assigned him by 'duty' in the form of human obligations, not least towards his subject people. Through exploratory role-play he picks his way towards responsible action.

The acting theme is worked through in some depth. His affair with Marcelle is from first to last a delicate interweaving of sincerity and impersonation, for which, as she points out in her finely ironical letter of parting, he proves to have the greater talent. Like Sartre's Kean, he learns that men instinctively improvise versions of themselves to woo the women on whose love and approval they depend; but this does not reduce him to cynicism or despair. Rather, it makes him understand the reality of the love he sincerely feels for both, and the difference in its manifestations towards each of them. The Marcelle who embodies the 'real' world for him enables him to sense the real person waiting in the other woman, the conventional bride ordained by necessities of state. At the same time he comes to accept both the difference and the strange continuities between semblance and reality. The clarity of mind shown by both parties in his final, very moving, interview with Marcelle, is in this sense the climax of the novel.

In other ways too, *Oliver VII* recapitulates and moves beyond core ideas of *Journey by Moonlight.* Oliver's stated reason for wishing to abandon the throne is the desire to experience a supposedly more authentic life, an impulse that connects him with both Mihály and Erzsi in the earlier novel. Its principal condition, he tells his friend the Major, is the element of 'uncertainty'. The ideal state, encapsulated in the free-wheeling life of the eternal trickster St Germain (an upgraded, benign Szepetneki), is never to know what might be coming next. So Oliver flees the predictable sweetness and innocence of his betrothed Ortrud in search of the danger, the spontaneity, the moment-to-moment aliveness he eventually finds on his 'honeymoon' trip with Marcelle to Torcello. But unlike Mihály's, his eventual return to his place in the family firm is not a failure and a regression; rather, it is corrective. When asked what 'real life' is actually like, he concedes that it is not so very different from what he already had. What Szerb intends by this we can only guess: he is far too agile to spell such things out, but two answers are implicit in the action. First, even at the Palace, as the closing pages make clear, life has plenty of surprises. Wherever you are, reality is spontaneous in its expression. Second, given the illusory nature of so much human intercourse, and the impossibility of permanently gratifying the self, duty, the doing what is right, is as good a guide to happiness as we will ever be given.

And possibly too, when such self-denying choices are made, something else comes into being. The Oliver who returns to his ancestral throne has become a larger person than the Oliver who left. Even so, and, as with his other two novels, the ending is a fine and subtle balancing of ironies. Princess Ortrud shows every sign of turning into something other than the conveniently deferential bride she had been; and questions remain about Coltor's cynical acceptance of the amended treaty and its proposed monitoring body. Alturian dreaminess has yet to engage with hard-edged Norlandian pragmatism.

The novel can of course be enjoyed without any sense of these undercurrents. The broad comedy, the sly wit and unfailing good humour are a source of steady delight, as is the freshness of the writing, with its constant surprises and reversals. The gentleness of the irony is not a new feature of Szerb's writing—it determines the tone of both *Pendragon* and *Journey*—but the sunniness of its view of humankind is. Conceived in a world of marching jackboots, the setting and tone have at times more in common with the Bohemia of *The Winter's Tale* than with Hitler's Bohemia-Moravia. Villains abound, but no actual evil is done, and their villainy is not so much seen off as transmuted into good. St Germain, the arch-swindler, becomes, like Shakespeare's Autolycus, the unwitting instrument of redemption (and the parallel is made even more teasing when he suggests, only half-jokingly, that 'there must have been a divine purpose at work here'). The King's elaborate deception leads in the end not just to self-discovery but to the salvation of his country. Of course humankind is venal, self-deceived and self-important, and things are never quite what they seem; but there is not a harsh word in the whole book. The prevailing spirit is one of cheerful, amused, open-eyed forgiveness. How that was possible at so steadily darkening a time for its creator remains a matter of conjecture.

For all this, *Oliver VII* confirms the self-declared 'neo-frivolism' of *Pendragon* as the 'serious' business it is. Szerb nowhere expands this concept into a formal philosophy—that would hardly have been in the spirit—but its implications are many and far-reaching. Originating, no doubt, as the natural expression of an irrepressible wit, itself the overflow of a formidable intelligence, it becomes a self-imposed discipline, a means of distancing personally-charged material, to make it available for the impersonality of art. At the same time, it gives free reign to the principle of surprise, so integral to his sense of the paradoxical nature of the world. In *The Pendragon Legend* an alchemist who has all his life 'believed passionately in the supernatural' makes the shattering discovery that it actually exists. Mihály's voyage of self-discovery in *Journey by Moonlight* is equally marked by a series of comic reversals of certainty: 'This was not the first time he had seen black as white...' And as the 'fire-eating' Delorme observes in *Oliver VII*, 'sometimes these truisms turn out to be true. Life holds no greater surprise'. In the dizzying world of Szerb's fiction, things are forever turning out to be the opposite of what they seem, or even more strangely, what they always were.

The philosophical, or perhaps we should say psychological, essence of this neo-frivolism was caught by the religious historian Károly Kerényi, who said of the writer (a close friend) that "he never took himself seriously". This was more than a compliment; it exactly reflected the value Szerb attached to the 'self' as in 'self-interested' and 'self-important'. If personality is plural—as Freud, and Pirandello, knew, and *Pendragon* wittily demonstrated—then the different selves that make it up will include some very odd bedfellows. For Szerb's mentors, if that is what they were, the consequences are potentially tragic: reality is unknowable, and the poor battered ego is locked into a hopeless struggle for permanence. Szerb turns that conclusion on its head. Since life, for him, is a joyous, miraculous thing, and love not entirely an illusion, the instability of the 'self' is in fact a form of release. Its inconsistent nature, and the endlessly ingenious strategies it devises to keep its end up, are necessarily comic. The art that grows from this realisation is too benign for satire, too shrewd for sentimentality; it pulls off that almost impossible trick of accommodating a disillusion bordering on cynicism with an amused, indeed delighted, acceptance of the world with all its faults.

What is perhaps most moving of all in this, is that the values enshrined in Szerb's novels were so much of a piece with the qualities that made him such a remarkable human being, and that those qualities, attested by so many—his unfailing kindness, his playfulness, the gentleness of spirit—find such full expression in this radiantly benign, all-forgiving last novel. They were qualities he took with him to his grave.

With the passing of the third 'Jewish Law' of October 1942, the questions of identity and loyalty that feature so strongly in Szerb's fiction took a new and urgent form. Reclassified, to his dismay, as Jewish, and an alien in the land of his birth, it was now his turn to choose: between accepting the role he had been allotted, and the chance to leave. At first, it seems, he simply clung to hope. His books were banned; *Oliver VII* sank without trace; he lost the right to teach in his university; was summoned for periods of forced labour. Ahead lay the ghetto, the compulsory yellow star and the death camps. Presented with repeated opportunities to escape and an academic post at Columbia University, each time he declined. Some of those close to him, such as the poet Ágnes Nemes Nagy, thought he did so out of naive optimism, misplaced idealism or the misguided notion that his reputation gave him exemption; and those factors doubtless played some part. But there was also a real commitment to Hungary and to his work there ("How can I teach students who haven't read their Vörösmarty?")—which his widow later claimed as the major reason he stayed. And there was also an unshakeable loyalty to those he loved. Even when granted permission to leave in 1944, he declined when the Arrow Cross threatened reprisals against his family; again, just weeks before his horrific death in January 1945, he sent his rescuers away because his younger brother was in the same camp. On another occasion, he simply refused to leave if it meant abandoning his old colleagues and friends

Gábor Halász and György Sárközy. People wrote of the 'mood of resignation' that came over him, and the way he continued to put others first, to think of their needs when his own prospects were becoming so dark. It is difficult not to read the values embodied in his fiction, particularly *Oliver VII,* into his conduct during these appalling circumstances.

Forgiving he might have been, and possibly overtrusting. But he was not blind to what was coming. For some time he had been compiling his last book, an anthology of his hundred favourite poems translated from the major European languages. Just one of these was his own work, from the German of the Swiss Nobel laureate Spitteler. It proved horrifically relevant. In it, Consul Cornelius the Clement, who has ordered that his slaves should be required to perform only labour that is congenial to them, discovers one who is physically incompetent and an object of general mockery. He asks the man what he did in his home country and receives the sour answer (the title of the poem): 'Only a King'. Cornelius considers for a moment, then, being a man of clemency, gives the order: 'Kill him'. Is it chance that 'only a king' is also the concluding phrase of *Oliver VII*?

Antal Szerb more than once complained that the playfulness of his manner too often led people to underestimate the seriousness of his scholarly work. It is hard to resist the notion that much the same fate has befallen his three novels. They have too often been patronised as a mere adjunct to his great histories of Hungarian and world literature; and their playfulness too, as the bleak publishing history of *Oliver VII* testifies, is too often taken at face value. No less taken for granted is Szerb's sheer technical mastery. Every aspect of his craft rewards attention: its subtle tact, the delicate, constantly-shifting, ever-mimetic style, the limpidity and purity of his diction, the ear for dialogue, the almost mathematical symmetry of his plots, his capacity to charge naturally arising situations and objects with symbolic resonance—quite apart from the shrewdness, even in so delicate a concoction as *Oliver VII,* of his comments on the human condition. These virtues, so integral to his hold over a faithful and growing readership, have never attracted the critical attention they deserve.

And how nice it would be to have a proper biographical study of the man. There is of course a significant body of material now available, including a volume of collected diary entries, anecdotes, reminiscences and reflective pieces, published by Magvető in 2001[3], and a fine book of memoirs[4] —all available in Hungarian only, and yet to be systematised. The omissions tantalise as much as the fragments inform, and the difficulties are compounded by the equally unfortunate absence of a systematic bibliography. As things stand, even so basic a matter as the date of *Oliver VII*'s publication is left unclear. The dust-covers of the new and 1996 editions give it as '1942–3'. Does that mean 1942? or 1943? (the latter date to fall in with the copyright ascription)? Why do the highly dependable HunLit website and other

3 ■ See Note 2.

4 ■ Tibor Wágner, ed.: *Szerb Antal emlékezete: Akitől ellopták az időt* (The Memory of Antal Szerb: Robbed of Time). Budapest, Kairosz, 2002.

authorities assign it, perhaps more plausibly, to 1941, while others suggest 1942? If we consider how rapidly the writer's circumstances were changing, that is to say, deteriorating, no doubt month by month during the period when he would have been composing it—possibly any time from 1937 onwards—these dates might well have a bearing on interpretation, or at least provide a fuller understanding of the novel's context. Was Szerb still working on this joyously life-affirming tale after his reclassification in October 1942? Do its sweetness and lightness of tone betray mere escapism, the near-sentimentalism alluded to earlier, or a defiant assertion of civilised standards against a world descending into barbarism? At present we can offer little more than an educated guess.

Szerb's following is now Europe-wide. Admired for many years in Germany, Italy and France, his books are reaching out into ever more languages. *Journey by Moonlight* has achieved something approaching cult status both in Britain and further afield. *The Pendragon Legend,* translated in late 2005, has sold strongly and is currently reprinting. Later this year, Pushkin Press will add *Oliver VII* to its list of the author's work. Along with Márai and Kertész, Antal Szerb is currently the writer who most represents his country in these islands. How pleasing it would be to see the appearance at last of full-length critical and biographical studies—and not just in Hungarian—to accompany the texts, and to tell us more about this remarkable man. ❧

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Antal Szerb

Oliver VII

Extract

Sandoval the painter had tactfully left the young couple to themselves—the word 'young' being used here in a rather specialised sense. The dancer was certainly young. Officially seventeen, she could not in truth have been much older. Count Antas, however, was more like sixty, at the very least.

The Chateau Madrid coffee house, on whose terrace they were sitting, was the supremely fashionable place to be seen in in early spring, with its pavilion under the celebrated hundred-year-old plane trees beside the little lake in the park that began where the city ended. Given the small number of these open air coffee houses in the state of Alturia during those years before the war, you might have expected to have to fight for a seat. However at the Chateau Madrid, the breeze was included in the bill. With a cup of coffee costing three Alturian taller, the clientele consisted solely of the social elite and the demi-monde. On this particular day, with the steadily worsening financial crisis, it was less than full.

In front of the Count rose a tall stack of side plates, one for every drink he had imbibed. The Count drank himself into a stupor most evenings, but, not being a man of narrow principles, he had no objection to drinking in the afternoon as well. In fact, he had probably been at it that morning too—it was hard to say quite when he had begun, since he would normally have known better than appear in so large a gathering in the company of a little dancing girl of such dubious reputation. (In those years before the war women still had such things.) Luckily the trellised bower they were in offered a shield from prying eyes.

"My gazelle!" he murmured amorously. The little dancer acknowledged this compliment with a happy smile.

"My antelope!" he continued, developing his theme. He sensed the need for yet another animal, but could think of nothing better than a pelican.

At that precise moment Sandoval burst in, with an anxious face.

"Your Excellency!..."

We thank Melissa Ulfane and the Pushkin Press for permission to use this extract from their forthcoming Oliver VII, *the third novel by Antal Szerb to come from Pushkin in translations by Len Rix.*

"My boy," the Count began, in a voice that verged on a hiss. He did not welcome intrusion. But Sandoval cut him short.

"Count," he insisted, "Her Ladyship is here, with her companion."

Antas clapped the monocle to his eye and stared around. It was beyond question. Slowly, terrifyingly, like a fully-rigged old-style frigate, his wife was negotiating the entrance.

"I'm done for!" he stammered, his eyes darting hither and thither, as if some unexpected source of assistance might come sailing through the air.

"We can still get away," whispered Sandoval. "We can nip out through the kitchen and straight into the car. Come on, Count, be quick... and try to look like someone completely different."

"And the bill?" demanded the grandee, a gentleman through and through.

Sandoval tossed a fifty taller note onto the table.

"We must go. Quickly!"

They dashed out of the bower, Antas with averted face. Almost immediately he collided with a waiter balancing a tray in his hand. The crash of broken crockery brought all eyes to bear upon them. Antas began to apologise, but Sandoval seized him and led him, at a speed scarcely to be credited, through the kitchen, out onto the street and into the car, losing the girl somewhere along the way.

"You don't think she saw me?" the Count asked, slamming the door shut behind them.

"I'm afraid it's quite certain she did. When Your Excellency knocked the waiter over everyone—including the Countess—turned to look. So far as I could make out, in my state of agitation, she was shaking her parasol at you."

Antas slumped back into the seat.

"That's it. I'm dead," he whimpered.

Sandoval meanwhile had started the engine and swerved out onto the main road leading to the city. There had been no time to send for the driver, and they left him to his fate.

"If I might make a suggestion... " said Sandoval, breaking the horrified silence.

"I'm listening," the Count whispered, in the tones of a man whose life was about to expire.

"The fact that Your Excellency met Her Ladyship is not something we can do anything about. But time is always a great healer."

"What do you mean?"

"For example, if Your Excellency were to disappear for a few days—a week, shall we say? During that time her rage would subside, and she would start to worry, not being able to imagine where you might be... and it would give me time to think up some story or other to put a plausible front on what happened..."

"How could I disappear, my boy? Me, the Royal Chief Steward? How could you think that? Such a prominent public figure!"

"True, true. Just let me think for a moment... I have it! I'll take Your Excellency to the country mansion of a friend of mine, up in the Lidarini Mountains. It's

utterly remote. The post takes a week to get there. Trenmor, my friend, is abroad at the moment, but the staff know me well—they'll obey me without question—and you'll be completely safe up there, where no bird flies. Even if you wanted to, you wouldn't be able to leave until I came for you with the car."

"Good, good, my boy. Take me wherever you wish. Just don't let me see my wife, and above all, don't let her see me! And make sure you never get married."

The car turned round and set off in the opposite direction, away from the city. Soon the Count was fast asleep. He woke again only when they reached the mansion. There Sandoval handed him over to the household staff and took his leave, promising to return once the skies over the marital home had cleared. Antas thanked him profusely for his services, and Sandoval hurried back to the capital.

It was late evening when he arrived in Lara. There were far fewer people than usual on the streets, but he noticed a lot of soldiers. The storm that had overtaken his car on the road had now died down, but dark clouds continued to race across the sky.

"It's the same up there," he thought, studying them with his painter's eye. "The sky is as restless as I am. Well, not many artists get the chance to play a role in major historical events. Perhaps only Rubens..."

The car squealed to a halt outside a large, unlit building and he leapt out. "The Barrel-Makers Joint Stock Trading Company," proclaimed a rather tasteless sign.

"Even the notices in this country need a revolution," he muttered to himself.

He applied his weight to a bell.

A narrow section of the vast door opened, and someone peered out cautiously.

"The barrels from Docasillades," he announced meaningfully.

"Come in—we're checking the staves," a voice replied, and Sandoval entered.

"Good evening, Partan," he said to the doorman, who was wearing a leather coat and bandolier. "The eighteenth?"

"Upstairs in the balancing room."

He made his way rapidly up the poorly-lit stairwell and arrived at a door. In gold lettering on a black plaque he read the word 'Accounts'. Inside, a group of about ten men were sitting on benches around the walls. They were oddly dressed, with the sort of intense faces you see only in times of historic upheaval. "Who are they? And what might they be in civilian life?" he wondered. The majority had strange bulges in their clothing, caused by ill-concealed pistols. They seemed to know who he was and simply stared at him without interest. A young man got up from a table at the far end of the room and came rapidly over to him.

"Well, at least you got here, Sandoval. We've been waiting a long time. Come this way."

Sandoval followed him into the next room.

It was small and almost completely empty apart from an oddly-shaped telephone—one of the stages along the secret line. Beside it sat two men, smoking.

The first, with his black suit, gold-rimmed spectacles and impossibly narrow face, was Dr Delorme. Sandoval knew him well, and went across to him. The other man he had never seen before. He was extremely tall, with austere, intelligent

features; his hair, which was unusually straight for an Alturian, was slicked down flat against his head.

"Sandoval," Delorme introduced him to the stranger.

The man clicked his heels, held out his hand, but did not give his name. Then he drew back into a dimly-lit corner of the room.

"Well?" asked Delorme.

"I spent fifty taller," Sandoval replied. "I paid the bill at the Chateau Madrid."

It amused him to see how much it disconcerted Delorme that he should begin with this trivial demand. Delorme was clearly struggling to conceal his nervous excitement.

"Of course. Here you are." He handed over a fifty taller note.

"And now, if you would be so kind as to give us your report."

"No," thought Sandoval, "you could never make him forget his manners. He's not what you'd expect, for a rabid demagogue."

And he recounted his tale. As he spoke, the stranger drew closer to him, studying him intently.

"Splendid, really splendid!" remarked Delorme. "Only an artist could have accomplished that. I particularly like the way you timed the Countess' arrival."

"It was very simple. I sent her an anonymous letter saying that if she wished to expose her husband she should come to the Chateau Madrid at six. I know how jealous she is."

Delorme turned to the stranger.

"This place in the country where they've taken him is manned by our people, masquerading as household staff. If necessary, they'll detain him by force. But it won't come to that. Fear of his wife will be much more effective."

"Thank you, Sandoval," said the stranger, and again offered his hand.

"Glad to be of service. Might I ask one favour in return? I don't like being a blind instrument. If there's no special reason why you can't, would you explain why it was necessary to get that harmless idiot out of the capital?"

"Why?" the stranger replied. "Because it's his job as Chief Steward to select the regiment responsible for guarding the palace the following day. Since he won't be there tomorrow, I shall have to choose it myself."

Sandoval glanced quizzically at Delorme.

"The gentleman you are speaking with is Major Mawiras-Tendal, His Highness' principal aide-de-camp."

Sandoval bowed, rather maladroitly. What he had heard astonished him. The King's aide-de-camp and close friend was involved in this business? How very widespread the discontent must be...

It had barely touched him personally. As a mere painter he understood nothing of the economic problems that had produced it. The King himself was a kind and intelligent man, extremely sympathetic in Sandoval's opinion. It was only his loathing of petty-bourgeois complacency that had brought him into Delorme's

camp. That, and the love of gambling, and of the unexpected—in a word, the desire to live dangerously.

"And the day after tomorrow," the Major continued, "the Twelfth Regiment is on guard at the palace. It's the one regiment in which we can count on every man. Do you follow me?"

"So, then. The day after tomorrow?"

"The day after tomorrow."

The Major shook hands and left. Sandoval stood staring after him, speechless.

"Well, well. He too?"

"He especially. He's closer than anyone to the Nameless Captain."

"Extraordinary."

"Don't forget that Mawiras-Tendal is the grandson of the great revolutionary hero every street in Alturia is named after."

"Blood being thicker than water..."

"So it seems. Sometimes these truisms turn out to be true. Life holds no greater surprise."

"Have you any orders for me, for tomorrow?"

"My orders? I must ask just one thing of you. I'd be very glad if you would take yourself off to Algarthe and call on the Duke. You're the only one of our people they'll allow in, now that he's kept under such close guard. They know you as his portrait painter, and the thing is, no one will take you seriously. That's why you are so priceless to us."

"I must resist this notion of pricelessness. I can be paid at any time..."

"I know," Delorme replied with a smile. "And I am sure you've had little cause to complain so far. I was thinking of pricelessness in the moral sense. So, then, Algarthe..."—and he stroked his forehead wearily. He seemed to be having difficulty focusing his thoughts. Then he continued:

"My God, I'm so tired. After we've brought this revolution off I shall retire for a fortnight to that sanatorium for journalists. If only I don't have to become Prime Minister! Anyway, as I said, Algarthe... have a word with the Duke. You know how to talk to him. Try to knock some sense into him. Prepare him for what's coming. If it comes completely out of the blue, he's so frail it could affect him badly. It could even kill him, and then we're right back where we started. Send me a report on his condition afterwards. And now, God go with you. I've got a whole series of reports to get through tonight. About the navy, the universities, the winegrowers' association, the market traders... we're carrying the whole country on our backs. God be with you. And please, spare me the password, and can we do without with the secret handshake? I'm tired."

The situation in Alturia was as follows. Simon II, father of the present king, Oliver VII, had been an outstanding ruler, and the country had suffered in consequence ever since. He modernised the army uniform, established elementary schools, introduced telephones, public ablutions and much else besides, and all

this benevolent activity had exhausted the state finances. Besides, as we all know from our geography books, the Alturian people are of a somewhat dreamy nature, fanciful and poetically inclined.

Along with the throne, Oliver inherited a chaotic financial situation. A man of true Alturian blood, he shared the dreamy nature of his people and showed little aptitude for fiscal matters. It seems too that he was unfortunate in his choice of advisers, who grew steadily richer as the public purse grew lean. To pay the civil servants on the first of each month the Finance Minister had at times to resort to near-farcical expedients, such as doling out their entire salaries and expenses in copper coins from the toll on the capital's Chain Bridge. Malicious tongues even claimed that it was his masked men who carried out that daring break-in at the Lara branch of Barclays Bank.

At that point the Finance Minister, Pritanez, in an attempt to head off the discontent that was reaching revolutionary fervour, accepted a plan to reorganise the entire economy.

The Alturian people's almost exclusive sources of revenue were wine and the sardine—the famous red wine of Alturia, preserving in drinkable form the memory of southern days and southern summers; and the famous Alturian sardine, a small but congenial creature, the comfort of travellers and elderly bachelors alike, when served in oil, or with a little fresh tomato. For centuries the principal market for Alturian wine and sardines had been the affluent citizens of Norlandia, under whose gloomy skies the grape never grew, and whose chilly shores the sardine took care to avoid.

When, in the early years of Oliver's reign, the national purse began to show alarming signs of atrophy, Finance Minister Pritanez received a visit one fine day from the renowned Coltor. This Coltor was the greatest business tycoon in Norlandia. Legends abounded of his unbelievable wealth, and of his astonishing talent for buying and selling. He did not deal in mines, factories, land or newspapers, as did other great financiers. Instead he marketed innovations. For example, throughout Norlandia and all the neighbouring states, he retailed half-pairs of shoes, to be purchased in case of inadvertent loss of the other half. By some remarkable feat of technical ingenuity the left shoe would also fit the right foot and the right shoe the left. It was he who introduced the practice of building house walls with onions, developed the textile cigarette and the ant-powered spirit lamp; and he who found a way to convert the famous fogs of his homeland into edible oil. There was no counting the number of discoveries he had harnessed for economic exploitation.

And then, after all that buying and selling, it occurred to him that you could also buy a country. The proposal made to Pritanez was that he, Coltor, would take control of the entire wine and sardine production of Alturia. In return he would put the nation's chaotic finances in order. The Alturians were poetical souls, for whom the whole tedious business of money was just a source of worry and disappointment, but now he was offering to lift this burden from the nation's shoulders.

Pritanez embraced this proposal with the greatest enthusiasm, not least because the contract, once signed, offered him personal prospects such as the finance minister of an impecunious little country could only dream of—presuming, of course, that he addressed the issue with the resolution of a Cesare Borgia. Determination was not one of his characteristics. He was a rotund, circumspect individual, who lived in a perpetual state of terror.

By extending similar blandishments to his fellow ministers, Pritanez managed to secure their support. But that still left the most important item of all, the consent of the King. From the outset, Oliver had opposed the plan with unusual vigour. He would not hear of his country being sold to foreigners, and he turned a bright red if Pritanez ever dared mention it. The man was beginning to sense that the whole wonderful scheme would come to nothing, because of the stupid pig-headedness of a callow youth.

Coltor meanwhile went on developing the plan in ever finer detail, as if no obstacle to it could possibly arise from the Alturian side. He managed to rouse interest in it even in those ruling circles in his own country that had initially thought it rather ambitious, and their enthusiasm had grown steadily. In the end, the Norlandian government had adopted the scheme as its own, and Baron Birker, their ambassador in Lara, had done his best to win the King over. Eventually, it seemed, Birker's reasoning had prevailed: Oliver now saw that his country had no other means of escape from financial chaos, and he finally accepted that he would have to put his name to the document.

Even so, the Norlandian government still felt it necessary to make sure that the King did not change his mind with the passing of time, and that he would continue to believe in the plan and support it. The best way to ensure that, it seemed to them, as a nation deeply committed to family life, would be to bind the King to their own ruling house by personal ties. They proposed that Oliver should take Princess Ortrud, daughter of the Emperor of Norlandia, as his wife.

Oliver had not the slightest objection to this idea. He had known Ortrud since childhood, when they had played together in the dust of the Imperial Palace gardens. She was a handsome, cultivated young woman, and they had always been the very best of friends.

However when the news was given to the citizens of Alturia that they would soon acquire a queen in the person of Ortrud, a difficulty began to emerge. Normally they were as enthusiastic about such royal goings-on as the citizens of any other country, and their government had counted on this feeling. But it did not materialise. The press made great play of the fact that never before in the history of their Catholic nation had the king married a Protestant. One way and another, all sorts of absurd rumours began to circulate, most notably that the male members of the Norlandian royal family had been, for over a hundred years and without a single exception, drunkards, philanderers or half-wits. Some of the dailies went so far as to issue lurid pamphlets alleging that Emperor Eustace IV had stolen one of the smaller state crowns as a

pledge for a Greek pawnbroker, and that Prince Simiskes had drowned in a barrel of rainwater when inebriated.

Then one day the real scandal broke.

The opposition press got wind of the Coltor Plan and announced the news with the full panoply of suitably outraged comment. What was particularly strange about all this was that only the King and his ministers—none of whom had anything to gain from a premature disclosure—had been party to the information. From that point onwards they viewed each other with even greater distrust, double-checking their wallets as they went into cabinet meetings, and burning their account books before leaving home. But for all their vigilance, they never discovered who the traitor was.

This marked the start of the role played by the fire-eating Dr Delorme. Here was a treasonous plan, which would bring total destruction on the state of Alturia! Day after day his ranting editorials poured out molten lava against it—it was scarcely credible that one man could carry so much lava inside himself. And these daily outpourings were devoured with ever greater eagerness by the population. The government made one or two clumsy attempts to silence the press, but in that archaic world the techniques for doing so were still remarkably undeveloped.

The young monarch became more and more personally unpopular. Prior to this, the good-hearted Alturian people had always taken a misty-eyed delight in the fact that he was so young and yet a king. Now, when he appeared in public, he was met by sullen, hostile looks. His oleograph portraits were stripped from the walls of public houses, and the popular baby soap, cider and travelling basket that carried his image became unsellable, however great the discount offered by their horrified vendors. The Alturian people, like southern races everywhere, loved to express their political opinions in the form of slogans daubed on walls. Now, instead of the universal "Long live the King!" and "Oliver our pride and joy!" there was a steady shift to such sentiments as: "Foreigners out!" "Death to Coltor!" and "Keep our sardines free!"

The unrest was quietly fomented by underground organisations. The Alturians, although gentle and dreamy by nature, were born conspirators. For decades they had channelled all their sporting inclinations in this direction, and the plotters, as we noted earlier, came from every level of society. Following ancient tradition, they swore an oath of loyalty to the 'Nameless Captain'. There were those who thought that this being was a mere mythical notion, but others, the majority, were convinced he was a real person, who would come forward and declare himself at the moment of action.

The conspirators' stated aim was to force the abdication of Oliver VII and replace him with the country's grand old man, Geront, Duke of Algarthe—the person on whom Sandoval was to call the following day. ❧

Translated by Len Rix

András Zoltán Bán

Closing Time

Márai's diaries make it clear that he was familiar with the work of Beckett, in particular with *Waiting for Godot.* It is, however, unlikely that he had happened upon a copy of the early novel *Murphy* (if perhaps he had, he would almost certainly have looked on it with some aversion). Yet, the conclusion of *Western Patrol: In the Lands of the Declining Sun* carries a surprising resemblance to the scene with which Beckett closes his novel, written almost at the same time as Márai wrote his "travelogue novel". In both, Regent's Park in London is the setting and in both, the secondary characters are people at leisure, flying kites. In both too, one senses closing time being called, the final farewell.

Farewell to Paris and London, farewell to the great scenes of youth, farewell, indeed, to youth itself, farewell to Europe, and farewell to adventure, to happy-go-lucky scampering hither and thither, to the self-importance of adolescence—this is the fundamental sentiment of Márai's notes.

Farewell? Is this not a bit premature?—the reader might ask. Perhaps an exaggeration or even role-playing? For the author was only thirty-five at the time. The story of his life offers us a way of grasping this early resignation. When Márai returned home in 1926 after some six years in Germany and Paris, he quickly found somewhere to live in Krisztina Town, an old neighbourhood of Buda; much to his own surprise, he found not only his hearth but his homeland. But first and foremost, he found his genre, the novel, while abroad he had mainly experimented with drama and verse. He was able to continue his work as a journalist almost without interruption, something which assured him a continuous, almost daily connection with his readers, whom he was only vaguely aware of when abroad. He made good use of the knowledge he had acquired during his *Wanderjahre.* His exceptional fluency in languages and his broad familiarity with European society, unusual in the slightly provincial world of Hungarian letters, would have predestined him to become a leading writer. His fate, however, took a different turn.

András Zoltán Bán
a literary critic, is editor of the cultural section of the weekly Magyar Narancs.

To begin with, his fellow writers looked with some suspicion on Márai's ascent. Although the authoritative writers and critics of the period responded favourably to his early novels, *Nyugat* [West], the formidably prestigious literary journal of the period, never counted him among its regular contributors. It should be added that he himself did little to advance himself with them. Indeed, in 1933, in alliance with a leading Social Democrat Zoltán Horváth, he devoted serious energy to a plan for the launching of a journal that would in part be a competitor to *Nyugat* (though for various reasons nothing came of this). Márai was dissatisfied with the slightly dated 'modernity' of *Nyugat.* He felt that the journal had stagnated and lacked the fecundity and force it earlier had. And while he was a bourgeois whose upbringing was Western, in other words almost a paragon of what *Nyugat* stood for, this juncture failed to come to pass. Márai's recurrent assertion of his bourgeois status was not without blemish in the eyes of his colleagues and rivals. He was bourgeois with an almost aristocratic haughtiness and a discernible superciliousness; moreover, he had crafted a bourgeois identity for himself with almost no trace of Hungarian traditions in it, as if for his own private use, accessible only with a key no one else had. And Márai's bourgeois-ness was neither of spotless conscience nor entirely self-assured—there always lurked within it the possibility of revolt, of turning everything topsy-turvy, the fatal leap into certain uncertainty. It is hardly incidental that Márai's formative Hungarian influence as a writer and human being was the novelist Gyula Krúdy, whom Márai immortalized in a masterful novella *Szindbád hazamegy* (Sinbad Goes Home). Krúdy was a bohemian, a lothario and an alcoholic who towards the end of his life was compelled to acquire an official certificate of poverty. He was a genius who drank and gambled away everything he had—one of Márai's hidden alter-egos. This was the Krúdy who, in the period before his death in 1933, no-one had any use for, neither the literary world nor readers, though it was then that he was writing his masterpieces. Márai's bourgeois mode was a kind of one-man way of life, and presumably one with a guilty conscience, longing in secret, in the absence of a Hungarian avant-garde, for the lifestyle of a Krúdy (much as later his exile turned out to be a one-man affair). It was as much fictive as real, as much pipe-dream as reality. And as replete with guilty conscience as it was with ideals. And in part something of a caricature, as he himself later, after the Second World War, belittled his earlier lifestyle. In *Föld, Föld...!* (English edition: *Memoir of Hungary, 1944–1948*), first published in 1972, but partly sketched out at the end of the 1940s, the third section of his autobiographical cycle of memoirs, he makes one of many attempts to explain his position.

> I continually quarelled with this class, this bourgeoisie. I, the bourgeois offspring of Upper Hungary, never felt at home in that bourgeois house and in that sphere of activity of Buda which now vanished amid the ruins. What was it that I felt was missing?*

*Translated by Albert Tezla.

And the answer doesn't tarry: "The atmosphere." Or, precisely, that which makes a way of life organic. Because according to Márai, in that world, in the milieu that prevailed in Hungary between the two world wars, every role or vocation took shape haphazardly and as something of a caricature, whether it be that of the priest, the soldier, the sovereign writer, the mistress who torments her servants, the prime minister, the political parties, the Regent, everything. And of necessity he too, coming from the bourgeoisie, he the bourgeois writer. Of course this only became entirely clear in the shock that followed on the war. But it was, in its essence, discernable earlier, and it had a strong alienating effect. When *The Confessions of a Bourgeois,* the first volume of his novel-memoirs, was published in 1934 Márai already seemed to be looking on his own oeuvre from the perspective of posterity, as a member of the succeeding generation. The close of the book is characteristic: "I want to recall and to remain silent." This work too was conceived in the spirit of farewell and finality, the close of youth and departure into adulthood. Márai created a new role for himself but accomplished it all too well: it became a rigid frame, a mask frozen to the living flesh of the face. With a resolute gesture Márai closed the gate and from then on no-one considered him as a companion in travels.

As perhaps neither did Márai. Others became suspicious in his eyes, as he himself did too. His spiritual solitude, his successes notwithstanding, became complete. (And what could be more natural than for the literary world to receive his ever increasing popularity with strong suspicion: in Hungary even to this day, any major success makes you suspect.) Hence the wounded hesitance to travel, the pleading summons, the allusions to home that he found outside the world of literature in the opening pages of *Western Patrol.* Márai was perhaps affecting the role of Goethe, who, following his *Italienreise*, practically never budged from Weimar, a veritable parody of the provincial.

But what sort of a home was this? With characteristic irony, Márai expands on this in the first pages of *Western Patrol*. Butchers, grocers, tobacconists in Krisztina Town, a manicurist who relates to him her disappointments in love, a small family, in others words "the people". No intellectually superior or patrician condescension. And there is a kind of bashful declaration of love for the homeland, again of course in Márai's distinctive manner: self-referential irony, a constant downplaying and a certain familiar intimacy; as he grumbles before setting out for London that he won't be able to see autumn in Krisztina Town. And this is irredeemable, he implies.

And yet he needed to travel. Why? Partly out of a sense of responsibility, the responsibility of the soldier on sentry duty, so to speak. The great Hungarian poet, Endre Ady (Márai, still in his teens, reported on his burial in 1919 for, among others, the Communist paper, *Vörös Újság*) has a poem that gives perfect expression to this: "Sentries! Be alert when on guard duty!" Márai clearly regarded himself as being a sentry on guard. The literal title of the book, if it can at all be translated literally, "Patrolling the Western Frontier," suggests this unambiguously. And he needed to travel because, despite all appearances—and this

cannot be emphasised enough—Márai was a man and a writer with a strong leaning to politics; in the eyes of the *Nyugat* circle, this too did not turn out to be much of a recommendation. (Not to mention that he was of the left, but there is no space here to elaborate on this.) It was primarily as a journalist that he could live out his interest in politics; his prolific political journalism in the 1930s bespeaks this commitment more than anything else—see the selection from his writings in the previous issue of this journal. This too of course must be understood in terms of Márai's distinctive manner. Namely, he was aloof from immediate party politics, but close to the vacillations and oscillations that politics induced in the human soul.

He needed to travel because, alongside his devotion to the quiet quarter of Buda he lived in, he was above all a European, and because it was of Europe he was hearing ever more disquieting tidings, the same Europe that he regarded as part of his own fate and which was the greatest spiritual experience of his life. This Europe that is the West was, alongside Hungary, a larger family for Márai. The pathos and irony of his declaration is unmistakable:

> I will take one more turn about the West—that is after all the meaning of this banal incident-packed excursion—and survey it once more, with as much thoroughness as I can muster. I will run my eye over this familiar, intimate and wonderful terrain as if inspecting family property; I shall strive to make a proper examination of the patient. Because I hear it is sick. There are many who loudly and worryingly proclaim "the twilight of Europe." What luck, I thought, that I had recently re-read Spengler: It brought to mind those key images of Europe's sickness, the book being far more relevant now than it had been ten years ago when I first encountered it...

One such diagnosis is panic over time, the characteristic of a waning era according to Oscar Spengler's *Decline of the West,* which stirred up so much controversy at the time of its publication (1918–1922). The dread of the passing of time is nothing more than a kind of anguished sense that one must hurry, for falling behind could be fatal. This is a kind of *Torschlusspanik,* the anxiety to get there before the gates are locked. Márai of course seized the opportunity to disregard this and, with a touch of self-mockery, flaunts his conservatism in travel: he would have most liked, he notes, to travel in a mail-coach. And though he doesn't actually cite Sterne, a comment from his diaries in 1983 might easily have found a place in *Western Patrol:*

> Sterne: *Sentimental Journey.* Two hundred years ago the ironic traveller could still hope that his observations and mocking cries would awaken interest among those back home. Today the traveller who has time during the course of his travels to make observations is a rare thing, and even rarer is the reader who would be willing to pay attention to these observations. Travelling and the travelogue, as a genre, have withered.

This may or may not be so, but this much is certain: in 1935–1936 Márai still had a pen, and there were still readers whose ears perked up at the sound of his familial but quarrelsome, amicable but mordant, voice.

Márai gave his work the subtitle of "A Travelogue Novel", accurate or not. If he intended to indicate that his book is neither a chronicle nor a collection of documents, neither an agglomeration of facts nor a guidebook with useful information, tips concerning shopping, the names of good restaurants, etc., then the subtitle is indeed fitting. And by giving it this subtitle, Márai frees himself, shakes off his chains and assumes other constraints by offering the reader something that diverges from the ordinary travelogue. We no longer need take everything at face value, for instance the lions roaring on the evening of Márai's arrival in London, and we are more inclined to think of the nightmarish hotel with its nine-hundred-ninety-nine rooms and an enormous breakfast table (almost a precursor to today's fast food restaurants) as part of a vision that bears some ties to reality, even if in the space of a moment it slips out from under this reality. It is not the factual material that is important, it is the vision that glimmers within it: the soldier who puts himself on sentry duty proves to be a good observer, and an even more trustworthy prophet. In his best pages here, Márai can capture the spell of the moment, "the moment that presents our earth to us", what he feels is his principle task as a writer. Márai and his female travelling companion, the other travellers, Parisians and Londoners, in a word, everyone, drink wine, slurp soup, go for walks, go shopping, stare at the sea and at the slightly ridiculous outfit worn by the kite fliers, put on raincoats in the rain, eat bacon for breakfast, and generally live their everyday lives—all the while hovering about a foot and a half above the ground. The melody of mythology accompanies the quotidien in a spirit akin to Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock": *"Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach? / I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach. / I have heard the mermaids singing each to each."* Indeed this is not a travelogue so much as the fruit of a novelist's art.

Thus, descriptions of notable buildings, various bits of useful advice are not what a reader should expect from the book. Instead he is greeted by numerous miniature portraits, thousands of observations, as minute as they are incisive, of a splendid Parisian wench at the cash register or earnestly giggling Japanese travellers in Budapest, a mother who commutes between Paris and a Budapest suburb, an Austrian travelling with a slide-rule, customs officials rifling through undergarments in search of cigars—the panoply is inexhaustible.

But the irony, ever ready to spring, subsides into silence in decisive moments in order to make room for a quiet but all the more resolutely resounding confession, a subdued pathos. Because all the vignettes are deceptive, the ill tidings prove to be true, and it is clear that Europe is facing closing time, a farewell; a writer cannot leave this unmentioned, for the barbarism can perhaps still be halted. The self-addressing voice of the conclusion is almost heroic:

> You should start home, I think, and tell people that you have tasted it again; take in a lungful of it, fill your consciousness with its raw dampness and tell them that in the Lands of the Declining Sun there still live people who could not breathe anything else, freedom alone being air to them. And is this all I learned and observed on my patrol? Could this be all? That is all. ❧

Sándor Márai

Western Patrol: In the Lands of the Declining Sun

A Travelogue Novel (1936)

Extracts

Well then, for heaven's sake, let's go. It will be a slow journey as it happens, quite slow and anachronistic, at practically dawdling pace, full of stops along the way, because there is no need to rush to our destination. Readers in a hurry are requested to leave at this point and turn to the usual, all-modern-conveniences means of travel: let them dash towards sundown by way of the Orient Express or in an aeroplane. For us there is nothing urgent. We will be moving quite slowly, thoroughly examining everything we pass on our way, even stopping at places that are no part of any organised sightseeing tour—hanging about the street corners of Paris and London for example—so, once again, to anyone in a tearing hurry, please overcome your feelings of rejection and find some other company. Because if there is a point to the journey it is, and can only be, this slow pace, this taking stock: it is the pointlessness itself that is the point. I know you can get from Pest to London in eight hours. But we will be travelling so slowly—and I cannot repeat this warning to my companion, the reader, often enough—that it will seem we are in another age altogether. There is, fortunately for the reader, no regular mail-coach between Budapest and Calais. We will not choose the fastest train, nor will we travel in comfort. It will be third-class for us, not for ideological reasons, but because it is the cheapest mode of travel, and those who don't fancy it, who turn up their noses at this popular form of public transport, should buy a ticket on the sleeper or stay at home. That is how strict I am on this matter. Because now that I have set my mind on the journey I must, of course, develop firm discipline and set some proper limits to the planning of this great adventure: I have, it is true, heard of more dangerous, more picaresque adventures but this unremarkable, this ridiculously simple, this trivial well-trodden—and I mean well-trodden in both senses—path, this excursion happens to be my own adventure, and I want to travel with as much care as did Alain Gerbault, the sailor who single-handedly circumnavigated the globe. We shall set our course west towards the Lands of the Declining Sun, proceeding through territories of the old culture and I will be taking certain basic provisions with me just in case, including soap, a thermometer, a pocket knife and other such useful items, for I have read a great deal recently about the Decline of the West and I feel a certain anxiety. I cannot begin to guess the

extent of the decline from this distance, nevertheless I am anxious so will take a spare toothbrush too, just in case I cannot find one in London. Yes, this is all exaggeration and irony, but there is a genuine anxiety underlying it, anxiety, disappointment and nervous expectation. I will take one more turn about the West—that is after all the meaning of this banal incident-packed excursion—and survey it once more, with as much thoroughness as I can muster. I will run my eye over this familiar, intimate and wonderful terrain as if inspecting family property; I shall strive to make a proper examination of the patient. Because I hear it is sick. There are many who loudly and worryingly proclaim "the twilight of Europe." What luck, I thought, that I had recently re-read Spengler: I brought to mind those key images of Europe's sickness, the book being far more relevant now than it had been ten years ago when I first encountered it, a damnably up-to-date book whose evidence I no longer question and whose conclusions are frightening and likely to be true. I think I am going to see the last days of Western European *Zivilisation,* though "last days" in Spenglerian terms might mean a century or two yet: cultural morphologists don't tend to deal with fiddly numbers.

Once again we will survey the domain of the west which is, apparently, on its last legs, survey it carefully, moving very slowly. Does not Spengler write that one of the signs of an atrophied civilisation is its feeling that time itself is in crisis, "time-panic" he calls it, and is he not brilliant to bring together the signs of "panic"? He points to the Ancient Greeks who had no great belief in calendars, their time-sense being undeveloped and favourable to art, thinking only in looser terms, such as the four-year round of Olympic Games, and to Thucydides who was so far unaware of time and history that he could declare that before his time "nothing happened that was remarkable or worthy of mention"! That shows how far the Greeks held time in contempt. It shows how far any culture that is alive holds time in contempt: cultures that are alive float, are unselfconscious and feel no 'urgency'; despite living in a country rich in stone and marble, the Greeks of the post-Mycenian era went back to building with wood, carving wooden Doric columns, the spirit of the 'Antique' regarding anything built with time in mind, anything to do with 'time' at all, as hostile to its interests. Cultures that are alive float in time, according to Spengler: cultures that have ossified into civilisations think in ever smaller units of time and, recording the moment, they panic! So says Spengler. That is why we intend to travel slowly, aimlessly, dawdling through the Gardens of the Declining West: we don't want to panic. That which is visible, or to be more precise, that which leaps to our attention keen to be noticed, we shall study closely, but we will be happy to miss the great sights of Europe in order to concentrate on the secondary products of the first rank at greater ease, with greater thoroughness. The time, I think, is gone when we should ride on the wind like some whirling dervish. In any case, I intend to buy some warm clothes for the trip.

We shall have to lock up the apartment, and on this night before our departure it will not hurt to take a last look round the walls since anything might happen in

our absence—burst pipes, earthquakes, world wars—and we can't be certain, not even in a journey involving such trivial well-trodden byways, that everything will be as we left it on our return. The humblest journey nowadays is subject to all kinds of risk... True, it isn't even certain that we will return the way we have planned or when we planned, after six weeks to be precise. Because that is all it is, a ridiculously short time, an end-of-summer six-week jaunt, that's all we have available in terms of time and space: it's faintly ridiculous even talking about it... Nevertheless I have a suspicion I will talk about it because that is my nature: I am doomed to talk. I don't believe in 'great' or 'small' experiences; I don't believe that travelling by rocket to the moon is intrinsically more interesting than travelling westward by third-class carriage for six weeks. The moment is the one true eternal point of interest, the moment that presents our earth to us! It is that moment I shall strive, through words and magic spells, to bring to permanence. And on Sunday morning—I warn the reader for the last time, most emphatically, and I warn him as a friend because this is the last moment that we can take leave of each other—we shall be standing at the Keleti, the Eastern Terminal, by the Paris Express, with a frightening amount of luggage, shivering, cold, in the night-before-the-execution mood that is the prevailing mood before all long journeys, sleepy and cigarette-coughing, among porters wondering how to get all the luggage required for such an undertaking into the luggage van. Acquaintances arrive. There is a great fuss. Where are we going? Only to see our western neighbours, we might answer a little nervously, not without a hint of boastfulness. The thing is I haven't actually travelled for two years. I am rusty, every part of my vocabulary is creaking. I want to make a survey of the West, I explain, because, apparently, "Europe is in decline"; and I can't spend time in all this to-ing and fro-ing explaining to the porter that I don't fancy sitting on my typewriter all the way to London. What a to-do! What petty incidents! And now we are on our way: here is Gellérthegy, the Danube, the station at Kelenföld. No turning back now. We take with us everything that is ours, as the wise old saying goes, leaving at home everything that anchors us, that drags us back, our dreams, our language, our secrets: all that stays at home. Go on, I say to myself: take to the road one last time.

For this is no longer an easy, youthful setting forth. It is not like seeing the world as a young man, going on an unlimited hike to nowhere in particular. I am no longer 'free': I am not bound by people, property or promises and yet I am bound more mysteriously, more indissolubly than those bound to their homes by family, fortune and need. There is enough bread everywhere, as much of it today as there was yesterday, and not just here; but I no longer yearn for the bread of other places. I don't covet anything foreign or long for anything that might take me away from this mysterious, intimately familiar tiny patch of earth to whose temper I have adjusted all my nerves, feelings and thoughts. I doubt whether I have any particular 'task', I certainly have no 'vocation', but if I am interested in anything, it is in my home, it is here I must develop, print, enlarge and perfect such images as I have of life. There is something here that concerns me directly. And yet I have remained,

miraculously, a stranger to it at home. I live between two worlds neither of which wholly accepts me, to neither of which do I have direct access. What can I do? I should just get used to it. But this landscape—these Transdanubian hills, the willow-lined embankments of the Danube, the gentleness of the landscape, the sadness of the hills, the idyll of an island in midstream of the Danube—remains inexpressibly precious to me. There is nothing I hate more than patriotic nostalgia; nothing I reject more firmly than the belch of patriotism in its cups, the kind that appropriates and patents a suspiciously loud feeling for some spot on earth. The ties I am talking about are, yes, diffident, possibly the most diffident of all imaginable feelings. Best not speak about them at all. But what can I do when the sense of place is a part of me? If a river to me means precisely this river, a wood means this wood only: this alone is the one true cow calf, the one true willow bank? What to do with the fact that, after considerable winding ways, I become so restless when we reach the post-Trianon border town of Komárom, that I have to go to the window and feel unable to accept the state of affairs: I stare at the town now split into two and I cannot accept it. That which, for me, was history yesterday is personal today. I am aware of the arguments and counter-arguments, I can practically repeat them by heart, as a schoolboy learns the 'right' answers by heart: I know I am 'a foreigner' here and I remain here, not asking pardon, asking for nothing from anyone. But every time we arrive at Komárom I grow nervous. That's the way it has been for years. Yes, we have been through all that now, it's over; now we can travel on, carriages swaying without our old light-hearted selves, carefully, suspiciously, westward once again...

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So here we are in Switzerland: in three hours we will be through it and past the French border. At Zürich a young woman joins us, very talkative, everyone must be informed of everyone's affairs, so by the time we arrive at Muhlhouse we too know everything. The train spends a long time in Basle. The French officials are very interested, one customs man being particularly interested in cigars: if people worked half as hard at economics as they did at seeking cigars among my underpants the financial crisis in Europe would be quickly solved. Germany—so I read—owes French industry and commerce some five hundred million francs from the last year but the customs man at Basle has given his conscientious all to the effort of discovering my secret cigars as though it might be possible to balance the French budget by means of some lucky, perfectly conducted, dawn cigar raid. That's where we have got to, between stratospheric flight and the poems of Paul Valéry, twenty years after the Great War. I watch his endeavours in good humour. I would like to help him. But since there is nothing contraband in my luggage—whatever illegal substances he thinks or suspects I am carrying in my travel baggage, not even he, the European customs man, has yet succeeded in discovering. Struggle on, my good man! I think in mellow mood. Pry away, turn everything upside down. That's your job. There are thirty European borders, each

with thirty sets of customs officials and thirty opportunities for misunderstanding. It will be hard. Customs will complain! This is how ideas have been smuggled across Europe's borders in the hidden pockets of the spirit by centuries of writers. Keep looking, I think.

He finds nothing. The young Swiss woman used to live in Munich, her father was a haberdasher, but the Nazis took a slice off the profits of businesses owned by foreigners so they dragged themselves, family, possessions, German bills and all, back to Switzerland. She is not particularly pretty but there is a dawn freshness about her, she smells of soap, she is well informed! And right now, at six in the morning, just before they get to Muhlhouse, she tells all, she spills the beans on the Third Reich, and there's not much she doesn't know. She herself is Aryan on both her father and mother's side, she informs us uninvited and a little too loudly; it is as if she had received a ticket, a box-ticket what is more, for the grand performance, the great debate. She speaks of emigration, the poor thing—I listen to her warily, with sympathy. Yes, it must have been really painful, possibly tragic, having to leave Munich. And she an Aryan!... this naïve indignation is particularly emphasised in the Swiss woman's story, since we are to understand that had it been otherwise, if she had happened to have been a non-Aryan, our travelling companion would have understood the German authorities. What should I answer? She is on her way to Paris, she says mysteriously, and immediately begins to apply make-up. She looks for eye-liners, little pots, a stick of carmine red in her cardboard pouch, she powders her nose, applies some red powder to her cheeks, she spits into a tiny box containing black cake and metallic glaze, stirs it to a paste with a little toothbrush and applies it without embarrassment to her lashes. She attends to this spot of worldly, faintly demi-mondaine feminisation only now, a few minutes after crossing the Swiss border into the France of the *Moulin Rouge* and the novels of Maurice Dekobra—because there is such a France, strange to say, in the imagination of a Swiss woman who has but a few minutes ago escaped the censure of her prim local bourgeoisie and immediately throws all her naïve energy into fulfilling the perceived requirements of a woman-of-the-world... Back home in that small town somewhere near Zurich—am I right?—you are not allowed to wear mascara, I think somewhat severely. But the French women who get on at Belfort smell of garlic rather than d'Orsay, solid Alsatian women without lipstick or powder, wearing only cheap department store chic, civilly reserved in their manner and looks and—thank heavens!—silent rather than chatty, as Central Europeans tend to be. Yes indeed, this is an example of western *sang froid.* Suddenly all of us keep our secrets to ourselves. The Swiss woman too falls silent as if by magic. A few kilometres back she was chattering of both intimate and commonplace matters, cursing the clumsiness of the Swiss Germans, the sluttish heartlessness of the French, the good-for-nothing Italians with their constant singing and every variety of the Swiss family, all this with considerable nerve and great relish. But she is silent now. We have arrived in the West. We have obligations. She is going to Paris, her cheeks powdered... why?

That's a secret, a secret, a secret. She is behaving as if setting out on an adventure and I could swear she is only going out to buy some thread. Keep your secret, I think.

After Belfort the train suddenly begins to race—hey, slow down, there's no great hurry yet! But for these people travelling between Basle and Paris it is always a matter of the utmost urgency. We are averaging 122 kilometres per hour down six-hundred miles of track, everything in the carriage creaking and clanking, the castles and towers of Alsace with their surrounding orchards glimpsed only for a moment, with that constant drubbing and vibration under us; for five hours now we must be in the hands of the almighty, hastening on the devil's chariot. This is what Spengler meant. The Spenglerian panic. Time atomised. I become aware that the winner of the Tour de Suisse is travelling in the next carriage—I have no idea who the hero is or what act of heroism he has committed: he probably succeeded in reaching a finishing point quicker than anyone else, on a bicycle perhaps, or in a car—all hail the victor! A lot of people are curious and walk past the window of the compartment where their fleet-footed, nobly muscled, laurelled contemporary is travelling, presumably to fresh victories and new races—contemporary? No, competitor, I think enviously. I don't take a look at him, not even a glance, not I. Stuff yourselves with laurels! I think and mutter. Beanpole! Lung-lout! The world belongs to you! I can't deny I am jealous. There is a tangible excitement among the passengers, people are constantly leaping from their seats and peering down corridors, whispering, peeking in, taking shy stock of the famous figure there in the compartment. He is the eternal enemy, this madcap, this butcher's apprentice aiming to break some 'record'. There are journalists travelling with him, I hear, jotting down his every word. The jealous antipathy with which I regard my fellow traveller is not exactly ennobling or gracious and it would be good to be able to overcome it. But it is precisely this kind of man, the kind that manages somehow to win some *tour,* either on two wheels or on foot, in the water or on the turf of a green playing field, that I can no longer abide. It is only very rarely, in a cinema, that I encounter them, on a newsreel bawling out the result of an American baseball game or a test match at cricket: some twenty or thirty troglodytes standing in a green field with forty thousand people in the background rumbling or screaming their heads off. This is all commerce now, big business in fact, a kind of stud farm nothing to do with 'sport', that is to say with training, the interplay of body and spirit and the old Olympic ideal. It's an unsettling sort of business. I like physical discipline and self-control but what has the harmony of the body to do with productions involving such sad, stressed, desperate people? So I grind my teeth. And as concerns the record, we are all, willy-nilly, competing for that, along with our fellow traveller on this godforsaken train, the hero of the *Tour de Suisse;* the same desire propels us at a hundred and twenty-two kilometres per hour forward into time as fires the illustrious butcher's apprentice in the next compartment; the same unstoppable rhythm, all of us running races in every possible direction with no prospect of stopping. While we are in this train moving

at a hundred and twenty-two kilometres an hour, a crazy racing car has been following us on the highway ever since Muhlhouse, occasionally overtaking the Paris Express, while above us the flight from Vienna to London is making its own headway at between two hundred and fifty and three hundred kilometres per hour and, on the sea, various ships proceed at blue riband speed: there's no climbing down now. And tomorrow, in the stratosphere, in thin air, something will be travelling at five hundred or a thousand kilometres an hour from Europe to America—why not? Human muscle can no longer stop the engine. A hundred, a hundred million engines ticking everywhere, on the earth, in the water, in the air; it is thirty or forty years now since this sickness of speed imposed its rhythms on us; distance is no more, there are no more obstacles—there can't be, never again, can there? Never, not even in the days of the diligence, was country so far from country, human being from human being, as when Sir Malcolm Campbell piloted his racing car and broke the record at four hundred kilometres an hour. A hundred and twenty-two kilometres an hour: who can comprehend this, who can grasp it? And our train isn't even aiming for a record, it is just the normal speed for the Basle to Paris Express! Am I wrong in thinking that the faces of my fellow travellers on this perfectly ordinary train bear traces of horror and scepticism? This businessman opposite was only just now organising his case of samples, shaking his head, nervously examining the second hand on his pocket-watch. Silent and horrified we are juddering towards a common, banal fate. We can no longer simply step off that which moves. And to what advantage? Once upon a time the merchant would have carried his wares from person to person, organising caravans, bearing the soul of the West to the East and returning to the West again with his freight of Eastern dreams and hashish. The traveller was an explorer once: the journey from Prague to Vienna was an epoch-making adventure; the traveller was urged to give an account of his experiences, the whole project representing the development of a more intimate relationship between people. Today it is an estrangement, an hour-by-hour distancing to the tune of one hundred and twenty-two kilometres. What does the cut-price tourist see of Paris and London in his seven-day round-trip? Hotel rooms and public buildings: there isn't even enough time to register the smile on a stranger's face... I have no great hopes of speed. I am a courier who does not know what message he is carrying or why. At Troyes I break the lamp in the compartment which is just as well since it is as if someone had struck me on the head so I might emerge from my bitter reflections. It always requires some accident to bring out the courteous and generous side of me: Fate never tolerates someone behaving contrary to their nature.

The old woman I wanted to help as she was struggling and stretching to stuff her heavy luggage into the luggage rack immediately denied any association with me since everyone could see that it was I with my sudden movement who broke the lamp. Oh yes, everyone saw it, all the Alsatian old women. I won't deny it. Serves me right for trying to be courteous. Every time I have lifted a finger beyond my normal role of good-natured observer of my fellow man it has been a disaster.

The lamp I have succeeded in breaking was brand new, as was every item in the furnishings of the carriage. There go two hundred francs, I think. It has already cost me one hundred francs to buy a ticket for this human drama that I am now resolved to enjoy. I sit among them like a leper. We have tidied away the broken glass, the conductor will be along any moment and then it will be up to me whether I confess my crime or remain in silent denial all the way to Paris... They wouldn't betray me, my fellow travellers, certainly not! But they are waiting for me to confess. They don't look at me, burying their heads in magazines, all anticipating my fall. Finally the inspector arrives! I call him into the compartment and produce the incriminating evidence. But what follows is so French it was worth the experience. The inspector gazes at the splinters, scratches his ear, mumbles something and goes away. Nor does he ever return. He avoids our carriage like the plague. Once we are in Paris! I think, but he doesn't appear in Paris either. Clearly he must hate scribbling notes and submitting reports and can't be bothered to sweep the broken glass away. A French inspector... an Austrian inspector would have stopped the train and set up an impromptu, improvised commission of inquiry; it would have been a fury of Central European scribbling, an orgy of seductive report submitting, then the forms, the signatures, the stamps: but all the energy of tracking down, information gathering and administering of fines that an inspector back home would have applied to such a crime is unknown in these parts. A lamp has been broken? So what? The state is rich enough, the train company has in any case insured all its fittings, someone or other will surely pay for the damage... oh la la! I know this voice. I take a deep breath. It seems we are almost there, at home.

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I hesitate a moment in the stairwell, which is exactly like those I see in American movies involving millionaire heroes with palaces whose halls are all marble, columns and copper ornaments, just as unlikely, full of just as much soulless, pompous grandiosity distributed along corridors and in reception rooms, enough to make the traveller shudder to think he has a contemporary stake in such a 'style'! A group of young men—Italians— walk towards me. On their ties they sport the local emblem of the *fascio*. They speak loudly, excited, in good temper. All I can make out in their shouting are the words war and started, and I have to stop in my tracks to avoid being swept away by them they are so pleased and in such a hurry; then they disappear among the columns of bar on the next floor. Their raucous good humour is still audible on the floor below in the silent empty hall. I have to stop because suddenly I understand. I hadn't understood quite so clearly all those months and years ago when I was reading the papers. I glance absent-mindedly at my watch and note that it is five in the afternoon on the first of September... I have now grasped the two words in a way I had never grasped them before. They are right: it has begun. What? Mr Rickett's oil business? The Italian–Abyssinian War? Or *the* war, the one we have long secretly thought about,

the one that started twenty years ago and never properly finished, the one that was suspended for a while, then continued by other means, using other weapons, then conferred about, after which we re-armed, and now a bunch of excited young men have finally pronounced the word, establishing the fact that "it has started." What? Well, that which simply had to happen sometime. For twenty years now, asleep or awake, I have been thinking about it; every thought of the present or the future has been haunted by the prospect of that which has now "started". It is what all Europe has been speculating about for the last twenty years. Poets in their verses, chemical factories in their test-tubes and retorts, philosophers in their studies: twenty years waiting for it to strike. Suddenly now it is visible, tangible. Am I looking at the moment through a magnifying glass? I don't think so. It is not the Italy–Abyssinia affair that has begun, or not just that—Italians and Abyssinians will set about killing each other but then there will be some peace, some truce, some bargaining, perhaps even a trade-off. But once people have started something they have to finish it: twenty years since we started and we have still not finished, nor will we finish yet, not for a long time. There are two Europes here living next door to each other, with two different aims, two different sets of convictions, and it is beyond human will now to ensure that the two Europes should not set about each other. Which of them has 'justice' on its side? But once it is no longer a matter of justice... Thirty neighbouring states, allied or at odds with each other in this part of the world, with borders and excise duties, with conflicting beliefs; thirty insular, secretive states puffing like asthmatics, making a 'peace' that is sometimes more cruel than a war... no wonder it has all started up again! This is neither politics nor commerce now, not diplomacy, not merely the satanic shadow of 'wicked capitalism' or the product of other such childish nightmares. The fact is that out of these thirty states, out of these two Europes, we have to construct something by a form of agreement, establishing some new system of production that we can call a mutually agreed name, a united Europe, otherwise we perish. It is a process that "started" not at five o'clock on the first of the month but much earlier, one that has now seized its moment. The 'peace' that has been in quarantine these last fifteen years might have been no more than an opportunity to learn a few battle hymns and sharpen a few knives. There is something in life at which the reader of a newspaper browsing his way through the various columns at home or anywhere in Europe will remark vaguely bitterly, "Things can't go on like this"—one day a decree, the next day an agreement, the following day an attack, the whole engine creaking and swaying: obviously things can't go on "like this". Now, suddenly, I understand. The young Italians up in the bar, they too "understand". And now I understand that it is not simply an issue between the two versions of Europe—yes, here they are, next to each other, the fascist and democratic versions, in such a state of economic, political, and ideological tension that was bound at some stage to become intolerable—but that, beyond this, something has "started" that may be mortally dangerous, but might equally be life-giving: birth at a critical moment. Europe, that geographical

obsession, must finally give flesh-and-blood birth to itself, that is what I understand. Up to now I only knew it. And with the raucous voices of the young Italians still in my ears I go out into the steamy humid street.

This street, this city, this world, from the Rhine through to the Pyrenees, from the Mediterranean through to Spitzbergen is the 'other' Europe. I stop on the corner and look around. There is plenty to look at. I feel like Rip van Winkle, full of doubt: the place has changed almost unrecognisably. Not on the outside, obviously. Valéry, who lives only a few streets away, called the thought of Europe a myth. I came here first thirteen years ago but today's Paris, today's West, seems to me, in its general mien, in its convictions, its mood, its obligations and agreements, only the faint shadow of a memory. The change I detect now, while the sensation of it is still fresh, feels like an assault, as if something had bodily touched me. The city wears different garments. Paris has changed more dramatically, in a more startling fashion, in the last decade and a half than it had in the years between the Napoleonic Wars and, yes, from the invention of the train through to the twenties. To think of that familiar year, nineteen-twenty, now, on this street corner in Paris, is like trying to focus some undefined, faded historical period! There is not one political agreement, not one international treaty that seems, at this distance of a decade and half, to be unaltered and still valid: Versailles, Locarno, Genoa, Stresa, all the textbook names live only in memory, like the Golden Bull. There is a change in the way men and women dress: there's a tarty cabbie-type seen round the streets, there are no vehicles from the historical past rolling by, omnibuses and trams have disappeared, to be replaced by high narrow motorbuses rushing and honking, and everywhere the tank-like monsters of the electric line shove past, one followed by another; old cafés, restaurants and apartment houses have changed beyond recognition, with new houses going up in new peculiar styles—everything brand new, everything freshly painted, everything transitional, built to last mere moments. What has happened? Everything speeds and shudders. Paris has changed more, inside and out, in the last decade and a half than between eighteen twenty and nineteen twenty. Werner Sombart has calculated that the population of Europe has grown from one hundred and sixty million to four hundred and eighty million in a hundred years. And now, about noon on a weekday, the streets of Paris are packed with crowds of unimaginable size—crowds everywhere, in the street, in the restaurants, before stores, in cinemas, as if preparing for something. Ortega y Gasset thinks they are preparing for revolution, "the revolt of the masses". The New Style you see in houses, in fashion, in technical innovations, is the style of the masses, crude, conformist and screamingly utilitarian: it is the style of a public that is aware of its power, a loud and conscious power that dares to proclaim its coarseness to the world. The masses demand to speak. Not only in politics, not only in assemblies. And it is not just their human rights they are clamouring for—they claim the privileges due their barbarity; they want to establish the reign of tastelessness: they dare to be coarse. That is one of the meanings of change.

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We are living opposite Regent's Park in an end-of-century London house that is as understated as all the other houses round here; its modesty and good manners preclude it from differing: a gentleman does not go about in evening dress when his neighbours are wearing the common grey of the everyday street. Is it a fine house? For a whole month I don't dare look around. I faintly suspect that its outer appearance is ugly, a typical Victorian building, a mixture of minor hunting lodge and compound hut. It's an English house. It is embellished with shrubs and flowerbeds, with a front garden leading to the gate, a flagstone porch by the flowers with long wisps of grass, like the whiskers of a goat, rising in the cracks: these scrupulous wisps of grass are a proper part of the English front garden. A few days later I am in Denham, in the wings of a set they are building for a René Clair film, a scene intended to resemble the entrance to a Scottish castle; here too are flagstones, this time of papier-mâché, and here are busy, conscientious men inserting long wisps of grass between them... Those wisps of grass between stones in the front gardens of the English bourgeoisie are the product not of nature but of human design. This too is tradition of a sort. The house comprises three floors, each floor three rooms. The kitchen is down in the basement along with the pantry and an elegant refectory for the servants; the sitting rooms and the dining room are on the ground floor; the upper two floors are for the bedrooms and the guest room; and the servants' quarters are up in the loft. There is an electric-powered lift in the house opening onto the common hall of the bedroom level but there is no room that opens directly into another room, there being instead a narrow corridor and the little hall to separate them, so it is impossible to burst in sudden fury through someone else's door, there is always a little space, a passageway wide enough for a single person between them. That is the English for you, that narrow passageway between rooms. There is an instinctive ban, even in private houses, against rubbing shoulders with someone else. There is always this distance between room and room, between one person and another: guests and family live under a common roof in unremarked isolation. The house is silent, deeply silent. And the street is just as silent, silenced by an invisible volume control. There is only the mewling of a cat, some exotic immigrant of a cat: it cannot be an English cat, not under any circumstances. It's not part of the house. The residents deeply regret the presence of the cat and will occasionally hunt for it, concerned that the cat might disturb me. It is pointless for me to assure them that back home I am used to unpleasantly louder, less sensitive cats, that I am fully inured against such and that no amount of noise or aggression is likely to disturb me. Despite all that they later catch the cat and call the RSPCA who come for it and take the discourteous, unremitting creature away, chloroformed, in a box. So now, without a cat in the house, silence rules supreme, there are absolutely no unwelcome, unbidden noises to disturb me. The street too is silent, the wide street, one side of which is protected by the low decorated iron railings

of Regent's Park. All day long hordes of buses and cars proceed along this busy road but here even the buses are quiet, the cars don't sound their horns, I don't even hear the barking of a dog. Yes, this is silence. This is England.

The silence is only disturbed on the evening of our arrival by a dubious unfamiliar din, a sign that foreigners have arrived in town, barbarians unused to the English way of doing things and who, moreover, have overfilled the bathtub. No one whose ancestors have not lived here since Tudor times can understand the deeper significance of the agonisingly trivial. Neither do we understand it in the first few moments of our arrival. I have a certain awareness of it because some years ago in South Kensington a policeman knocked on the door and warned me to bathe more discreetly. A noise echoes in the yard and suddenly I remember: it is the English secret, that glug of water one can never again forget. My lady travelling companion is bathing somewhere upstairs while I am discussing the fate of Central Europe and other Danubiana with the residents on the ground floor: she is bathing because she is intelligent; she can fill the time with meaningful practical activity. "The secret of the English!" we all cry out at once, all of us afraid, both guest and hosts. And we dash upstairs. Shall I tell you? Foreigners would not understand in any case. I don't understand it myself. Despite living here for years the residents are themselves foreign, so they don't understand it either. This English secret, one of a number of complex secrets, is that the water from the overflow of the English bath does not empty into a common waste pipe but into an entirely mysterious conduit that is built into the wall that has its outlet directly into the street. Why? No one knows. No answer is available. If the foreign visitor overfills the bathtub the excess water runs down into the street and the policeman can immediately tell that there are aliens encamped on the island. This inexplicable drain protrudes from the wall of every English house: later I saw for myself that entirely new houses are built the same way. No doubt there is a law governing it. While we are gathered at the bathroom door admonishing the barbaric foreigner I am suddenly overcome by a recurring sense of wonder, the wonder that always assails me whenever I find myself in London, that nothing I have learned or believed is as valid as I once thought. One has to relearn everything. It is not enough for those wishing to take up residence to accept the state of affairs: whoever finds himself here will bend or break but will not leave without a scratch. It is not enough to dissimulate, to pretend, to nod slyly and politely indicating that you accept everything: the people, their habitations, their social arrangements, their ways of dressing, their formalities; not enough to stand conspicuously, with studied nonchalance, for the National Anthem at the cinema; not enough to conform on the outside while retaining your doubts, not enough to remain a silently watchful, foreign observer. Whoever wants to live here must yield up his secrets and hand himself over heart and soul. Careful! they can tell! They are not interested in the overtly tamed, are contemptuous of any member of the bleating herd looking startled but ambling behind the leading sheep, slyly grazing in the opulent meadow. What they want is

for you to accept them, indeed more, that you should believe in them entirely, not just in their laws, in the rules of behaviour that govern the various forms of life here, but in the spirit too, the spirit out of which the law was wrought. They don't want you to kowtow to them; what they demand is that you trust them and respect their beliefs. You have to surrender everything if you want to live here, let go your doubts, abandon your opinions and all associated ideas, forget your continental cunning and various accomplishments—it is only in the privacy of your room that you are free to plot, to be shifty and treacherous, only there are you allowed to be an enthusiast, to be a devotee, to desire or loathe; that is how they do it, that is how it runs through their nerves, that is what they have settled on, and subsequently sealed with a royal seal and proclaimed with a fanfare of silver trumpets! It is the only way! I know of no London career that has been built on the continental model. Their talent for gathering information, a talent as mysterious and instinctive as that of jungle animals, as of gathering birds of prey, can scent an alien continental device; they will detect it and do not tolerate it. No-one who wishes to live here and prosper can breakfast on coffee and croissants, speak badly of sport, not even under his breath, be indifferent to animals and plants, enter a lift without removing his hat or express an unfavourable opinion of the hats worn by Her Majesty, Queen Mary, or of the three ostrich feathers once worn by aristocratic English girls at court. You will take tea at breakfast, with bacon or fried fish; on Sunday you must fly a kite or play cricket; you must be excited about Wimbledon fortnight and must acclaim the English for their sophisticated sense of humour. And you must believe in Empire. And in... but right now, just at this very moment when the water is running out of the upper waste pipe into the street, I can't think of the other things I have to believe in. The point is to believe. No ifs or buts. Your underhand schemes can be indulged too, provided they bear the stamp of royal approval. I suspect even murder in the course of robbery may be committed only according to certain traditional rules—it is no accident that de Quincy wrote a book titled *Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*. You must believe... for once they sense this convoluted complicity, these workings of faith, in you, you may do anything you please. You can be a communist and deny the existence of God, you may indulge your spleen and allow your selfish pleasures full rein. Here even an unbeliever is one who is capable of belief.

The night is silent and deep, it is only the roar of the occasional lion that wakes me around midnight. Elsewhere I am woken by the hooting of car horns or the clatter of trams. Nothing surprises me in London. "Can you hear the lions?" I ask half asleep. My travelling companion is astonished. That sound is unmistakably the bitter, proud roaring of a lion at night. "What sort of lion?" she asks, as she has never been to London before. I am very sleepy. "The British lion," I answer and fall asleep.

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A rainy prospect, fog hanging over the field like a sheet of glue; ruined buildings glimpsed through the fog, a Scottish castle its roof missing, the outlines of a few familiar grand houses; I have seen these buildings before, have crossed this square, a long long time ago... Now I recognize it! this group of buildings here used to be Piccadilly Circus. There are ruins everywhere, a department store whose upper floors have been destroyed by aerial bombardment; some toppled columns, a kind of Plaster-of-Paris Acropolis: this was once London. There are goats grazing among fallen masonry. A rusted bus is filled with sacks of straw, it contains a kitchen: people live in it, bearded men in animal skins and rags, women in shawls drifting through the ruins. It is a tragic, terrifying picture. All this is what we see in Denham of course in the gloomy light of a wet morning in the grounds of a great film studio. The new Wells film, *The Shape of Things to Come,* is in production, the English writer personally attending the shooting, famous actors and directors criss-crossing the stumps of ruined palaces: this is the coming century, fully furnished, literally in flesh and fur, as a few restless spirits imagine it in their lurid dreams. Denham is a wooded country estate full of brooks and meadows: having purchased a major film production company some leading Hungarian intellectuals and craftsmen operate the estate as a studio, constructing enormous hangars, a real Hollywood complete with associated town: and this is where the famous young director, René Clair is making a grotesque movie out of Wells's novel. It is a compelling vision. Here is London as we see it at the end of the century, a few decades after the latest war. Civilisation has been destroyed: war broke out on Christmas Day 1940 just as Londoners were busily buying gifts for the season of giving, the bombs falling precisely on Piccadilly Square. The city is a ruin, its inhabitants scattered in caves; Paris and Berlin are no more, millions of rotting corpses litter the continent, the four horsemen of the Apocalypse are galloping across a land of once lovely monuments and as soon as their hooves touch the ground new plagues are let loose: people flee towns, a curious wandering sickness hits entire populations, no one can find his place, whatever survivors remain carry on a nomadic bronze-age existence... So says Wells. Shadows liable to frighten children loom through the fog in the wings of the sunset West. The world was like this once, but who can remember it? The tablets of the law are broken, there is no society, no state, only itinerant hordes driving household beasts of burden across a barren landscape; an ox pulls a six-seater motor car, once an ambitious piece of engineering; telegraph wires dangle in the breeze though no one remembers what the wires were once used for. Soul no longer speaks to soul, it is the realisation of the new ice age scene from Madách's *The Tragedy of Man:* man returning to take shelter in the cave, draining off the fat in animals' entrails, fat that will serve to warm his cooling cells. Should I start back in horror? Should I be afraid? The vision is miraculously appropriate to the mood of the day. Yesterday in Geneva Sir Samuel Hoare registered his nation's protest at the desperate war launched by the Italians; the nights are clear with a

full moon and no trace of fog; an utterly determined Italian bomber would have no difficulty in locating its target on nights such as this as they pass over Malta... The British do not dismiss the possibility of war and do not fear it. Possibly for the first time in history it is the 'left' that desires war; British socialists have made arrangements for all contingencies, the empire is arming. The set of the Wells film hints gently at the potential realities of contemporary politics. I am quite calm viewing these childish studio constructions—I believe in life, I inwardly declare, wanting to make some ringing, robust response to the film set: I also believe in death, but I don't believe that the people of Europe, the descendants of Dürer's *The Painter's Father,* are doomed to leave the places where they lived and worked —their cathedrals, their museums, their shops, factories, their two rooms-with-kitchen apartments spiky with radio and cacti and return to the cave, draining off fat, like the Australian people of the tjurunga. I don't know what the future holds: the more enthusiastically loudspeakers and press insist on informing me the less I know what's going on, but now, face-to-face with this naïve, simplistic vision of a Wellsian hell, I am gripped by—*feel*—what Europe is; I feel it the way we sometimes apprehend meaning as a part of the mortal fabric that people build on and transmit as part of this or that identity. Whatever tomorrow's leaders and diplomats decide, the spirit of Europe does not take to caves. I wander through the wings of ruined Europe, preoccupied yet seeing with a dreamlike sharpness; but the sight cannot destroy the devotion and humility I feel when I think of the spiritual reserves of my home, the home that is Europe. We might go around killing each other but I am certain that we will live on, perhaps in greater unity, with a greater sense of our European identity, than before. It is a moment of crisis: I hear that the British insurance company is only willing to cover fifteen percent of the production expenses over the next three months against "the possibility of war"... But Europe's fate is not be decided on chance percentages. At the gate I look back, storing away this primitive vision of London in ruins.

The car takes us back into town. We are going on a visit to the suburban workshop of the great studio. They are showing rough cuts in one of the projection rooms. Now we can see the 'future' in 2036 AD, after the new Bronze Age as imagined by Wells and other contemporary utopians. I sit in the dark auditorium, gazing at these images of the future and am bored. Utopian writing always bores me. It seems to me that something is missing in such visions, something that would add tension and interest to the images; I find myself yawning at underground cities of glass and the strange loose cloaks in which people supposedly wander their quartz-lit streets, breathing an artificial ozone a hundred years from now: what I would rather know is whether the people underground are still paying alimony, whether there are servants and family insurance firms, whether we will drop calling cards in at other people's residences when visiting, what stays against hair loss might be deployed in 2036 AD and whether we will be able freely to transmit our thoughts using some form of broadcasting technology? Wells, of course, supplies no answers to such ridiculous

questions: no doubt he has more important matters to attend to. But such questions are of the first importance to me. What I have noticed is that it is always easier to write or dream the next century than the next half-hour. "Mr Wells", said a notable politician when shown some parts of the grim utopian film, "you believe that in the future the world will be governed by filthy cabbies. You are wrong, Mr Wells. The world will continue to be governed by intelligent people." I beg pardon of the cabbies on the notable politician's behalf for his use of the word "filthy": presumably he did not mean the honourable profession of driving cabs but a less honourable leather-coat clad ambition and world-view.

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There is a woman who comes in, a daily or cleaner, a real English lady in a raincoat who sometimes brings along her smartly dressed little girl who is herself a frighteningly civilised, quiet, well brought up working-class child. On our last Sunday we take the child with us to the zoo. The suitcases are already packed as we are leaving the next morning. The banal adventure is over: tomorrow we will be in Paris, and a few days later, back home. I have been dreaming about it for days, how my dog Bernát might have learned Latin in the meantime, or how they might have built hanging gardens on the Gellérthegy, complete with orchestras. And the news we have actually received is all pretty dull. There won't be a war now, they write, because, of course, they know everything there. We continue slowly packing: on the last afternoon I go to Selfridges and pay five shillings for Shakespeare's *Collected Works,* illustrated with pretty, naïve coloured illustrations: the Moor of Venice is a slightly nervous, sunburned foreign gentleman at a colonial resort, and Ophelia is exactly like one of the haughty, elegant mannequins in Selfridges window.

We are taking our leave, travelling home, because that's life: a quiet, constant, permanent, well-mannered leave-taking. Our last day in London is a Sunday, the daily's daughter wanders along with us as serious and quiet as an old English tourist guide. She is not excited by the animals. She is not excited by anything. She is English. She gazes at the spotty comical monkeys with the same indifferent politeness as at the affectionate lions or the rare okapi; in any case the monkeys are quieter, better behaved here than in continental zoos, mimicking the demeanour of the visitors, the old, lonely chimpanzee is a quiet, conformist gentleman, the director of a beer-manufacturing firm at a board meeting. English apes. I hate zoos. I leave the child and the animals and cross over into Regent's Park.

I walk through the park for the last time. It is the loveliest of my recent experiences of the world outside and its landscape. Last night a thunderstorm passed over the island beating down the autumn flowers in the botanical gardens in the corner: crushed dahlias hang without petals as in a pool of blood. But the lawn is lush and full of life. There is a fair amount of activity around the pavilion where the kite-fliers have their clubhouse: this restless, blowy weather at the beginning of October is ideal for flying kites. I walk over to them and watch them.

Those flying kites are chiefly old men who seem to be wearing odd knee-length trousers for the occasion: the correct dress for kite-fliers, I presume. There is also a black man, happily enjoying himself, much more skilful than the old English fliers, helpful and kindly, his kite already high in the sky, almost disappearing... Flying kites for the English is what fishing is for the French: it calms the nerves. It requires considerable patience. Not to mention wearing a peculiar outfit and equipping oneself with lots of string. But above all it demands a capacity for daydreaming and reverie, involving some memory of childhood, modesty and desire. Look! There she flies! they say. And they raise their hands to their eyes and gaze intensely into the clear air. Then they go home, carefully put the kite away, take off their peculiar outfits and return to their lives as perfectly unexceptional shipping magnates.

I watch the kite: there she flies. I walk a little further off and sit down on a bench, not being a member of the club and not wishing to injure their highly developed sense of legality. The sun is shining, an old woman leads two lanky lollopy-eared dogs across the grass, then the guards arrive, scarlet clad, from the nearby barracks, civilised, well-mannered guards who will put on a fiery display later in the evening on the slopes of Primrose Hill. Then an itinerant preacher turns up carrying his pulpit on his back: he constructs his makeshift platform at the edge of the grass and is soon at the centre of a circle of casual passers-by, raising his arms to heaven, about to speak. He talks about the life everlasting, about the dole, about the reform of fishing rights or about love. Quite a few stop to listen. The bench is comfortable. I watch the kites distractedly: the garden is now like the deck of a ship, the traveller feels as though he is on an ocean liner at a moment of time between nothing and nothing. Tomorrow I shall be in Paris, and a week later at home. Will I ever come back here? I don't know. Nothing could be simpler, I think, you just get up and catch the train, and, then again, I think, nothing could be more difficult. I already know, and realise more clearly each time I set off, that change is to some degree decay, that the adventure is tainted. Soon we will be on our way again, watching familiar landscapes through train windows, then suddenly there will be a flash, a moment of blinding familiarity, a mysterious painful otherness. Home! What awaits me at home? It is the same thing I left behind, that insoluble idyll of harsh reality, compared to which the world is merely cloud, glimmer, mirror-image. One day I really must sit down and write The Great Illustrated World History of Home, complete with maps, having specific regard to its colonies. When I get home, I think.

At home, of course, the ultimate form, the last, the unique frontier... home is life and home is death. Noon bells are ringing, the kites are slowly being reclaimed by their owners, they arrive in clusters as in a Chinese painting: time to go home. Liesl is bound to have prepared a wonderful farewell dinner: one should thank her, say goodbye, thank her for pointing out the stylistic and narrative glories of *Mothers Cry,* the book she gave us to read, and for appearing each morning, tray in hand, singing the praises of the weather and advising us to have a thoroughly

marvellous time. We must say goodbye to our kind hosts who took such trouble to ensure that no stray, impudent English cat should disturb the visitors; to the fine house where, according to an unwritten English law, curtains are to be ceremonially drawn at six every evening; and indeed to the West generally about whose condition dubious and worrying rumours continue to circulate at home, even among the better philosophers. We are saying goodbye to all this in our own fashion. The historical moment of our visit was not exactly propitious but there is absolutely no reason to despair. The culture of the Lands of the Declining Sun will not collapse tomorrow: its fortresses, its battleships, its institutions and its social agreements will still be around, probably even the day after tomorrow. There may be kites gathering in the sky, but the calm, watchful expression of the kite fliers suggests that the islanders are unafraid of airborne monsters. It could not be any other way: civilisation is not protected by battleships but by moral laws and when all kinds of barbarian forces deny such laws, these watchers on the western borders persist in believing that, when push comes to shove, it is not anti-aircraft guns that offer protection but the conscientious affirmation of civilised human values. Is it possible that the world of the West with its reason, balance and self-imposed discipline, will tomorrow be no more than rubble, fit only to be displayed in the halls of a museum, like the remains of Ur? But these western watchers shrug their shoulders at any lack of faith, dismissing such doubts. They stand guard on the battlements of human culture, calm and disciplined, far-sighted, building a world they can believe in where one may lose battles but still win the peace at the end.

I start back home across the grass, treading the lawns of freedom one last time by way of farewell, like someone with a perfect right to do so. Time to end this unremarkable cut-price tour and to round off these notes too, themselves as leisurely and undirected as the journey they describe. It is noon. Smoke rises from the chimneys of London, the rich aroma of countless Sunday legs of mutton drifts above me. I stop for a moment at the edge of the park and breathe in the thin, salty air with its tang of the sea. Breath of sea blends with taste of world, and that, I think, is the one adventure fit for humankind: the journey that tastes of freedom. You should start home, I think, and tell people that you have tasted it again; take in a lungful of it, fill your consciousness with its raw dampness and tell them that in the Lands of the Declining Sun there still live people who could not breathe anything else, freedom alone being air to them. And is this all I learned and observed on my patrol? Could this be all? That is all. ❧

Translated by George Szirtes

Sibiu: European Capital of Culture 2007

Szabolcs István Guttmann, Sibiu's Chief City Architect, in Conversation with Zoltán Tibori Szabó

Zoltán Tibori Szabó: *A few years ago when I was writing about Sibiu—Hermannstadt to its Saxon inhabitants, or Nagyszeben as it is called in Hungarian—I was struck by the fact that a city whose population was 96 per cent Romanian should have elected, by an overwhelming majority, an ethnic German mayor. A young Romanian journalist provided an answer: the Romanians felt that they had "inherited" what the Saxon Germans had built up over 800 years, and so they entrusted the town's affairs to a Saxon mayor who would know what to do with it. Deaf to the propaganda of Bucharest-centred political parties, they elected Klaus Johannis as mayor in 2000, re-electing him in 2004.*

But did Johannis really know what to do with the city?

Szabolcs István Guttmann: I came to Sibiu in 1987 as an architect who had just qualified in Bucharest. In those days, under the Communist state, graduates were not free to take jobs just anywhere. Jobs were offered by the state and the applicants were selected on the basis of their university marks. I had chosen Sibiu because it was the closest to my native city of Cluj-Kolozsvár. The other consideration was that at that time—and sadly this is still true—Sibiu was the one city full of historic monuments where there were expert architects busy grappling with urban development problems. Two great Saxon architects were active in the city, both of whom also had a grounding in history: Paul Niedermaier, a specialist in the period from the twelfth to the sixteenth century and the only architect member of the Romanian Academy, and Hermann Fabini, who in 1983 published a history of Sibiu in the Middle Ages and that at a time when it was impossible to go ahead with any project that might be aimed at the conservation of historical towns. Right up to the present, there is no other town in Transylvania which has been as thoroughly catalogued as Sibiu in regard to its medieval architectural treasures. These two architects surveyed each and every house from cellar to rooftop and demonstrated Sibiu's unique architectural and urban characteristics. For me it was a challenge to be a young architect in a city where I was able to size

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Zoltán Tibori Szabó,
a correspondent of the Budapest daily Népszabadság, *is a literary historian, a translator and a journalist, who lives in Cluj, Transylvania. His publications are, among others, on the history of Transylvania, on minority issues and on the history of the Holocaust in Transylvania.*

up what is actually behind those books. I was astonished to have it impressed on me that it was not just a matter of architecture. Up until 1989, about 15 per cent of Sibiu's population were Saxons, among whom were artists, musicians and others engaged in the arts. Juliana Fabritius-Dancu, for example, had published albums on the Saxon fortified churches of Transylvania in the 1980's. Within a few years I became very enthusiastic about the city. Along with my Romanian colleagues I worked on drawing up idealistic plans for urban renewal. It helped that in 1987 Nicu Ceauşescu, son of the dictator, was put in charge of the city and the county. That put us in an exceptional position, and not just because we could buy more milk or cheese than elsewhere, but also because Nicu Ceaușescu took the very interesting decision to commission the reconstruction of the old Rondella Theatre. So, while his father was demolishing and building over Bucharest, the son was reconstructing old buildings in Sibiu.

Which suggests that Nicu Ceauşescu helped the city.

So did the city's ordinary residents. Sibiu's citizens could tell exactly why they wanted to regain the theatre that had burned down in 1948 and had been rebuilt as a workers' club and cinema. When four decades later the issue was raised whether it should be renovated and possibly converted into a modern cinema or dismantled and slimmed down in order to widen the road, Hermann Fabini, who was the architect of the city's totally unprofessional estate management department, had the last word. He announced that he had information in his possession that would allow the theatre to be rebuilt. The county planning office commissioned us to do the plans and I was able to start work with three colleagues—Ion Bucur, a native of Sibiu and the architect most actively engaged with the old city, Radu Medrea, who went off to Paris in 1990, and Liviu Gligor, with whom I was at university and who likewise handled city affairs as if he were a local patriot.

You mean to say there wasn't one Saxon in your team?

No, all of the architects whom we worked with were Romanians. That in itself shows that the city was conceived on very sound lines. I was able to satisfy myself that it really is true that a city nurtures its inhabitants and they in turn, by representing that legacy, instruct those who come after them. Continual engagement brings its rewards. We were able to set about work with new energy, working together with many small architectural studios. Then around 1991–92 we were forced to realise that the city fathers were not interested in the restoration of the town.

When did it actually become possible to undertake ambitious projects in Sibiu?

When Klaus Johannis was elected mayor in 2000. One day he went on a walk with me around inner-city courtyards that were in serious danger of collapse. It was truly memorable for me because I realized that I could count on both the funding and the will to carry out the reconstruction of the Old Town in the four years to come. Serious work began in 2001. By then plans had been drawn up within the framework of an overall city plan and a start was made on renovating the infrastructure. Meanwhile the Capital of Culture programme was agreed on at ministerial level in 2002. Nevertheless, in spite of approval by the powers-that-be Sibiu received no information from Bucharest during the next two years. The necessary documentation was completed for the deadline of February 2004 only because

Multi-ethnic Transylvania

Over the course of the last millennium, three nations have had a dominant influence on Transylvanian society: Romanians, Magyars and 'Saxon' Germans.

Magyars settled the area that had once been the ancient Roman province of Pannonia, within the area marked out by the Carpathian Mountains, around the turn of the 9th into the 10th century AD, with Transylvania soon after becoming part of the Christianised Kingdom of Hungary. They organised the local administration of Transylvania, creating a system of counties and establishing the diocese of Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia, Weissenburg). The Székely (or Siculi or Szeklers), also ethnic Magyars, eventually found their way to the eastern part of Transylvania, where, in exchange for services as border guards, the kings of Hungary granted them a high degree of autonomy.

Ethnic Magyars left their stamp on Transylvania's landscape, economy and culture in countless ways, the traces of which are highly visible to the present day. Now there are just 1.45 million ethnic Magyars making up barely 20 per cent of the total population.

The **'Saxons'** too came to Transylvania under the auspices of the kings of Hungary, with those who arrived during the 12th century likewise being granted wide-ranging autonomy. The country over which King Géza II ruled (1141–62) was sorely in need of settlers to increase its population and economic weight, and German peasants were ideal as they had considerable experience in clearing forests. There are several competing hypotheses about why they came to be known as 'Saxons', one of them being that many of the earlier newcomers happened to have settled first in the region east of the Elbe, then part of the duchy of Saxony, before moving on. The Saxon priory of Hermannstadt (Sibiu, Nagyszeben) was founded in 1192, followed shortly thereafter by the first three 'seats' *(sedes)* that collectively made up the 'Altes Land'.

More German settlers entered Transylvania during the reign of Andrew II (1205–35) and they were wedged in among the Magyars who lived in the 'seats' that form the modern counties of Hunedoara (Hunyad) and Alba (Alsó-Fehér). The next wave established the seats of Reussmarkt (Miercurea Sibiului), Reps (Rupea) and Broos (Orăştie). Other 'Saxons' had arrived even earlier, some already under Saint Stephen the King (1000–1038) to work the mines of northern Transylvania. In the area round Bistritz (Bistriţa, Beszterce) they were also joined by peasants.

In 1211, Andrew II endowed the area known as Burzenland (Ţara Bârsei) to the Teutonic Knights. Over time, the Saxon settlements started to grow into towns. Hermannstadt, Bistritz, Mühlbach, Kronstadt, Schässburg and Mediasch became centres of commerce and handcraft. There emerged an urban middle class, including a patriciate, and before long a guild system. Nevertheless, a substantial fraction continued to live in villages, predominantly working on the land. In medieval Transylvania many Saxons were granted patents of nobility.

The first appearance of **Romanians** in Transylvania has been a contentious issue down to the present day. In the view of most Romanian historians, the Romanians are the Romanised indigenous population of the Roman province of Dacia, who have continuously lived in Transylvania since Roman times (i.e. long before the Magyars and Saxons). This is accordingly referred to as the "continuity" hypothesis. Hungarian scholars, on the other hand, argue that the Romanians began to infiltrate the Carpathian Basin from the south after the Magyars had arrived. The slow permeation of the pastoral tribes into some of the more mountainous parts of Transylvania started at the end of the twelfth century. The first really big wave of settlements was sparked by the Black Death, which reached the region in 1348–49. By the end of the fourteenth century they had 130 settlements on estates belonging to the Hungarian crown and enjoyed various minor privileges.

The Magyar and Saxon rural populations at first did not pay much attention to the Romanian pastoral nomads of the mountains and their gradual expansion within Transylvania. Thus, the Romanians, as a result of this continual encroachment rather than any organised settlement, first took over the areas around Saxon and Magyar villages, then increasingly entered the settlements themselves. Even during the early eighteenth century there were no more than one quarter of a million ethnic Romanians living in Transylvania, but by the end of that century the number was approaching 800,000.

The 'three established nations' had formed the political basis of Transylvania from the 15th century onward. That was when the country's three privileged 'nations'—the Hungarian nobility, the Székely and the Saxons—in 1437 agreed on the Unio Trium Nationum, which was to define the social and political arrangements for the ensuing four centuries.

A *natio* in the medieval Transylvanian context was not an ethnic but a constitutional concept. Thus, the Székely had Hungarian as a native language but they still constituted a separate nation; by the same token, the approximately one third of all Saxons who lived on the Komitatsboden (county territories) did not count as part of the Saxon *natio*. With respect to both their ethnicity and native tongue, the Hungarian nobility—not just in Transylvania but throughout the Kingdom of Hungary—were totally at one with the peasants among whom they lived, the language used in the official domain being Latin. Over time, from the sixteenth century onwards, a growing number of the nobility adopted the language and lifestyle of the court that ruled over them, but even at the end of the nineteenth century there were a fair number of Romanian-speaking ethnic Romanian landowners, worshipping according to the Eastern Orthodox or Byzantine Catholic rite, who were proud to belong to the Hungarian nobility but also, at one and the same time, proud of their ancestry. Many played an active role in the Romanian national party. Transylvania's tragedy was the way in which the legal concept of a 'noble' nation was distorted into an ethnic and linguistic one. This gave rise to the still powerful myth of centuries-long suppression of Romanians by Hungarians, whereas in this part of the world consciousness of nationality, even among the literate (and they were a minority), is barely two centuries old.

In Torda (Turda), the Transylvanian Diet of 1568 proclaimed 'freedom' of worship for the first time in the Western world, though in practice this initially extended to only four 'established' religions—Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, the Reformed Church (Calvinism) and Unitarianism—but not, for instance, to the Eastern Orthodox Church or Judaism. The Jews were finally granted certain rights by Prince Gábor Bethlen during the seventeenth century, but Romanian communities only gained a rather limited autonomy in the eighteenth century that was expanded in the nineteenth century.

The modern age reinforced the idea of a Transylvania constructed on such autonomies, but this found no effective mode of expression. Despite that, all three of the largest ethnic groups—Romanians, Hungarians and Saxons—did possess a certain degree of autonomy. This gave rise to a mode of peaceful co-existence, a Transylvanian model of inter-ethnic tolerance, to which many people advert to this day. The reality, of course, was not quite so rosy, and thus efforts at integration that arose from time to time on the Hungarian or Romanian side tended to downplay or even disregard the existence of the other two ethnic groups.

Over the course of the centuries, substantial numbers of Gypsies, Armenians, Jews, Slovaks, Ukrainians, Bulgars, Serbs, Croats, Poles and others have also settled in Transylvania and contributed to the enrichment of its culture. ❧

Johannis managed to mobilise the city. The architects were solidly behind the mayor.

Who had the idea of going for the European Capital of Culture programme?

The Ministry of Culture put on a UNESCO conference in Sibiu in 1998, but the city was anything but ready to host events at that sort of level then. When the Luxembourgers saw the city they almost fainted on the spot. The idea of twinning Luxembourg with Sibiu came from the Luxembourgers themselves. There is something like an eighty per cent overlap between the Saxon dialect of Transylvania and the Luxembourg dialect. Nowadays a special section of the Sibiu branch of the Romanian Academy, based in what is called the Luxembourg House, concerns itself with this. The Luxembourg Ministry of Culture pledged to fund the renovation of one building provided legal and other preconditions could be met. The city reverted ownership of the selected building at No. 16 Kleiner Ring to the Saxon Lutheran Church, and Luxembourg kept its word. Reconstruction started, only it turned out that not only did the house have serious subsidence problems, the retaining wall beside it was also in a parlous state, where the main street cuts over from the Lower Town to the Upper Town. Now, in that same house, one can discuss Transylvania's medieval culture in a café that is named after the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund of Luxembourg, King of Hungary (1387–1437). On the ground floor is a tourist information centre where the staff speaks at least five languages, on the first floor are offices for the functions that are being put on in 2007 and, on the second floor, there are rooms for those invited to the events. Through the Luxembourg House we maintain links with the West, while Luxembourg is able to provide support, for instance, to minorities subject to ethnic discrimination by presenting the issues that Franco–German rivalry has aroused historically. The city induced Luxembourg to make this investment, and Luxembourg cultural directors in their turn prompted this year-long programme.

Has any other assistance come from abroad?

The Germans have also invested in Sibiu, establishing an important social advice bureau. They are earmarking roughly the same amount for that programme as the Luxembourgers for the house on the Kleiner Ring.

Sibiu's Saxon heritage is now being recreated with a largely Romanian team and a great deal of foreign money. Do the city's 96 per cent Romanian inhabitants feel they have anything to do with this?

This is not just a matter of the physical environment. Not when values can be transmitted in the way that the Bach Choir does, with its concerts starting dead on time, almost to the minute. Some two-thirds of the members are non-German, and yet they nonetheless operate at just as high a professional standard. Or take the rediscovery and documentation of Transylvanian musicians and musical traditions: Ursula and Kurt Philippi are both themselves Transylvanian Saxons. Kurt is in charge of music for the Lutheran diocese and in his free time trains the orchestra at the Brukenthal School. His wife Ursula is cantor at the Lutheran Stadtpfarrkirche, the parish church, one of several Saxon professional organists and also a teacher at the Academy of Music. She gives recitals around the world, from Tokyo to the USA, and every summer she manages to present a completely new programme in Sibiu. People around in Sibiu notice that the city stands for and passes on enduring verities. In short, it would be fair to say that respect

for the Saxons has been extraordinarily important in the change. To the present day, not one of the German schools has closed, even though the position is slowly being reached where there are few ethnic German teachers and the majority of the pupils are children of Romanian families. Still, the radical decline in the number of Lutherans has been halted. A new problem are the many children of mixed marriages who are no longer fluent in German. As I see it, our task as architects is to furnish an appropriate milieu for values and people.

Can you give a specific example?

One example is the Hermannstadt/Sibiu Philharmonia, which was founded in the 1870s as a private musical society, then later came under state control. When we set about restoring Sibiu's old theatre in 1988, there was no consensus even among the leading architects. I had the chance to be a member of the team that made a start on the work within the framework of the planning institute. We managed to survive the rocky road to democracy that lasted from 1990 until 2000, when every year we found out something: that there were no funds for us, or that a sports hall, for instance, might be more important than an old theatre. Because of the lack of funds, the most precious medieval parts of Sibiu almost went to rack and ruin before progress could be made after 2000. The old theatre auditorium was restored and turned out to be suitable as a concert hall for the local symphonic orchestra. They first performed in it in 2004 and since then the audience for classical music has doubled and concerts are all sold out. Up till then music-making had taken place in improvised venues. So, if I look back on what that building has been able to accomplish, it turns out that it reflects not only the living history of the past twenty years, but also a very positive note in the cultural history of the city. Anyone who enters the concert hall today is able to feel their way right through the fortification and construction of the city, from 1540 onwards, from the Great Tower, nothing of which had been left visible right down to the very recent past.

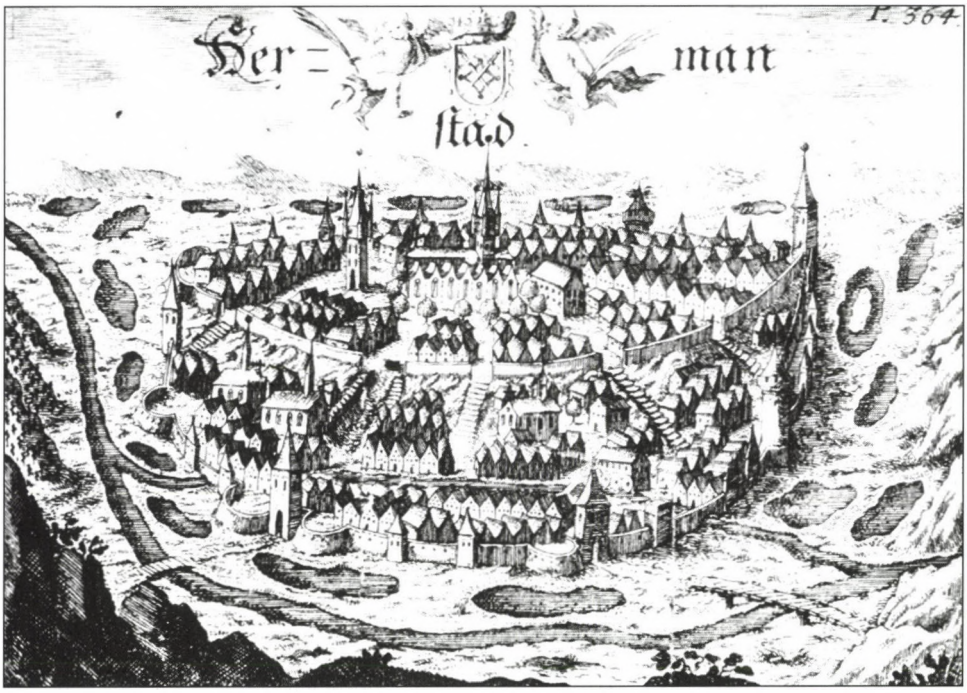
So you built the present on the past.

Literally. What came to light were tunnels connecting the aqueducts, embrasures for muskets and cannons, so it is now possible to get a good idea how the city outside the fortifications would have been defended during the Middle Ages. The main façade of the theatre, built in 1902, has also been restored. It fits in well with the Neo-Classical edifice of the museum beside it, built at the end of the first decade of the 1800s. By the car park in front of the old walls that is now used by coaches, there is a cultural café, which runs films in the foyer and is a handy starting point for tourists who want to walk round the bastions. At one of the towers we have installed a staircase, which offers a shortcut into the historic centre and its squares. That is how the town welcomes visitors. The old theatre has become a functioning arts centre that everyone can feel part of. It actually operated as some sort of open-air theatre as far back as 1788, when the defensive function of the tower that had been tacked on to the bastion ceased and it was found to be suitable for open-air performances. This type of theatre was commonplace in the West but it also existed here, a long way from Luxembourg. We found a powder magazine where the stage now stands, and it seems likely that something like Shakespeare's Globe Theatre functioned there, with the gangways for the musketeers serving as the balconies. All that is now open to inspection: the embrasures are visible on the stage, the recently rebuilt balconies may be in the style that prevailed about a hundred years ago but they are, after all,

modernised variants of the gangways for the sharpshooters. European history is manifest in this complex of buildings, which survived purely because the city had been passed over, and it was Kolozsvár (Cluj) that was made the capital city of Transylvania in the nineteenth century. Demolition and re-building went hand in hand there and parts of its precious past were lost.

For this celebratory year of 2007 the historic city centre has been at last restored.

What has been restored is special even by European standards. The old town centre of Sibiu is a superb townplanning heritage of the medieval Hermannstadt. Three spaces in fact tell the story of the way a fortified church turned into a city. Huet Square is the first system of fortifications. The dwellings around it, the Kleiner Ring, Renaissance houses, leaning against the wall, with arched commercial premises on the ground floor made up the next unit. The Grosser Ring, with the third ring of fortifications, created a space where district fairs could be held, since it was protected in practice. In the course of rehabilitation we used paving to display the history of these spaces. Restoration work on the Grosser Ring, Kleiner Ring and Huet Square complex can be regarded as complete. In Huet Square even the stonework over the medieval cemetery had to be renovated. What was revealed so marvellously was how burials had taken place there up to the sixteenth century and, sadly, it also transpired that the last skeletons no longer had any earth cover, because the top 60 centimetres of soil or thereabouts were stripped away in the nineteenth century, so children would have been playing directly above bones. We dug down a further 60 centimetres, with bones being turned up every step of the way, a whole range of graves from the collective to the individual. This threw up huge archaeological problems. Something like three thousand skeletons had to be removed, catalogued and reburied. A magnificent rotunda chapel also came to light which had disappeared by the time the Gothic Lutheran Parish Church was completed in 1520. So, we uncovered the whole lot before paving the entire square. Restoration of this smallest of the three squares was a very complicated business, given that it was a space in daily use and that both the Lutheran Church and the Brukenthal Gymnasium are located on it. But there was no interruption to regular divine services or occasional concerts in the one and teaching in the other. The paving of all three squares came from quarries in Transylvania: andesite from Tîrgu Mureş was used in Huet Square, stone from Simeria in the Kleiner Ring and from the Braşov area in the Grosser Ring. We took a whole course on what different stones could be used, and how to pave these squares, with some assistance from Germans and Italians. Huet Square has a decidedly medieval air to it, with sign-posting of the sites of the former citadel walls, the rotunda, as well as the foundations for a sanctuary on which work started in the sixteenth century, but which was never completed, as well as the places where demolition proceeded in the nineteenth century. This means that the experts are in a position to imagine how the space as a whole might have appeared in the Middle Ages. The wavy paving in the Kleiner Ring was a happy post-modern solution for abutting it in one sweep to Huet Square, where the arcaded houses were also restored. The inspiration for the paving of the Grosser Ring was a Baroque parquet flooring pattern, so that while it serves literally to pave the way for the first-floor space of the Brukenthal Museum it also manages to provide a unified stage for the many other functions met by the square. This is where one sees the appearance of civic street ornaments produced from



View of Hermannstadt from the North. From Das Alt- und Neu-Teutsche Dacia *(The Old- and New-German Dacia) by Johannes Tröster. Nurenberg, 1666.*

various kinds of vitrified brick that once upon a time were the stamp of a town's importance: a sixteenth-century *Roland le preux* is in the History Museum, while a statue of St John of Nepomuk, the patron of Bohemia, has been set back in its original position, a few steps away from the courtyard of the old Jesuit school in the Grosser Ring. An old well with timber and ceramic conduits also came to light. Reinstallation of the nineteenth-century well that replaced this was also accomplished; it had been demolished in 1948, but its marvellous wrought-iron cage was likewise restored, and that is now the drinking fountain in Grosser Ring.

How did people take to these restorations?

Sibiu's inhabitants take joy in a renovated building that they are free to enter, that has been opened up to them. The local press asked them which of the city's buildings are their favourites, and the survey came up with the answer that nine of the best-loved buildings are located in the city's old centre, with the Lutheran Parish Church in first place, an edifice the construction of which was started in the time of King Matthias Corvinus and completed by 1520. A southern façade was added to the basilica, raising it and extending the nave. The steeple thus rises from the middle of the church with a powerful monumental effect. It was this that makes the Hermannstadter Stadtpfarrkirche the favourite building of the inhabitants of Sibiu. That is both good and bad from the viewpoint of a present-day architect. It is bad in the sense that it raises the question of how an eight-hundred-year-old edifice can possibly incorporate the much broader potentialities of the modern world. On the other hand, it signals that the city dwellers respect and love the building, even though

most of them do not go there to worship but to attend concerts. The Old Rathaus is now the History Museum, and this building incorporates the most splendid keep in Transylvania—one of the city's main attractions. There is a true medieval atmosphere in the garden, with a stone baldachin that provides a stage for outdoor concerts; the courtyard, by contrast, has a more Renaissance feel. The manner in which museums have proliferated in Sibiu can be traced back to the Late Baroque era. Samuel von Brukenthal (1777–1803) was the imperial governor of Transylvania, and he erected a palace that would not only be his home but would also serve as a museum and library. The Brukenthal Palace was the sole Late Baroque palace in Transylvania that escaped wrecking in the aftermath of the Second World War, only because it operated as the municipal museum during that critical period. All the other Transylvanian chateaux and palaces were subjected to brutal remodelling and knocking about. Our architect colleagues from Hungary who were involved with the renovation of the Grassalkovich mansion in Gödöllő were amazed to see that in the Brukenthal Palace everything down to the last door handle, from the parquet flooring to the wallpaper, had been preserved in its original condition. The best part of the Museum's collection, however, was hauled off to Bucharest when the Communists assumed power, but not long ago the Lutheran Church, who are the legal heirs, managed to claim back the finest of the paintings, books and ethnological objects, so that they continue to serve the city. The fact that the Lutheran Church has regained legal title to the Museum and its contents does not have any major practical consequences as the Church did not seek these back for its own ends but in order that, working with the Ministry of Culture, it should continue to operate it as a museum with the sole proviso that the Church would be given a say in the administration of the institution.

As the city's chief architect, how do you weigh up your twenty years in Sibiu?

Nowadays it is not just a matter of Sibiu itself but of all the historic towns of Transylvania being on the look-out for, or even expecting, good models to follow. If Sibiu's experiment in 2007 proves successful, it may be that one factor which emerges is that the only way it is worth embarking on urban renewal is by always pinning to it a stimulating cultural event. Transylvania is unique with regard to its natural, historical and cultural treasures; it should be one of the great centres for tourism. 2007 amounts to a huge chance for us to show ourselves to the town dwellers and the world. Looking at the programme to mark the twinning of Luxembourg and Sibiu, what stands out for me is the strapline: "multicultural, multi-ethnic, multi-confessional." We need to show Europe that these are not empty words. That occasion has also enthused the handful of ethnic Magyars who live in Sibiu. Since March of this year a Hungarian cultural centre has been operating under the aegis of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (RMDSz–UDMR), one of the parties in the coalition that currently governs Romania, and this may serve as catalyser more widely in Transylvania, Hungary and the Carpathian Basin as a whole. The period from August 19th to 24th is organised as a Hungarian week, each day of which will be devoted to a single Hungarian personality.

If tourists do come to Sibiu, many will probably wish to look around its hinterland and see the Saxon fortified churches. What sort of condition are these in?

As part of the programme of events, there is

Gyula Hegedűs

View of Sibiu's Old Town with the Lutheran Parish Church
from the Council Tower, the Ratturm.

József Sebestyén

The southern side of the Grosser Ring (Piața Mare):
the Haller House with its Renaissance gateway.

The courtyard of the Old Rathaus, now the Museum of History – Brukenthal Museum.

József Sebestyén

The Kleiner Ring (Piaţa Mică): the Ratturm, built in the 13th century and reconstructed in 1588.

JÓZSEF SEBESTYÉN

Liars Bridge on the Kleiner Ring (Piaţa Mică), connecting the Upper Town, the historic part of the city, to the Lower Town.

JÓZSEF SEBESTYÉN

The Luxembourg House on the Kleiner Ring (Piaţa Mică).

GYULA HEGEDÜS

The Grosser Ring (Piaţa Mare): the Blue House and the Brukenthal Palace on the left, the former Bodenkreditanstalt and the Catholic Parish Church on the right.

GYULA HEGEDÜS

The drinking fountain on the Grosser Ring (Piaţa Mare).

going to be a splendid exhibition in the Grosser Ring that will show aerial views of them on 2 x 1 metre panels. There has already appeared a book by Martin Riel, a historian who works at the Danube Museum in Ulm and championed the showing of these panels. Visitors will therefore be able to form an impression of the region in which Sibiu is located. From the tourist centre they will then be able to pick up information on how to reach the fortified churches and what to expect when they get there. As regards their physical condition, the position is not exactly rosy, but there has already been some progress. A programme now exists within whose framework the Lutheran Church is attempting to do at least the work that is most urgently needed: roof repairs, railings and so on. They are trying, in other words, to move beyond a phase where these assets are under threat of perishing.

Do these monuments have a future?

They would, if there were to be an explosion in the wider region of the sort of optimism that was not present even in Sibiu six years ago. Prince Charles has done much for the church at Viscri (Deutsch-Weisskirch), which since 1993 has been a World Heritage site, and the Mihail Eminescu Trust, which enjoys his patronage, has initiated a whole string of renovation projects in the Transylvanian Saxon region. We need to identify private investors: it would be very much in their interests if they were to get behind the renovation work. The Saxon settlements of Cisnădie (Heltau) and Cisnădiora (Michelsberg) are within easy reach of Sibiu. The Romanesque church at the latter nowadays acts as a theatre auditorium for Sibiu since it only operates as a monument, with some of the most interesting theatrical performances being staged there. The fortified church at Heltau is still used by a congregation: the problems are most acute where that is not the case, as one can be sure that in any place with even just a single Saxon inhabitant that person will wind the clock and look after the church as far as possible. Fortunately, there are now centres to which one can take treasures that are in need of rescue, one of those being the Teutsch House in Sibiu, which operates as a German centre and archive and where ecclesiastical books and registers are indexed by one of the most up-to-date methods. There is also an exhibition space, a conference room and a second-hand bookshop with a café. Altarpieces are brought in to be restored. The theatre's main auditorium is scheduled to take in, from one of the fortified churches, a 1788 organ of which only the case is now intact and which is to be brought back into working condition by Hermann Binder, a famous organ restorer based in Sibiu. The Lutheran Parish Church in the city centre has had a Baroque portative organ restored which is now in constant use, alongside the big nineteenth-century Romantic organ. Organs saved from Saxon fortified churches are now in St Michael's Church in Cluj. Of course, much more money is needed, but I think the example set by Sibiu is having, and will continue to have, an impact. The city airport has developed to such an extent for 2007 that it could be a spur for Cluj and Tîrgu Mureş. If they too make investments, then a fresh start can be made on things that we have neglected over the past sixty years. ❧

The Stones of Hermannstadt

Horst Schuller in Conversation with Farkas-Zoltán Hajdú

Dr Horst Schuller was born in 1940 and graduated in German from the University of Cluj. He trained as a teacher in Sighişoară and taught in Braşov before becoming a journalist with the Braşov-based weekly Karpathen Rundschau. *Following Romania's transition from the Ceauşescu dictatorship, he took up a post at the University of Sibiu, lecturing on comparative literature and the history of translation. On retiring in 2002, he moved to Germany. His major work is a book on the journal* Klingsor, *published in Braşov between the two world wars, which played a substantial role in presenting the cultural face of the Saxons of Transylvania.*

F.-Z. Hajdú: *I would like to talk to you about today's Sibiu, the city once known as Hermannstadt, which used to be referred to as the capital city of Transylvania's Saxon nation. What are your earliest recollections?*

Horst Schuller: I wasn't actually born in Sibiu but in the village of Mosna (Meschen or Muzsna), which lies near the town of Mediaş (Mediasch or Medgyes). That is where I first heard the name of Hermannstadt. It was often mentioned by my mother because she had completed a course in domestic science there in her younger days. She had a splendid photograph album full of snaps of her in Sibiu, taking part in various sporting events in a black gym slip and black plimsolls, or out hiking with companions in the mountains near the city. Those were the first real mountains that I saw. I associate my Sibiu with those snowy peaks and my mother's younger days. Whenever I worked with her, in May or June in our vineyard above the village, she would always point to those peaks. To begin with, of course, I didn't understand what it was that I was supposed to be looking at, so I just stared at the horizon and nodded. Later on I tumbled to the fact that those weren't clouds but high, gigantic, snow-covered mountains. That was how I came to know something about that distant town where something was always happening and where my grandfather had been apprenticed as a tailor. Such family recollections bound me to the city that I soon enough came to know at first hand. I contracted scarlet fever, and because the local doctor was late in diagnosing it, I became deaf overnight. My parents stood me with my back to them, in one corner of

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Farkas-Zoltán Hajdú,
a writer and a translator, is a native of Transylvania who has been living in Heidelberg since 1987.

The Exodus of the Transylvanian Saxons

Between the two wars over 700,000 ethnic Germans lived in Romania (702,717 according to 1920 census figures). These included the Transylvanian Saxons, the more numerous Banat Swabians and the Satmar Swabians from the pre-1867 Kingdom of Hungary, the Germans of Bessarabia (formerly Russia) and the Bukovina (formerly Austria) and a number in the Old Kingdom (pre-First World War Romania.) In 1930, there were approximately 250,000 ethnic Germans in Transylvania alone, making up an estimated 9.8 per cent of the total population there. These numbers were considerably reduced by the cessation of the northern Bukovina and Bessarabia in 1940 (confirmed in 1945), by the many who fled with the retreating German army in 1944 and by those ethnic Germans who served in the Waffen SS or were deported to the Soviet Union after the war and never returned. By the time of Romania's 1948 census only 343,000 professed to being ethnic Germans, though it is very likely that many did not dare admit their ethnic affiliations. The true number is estimated as about 400,000.

It was around then that voluntary emigration began in earnest. Thus, 19,748 of those who regarded themselves as being ethnic Germans left the country between 1950 and 1969, 46,643 between 1970 and 1977, and a further 92,947 between 1978 and 1984. During the latter period Romania was effectively selling off its ethnic Germans in much the same way as it had done earlier with its Jewish population to Israel. The Federal Republic of Germany paid 12,000 Deutschmarks per head and the Ceaușescu administration sanctioned the emigration of around 12,000–15,000 ethnic German citizens annually, with the money being remitted by Germany in part straight to a bank account kept by the Securitate (the feared secret police). By the end of 1989 there were no more than about 200,000 ethnic Germans still living in Romania.

Following Ceaușescu's summary execution, on Christmas Day of 1989, the country's borders were opened. In 1990 a total of 95,900 'Saxons' and 'Swabians' moved abroad for good—and that was just those who did so 'officially' (i.e. with the express permission of the Romanian authorities). Continued emigration meant that the already depleted community lost a further 16,767 persons in 1991. As a result, the census carried out on January 7th 1992 found that just 119,436 of Romania's total population of 22,760,449—or just 0.52 per cent—professed to being ethnic Germans.

The emigration has continued since then. In 1992, for instance, the number of ethnic German emigrants was 8,845, and in ensuing years it was in the range of two to four thousand people per annum. The findings of the 2002 census were shocking from the viewpoint of the remaining ethnic German community, which was found to have shrunk to 59,764, among whom barely 14,000 were living in the heartland of the Saxon nation in Transylvania. For all practical purposes, the few who were left in rural areas were elderly individuals still living in their native villages who clearly wish to die and be laid to rest there.

the room, and started talking. I couldn't hear a word. My mother was beside herself; my father loaded me onto a horse and cart and took me into Mediaş where we got on a train, itself a huge novelty for me, and we set off for Sibiu. The doctors diagnosed that my tonsils were dangerously swollen, so they operated immediately. I have fragmented memories of a man in white coming towards me with a rubber apron, one end of which he hangs round my neck. During the night following the operation Father draped his overcoat on me, picked me up from the bed, then started to run down some stairs because an air-raid warning was being sounded in the town. After a few days I was discharged from the hospital and father took me to the station. I have a clear memory of the mountains of cherries piled up on tarpaulins, the abundance of produce.

The break-up of the Transylvanian Saxon population got under way after 1945.

My father was deported and we moved to a village by the name of Richiş (Richersdorf or Riomfalva). Mother was left to support the family; she was clever and tough. She came up with the idea of beekeeping, and within two or three years she was so good at handling bees that she got a job as apiarist on a big state farm. The bees took her first to the area around Sibiu, to Păltiniş (Hohe Rinne), to collect mountain honey. It was only then that I began to understand why my mother adored the mountains. I took great pleasure in breathing in the redolence of forests, the cool air of the mornings and early evenings.

Sibiu is not far from Braşov or Kronstadt, another large Saxon town. Do you have any childhood memories of Braşov?

I was much less aware of Braşov. For a long time, city for me meant only Sibiu. But the fact that Sibiu was the true intellectual and cultural centre for the Saxons of Transylvania, the seat of the Lutheran bishop, was something I only began to appreciate when I was a student teacher in Sighişoară or Schässburg. Then, as a teacher, I made the acquaintance of Braşov, because that's where I was posted. I soon learned about the centuries-long rivalry between the two cities, though there's nothing particularly odd about that, since you get rivalry just about anywhere in the world where you have two towns of roughly the same size fairly close to each other. To oversimplify, people who live in Braşov have always been a bit snootier, thinking they are cannier, more talented, more open to the wider world than people who live in Sibiu. It's true that historically they were obliged to cultivate contacts with foreign peoples, since Braşov lies on the northern slopes of the South Carpathians which once separated the Kingdom of Hungary and the Principality of Wallachia. For centuries it was a border town, and from the very beginning its inhabitants had to be more mobile and more open. Sibiu, by contrast, was always a 'sleepier' town, more 'studious', more aloof. Even today people from Braşov love to brag that they have given many more gifted individuals to the Saxon culture of Transylvania than has Sibiu, especially when it comes to the arts. What is true is that two generations of great artists grew up there, largely thanks to the city's prosperity. Braşov's Saxon burghers built a string of villas, each more splendid than the last, and they purchased so many objets d'art that the artists had trouble keeping up with the commissions. That great building boom of the early twentieth century had its drawbacks as well, for the new villas replaced medieval houses. As a result, Braşov's city centre boasts far fewer valuable monuments than Sibiu. The people of Sibiu were poorer, and poverty is well known to be the most effective preserver of historic monuments. In any case, Sibiu had a more complex social and intellectual structure, with huge chasms between the Upper and Lower Towns, between middle-class burghers and lower middle-class artisans, between the intelligentsia and tradesmen. Despite that, Sibiu never gave rise to such blatant intellectual cliques as did Braşov. Before the First World War, Braşov's inhabitants were kept abreast of the latest cultural news from around Europe mainly by the magazine *Karpathenrundschau,* edited by Adolf Meschendörfer, and later on by *Klingsor,* founded by the journalist and writer Heinrich Zillich (1898–1988) in 1924, who also edited it. These created a productive intellectual tension and polarisation. Sibiu also had its literary and art magazines, *Ostland and Frühling,* but these were nothing like as critical or divisive, as they preferred to look for consensus, to propagate the unity of Transylvanian Saxon culture, and thus they always came across as rather anaemic.

Braşov was the most prosperous Saxon city but the Lutheran bishop was in Sibiu. Did Braşov's inhabitants ever endeavour to entice the bishop to move to their city?

Braşovers contented themselves with the knowledge that the great Saxon humanist and Protestant reformer Johannes Honterus (1498–1549) was born and bred there. I would note as evidence of both the open-mindedness and ambition of Braşov's inhabitants the fact that in 1922 they chose Viktor Glondys, a Silesian-born convert from Catholicism and lecturer at the university of Czernowitz, as their *Stadtpfarrer* (minister in charge of the city parish). He went on in 1932 to become the last Saxon bishop before the Second World War. The citizens of Braşov sent him off to his new post with—what else?—a fabulous collection of paintings. Braşov, or to its Saxons, Kronstadt, thus recognised that since the mid-nineteenth-century Sibiu has been the seat of the Saxon bishop, but it has stubbornly maintained its independence all the same.

Joachim Wittstock in his essay discusses a string of Saxon and Romanian writers who were born or lived for a long time in Sibiu, and he reaches the conclusion that Sibiu spurred all of them to delineate a kind of utopian, non-existent dream.

If we place that sentence in the Braşov vs. Sibiu context, we could say that it was mainly philosophers who lived in Sibiu and mainly merchants in Braşov. However polarizing that sounds, there is some historical and social basis for it. The intellectual centre really was Sibiu, if only because that was where the Saxons' national archive was located; this was where the first German teachers' training college was established and where a series of scholarly publications were published. In other words, it was an attractive place for those engaged in intellectual pursuits. But, as I have already pointed out, theirs were minds that found it easy to accept new things.

It is no accident that the Klingsor *group round Zillich began to take an interest in post-1918 Hungarian Transylvanianism. There were prominent Saxon and Romanian thinkers who dreamed of seeing Transylvania as an 'eastern Switzerland'. Long before then, the region had nurtured a separatist—multicultural, if you will—climate that, after the First World War, was called Transylvanianism by the Hungarian press, and 'the common Transylvanian heritage' by the Romanians and Saxons.*

The openness of, above all, Braşov society and its press was perceptible even at the time of Hungary's 1848/49 revolution. That was around when Johann Gött came from Germany. In 1834 he purchased the printing office that had been founded by Johannes Honterus, and in 1837 he started Transylvania's second German newspaper *Siebenbürgisches Wochenblatt*, then the following year the Romanian *Gazeta Transilvaniei* and the Hungarian *Erdélyi Híradó*. With its more welcoming face for foreigners, Braşov drew profit from this openness by broadening the horizons of its increasingly mixed population. It was also characteristic of Zillich's initial activity that he set the goal of using his paper to present all of Transylvania's communities, to inform others about their lives and cares.

If a man from Braşov and a man from Sibiu met on one of Transylvania's notoriously atrocious roads at the beginning of the nineteenth century, what language would they have used to communicate?

A Saxon dialect. If they were educated, they would have understood one another,

because they would have used not the patois of their birthplace but an 'artificial' language that was called 'ecclesiastical Saxon', which differed quite considerably from literary German but was comprehensible to all the educated Saxons. Not surprisingly, it most closely resembles the dialect of Sibiu, since it was mostly there that Transylvania's national assemblies were held during the eighteenth century, and thus the dialect of Sibiu was considered the most genteel by representatives from other areas.

Schooling was always the institution most valued by Transylvania's Saxons. Here, too, it was again the grammar schools in Braşov and Sibiu that were the most eminent: the Honterus and Brukenthal Gymnasiums. Did the two schools compete?

Certainly not while all the Saxon schools were still in existence. The conflicts only deepened a good deal later, under the Communist dictatorship. I am thinking of the Sixties, Seventies and Eighties, when there were really only these two top-drawer secondary schools around.

You lived for a long time in Braşov, first as a schoolteacher then as a journalist, before becoming a lecturer at the University of Sibiu. How do the two towns compare?

Sibiu was always the more provincial. Even the dress of the town dwellers is more rustic. In Sibiu everything happens more slowly, and the surrounding villages have left a much more powerful imprint on the town than is the case with Braşov. There was always more money in Braşov, and it was always much more dynamic, reacting more sensitively to changes. But I have to say all this in the past tense, because nowadays the table has turned and now the money is going to Sibiu.

And why is it that Sibiu and not Brasov is the European Capital of Culture for 2007?

Because, for one thing, Constantin Noica (1908–87), the Romanian philosopher, did not withdraw to Poiana Braşov (Schulerau), but to Păltiniş, which was always better known to and liked by the Romanians. The Romanian intelligentsia of Transylvania are more drawn to Sibiu, and all the more so because not far outside the town is the village of Răşinari, which was the birthplace of two leading figures in Romania's intellectual life, the philosopher Emil Cioran (1911–95) and the poet and prime minister Octavian Goga. The poet, playwright and philosopher Lucian Blaga (1895–1961) also spent much of his life in Sibiu.

Even though Braşov had more contact with Romanians from the Middle Ages on.

Yes, but those were mainly commercial links. True, several important Romanian publicists lived in Braşov in the nineteenth century, but by the end of that century most Romanian intellectuals sought inspiration from Sibiu. Given that, it is quite natural that Sibiu should have been nominated as a candidate for European Capital of Culture. It is obvious that the idea of making a bid did not come from the Saxons so much as the Romanians and Luxembourgers. The Romanians nominated Sibiu in preference to Bucharest, with its hectic bustle as their intellectual capital, and Luxembourg, of course, fully supported that. Or rather, it was the other way round: Luxembourg took the initiative and then the Romanians got behind it. The decision was swayed not just by sympathies, of course, but by the cityscape itself. Just on account of its geographical location alone Sibiu was more appropriate for a year-long celebration than Braşov, crammed as it is in a narrow valley. Braşov has a wonderful fifteenth-century City Hall and the monumental Gothic edifice of the Black Church,

but to the foreign visitor it doesn't have a particularly cosy feel. Braşov also has only one main square, compared with Sibiu's two, and Sibiu's surroundings are far more attractive. The mountains are only on the horizon, but near the city is the friendly woodland of the Dumbrava Sibiului (Junger Wald). In short, it's more alluring, airier, sunnier, with a centre that has retained a medieval atmosphere.

You mentioned that the idea of bidding for Capital of Culture came from Luxembourg.

Luxembourg's decision was probably guided by information about Transylvania supplied by historians and linguists. The Transylvanian Saxon Dictionary is compiled and edited in Sibiu, and there is also a research group engaged in comparing the Luxembourg and Transylvanian Saxon dialects. I imagine they saw this as being a common point of departure which could serve to link the two cities. I ought to say that it has become clear that any suggestion of there being a direct relationship between Luxembourg German and Transylvanian Saxon is pure fiction. The many features that the two have in common are not due to a shared ancestry but to the fact that both regions are where the local language has fossilized, has not changed at the same pace as in other German-speaking areas. But then the fiction is agreeable to both parties—to the Transylvanian Saxons because it allows them to regard Luxembourg as a clearly definable ancestral home, and to tiny Luxembourg because it gives them relatives living in Eastern Europe. So, it's a fiction that is enthusiastically fostered by both parties. Research, especially that of Hermine Pilder-Klein, has clearly shown that the ethnic Germans of Transylvania arrived in the country in several waves and from several regions, from several homelands, the first of them during the reign of Géza II. Many came at the time of the Crusades, and the process can only be regarded as coming to an end during the eighteenth century. That doesn't seem to put the politicians off, though, as they keep on enthusiastically proclaiming and financing this jointly dreamed-up kinship. Luxembourg has had a presence in Sibiu for a fair time now. At its own expense it has restored a town-house, the Luxembourg House, and put it at the disposal of the research group that is compiling the Transylvanian Saxon Dictionary.

Census data show that the number of speakers of the Transylvanian Saxon dialect is in rapid decline. Soon it too will be a dead language.

Transylvanian Saxons are now living in a diaspora. The time will soon come when it will be only individuals who are capable of maintaining that identity. Something new will ensue, something else. That's why I deplore declarations that the German schools in Transylvania have the job of preserving and protecting the German elements of Transylvanian culture. That's absurd! What seems more feasible to me is a process of passing-on, of rousing interest in the cultural values of a vanishing minority. Here I need say no more than democracy: democratic rules governed the operation of Transylvanian Saxon communities for eight centuries. It's enough to look at their fortified churches. These massive buildings were not paid for by the money of princes or aristocrats but were built by the decades-long shared labours of simple village communities. I believe that message is still valid today: a community is capable, through its own efforts and without any external funding or assistance from outsiders, of creating values that transcend its resources—provided that is what all the members want, provided that the community is functioning, and provided everyone identifies with the common goal.

The original inhabitants, who have emigrated, are not the ones now restoring the bastions, churches and medieval houses of old Sibiu but the more recently established Romanian population. This new attitude to Transylvania's old values is reassuring, especially when one thinks of the depredations of the Communist era. Then the majority community did everything within its power to get rid of anything that was a reminder of Transylvania's other nations. I am reminded of an antique Cretan example. In Gortyn the Greeks inscribed their law code on large slabs of marble which were set out in the main square. The Roman emperor Trajan reused stones from such an inscription-bearing wall when he had the Roman theatre—the Odeon—rebuilt after it was destroyed by an earthquake. In other words, the new power in the land did not destroy the values of the defeated people but incorporated them into their own culture. Or is that a forced parallel?

Not in the least! Much the same thing happened many times over in Transylvania, though of course one has to rule out the Communist era. But take 1944, when German troops packed the Saxons of northern Transylvania onto trains and resettled them in Austria and Germany. The churches in the villages were sold off to the Eastern Orthodox Church, and that is why the buildings are still standing today. The Romanian community added an iconostasis, put their own cross on the steeple and thereafter regarded the church as their own. So those buildings survived. They are not museums, they haven't been expertly restored, nor will they be, because they're in use; they have another function. That's fine by me, as I'm not a great believer in conservation—one can't place everything under a bell jar. The situation has changed since 1989, of course, because no new owners have been found for the Saxon villages as they are being rapidly abandoned. The Romanians there can't take everything over—all the more so as most of the Eastern Orthodox believers now have their own churches. Sadly, a resettled community cannot keep a growing number of medieval Saxon churches in a good state of repair, so these are slowly crumbling and becoming little more than stone quarries. But then history itself is nothing other than a huge quarry. After all, the inhabitants of the village of Gârbova (Urwegen) incorporated stones from Roman times into their buildings: they made use of what was already to hand, that was their foundation. The only question is how intentional or expedient the dismantling of those old churches was. Is it right to expect that a form of reverence will be shown towards them? Because if they figure as merely a decorative element in the landscape, then that is debatable. I will mention just one example, that of Feldioară (Marienburg or Földvár) near Braşov. The ruins still stand today, but only because it was under those walls that Petru Rareş, the prince of Moldavia, is reputed to have won a battle against Habsburg forces in 1529. As the myth was embroidered further, Feldioară was named Rareş's castle; however, even a historical myth is unable to protect ruins.

So it's just a matter of whether the history of those stones survives?

Stones, whether they be Roman or Transylvanian Saxon, can tell many stories—obviously to anyone who pays attention to them... Let me reformulate the question: How does a person relate to a town that is structurally and culturally foreign to him? From that perspective, I think that something quite new is happening in Sibiu. The restoration and renovation work is giving employment to a great many people, giving them a livelihood. A new kind of consciousness is emerging with the ethnic Romanian majority sticking up for the city, even though they think of it not as Romanian but

Transylvanian. They recognise that others built it, that others were living there before them, though that isn't quite so simple as all that because there are still people who would like to see it as being of Romanian origin. The signposts are instructive in that respect: they are marked Sibiu—Hermannstadt, even though according to the laws currently in force such bilingual signposts can only be set up where a minority makes up more than twenty per cent of the population. I see that as symbolic of a new kind of tolerant, relaxed way of thinking. It means that the inhabitants have accepted the city, along with a history that is in fact alien to them.

Can we hope for a kind of multicultural civic identity?

To be sure. Indeed, one can even speak of an awareness of a Transylvanian identity. Nowadays that notion is even found in the Romanian press, even if with simplified generalities, such as the idea that Transylvanians are more deliberate, franker, more highly principled. Not long ago I read in a Romanian newspaper that cheese vendors from Oltenia wear hats in the style of the village of Sălişte because customers only trust produce from Transylvania. There are cases where prejudices can be positive!

What do you think the chances are that Sibiu will be able to go on developing after 2007?

Let's assume that grey, mundane reality followed on the wedding at Cana—that's how it will be in Sibiu also. When the countless celebrations of the jubilee year are over there will be a return to everyday life, and no doubt signs of a hangover will also appear. Nevertheless, the whole process involved in the Cultural Capital project has meant a huge boost to the entire area, especially from an economic point of view. The airport has been modernised, bypasses have been constructed, the university has been expanded. Besides that, Johannis, the Saxon mayor, has demonstrated that chances for development are much better with an even-handed leadership that is not corrupt.

Do you believe that it is Sibiu's genius loci that has determined and alters the perceptions of its inhabitants?

People are subject to a host of influences in the course of their lives. The citizens of Sibiu are at present subject to a great many positive influences, thanks to which they are proud of their town irrespective of their ethnic origins. Would it be worth giving that up? I don't know what the point of that would be. More than that, the positive example has also inspired other communities. Mayor Johannis's success has led the ethnic Romanian majority in two other towns in Sibiu County—Cisnădie (Heltau or Nagydisznód) and Mediaş—to likewise elect ethnic Saxon mayors.

What do the Transylvanian Saxons now living in Germany make of this honoured status?

They are very enthusiastic. Articles about it appear in every issue of *Siebenbürgische Zeitung,* which is published in Munich. I term the phenomenon a non-territorial pride, a borderless local patriotism. They refer to the Saxon bishop as 'our bishop' and the mayors as 'our mayors', which is pretty odd when you bear in mind that most of these people left the region years ago. But then that, too, is a positive phenomenon, because the Saxons that live in Munich also gain an enhanced sense of their Saxon identity. When the Western press was going on about the street kids and corruption in Romania, people tended to deny their identity. Now I can say with great pride that I come from a European Capital of Culture. ❧

Miklós Györffy

The Calligraphy of Voice

Lajos Parti Nagy: *A fagyott kutya lába* (The Frozen Dog's Foot). Magvető, Budapest, 2006, 192 pp. • László Garaczi: *metaXa.* Magvető, Budapest, 2006, 150 pp.

Lajos Parti Nagy is a stylistic virtuoso of contemporary Hungarian writing. It should be noted that the principle source and material of his virtuosity is the withered, vulgarised language of the styleless rabble. Parti Nagy knows and comprehends this misshapen creature astonishingly well, the symptoms and processes of the depredation of language, which he takes to absurdity, mimicking them with creativity, humour and exaggeration. As he treats them, they are turned into grotesque parodies and surreal poetry by staying close to the sociological roots of manners of speaking. His new anthology of short stories, *The Frozen Dog's Foot,* is an orgy of documentary fidelity to spoken language and grotesque linguistic inventiveness.

The collection, which gathers together the fruits of the last ten years or so, contains twenty-two short stories and is a direct continuation of his previous (1994) collection *A hullámzó Balaton* (The Swell of Balaton). Such is the continuity and affinity that *Taxidermy,* a recent and critically acclaimed feature film, was based on the stories, and in particular on the title stories of the two volumes. The film's director, György Pálfi, was captivated by "The Frozen Dog's Foot", one of the finest of the stories. It is one of the three in the volume in which neither the corruption of language nor the mentality and behaviour behind this corruption is the substance of the text, but rather a stylised archaic character involving a topic taken from the past. "The Frozen Dog's Foot" is a medical anamnesis delivered at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The ironic narrative frame is provided by the commentaries of the physician, expressed in the technical language of the day. The main text is the account, cited as the indirect speech of the patient, of the events preceding an accident that has driven him to the edge of derangement. The story is concerned with a military tailor of the reserve who serves in the village household of a captain as a kind of jack of all trades. The captain's Juno-assed wife and his two adolescent daughters hold the man, who suffers from what he calls "fuck-rage", in a state of permanent sexual excitement. He sleeps in a windowless pantry beneath the steps leading up to the attic, using a wash-tub as a bed. However, every two weeks he has to fill this same tub with hot water so that the three women can take a bath one after the other. Again, whenever a pig is slaughtered he also has to relinquish his bed, because the fresh meats—quivering,

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Miklós Györffy
reviews new fiction for this journal.

steaming innards and all—are stored in the tub. And following "the baths and the bacon slabs" he always has to wash out the tub. After the slaughtering session, the snatch-obsessed tailor fantasises about the captain's wife slinking into his "bedroom" in the middle of the night, lying down in the tub, and pulling him onto her slippery, steamy flesh. In the morning he awakes, after the ecstasy of ejaculation, to find that he is "freezing on the spot, and that he is lying, his lower body naked, on his belly on the ruined meat, with the salt painfully stinging his penis. And that the captain, having opened the door to get his bicycle and caught him thus, immediately shoots him dead." But the first sentence of the story ("My scruffy patient, his head bleeding, is coming...") tells us the shot had not been fatal after all.

This kind of punch-line is rare in stories by Parti Nagy. "Devil's String" which closes the volume stirs recollections of earlier Hungarian literature. It has a "retro" setting, a spa in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy; Parti Nagy's circumstances and characters, a balance of pastiche and parody, turn it into a stylistic study of a life of lavish luxury. The characters concerned are a private tutor and a violinist brought from Pest who, while looking forward (in vain) to the favours of a dissolute countess at the spa, get thoroughly drunk together.

Most of the short stories are shorter than the two here mentioned and are basically studies in language. They are constructed out of, in Parti Nagy's words, "the meat of language": figures, coarse, miserable, vegetating pariahs, homunculi incapable of articulate speech, wretched louts, and lowly automatons. These are either the pitiful and laughable creatures of the Kádár era or they fit within the haunting nightmares originating in our experiences of the Stalinist period that preceded it. Among the most memorable of the latter is "The Mine Laundryman". The setting is the laundry of a mine that is slowly being run down and partly operated by women in immeasurably bleak industrial surroundings. Since there are always rings, necklaces, earrings, wallets and other misplaced objects to be found in the pockets of the clothes to be washed, "in the golden age, when the mine was operating at full steam, to be a laundryman was a veritable El Dorado." However, the comrades in the central office get wind of this supplementary source of income and start turning up every Wednesday at the mine for their share, handed over in small paper bags. As a kind of eerie twist it turns out that the laundryman is in fact a woman, though the reader is led to believe her to be a man owing to the mention of two assistants, deaf-mute ethnic German twin girls, with whom she romps on the piles of crinkly, well-washed grey handkerchiefs.

The "plant" in the story "Closed Chain" would fit well into science-fiction: it is a resort that "resembles an office block or a former barracks. From the outside it is at most three stories, while on the inside it is at least ten," and the guests are not permitted to go down to the lower levels.

> The Phoenix Hotel is maintained expressly for the family members of soldiers at the front. If a letter has not arrived from the front for some time, the family converts what it can into cash and travels as a member of a group to this hotel intended specifically for them, where video recordings of the corpses are rerun everyday on closed circuit television. If someone recognizes their child, they can take the body. The zinc coffins encased in a wooden box are referred to as freight number 200. If the body in the coffin turns out not to be the right one, all they can do is bury it, whoever it may be, male or female.

Elsewhere, the setting for these grotesque horrors is named. The narrator of "Snow Flash" is a secret policeman in the Kádár era, who relates in appalling technical jargon how Kálmán Daruh, a 'dissident' home on a visit, is mixed up in a smuggling affair, leaving him no choice "but to spill the beans on his

Hungarian connection friend, as the former husband of his former mistress, Ede Csiíz. Ede, who used to be in the business of making musical instruments, is now a labourer and storeman." The "source" of the rest of the short stories is a woman of shifting identity, a certain Bella Wrights (in Hungarian Szép Róza, a pun on *"szépprózа"* or fiction), who the narrator inserts between himself and the events narrated. The stories seem to unfold from an obscurity of language that often encumbers the reader, who may have to begin again several times before the fragments narrated come together. In "There are Troubles Everywhere" this technique becomes the subject of the narrative. Here, Bella is a public lavatory attendant who also peddles ties; passing references to her conversations slowly sketch the man who stops every day to pick out a tie at her stand. Little by little, he relates a confused story of an affair with a woman. The short story itself develops as she puts the tale together in her mind, or rather in the mind of her listener, while on the linguistic level the man's direct speech is mixed into hers and the narrator's intertwining indirect discourse.

Some stories are linguistic and stylistic bravura: lyrically grotesque genre pictures of a situation or mood, or humorous sketches and linguistic parodies. "Bowers Timeless" masterfully caricatures Sunday afternoons in the gardens of small town restaurants, while in "No Strings Attached" a gold-toothed nouveau riche woman brags that when she had a cake made for her daughter's wedding it was so big "that it simply didn't fit on the TV screen." So "we made a fine video ourselves, recording the truck as it comes with it on to Heroes Square, and the box is bigger than the God of the Hungarians, or whoever it is standing there with the skateboard." "Study in Language" is in its entirety an ostentatious, knuckle-brained, popcorn-gobbling, formless monologue. The story that appears in this issue, "Kenyans" gives voice to a group of domesticated ostriches from a Hungarian farm who are taken, with backpacks, golfing caps and white trainers, to make a coach excursion to Lake Balaton as a reward for a job well done. From time to time Parti Nagy's humour loses all sense of proportion and leaves an impression of dubious banter as in "Hotel Coopoffice" which paints a horrific picture of village tourism: the narrator wants to spend a night with his girlfriend in Csőpép, famous for its worker-militiamen and for its goat cheese. The local old women descend on them like a legion of brigand crows. When they finally take refuge in their car, "the frustrated people of Csőpép surround them and keep lifting the back of the car, sitting on the engine compartment and the roof and snickering and drumming on the metal sheet with their withered palms."

Overall, the picture is uneven. Superb moments of bravura alternate with instances of plain silliness. No doubt there is no one today who can satirise our contemporaries and our intellectual, spiritual and linguistic deformities more incisively or wittily than Parti Nagy. But are the risible and misshapen always others or are they not ourselves at times? And does linguistic virtuosity not at some point become an end in itself? These are questions that have long lingered around Parti Nagy's ingenious talent, and this volume hardly disperses them.

László Garaczi's new novel *metaXa* is concerned with loss of personality. Garaczi began writing in the second half of the 1980s, a contemporary of Parti Nagy's who was also hailed as a hero of a new literary wave. Though he called his shorter pieces stories, they are a long way from the traditional short story understood as something that recounts an unheard of event culminating in some kind of pointed conclusion, as one finds in Parti Nagy's narratives. They are texts in which a voice speaks, and what this voice says is less important than how it speaks. The speech style, however, was usually a parodic

stylisation of possible speech styles and, ultimately, similar to the grotesque speech-arias of Parti Nagy. Garaczi has also written two autobiographical novels ("as-if novels") but their subject is also this insolent, provocative voice that deprives remembrance of its traditional literary dignity and demotes it to being the mere tool of a linguistic game.

metaXa, on which the author spent quite some time, preparing several versions, is a turning point. Barely one hundred and fifty pages in length, it is a mature, precise and dense text. The writer Ákos Szilágyi said of it:

> Garaczi's prose is much like an engraving, as if he who wrote it (not the narrator, but the author), had etched, delicately but mercilessly, with the weight of implacable finality, into a translucent, polished, smooth surface—sky, glass, ice—by using the diamond pin-pricks of precise words, the grotesque features of the world that takes shape through the narrative in an unbroken process of sketching.

Szilágyi discerns "the icy tone of objective irony" in *metaXa,* but tragic shadings may also be felt. Garaczi seems to have turned away from the postmodern to a version of modernity which depicted and analysed loss as leading to grave, irredeemable crises of personality. (Camus' *The Stranger* comes to mind.)

metaXa concerns a middle-aged man who, unable to choose between two women, loses both and winds up in a psychiatric ward. The entire novel consists of a single sentence, the protagonist's interior monologue. This single sentence does not comprise any contingency, inarticulateness or bundle of subconscious associations, it conveys rather the instability and volatibilty of the protagonist's perceptions and mentality. Here too a continuous, monotonous voice mechanically asserts and establishes something which has but a fleeting validity before vanishing without trace. The protagonist is little more than these momentary impressions; as the tortuous experience of the ceaseless yet insubstantial present accumulates, he becomes increasingly estranged from himself and his surroundings. (Assuming, of course, that there was ever anything in common between them.) It is not difficult to read the monologue: commas clearly separate clauses from one another, paragraphs and chapters separate sections of the text. From another point of view, however, it is quite tiring, for the reader can only interpret the logical relationships between the individual clauses by inserting full stops at the appropriate places. The reader might also wonder whether this lack of punctuation, which renders everything a blur, is absolutely necessary.

The tension between a more "reader friendly" narrative and rigorous poetic intent is palpable in other respects. For instance, the novel has a plot-line which unravels in the present tense, for the most part in chronological order. The narrator-protagonist meets a childhood friend and the latter's sister Marina again in Budapest, and his orderly life is turned upside down. His string quartet then travels on an extended tour of the United States, where the Internet unites him with Marina, who also happens to be over there. He forgets about the lover he has left behind at home (who as if at the prompting of some telepathic intuition moves out of his place) and falls in love with Marina. They return to Hungary and get married. Marina's unruly family surrounds them, and he eventually moves back into his apartment, where he is welcomed by his ex-flame Gigi, who in the meantime has herself returned. For a time he is with one or other of the two women, who slowly become aware of each other. Slipping into a sort of catatonic state, the man suffers whatever may come to befall him, whatever happens to come his way irrespective of his desires, until finally he and his childhood friend jump into the Danube, presumably with the intention of killing themselves. Nothing happens to him,

he simply swims to safety and returns home. He ends up in a psychiatric ward in a country manor house, where the psychiatrist suggests that he write in the third person,

> with the perspective of an outsider, and give your protagonist a name, Félix, Andor, Róbert, whatever, and don't use your memories but read the lips of an imagined mouth, listen as if listening to a tale, a myth, a legend; don't have sentences, have states of consciousness, give attention to the energies of intimation, not to form, and all the while—this is the essence—estrange yourself from the object, cool all that is personal to zero degrees...

The novel thus can be understood as the text that this protagonist, estranged from himself, writes in the clinic as a therapy to restore his personality.

Beneath the surface of this more or less banal story, *metaXa* employs various cunning devices to indicate the stages of the loss of personality—and to render the reader increasingly uncertain. The novel consists of four chapters. At the beginning of the first, is the word "ÉN" (I), and here the narrator can be identified with himself, speaking in his own name, even if about little more than confusion and absurdity. The second chapter is headed "TE" (YOU). Here the protagonist seems to fall outside of himself, understanding less and less who is acting in his name, who it is to whom things happen as if they were happening to him (though barely comprehensibly). For the most part, the narrator addresses his ever more uncertain self in the second person, but the use of the first person form of the verb may itself be a symptom of this uncertainty. (This second chapter includes the wonderfully written account of the quartet's tour of the United States.) The third chapter, "Ő" (HE), is a third person narrative. Here the narrator calls himself Félix, one of the names suggested by his psychiatrist (Félix in Hungarian can be read as a pun on "half X".) The X here is clearly the X from the title *metaXa,* though why a Greek brandy has become the title of the novel I confess I have not been able to work out.

Although a chronogical order is mostly maintained, the psychiatric ward is part of the setting in the first chapter and is returned to over and over again in the narrative while everyday events in the clinic cannot be fitted into any chronological order. The unravelling of the story is sometimes interrupted by childhood memories, usually involving parents. The place in the chronology of some of the events and occurrences is not always clear at first; the reader needs to be tremendously attentive to establish a sequencing that clarifies the relationships between the events and the entire plot. The reader has to grasp each clause as an independent unit and fit it into its proper place in the scheme.

ÉN-TE-Ő-X (I-YOU-HE-X) is the formula for the loss of personality. The X chapter allows the possibility that the man who jumped into the Danube was not the man who had been pushed over the edge by his relationship with two women: it was his childhood friend Zsolt, who from then on takes over his identity. It is he who names himself Félix, he who writes the first and second person monologues of his friend who drowned. However, the fact that this "Zsolt-Félix" often expresses himself using musical terms and concepts, as "I-YOU-Félix" had earlier, runs counter to this strained reading. Adopting such a fanciful approach to interpretation, one might even claim that Zsolt himself doesn't exist, that he is merely the invention of the confused violist. These games and profondeurs may offer thrilling interpretive possibilities to learned critics. But what makes Garaczi's novel exciting reading, however, is that distinctive "icy tone," the keen "diamond pin-prick" that engraves a host of snapshots and sporadic impressions into the textual surface of the narrative. In other words, the calligraphy of narrative voice. ❧

Nicholas T. Parsons

Narratives of 1956

Paul Lendvai: *Der Ungarnaufstand 1956: Eine Revolution und ihre Folgen.* München, C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 2006, 320 pp. Illustrated. English edition due from Princeton University Press in 2007. • Bob Dent: *Budapest 1956: Locations of Drama.* Budapest, Európa Könyvkiadó, 2006, 432 pp. Published in Hungarian by the same firm (2006) as *Budapest, 1956: A dráma színterei* • Katalin Bogyay: *The Voice of Freedom: Remembering the 1956 Revolution. True stories of personal experiences from those whose lives were changed forever.* London, Hungarian Cultural Centre, 2006, 128 pp. Illustrated. • Ibolya Murber, Zoltán Fónagy (Eds.): *Die ungarische Revolution und Österreich 1956.* Vienna, Czernin Verlag, 2006. 544 pp.

> *"All constitutional talk is nothing compared to one spark of that temperament which at least defends itself against bands of robbers."*
> Jakob Burckhardt

> *"One does not make a revolution simply by consciously increasing the suffering of one's genuine or illusory enemies."* – István Bibó

Revolutions generate their own mythologies, iconologies and pieties. Every schoolboy has heard of the 'storming' of the Winter Palace in St Petersburg on the night of November 7th (old style: 26th October) 1917, or the 'storming' of the Bastille on July 14th, 1789. But not every schoolboy knows that the insurgents practically walked into the Winter Palace, which was guarded by cadets, a women's battalion and a few cossacks; nor that the main preoccupation of the mob, once inside, was to consume as much of the Tsar's favourite French vintage as possible before the supply ran out. Perhaps slightly more schoolboys know that the Bastille, guarded by veterans unfit for active service who were backed up by thirty-two Swiss grenadiers, boasted just seven inmates on the day it was stormed—four forgers, two lunatics and one 'deviant' aristocrat (it would have been two, but the Marquis de Sade had just moved out to the lunatic asylum at Charenton). It is the propagandists (in the Russian case the ideologically committed artists and film-makers) who have turned inglorious or sordid events (the Paris mob went on to engage in an orgy of looting and lynching) into heroic symbolic moments. At the Winter Palace or the Bastille, so we are encouraged to believe, the apocalypse occurred, the old regime collapsed, the new era was born.

Nicholas T. Parsons
divides his time between Vienna and London and is currently working on a literary and cultural history of Vienna. His history of the guidebook as a genre Worth the Detour *is published in July 2007 by Suttton Publishing.*

One remarkable aspect of the 1956 Revolution in Hungary is that it lacks a Bastille or Winter Palace image, not least because the cathartic deliverance that such an image would have symbolised was delayed for thirty-three years. During that time the levers of propaganda were firmly in the hands of those who were anxious to portray the participants as no more than a mob. No effort was spared in traducing the *forradalom* (revolution) by representing it as the *ellenforradalom* (counter-revolution), which in Hungarian political rhetoric reeked of a return to reactionary government and Horthyism. Paradoxically therefore, the failure of the Revolution, and the concomitant failure to establish an iconology of its success, has meant that truly heroic scenarios have retained their integrity as historical events to a remarkable degree, while the least edifying incident (the massacre of Köztársaság tér) has never been airbrushed out of the narrative. Indeed, in two of the books under review, the latter incident has been confronted with an almost painful honesty. Establishing truths, even uncomfortable ones, belongs to the honour of the Revolution as an episode of national self-realisation, all the more so because of the unrelenting efforts of an illegitimate regime to dishonour that episode. The relative 'success' of that regime's efforts over three decades puts one in mind of Sir John Harington's cynical epigram: *"Treason doth never prosper: what's the reason? / For if it prosper, none dare call it treason."*

Harington's cruel paradox helps to explain the vital significance attached to terminology such as 'revolution' and 'counter-revolution', a debate which might otherwise seem a little abstract to outsiders. 1956 was, by common consent, a *national* uprising, which is why party boss Ernő Gerő, most of whose career had been dedicated to subordinating his country to the interests of a foreign power, while cloaking his treachery in a supra-national ideology, hastened to characterise the initial mass march to Bem tér as a '*nationalistic* protest' (italics mine).[1] It is an unfortunate element in Hungary's polarised political rhetoric that the distinction between patriotism and nationalism is often deliberately blurred, on the right to lend respectability to nationalism or worse, on the left to tar the patriotism of political opponents with the brush of nationalism and chauvinism. The word 'counter-revolutionary', with its baggage from previous regimes of reaction and fascism, was an opportune verbal weapon for the regime to distract attention from the national solidarity of Hungarians at this desperate moment in their history. It should not be forgotten that Imre Nagy, to whom the mendacious slogans of party propaganda were still second nature, continued to refer to the uprising as 'counter-revolutionary' up to the 28th of October, when the panic-stricken Central Committee decided it would be politic to rechristen it the 'national democratic movement.'[2]

It is in the evocation of the Revolution's national authenticity that Bob Dent's *Budapest 1956* plays such a vital role. Of all the books that have poured from the presses to cash in on the fiftieth anniversary of 1956, his work stands out as a superb tribute to the men and women involved, precisely not because it sentimentalises them, but because he has presented the multiplicity of the truth of what happened at each disputed *'Schauplatz'* in the streets of Budapest. Although Dent mentions the various plaques and monuments that have been erected on the spot, these are mostly not (yet) places of pilgrimage, even if Dent himself and others have begun to 'market' them as a part of a tourist itinerary. Nor are

1 ■ Ignác Romsics: *Hungary in the Twentieth Century* (Budapest, 1999), p. 306.
2 ■ Romsics, op. cit., pp. 307–8.

they yet—Bastille-like, or Winter Palace-like—*lieux de mémoire* in the sense made fashionable by Pierre Nora, although they might perhaps fit into the typology of a nation's 'communicative' (rather than 'cultural') memory, as developed by Jan and Aleida Assmann. Insofar as places like Széna tér, the radio building in Bródy Sándor utca, and the Corvin köz should develop into physical markers of a national cultural memory like the Petőfi statue, or Szabadság tér, or the 'eternal flame,' Dent's book (which is published also in Hungarian) will surely have played a contributory role.

For the moment however we are still dealing substantially with the raw material of history as much as with its immaterialisation, the latter process inevitably involving a constructive use or misuse of specific past events to shape and influence present (or future) realities.[3] As the poet Ezra Pound once remarked: "Not what happened, but what is remembered is significant." Dent himself (in an interview with CNN Traveller) attributes the 'strange' absence of a 1956 museum to the fact that many incidents are still controversial.[4] In Dent's documentary guide we are still anchored to "what happened", which is not as simple to describe as it might appear. It is said that if you ask four witnesses in a court of law to describe a motor accident, you will get four differing accounts, some of them directly contradicting each other. For each event he describes, Dent has collected all the four witnesses, or at least as many as have left their accounts, annotated their testimony in respect of verifiable inaccuracies or misconceptions, but otherwise left the reader to make up his own mind. In so doing, he comes close to emulating Leopold von Ranke's demand that the historian should show "how it actually happened." Unlike von Ranke, he has not merely sat in an archive (though he has done that), but has scoured the city for verbal testimony, measured the reliability of eyewitness accounts by autopsy at each location, and presented us with a patchwork of accounts, some of which are mutually incompatible. It is a towering achievement, worth a good deal more, it must be said, than several of the error-strewn ego-centred descriptions that have received much wider coverage.

Dent has grouped his scenarios topographically round the city, covering each place where something significant happened. His method may be exemplified by examination of his account of two crucial (though not in fact pivotal) clashes, the heroic defence of the Corvin Passage (Corvin köz), which is near the junction of Üllői út and the Great Boulevard, and the 'massacre' on Köztársaság tér (Republic Square), which is to the south of Rákóczi út and best known to tourists from the Erkel Opera House at its north-west corner. In the hermeneutics of the revolutionary narrative, these two names are associated respectively with its most glorious and its most ignoble moments. In the one case we have the story of resourceful and courageous revolutionaries pinning down much larger forces by skilful use of the terrain; in the other we have revenge killing, a mob lynching. No clearer example than these could be given of the struggle for possession of historical legitimacy, or its forfeiture, as traditionally conveyed through the claims or denial of 'victim status.' The fighting at the Corvin köz was a David and Goliath affair, retrospectively tapping into one of the most deeply resonant and powerful motifs of human consciousness, the nobility and cunning of

3 ■ For a perceptive discussion of *lieux de mémoire / Gedächtnisorte* in relation to Austria, which has influenced my remarks here, see: Konrad Paul Liessmann: *Die Insel der Seligen: Österreichische Erinnerungen* (Innsbruck, Wien, Bozen, 2005), pp. 15–26.

4 ■ CNN Traveller, Nov–Dec 2006, "Rollercoaster Revolution" by Karl Peter Kirk.

the underdog. The Köztársaság tér massacre, on the other hand, is a propaganda gift to the opposition, and is deplored by an otherwise approbative liberal consensus as besmirching the underdog's credentials. Bob Dent includes both locations, both as cicerone and in his written guide to the 1956 locations of drama. But will such an ambivalent toponym as "Köztársaság tér" ultimately form part of what the Assmanns have dubbed the nation's 'cultural memory'?

The Corvin Cinema area was surrounded by tall buildings overlooking the Üllői út/Great Boulevard junction, while the interior passageway *(köz)* itself could only be accessed by narrow alleyways, the whole complex making a perfect defensive and subversive position. So ideal was it, as Bob Dent points out, that the Kádár regime, in its propagandist *White Books,* claimed that this proved the ('counter'-) revolution was well planned and organised by professionals. In fact the defence began spontaneously with some 40–50 people, which grew to 800 as new recruits arrived, finally 1,000 to 1,200. In a fascinating passage Dent dissects the social compositon of the extremely youthful defenders of the Corvin köz (now memorialised in situ by the statue of a boy holding a rifle). The *White Books* mendaciously branded them as 'fascists and criminals', but there were all sorts present, ranging from disillusioned Communists and soldiers, or people convicted of non-crimes under Stalinism, to some from the extreme right and several teenagers. In other words the group was not significantly different from those active at other revolutionary incidents. Significantly, in view of the oft-repeated mantra that the 1956 Revolution was *not* about dismantling Socialism,[5] Dent, Lendvai and others have revealed an ideological split between the leaders of the Corvinists. László Iván Kovács, who seems to have been ousted in a coup on 1st November, was a leftist, while his replacement, Gergely Pongrátz was on the right, described by one witness as strongly anti-Communist and *anti-socialist* (my italics).[6] This was a cue for the *White Books* to claim that Pongrátz "openly boasted of his fascist past", which would have been rather an empty boast, as he was 12 years old and living in Transylvania when the Arrow Cross rose to power.

Dent's treatment of Köztársaság tér as a "location of drama" displays a similar attention to detail and is based on differing perspectives offered by Ervin Hollós with co-author Vera Lajtai (1976), Miklós Horváth (1994) and László Gyurkó (1996), whereby the Hollós/Lajtai account represents the "point of view of the defenders of the building", as Dent chastely puts it. The massacre that took place had a complex progression, in which misunderstandings played a significant role. One of the most farcical was the firing on the Party Headquarters by the tanks sent to relieve it, evidently in error rather than in support of the insurgents. Non-combatants attending to the wounded in the square also came under fire from the defenders.[7] When the shooting stopped, two army colonels and the Budapest Party Secretary emerged from the building bearing white flags, but were shot at, after which the two officers were lynched. Some of the insurgents entered the building and committed further atrocities, while others tried to prevent further lynchings. In Lendvai's equally detailed

5 ■ This mantra was eagerly taken up by left-wing western journalists, e.g. Bruce Renton of the *New Statesman* and *Nation*. See Clare Doyle: "Hungary 1956 – the dreams and distortions" posted on www.socialistworld.net/eng/2006/11/10hungaryb.html

6 ■ Dent, op. cit., p. 207, citing a fellow revolutionary activist, Per Olaf Csongovai.

7 ■ See *HQ* 184, Vol. 47, Winter 2006, George Gömöri's review of books by Unwin and Sebestyen, p.117. Also Lendvai, p.119.

account, we are given the actual balance of the casualties (20 insurgents killed, 25 defenders lynched). Although (again according to Lendvai) common criminals were mostly responsible for the lynchings, it is also true that a belief that the building was a main centre of ÁVH detention, interrogation and torture, which it wasn't, fuelled the fury of the crowd. Sir Francis Bacon famously described revenge as "a kind of wild justice", but lynching is simply the wildness without the justice, since innocent people are included among the victims. On the other hand, exactly where do you draw the line between 'innocent' and 'culpable', when virtually all ÁVH recruits and workers at the Party Headquarters could be seen as cogs in a vast machine of cruelty, terror and oppression?

All commentators have expressed their disgust at the sadism and brutality that burst out on Köztársaság tér—obviously nobody wants to be seen to be gloating over dismemberment and torture. It is a merit both of Lendvai's vivid and well-written narrative[8] and Bob Dent's collage technique that we are edged a little beyond ritualistic condemnation and made to think about the wider context of what happened. In *The Voice of Freedom: Remembering the 1956 Revolution,* a splendid collection of oral reminiscences edited by Katalin Bogyay, István Molnár (a witness) makes the following observation on the massacre:

> It was very sad that it happened that way, the massacre and the hangings, but you have to put it into the context of what was happening to the people. For example, one of my mates had his fingernails pulled out while being made to confess, or I don't know why.[9]

Lendvai adds a cold statistical perspective: the number of recorded lynchings up to the reimposition of Communist control in November was 37, mostly suspected ÁVH members. By way of contrast, Bob Dent relates that one of the ÁVH lieutenants in command of the Party Headquarters was saved by a group of the besiegers, who gave him a change of clothes so that he could escape in a lorry posing as a kitchen worker. In the light of the foregoing years of torture, judicial murder and persecution, not to mention the massacres of unarmed protesters during the Revolution itself (over 100 in Mosonmagyaróvár alone),[10] the general *absence* of gratuitous brutality is as eloquent as its very rare occurrence. Also significant, as Lendvai underlines, was the virtual absence of anti-Semitic outbursts, notwithstanding the substantial representation of Hungarian Jews in the machinery of oppression, though he adds that the time was short and "nobody could exclude the possibility of a later wave [of anti-Semitic incidents.]"[11]

It is a feature of the competing narratives of victim status that the dead and mutilated can be exploited cynically by propagandists who themselves have not the slightest scruples about committing, or ordering, or supporting the most savage crimes against humanity. As Lendvai puts it:

> Although the acts of revenge [on Köztársaság tér] were immediately and sharply condemned by revolutionary leaders, the free

8 ■ Paul Lendvai, op. cit. Lendvai's account of the 1956 Revolution is distinguished by its broad international perspective and narrative skill, that unobtrusively combines some of the author's personal experiences at the time. To someone wanting a compelling, well-balanced and highly readable account of these events, this is the book to go for.

9 ■ Bogyay, op. cit., pp. 56–7.

10 ■ Lendvai gives a lower figure of 58, but recent research has produced estimates as high as 180. The figures were successfully suppressed by the Kádár regime and even obfuscated by vested interests after the change.

11 ■ Lendvai, p.129. Romsics however refers to 16 anti-Semitic atrocities in the countryside (op. cit., p. 307).

> press, the Writers' Association and a whole range of democratic and revolutionary organisations, from Moscow to Paris to Peking the grim pictures of the victims of lynch law were exploited by Communist organs of propaganda to smear the revolution as 'counter-revolutionary terror', and 'a witchhunt against Communists'[12]

and this from a movement whose primary modus operandi was the witchhunt against supposedly deviant Communists and non-Communists! Such propaganda was not entirely ineffective and occasionally one even gets the impression that it has leaked into the liberal consensus narrative of 1956.[13] This seems to be the case when the thesis is advanced that the massacre of Köztársaság tér was *the* event that tipped the Russian leadership, those sensitive souls, in favour of reintervention. Reviewing former ambassador Peter Unwin's book in these pages, George Gömöri has castigated this view as a "gross exaggeration". Be that as it may, such a theory has a subliminal attraction for the 'realists' of foreign policy debate, in that it shifts ultimate responsibility back onto Hungarian shoulders. ("Look, the Russians had no choice if people were being hung from lampposts!")

Nevertheless almost all commentators regard the events of Köztársaság tér as a blot on the revolutionary escutcheon that cannot and should not be explained away. In Bob Dent's eight-page Appendix on "Köztársaság tér Revisited ", he examines at some length the selective amnesia and plain distortions of those who could not come to terms with the fact that 'their side' had committed atrocities. That is always one of the most difficult psychological challenges when one's own nation is involved in what is otherwise perceived as a 'just war' (and even more so if the war is widely perceived as 'unjust'). In reality, the overwhelming perception of the Hungarian Revolution in the free world honoured it as "one of the least bloody of all time".[14]

Not only that, the Hungarian people were perceived as unequivocally having possession of the 'victim narrative', something reinforced by their clear, simple and ideologically uncontaminated demands: internal freedom, no Russian occupation, independent judicial procedures and the rule of law. Professor László Péter, interviewed by Katalin Bogyay, makes another important psychological point: after years of political disasters and pariah or semi-pariah status, Hungary regained its national self-confidence in 1956: "Hungarians came out of the War as a desperately pessimistic, downtrodden people. We didn't really have any self-confidence, as officially the country was labelled 'Hitler's last ally'. Suppressed again and confined to the Trianon borders, Hungarians lost self-confidence. That self-confidence was rebuilt through that marvellous failure, which was really the work of young, working class boys who were shooting at Széna tér and at Corvin köz."

Here I think we see the glimmerings of something that seems to me to be largely lacking in the literature of 1956, namely an interpretive narrative that is not wholly wedded to the liberal consensus, but more conservative in nature. The claim that 1956 was all about 'reforming', or even 'rescuing', socialism rests on two admittedly powerful pieces of evidence. Firstly there was the magnificent performance of the Csepel workers with their spontaneous democracy of workers' councils and their long and heroic resistance to the new dispensation, far

12 ■ Lendvai, op. cit., p. 122.

13 ■ I take this to be what Gabriel Partos refers to as "a broad professional consensus about the nature of the revolution", which has however been arrived at chiefly by liberal intellectuals. On the challenges to this, see: Gabriel Partos: "Hungary: History's Battleground" (8-11-2006) posted on www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-protest/hungary-4075.jsp.

14 ■ Historian Bill Lomax, quoted in Lendvai, p. 122.

longer indeed than that of the students and intellectuals. Bob Dent's coverage of this is particularly powerful and moving. Secondly there is the famous declaration of the General Secretary of the Smallholders' Party, Béla Kovács, underlining that Nagy's reform government, of which he was now a part, rejected a return to Horthyism: "No one should dream of the old order. The world of counts, bankers and capitalists is buried forever. Anyone who today thinks in the same way as in 1939 or 1945 is no true smallholder."[15] This attitude is understandable from the leader of a party whose supporters had been radicalised by the quasi-feudal conditions of Hungarian agriculture prevailing right into the 20th century, and who owed their initial liberation to a popular land reform instituted by the Communist Imre Nagy—only to land in an even worse situation subsequently through forced collectivisation and compulsory deliveries. But the Smallholders had achieved 57 per cent of the vote in the first fully free elections after the Second World War, and a fair proportion of their supporters must have been bourgeois urban conservatives.[16] What had happened to this huge electoral pool in the meantime? Furthermore the potential conservative vote had many components (Democratic People's Party, Christian Democrats and so forth), well analysed by Lendvai in his book.[17] In a multi-party system with a secret ballot (not yet promised at the time Kovács made his remarks), it seems more likely that Hungary would have jettisoned almost all leftist ideologies, save a form of social democracy which in practice accepted—even welcomed—the wicked bankers and capitalists, provided they operated within a legal framework that disallowed the abuses of the past.

This is after all what happened in Austria, a country that also had an authoritarian clerico-fascist state between the wars and then suffered military occupation until 1955, the most unwelcome part of the latter again being the Russian presence with its attendant asset stripping. Although the situation in the two countries was not identical (Hungary lacked Austria's substantial tradition of moderate Social Democratic government at the local level), the first free elections in Austria after the war (albeit still under four-power occupation) produced a result that surprised everyone, except perhaps the voters: the conservative non-Nazi right (hastily relaunched and rebranded as the People's Party) got just under 50 per cent of the vote, the Socialists a little over 44 per cent and the Communists (to the utter incredulity of their Russian paymasters) precisely 5.41 per cent. It is interesting that this result for the Austrian KPÖ is precisely the one for the new-look Hungarian Communists, were free elections to be held, that was prophesied by the shrewd and cynical Georg Lukács during frantic October discussions about the rebranding of the party as the "Hungarian Socialist Workers" Party'.[18] Hungarian intellectuals however dreamed of a 'third way' between capitalism and Communism. Lendvai quotes the view of the distinguished writer László Németh that the Revolution had been fought for a "multi-party system based on common principles, which would succeed in combining the ideological strength of socialism with the flexibility of the parliamentary system".[19] István Bibó, who had written so insightfully about Hungary's political culture and the disintegration of Central Europe, evidently believed

15 ■ Quoted in Lendvai, p. 147.
16 ■ cf. Romsics, op. cit., p. 224: "The Smallholders appealed to the landed peasantry and the Christian middle classes."
17 ■ Lendvai, p. 152.
18 ■ Quoted in Lendvai, p. 118.
19 ■ Quoted in Lendvai, p. 148.

something similar. At the end of his essay on the crisis of Hungarian democracy, written in 1945, he had spoken of the possibility of Hungary serving "as a practical example for the beleaguered democratic forces throughout the rest of the Continent by becoming the synthesis of Anglo-Saxon and Soviet-style democratic practices."[20]

The almost tragic naïveté of this idea, coupled as it is in the body of the essay with an extraordinarily penetrating analysis of the Communist mentality and tactics as they actually were, throws into sharp relief the yearning of Hungarian intellectuals for a middle way between Communism ("the dictatorship of the proletariat"—Bibó) and the uneasy mix between neo-feudalism and capitalism of the Horthy era ("the return of a reactionary regime"—Bibó).[21] In his retrospective essay on *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956,* Bibó writes of "the prejudice [sic] shared by orthodox capitalists and orthodox Communists, according to which socialism or [a] society free of exploitation, can be successfully realised only by discarding the Western techniques of freedom for a lengthy period of time". And later he asserts that

> *after* [my italics] the defeat of the Revolution a broad and quite definite public consensus emerged without any difficulty regarding the methods for maintaining a socialist society combined with the Western techniques of freedom, through a multi-party system limited to parties which accept socialism as a common platform.[22]

A politically conservative narrative of the Revolution would, I think, challenge these assertions. One objection might be that, *had the Revolution been successful,* such an analysis would increasingly sound like that of the majority of unsuccessful generals in history, whose problem is that they are still fighting the previous war. A further objection is that the idea of "socialism as a common platform" is meaningless without defining what socialism would mean in practice. And last but not least, the "quite definite public consensus" (the perceived existence of which doubtless underlies the oft repeated claim that the revolution was not about replacing 'socialism', but about giving it a human face) is, one very much suspects, a consensus arrived at chiefly by the intellectuals who write the revolutionary narrative. The secret ballot has a way of overturning truths that intellectuals regard as self-evident, as was the case with the Austrian ballot cited above.

That the 'third way' might very well have turned out to be the 'Austrian way' (rather than 'Finlandisation') is at least partially made plausible by the last of the books here under review. Ibolya Murber and Zoltán Fónagy have edited an extremely interesting collection of studies in *Die ungarische Revolution und Österreich 1956.* The first part with contributions from János M. Rainer and Csaba Békés, covers familiar ground, while the third part deals with the reception and treatment of Hungarian refugees in Austria. Space permits me only to concentrate on the second part, which discusses the implications for Austria, for which I hope the authors of the other studies will forgive me. It does not imply disparagement of the detailed descriptions they provide of the everyday realities confronted by refugees and their hosts. However, the second part of the book is of particular interest for its excellent treatment of the delicate situation in which

20 ■ István Bibó: "The Crisis of Hungarian Democracy" in: István Bibó: *Democracy, Revolution, Self-Determination. Selected Writings,* ed. Károly Nagy, translated by András Boros-Kazai (Boulder, Co. 1991), pp. 147–148.
21 ■ Ibid., p. 89.
22 ■ Ibid. "The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: Scandal and Hope" (written in 1957), pp. 338–9.

Austria found itself, and is not without relevance to some of the issues I have raised above in relation to Hungary.

Austria had only regained its full independence with the signing of the Staatsvertrag the previous year (15 May, 1955). However it had had a functioning, freely elected government since November 1945, albeit one subject to overall constraints imposed by the occupying powers. Although not stipulated in the *Staatsvertrag,* all political parties represented in the Nationalrat unanimously passed an act on the 26th October following, by which Austria committed itself to perpetual (*"immerwährende"*) neutrality. In reality this was part of the deal which Austrian delegates had agreed with the Soviet Union a month before the *Staatsvertrag* and which was summarised in the "Moscow Memorandum". The basic model for neutrality was that of Switzerland, which is to say that the country engaged to actively defend its borders and to participate vigorously in international institutions. On the other hand, and this was perhaps the most important element for the Russians, it undertook not to join any military alliance, nor to allow military bases of foreign powers on its soil, and under no circumstances to intervene militarily in other countries. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 immediately presented a major challenge to the country's freshly baked independence and neutrality, a challenge to which the nation (and especially the government) responded with considerable aplomb.

Not surprisingly, it was Austria's neutrality which the Soviet Union sought to manipulate in its own interest through its *Sprachrohr*, the Austrian KPÖ. In an extremely interesting and well-researched contribution Renáta Szentesi documents how they set about this. The strategy of the KPÖ was to claim it was acting solely in defence of Austria's neutrality, which (according to the Communists) the government was putting in jeopardy. For its part, the coalition conservative–social-democratic government under the conservative Chancellor, Julius Raab, showed a remarkable and courageous self-confidence. Raab himself, in a radio address, enraged the KPÖ propagandists by remarking that military neutrality should by no means be confused with a colourless neutrality in political questions.[23] And Raab had caught the mood of the people: the unpopularity of the KPÖ increased (there were even incidents and scuffles outside KPÖ offices and at events it organised) and in the elections held three years later the party lost its remaining representation in Parliament. Most of the specific accusations that were made by Soviet propaganda, and echoed by the KPÖ (for example, that there had been transport of weapons to the Hungarian revolutionaries with the complicity of the government), could be shown to be groundless.

On the other hand, the Austrian government was somewhat embarrassed by the overwhelming solidarity with the revolutionaries that found an outlet in fiery press articles, and indeed it appealed more than once to the press to behave with more responsibility and restraint. It also expelled Ferenc Nagy, the Smallholder Prime Minister of the 1945 Hungarian government, who had travelled to Austria to see if he could raise a contingent of emigré fighters, on the grounds that his presence and activities "could shed a bad light on the [humanitarian] transports" to Hungary.[24] But perhaps the most important lesson from all this was

23 ■ Ibolya Murber, Zoltán Fónagy, op. cit.: Renáta Szentesi: "Anschuldigungen gegen Österreich von Seiten der Sowjetunion und der KPÖ während der Ungarnkrise von 1956 anhand österreichischer Quellen", p. 251.

24 ■ "... dass sein Präsenz ein schlechtes Licht auf die Lieferungen werfen könnte." Ibid. Martin Pammer: "Die Österreichische Gesandschaft Budapest und ihre humanitäre Aktion 1956", quoting a confidential memorandum in the Austrian Staatsarchiv.

that neutrality, as has been underlined by historians and most politicians, only works as a legal concept in respect of military activity. In a free country it cannot be made to encompass restrictions on free speech and press freedom, nor to restrict the transport of humanitarian aid that 'objectively' speaking assists the revolutionaries.[25] Indeed, one might say that neutrality gives a greater moral weight to free speech than it might otherwise have, while it is a feature of neutral countries that they direct a great deal of energy and enterprise to humanitarian activity that the status of neutrality actually makes it easier to carry out.

Of course the Russians did not seriously fear a military intervention by Austria in Hungary, and they must have known that America, despite the incredibly cynical and irresponsible behaviour of Radio Free Europe in Munich, showed not the slightest sign of mobilising to help the Revolution. To the contrary, a certain confidence that the West would not interfere, based on private assurances to the effect that the Yalta deal still held, emboldened them in their decision to intervene and suppress the Revolution, however much embarrassment and loss of face that would cause them.[26] What indeed they and the propagandists of the subsequent Kádár regime feared most was precisely what Austria offered: an example of a free, neutral and politically unaligned country that functioned well as a moderately social democratic or moderately conservative society within the rule of law and benefiting from the energy of a socially regulated capitalism. As I argue in this review, it is unlikely that such a model right on the doorstep of Hungary would have had no impact on future developments there, had the Revolution been successful.

If the Austrian government behaved with admirable firmness and the Austrian people displayed a quite extraordinary degree of fellow-feeling and neighbourly solidarity with the oppressed Hungarians, the revolution threw up one real hero amongst the foreigners present in Budapest, namely Walther Peinsipp, the head of the Austrian Legation. Mixing guile with boldness, Peinsipp sought to give the impression that he was working with the authorities (and even extracted a fulsome letter of thanks from the Hungarian Foreign Ministry for Austria's humanitarian contribution, which was probably motivated by the desire of Kádár-loyal functionaries to establish control over relief convoys); in reality he controlled the dispensing of medical and other supplies in a manner decidedly favourable to the revolutionaries. His Hungarian-speaking assistant, Dr Georg Ronay, set up a committee of medical personnel to allocate these supplies, which were stored in the Legation so that they should neither land on the black market, nor be redirected into the hands of the "Hungarian authorities" by being channelled through the Hungarian Red Cross. Dr Ronay distributed penicillin to doctors whom he knew and trusted, but with some courage refused it to the (thereby enraged) Communist doctors at the military and ÁVH hospitals.

This was not simply vindictiveness, since the forces opposing the Revolution certainly would not have been able to resist misusing the power that exclusive control of medicines and relief supplies would have given them. The Austrian (or at least Peinsipp's) view was that the Hungarian authorities (and the Russians) were responsible for treating their own, and they should not be enabled to put further pres-

25 ■ Ibid. Szentesi, p. 272.

26 ■ Patrice de Beer of *Le Monde* cites the reassurances given to the Kremlin by the American ambassador, Charles E. "Chip" Bohlen. See www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-protest/hungary-anniversary-3958.jsp (2-10-2006).

sure on the people, for example by refusing them access to Western medical supplies or prioritising their distribution. On the other hand Peinsipp, as he candidly admitted in his subsequent report, authorised distribution to a children's hospital associated with the ÁVH, "not only because children cannot be held responsible for their fathers", but to give more plausibility to the image he wished to project of even-handedness as between the claims on assistance of bodies associated with the regime and those of the revolutionaries.[27] This balancing act he carried off with aplomb, keeping his nerve even in the face of a propaganda offensive cooked up by the Communists to the effect that the Legation was in fact storing weapons for the street fighters. Nor did he need to cable Vienna with the ironic sort of inquiry once sent by a British admiral to headquarters, namely "on which side are we currently neutral?" He and his colleagues acted in the confidence that their decisions accorded not only with what the government would privately approve, but with what the vast majority of Austrians would want.

Murber and Fónagy's marvellously rich and informative book is of course primarily about Austria rather than Hungary; however I have taken the topic of neutrality as its leitmotif, since this obviously is what makes it so illuminating about Hungarian events of 1956. Moreover it is not only Austria's adroit exploitation of its neutrality that leads one to seek parallels with what might have come about in Hungary—especially after Nagy finally shed his Communist blinkers and announced the country's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact and intention to hold free, multi-party elections. With free voting, it is likely that the internal political structures of Hungary would have modernised fairly swiftly, as in Austria. Always accepting the markedly different levels of social development actually prevailing in the two countries, there are nevertheless certain parallels between the Christian Social movement in Austria, rebranded as a broader Christian conservative *Volkspartei* (People's Party) in 1945, and the *'népi'* ('popular' or 'people's') cultural and political movement of Hungary. István Bibó was the outstanding proponent of the latter, together with figures like the writer and activist Áron Tamási (with good reason, one of the most carefully watched intellectuals under the Kádár regime until his death in 1966). The *'népiek'* were not anti-Semitic as the Christian Socials had tended to be, but the 'Social' element of the Christian Socials corresponds roughly to the 'socialist' element in the concern for the economically disadvantaged of the *népiek*. Both movements, the Austrian and the Hungarian, were populist, Christian (Catholic in Austria, Calvinist/Catholic in Hungary) and idealist in character.[28] The potential affinities between the Hungarian Social Democrats (whose leader, Anna Kéthly, was acclaimed as "Hungary's sole authorised representative abroad" in Bibó's famous proclamation typed under the noses of the Russians in the Parliament building when all was lost) are even more conspicuous. In my hypothetical conservative narrative of 1956, the *Népiek* (supplying the intellectual input from the right), the Smallholders (merged with smaller conservative groups) and the Social Democrats would have begun to revolve around a democratic consensus at the centre, producing in due course something not unlike the Austrian constellation.

27 ■ Pammer in Murber and Fónagy, op. cit., pp. 141–2.

28 ■ Romsics, op. cit., p. 224 points out that the *népiek*-oriented National Peasant Party, apart from appealing to landless peasants in the Eastern Great Plain, also attracted "low-paid provincial white-collar workers", a similar layer to the Viennese constituency of "the little man", near, but not at, the bottom of the heap, which the Christian Socials appealed to.

Such an analysis has one salient objection to it, namely the remarkable performance of the Workers' Councils in Csepel, Újpest, Kőbánya and Kelenföld that held out considerably longer for their freedom against impossible odds. In an Appendix entitled "Workers' Councils—Hidden from History" Bob Dent points out that Western commentators underplayed or ignored their incredible achievements partly because most Western journalists hastened to leave after the second Russian intervention (when the Council's resistance became most important), and partly because of unease about their 'anti-capitalist', 'pro-socialist' and obstinately 'revolutionary' (in a Marxist sense) stance.[29] The Councils were an equal embarrassment to Kádár and co., since their very existence refuted the mendacious claim that the regime alone represented the working classes. It is really only the 'extreme' left, for example the Trotskyists, who have taken up their cause. A 1986 article that can be downloaded from www.marxist.com describes how the "workers' consciousness leaped forward" by means of the Councils, and how they were elaborating "Lenin's programme of defending the revolution against bureaucracy."

Bob Dent, who describes himself as a 'libertarian socialist', makes some shrewd points and is able to call in aid ex-President Árpád Göncz, who frequently highlighted the vital role of the Councils in 1956. But Göncz himself remarks that the "multi-party parliamentary system of western Europe hardly tolerates the type of direct democracy ... via the directly elected workers' and revolutionary councils controlled by the workplace and residential communities".[30] This surely is the point: deplore the fact as an activist ideologist may, most people do not want to be bothered day in day out with a political role in the workplace, providing the conditions under which they work are tolerable, or at least negotiable. The bravery of the Csepel workers and their colleagues elsewhere was contingent upon their enormous betrayal by the people who claimed to represent their interests and the desperate situation to which Stalinism had reduced their industries. While conservatism is the beneficiary of apathy, it is also true that it offers many people the partial escape from endless politics that they actually desire. This is not intended as a cynical remark, though some may judge it so. In times of relative prosperity and a reasonably fair distribution of the wealth created, voter turn-out in the mature democracies tends to fall. When the system seems to be getting out of kilter, or the government becomes spectacularly complacent, corrupt and incompetent (as happens to all governments that stay in power for long periods), voter apathy decreases.

Professor Péter (himself a member of the Smallholders' Party at the time) puts his finger on the principal motivation of ordinary people, a motivation that is at least as powerful as more elevated notions, when he says in his interview with Katalin Bogyay: "The basic principle of Western society, as I see it, is not really freedom or democracy. These are important but the basic thing is security, one could even say an obsession with security." He is talking about political and military security, of course, in the nations of the West during the Cold War. But the notion of security is also the major factor in private life, and this had been destroyed by the Communism that claimed to offer it. János Kádár's great skill was to restore a basic sense of security —which doubtless accounts for the bizarre fact that a 2002 poll in Hungary (quoted by Lendvai) put him fourth after Széchenyi, Kossuth *and* Nagy in the list of Hungary's most admired leaders!

29 ■ For a detailed and enthusiastic account see: Balázs Nagy: "Budapest 1956: The Central Workers' Council", this English translation reprinted as No. 2 in *International Socialism Reprints* (1980).
30 ■ Quoted in Dent, p. 382.

That he scored only three points less than the man he so ruthlessly betrayed may illustrate the Hungarian public's remarkable pragmatism, or stupidity, according to taste; but he had largely removed the constant fear of a knock on the door at dawn, provided you played by certain easily ascertainable rules. To quote Péter again:

> Democracy in 1945 meant that Pista *bácsi*, one of our neighbours, was taken away by the police for criticising democracy. This is how I learnt that democracy was merely the name of a police state imposed on us by the Russians.

One might couple this remark with another from István Bibó, talking about the Communist view of the Smallholders at the same period:

> The Communists must have known that their new allies [did] not consider democracy as a desperate, angry and possibly demagogic struggle for human respectability, freedom and equality, but first of all as order, lawfulness and security.

In the same essay he concedes that

> there are certain tasks of reconstruction that can only be accomplished by capitalist methods, for instance by generating a greater sense of security, promoting entrepreneurial initiative, encouraging the investment of capital, securing loans etc.[31]

The overwhelming impression one receives from a perusal of the books under review is one of the Hungarian Revolution's pragmatic and spontaneous nature, and the mirror image of that in Austria's official and unofficial response to it. This was seriously misjudged by Nagy at the beginning, since he was still a prisoner of a fundamentally ideological way of thinking. (All the accounts under review mention the disastrous opening of his incompetent speech from the Parliament building, that began revealingly by addressing the crowd as "Comrades".) The pragmatic nature of the Revolution also accounts for some of its residual pieties—Lendvai, otherwise hard-headed, becomes almost dewy-eyed about Nagy's 'patriotism' and it is considered bad taste (though not on the further left, cf. Hobsbawm) to recall that he survived the Stalinist purges by informing on his colleagues in Moscow and only avoided a worse fate than ostracisation under Rákosi because he was protected by the NKVD.[32] Likewise almost all accounts of the reburial of László Rajk play down or gloss over the fact that he was a vicious rascal who had presided over vote-rigging and worse as minister of the interior.[33] But the enduring image of 1956 transcends these awkward dubieties: instead it is an image of a people tested to the limits of endurance and beyond, who spontaneouly reasserted their claim to national sovereignty, demonstrating thereby that none of their official leaders were worthy of them. To this the voices that speak to us in these four volumes bear eloquent testimony. ❧

31 ■ István Bibó, "The Crisis of Hungarian Democracy", op. cit., p. 104 and 118.

32 ■ Eric Hobsbawm, "Could it have been different?" in *London Review of Books,* Vol. 28, No. 22, 16 November 2006. An unsigned article (first published 1986, recycled 2006) posted on www.marxist.com/History/hungary1956-86.html even says of Nagy: "Despite his reputation as a 'reformer', on the crucial questions confronting the Hungarian workers Nagy was no different from the hard-line Stalinists."

33 ■ Lendvai is far more blunt than most commentators when he claims that Rajk was anything but a conscious "national Communist" or revisionist and that as minister of the interior he cruelly persecuted and destroyed opposition parties and was the architect of the revolting show trial of Cardinal MIndszenty. Op. cit., p. 40.

László Csorba

The Making of a Capital

Robert Nemes: *The Once and Future Budapest.*
De-Kalb, Northern Illinois University Press, 2005, XI+247 pp.

It has been some time since we have seen a book on Budapest as good as *The Once and Future Budapest.* Its merits are many. It is rich in data: yet this richness is not excessive. It makes for enjoyable reading: yet the use of a scholarly terminology is appropriate. It is well-proportioned: general statements and the examples, stories and anecdotes illustrating them are finely balanced. It arouses the reader's interest and keeps it throughout its eight chapters. It defines its aim—to examine the influence of Hungarian nationalism on the history of Budapest, from the end of the eighteenth century through the unification of Buda, Óbuda and Pest in 1873 up to 1890—and adheres to the necessary perspectives accordingly.

All the while it provides good reading. The witty subtitles not only entertain, but also implicitly reflect the many angles the author approaches his topic from. He overviews the system of power in the cities, the country and the whole of the Dual Monarchy. He walks down streets that were dusty and muddy at the beginning of the nineteenth century. He looks around the village-type houses on the outskirts of the three towns, the mansions of wealthy merchants and tradesmen in their centres, as well as the Royal Castle in Buda, where a Habsburg archduke lived for more than half a century. As the highest ranking dignitary of the 800-year-old Hungarian kingdom (originally the king's deputy) Palatine Joseph became fond of the city and contributed substantially to its prosperity. Nemes takes us to the field where the first horseraces took place and where modern social life in Pest started, and to the clubs and casinos where the political elite and the founders of voluntary associations prepared for the transition from feudalism to a civil society. We take part in the festive procession on 20 August to honour the great king, the founder of the state, St Stephen, in the streets of Buda's Castle Hill, gaining insight into the confessional situation in towns. And here we are shouting "Vivat!" by the torchlight music offered by the youth of Pest to welcome the beautiful Zichy sisters, who were at the

László Csorba
is Director of the Hungarian Academy in Rome and Associate Professor at the Department of Cultural History of Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. His books and other publications are on 19th- and 20th-century Hungarian history, on modern Church history as well as on the history of Italian–Hungarian cultural ties.

forefront of the reform movement. (Nemes might have added that István Széchenyi, the leading reformer of the 1830s, was well aware of the key 'sociological' role of women in all kinds of movements—so much so that he dedicated his epochal principal work *Hitel* [Credit, 1831] "to the fine-spirited ladies of our fatherland".)

In his overview of the changes of the social strata, the author deals with the German burghers and the Jewish community in more detail, since their "Magyarisation" played a vital role in the change of the ethnic character and the language character of the towns of Buda, Pest and Óbuda. (Less attention is given to the question of immigration, which became important only after the period discussed in the book, i.e. following the unification [1872–73].) In his treatment of the 1848 Revolution Nemes recaptures the dramatic events in lively detail, clarifying how decisive these experiences were in the process of assimilation. Especially enjoyable among many witty details is Nemes' discussion of Gyula Benczúr's well-known painting *The Recapture of Buda Castle in 1686,* a brilliant iconographic presentation of all the characteristic ideological features in late nineteenth-century Hungarian nationalism (p. 185).

Following these well deserved words of praise a few inaccuracies should be noted, which do not render the book any less valuable. It is surely due to a misprint that the name of the excellent writer, Teréz Karacs (p. 52, p. 91 and p. 124), and of the renowned actress, Róza Széppataky (better known by her married name Déryné—p. 199) are misspelt. The author characterises the state of the development of Aquincum in the Roman Age among others by referring to one amphitheatre (p. 4). There were, in fact, two amphitheatres (the military one being much larger than the civilian one). Because of the slightly imprecise wording of the summary of the early history one might get the impression that Jews only appeared in the towns in Ottoman times (p. 6). In fact, Jewish inhabitants were already present in the Roman Civil Town and have been present in these towns ever since. A related matter of terminology is that it is not wholly appropriate to use the word "temple" (p. 111, pp. 163–164) for synagogues. Even though the word, in its widest sense, does denote every place of worship, it originally referred to sacral buildings where sacrifices were made to a deity. This distinction is especially relevant in the case of Jews, who could perform a sacrifice only in the temple of Jerusalem and, since its destruction, can elsewhere in the world only build houses of prayer or congregation rooms (which is what the word "synagogue", of Greek origin, refers to). The origins of the office of palatine go back well before the 15th century. The author obviously had in mind the so-called Palatine clauses *(nádori cikkelyek)* issued during the reign of King Matthias. These did not create a new legal situation but recorded and partly reinterpreted a situation that had existed for centuries (p. 42). In the 1830s, Lajos Kossuth was not yet the leader of the liberal opposition, neither in the Diet nor in the Council of Pest County (p. 60). He was merely one of its members, even if he was known throughout the country because of his newspaper articles. István Széchenyi was never the president of the Tudós Társaság (Scholarly Society, i.e. the Hungarian Academy of Sciences) founded by him, only its vice-president (p. 87).

Széchenyi is the only politician among the great statesmen of the century whom the author absolutely sympathises with. He believes that it was Széchenyi who first linked Hungarian nationalism with the idea of reforms and modernisation (p. 57), and that Hungarian nationalism gained its "distinctly liberal coloring" (p. 58) through his work. The social influence of "the

greatest Hungarian" can, however, not be understood if we are not aware that he was not the only, but only the first among a whole new generation of politicians with a programme for a new political movement. Miklós Wesselényi, Ferenc Kölcsey, Ferenc Deák and others appear on stage next to him in the 1830s, seeking a way out from medieval destitution and misery and equipped with the most progressive economic, legal and philosophical ideas of contemporary Europe.

Hungarian military historians have reached a consensus as to whether it was a strategic mistake in the spring of 1849 to lay siege to Buda instead of continuing the spring campaign towards Vienna. The opinion held by the author—viz. that this was the right decision from the perspective of political propaganda, yet a strategic mistake (p. 148)—differs considerably from those of Tamás Katona, Róbert Hermann and others. The archives provide evidence that a) the reserves of the *honvéd* (national) army were so meagre that it was impossible to continue their advance, and b) none of the serious military analysts reckoned that the siege of the Buda Castle would last as long as it did. One more point: since the map showing Buda-Pest in 1848 (p. 2) is obviously based on the sketch published in György Spira's *Petőfi napja* (Petőfi's Day, 1975), this should have been noted (unfortunately, the sources of the illustrations are generally not given).

The author seems to believe that the Habsburg monarchy contributed to the progress of Budapest (p. 7). Nemes cites the examples of the transfer of the Royal Treasury, the highest courts and the university from Vienna and from Nagyszombat (Trnava, Slovakia) to Buda-Pest. Capping this was a decisive change in Joseph II's attitude, with a view to developing the Twin Towns (p. 7) into a true capital. However, these measures were decades apart; I would find it more logical to consider them as the results of the political struggle with the estates (privileged groups of the feudal Diet). It is in view of this that a definite conceptual change can be discerned at the beginning of the 1780s, when Joseph II, within a short time, took a number of steps to make the towns a real provincial capital. Claiming that the Compromise of 1867 made Hungary an "equal partner" of Austria (p. 9), the author takes sides in a 150-year-long debate, while nowadays most scholars refrain from one-sided assertions concerning this matter. The evaluation of the position of Hungary in the Dual Monarchy greatly depends on whether one considers the legal circumstances, the economic situation, foreign affairs or military questions. The introduction of a market economy as part of the special union with the Habsburg Lands was advantageous in some areas but disadvantageous in others, so that it is problematic to attempt to describe it with a single attribute.

In fact, it is not so absurd to wonder, as the author believes (pp. 181–182), whether there was some validity to the demand of the Hungarian national movement that the centre of the Habsburg Monarchy be transferred to Buda-Pest (pp. 181–82). Let us keep in mind that, late in the spring of 1848, the whole of Europe was convinced that the German states would be unified, including the German lands of the Habsburgs. It is not unthinkable that sooner or later the military and treasury officials would have attempted to explain to the members of the dynasty that—due to changes in the balance of power—the monarchy had definitively become a 'Danube' monarchy, most conveniently and logically ruled from Buda-Pest. The unification of Germany, of course, was attained at another time and in another way—this, however, does not make the above idea an illusion. One more matter for consideration: compared to the splendid

description of the German society of Buda-Pest (p. 15), that of the Hungarian burghers seems to be missing, as naturally a considerable number of them had also been living in towns since the early Middle Ages, which became more important as the nobility settled here. Otherwise it would hardly have occurred to the Pesti Színház (Pest Theatre) to increase its audience by performing Hungarian patriotic plays from time to time, as described in detail by the author (p. 44).

There is, however, a question of approach beyond the minor issues mentioned so far that deserves a somewhat more detailed discussion.

When first delineating his subject, the author states that the nationalist struggle, with Budapest as its "holy city", has had a profound influence on the political culture of modern Hungary. He believes that this culture could historically have led to liberalism, progress and receptivity as well as to xenophobia, intolerance and exclusion (p. 3). As we proceed in the book (and thus in the history of the "Magyarisation" of Buda-Pest), the ratio of these two historical options slowly changes. The nationalist movement greatly contributed to the self-organisation of civil society and the stratification of the polity, due to which more and more formerly "invisible" social groups became public actors, such as women, workers and Jews (p. 12). Yet, according to the author, "Nineteenth-century nationalism had a darker side as well", and this darker side began to dominate, resulting in chauvinism, coercion and segregation, thus allowing exclusion, intolerance and intimidation to spread in Buda-Pest (pp. 12–13). The author regards the "national activist" as the principal hero of the age, who above all else strove to implement the national programme (the "Magyarisation" of the Twin Towns) and endorsed liberal reforms—the programme of economic, social and political modernisation of the country—only as a means to that end. He regards the language programme—the insistence upon the Hungarian language—as the turning point: in his opinion this created the first "foreigners" in the formerly common "Hungarus" fatherland, and thus necessarily gave rise to the forces of the "darker side" (pp. 50–53). Nationalism thus has a "Manichaean logic", it divides the world into "us" and "them" (p. 45), and—as the author concludes some pages later—this distinction is the first step towards exclusion. The author registers this in the 1840s: according to him it is from this time onwards that the young national activists started to use a sharper tone in the press and that xenophobia appeared in the streets of Buda-Pest (pp. 105–106).

Nemes' application of sociological categories and assertions to national sentiment as expressed in nineteenth-century Hungary is somewhat problematic. These categories are often revealing, so that their use is justified—yet sometimes they suggest a value judgement the actors of that period can hardly meet, as these categories also include the experiences and lessons of twentieth-century history. At several points, for example, the author discusses with clear sympathy the emergence in the eighteenth century of the possibility of the so-called 'Hungarus' identity in Hungarian history—i.e. that someone as a German, Croat or Slovak-speaking subject could be loyal to the Hungarian kingdom (e.g. pp. 73–74). This (non-nationalist) patriotism, however, was overcome by aspiration for a "pure" national state, calling forth the aforementioned "dark forces" which were influenced by the language movement. Nemes notes that the "national activists" at home were aware of the fact "that Magyars were less than half the population of the

Hungarian kingdom" which "was taken as a spur to decisive action, rather than as evidence of the unsuitability of the nation-state idea in Hungary" (p. 51).

The author ignores a basic dimension, i.e., the socio-psychological character of the national movement. He considers nationalism to be mainly a political strategy, and from a politological perspective the assertion is understandable. Statistics do convince a strategist that the relative strength of forces is decisive for the outcome of the struggle and ultimately renders the national "efforts" futile. Whoever fails to acknowledge this brings his fellow men much pain and suffering. Such language runs the risk of missing a basic socio-psychological aspect of the national movement. However, national identity is by no means merely a rational political strategy. It may be to some extent, yet it is mainly a peculiar communal self-suggestion with a pseudo-religious structure, symbolism, rituals, group mechanisms etc. Throughout the history of Hungarian nationalism—but mostly in its early period—the noble/aristocratic view of the past, according to which the Hungarians were the only state-founding nation in the Carpathian basin, has been held particularly strongly. Examination of this religion-like frame of mind, full of mythological moments, should provide a counterpoint to quantitative studies of populations of various ethnicities. This surely sheds an unfavourable light on Hungarian nationalism, especially bearing in mind present attitudes to human rights—yet it is a fact that renders the author's critical perspective difficult to apply. In sum, it is not helpful to construe a historical alternative that the people of a given time could not have been aware of.

There is another point as well. The appearance of nationalist sentiment in Hungarian history—emerging from the medieval situation through more intense contacts due to language, tradition and a modern economy—is inseparable from the position of Hungary in the Habsburg Monarchy. Two hundred years later, a historian looking back at the achievement of Hungarian modernisation within the Monarchy sees a story of success and may be inclined to forget what an important role the assertion of Hungarian interests had played in this achievement. Thus, the historian may easily disregard the facts showing to what extent Vienna's economic policies impeded the achievement of civil society in certain Hungarian regions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nemes helpfully notes this several times (p. 60, p. 65, p. 75), yet somehow fails to establish a causal relation to the virulence of nationalism. Unfortunately, historians outside Hungary writing on the Habsburg monarchy pay little attention to the question. Viewing the region as a whole from the perspective of the twenty-first century, the situation of Hungary at the time does in fact seem to be so idyllic and sheltered that some scholars easily condemn all opposition to Vienna as nationalist turbulence.

Such was not the case. One example: András Gergely's study[1] on the Fiume question shows that in the first half of the nineteenth century the Hungarian liberal opposition had a complex economic programme asserting Hungarian interests. Gergely argues that they sought compromises in customs and trade policy with the Viennese court to diminish or even overcome the disadvantages of the Hungarian economy. The author believes that the actions of the Protection

1 ■ András Gergely: *Egy gazdaságpolitikai alternatíva a reformkorban: a fiumei vasút.* (An Economic Policy Alternative in the Age of Reform: the Fiume Railway Line). Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982.

Association (Védegylet), for example, emerged out of xenophobic rhetoric (p. 187) —yet support for the Association came mainly as a reaction to exploitation through customs tariffs by the Habsburg economic administration. Also in the air was a political fear of Austrian absolutist aspirations inspired not only by a long historical memory, but by Josephinism, when feudal constitutionalism was, in Nemes' words, "suspended", as well as by the lingering resentment produced by Metternich's repressive policy in the second half of the 1830s. The Hungarian national movement may have been responsible for the appearance of the "dark forces" in the streets of Buda-Pest; however, by opposing policies intended to preserve the disadvantageous position of Hungary within the Monarchy, it was also inseparably intertwined with the ideas and aspirations that were fostering the emergence of communal self-governance.

This also holds true of the Magyar language movement. As far as facts are concerned Nemes gives a thorough account of Ferenc Kazinczy's language reform movement and work, and he notes some of its positive aspects such as the creation of a terminology for the sciences. He does not, however, stress that the movement also worked to create a defence against the absolutist aspirations of the Monarchy, as well as aiding the struggle for self-governance. As reflected by the words of Ferenc Kölcsey, the poet who wrote the national anthem *Himnusz:* "fatherland and progress" *(haza és haladás);* the national movement and the issue of the social-economic reforms were inseparable and present in every thought and action.

The author's final evaluation is sufficiently differentiated in its approach. Right from the beginning Hungarian nationalism was associated not only with the worst political tendencies of the century, i.e. the language policy and the preservation of the power of the nobility, but also with the best, with cultural innovation and liberal reforms (p. 186). Yet in the larger part of his book he is inclined to simplify what were complex conflicts and to consider language nationalism as the "greatest evil" among all the conflicts of an emerging civil society.

By the end of the nineteenth century the burghers of Budapest declared in every aspect of their life—as if by a daily referendum—that they were Hungarians. The author discerns the essence of their situation claiming that it would have been extremely difficult for them to do otherwise. And that is absolutely true. Would a Cherokee Indian have been better off if he had not started down the Trail of Tears? Or a Sicilian, if he had wanted to reject that Piedmontisation, which was inseparable from the Unification of Italy?

Rhetorical questions or not, Robert Nemes's book offers an excellent occasion for reflection. ❧

Anna Dalos

"It is not a Kodály School, but it is Hungarian"

A Concept and its History

The phrase "Kodály school" was first used by Mátyás Seiber in a November 1926 article on Kodály as a teacher of composition: "Anyone trained in the 'Kodály school' can count himself lucky."[1] (The inverted commas indicate that the phrase was unusual.) What Seiber was referring to was not an artistic orientation but an institutional form directed by a particular individual. The expression cropped up again, about a year and a half later, in István Sonkoly's review of Jenő Ádám's Suite for orchestra: "[Ádám's] composition displays all the virtues of the Kodály school. He writes concisely, favouring classical form, his orchestration is not overly dense, and he tends to treat the woodwind soloistically."[2] Again, "Kodály school" stands not for an orientation or trend, but for all that Ádám had absorbed in his studies under Kodály.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the expression "Kodály school" is rarely used in the literature on music and exclusively in the context of education, as a reference to the totality of a composer's academic work. This was the usage that prevailed for years, with Sonkoly employing it in this sense even in 1948: "Kodály, the composer and teacher, has founded a school"[3] is a clear allusion to the students as a group, yet Sonkoly was concerned with how Kodály taught the craft of composition and not with the factors that united this group. As late as 1972, Bence Szabolcsi saw the feature most characterizing the Kodály school as the love of the craft of composition.[4]

Infrequently though it was used, the "Kodály school" did acquire a new meaning in the late 1940s. Writing on the works of Ferenc Szabó, Endre Szervánszky, Ferenc Farkas and Sándor Veress in the Bartók issue of the music journal *Zenei szemle,* Szabolcsi recognized the "echo and reflection" of Bartók's and Kodály's music in works by the younger generation.[5] For him,

1 ■ Mátyás Seiber: "Kodály, a tanító" [Kodály the Teacher]. *Crescendo,* Vol. 1, no. 3, pp. 8–11. Quote on p. 11.
2 ■ István Sonkoly: "Új fiatal zeneszerző. Ádám Jenő Suite-je" [A New Young Composer. Jenő Ádám's Suite]. *A zene,* Vol. 9, no. 16, pp. 200–201. Quote on p. 200.
3 ■ István Sonkoly: *Kodály. Az ember, a művész, a nevelő.* [Kodály: The Man, the Artist, the Teacher"]. Nyíregyháza: Tanügyi könyvesbolt, 1948, p. 78.
4 ■ Bence Szabolcsi: "Úton Kodályhoz." [On the Way to Kodály]. In: *On Bartók and Kodály.* Ed. Ferenc Bónis. Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1987, pp. 372–404, esp. p. 378.
5 ■ B[ence] Sz[abolcsi]: "Mai magyar zeneszerzők zenekari művei" [Orchestral Works by Contemporary Hungarian Composers]. *Zenei szemle,* Vol. 2, no. 8, pp. 444–445.

Anna Dalos
is a musicologist. Her book on Kodály will appear later this year.

what distinguished the school of Bartók and Kodály was its professionalism, artistic independence and a musical idiom that drew on both European and Hungarian traditions. However, Szabolcsi also emphasized the differences between the great role models and their heirs, stressing the importance of the new embedded messages that were in accord with a new social and political environment.

> The school of Bartók and Kodály did not seek to make things uniform and characterless, but rather to set the composers free and to help them become complete artists. It is quite natural that the voice of the older masters keeps surfacing in the works of the present generation, but it is just as obvious that this echo and reflection conveys an entirely different meaning today, appearing in different forms, serving different messages and offering different solutions.
>
> What these artists have in common is, first and foremost, their high level of professionalism, which imposes the strictest demands and requires commitment and dedication from creators and audiences alike. Furthermore, they share a musical idiom that is Hungarian in a European way. This is their natural home, their working material, their way of thinking, of which they have taken possession and which they have claimed as the focal point from where they watch the world revolve. Of course, the stability they feel beneath their feet does not mean they can afford to spare any effort; the motions of the world certainly present them with some very difficult questions.[6]

Although Szabolcsi linked the concept of "school" to the names of both Bartók and Kodály, it was not only because of the Bartók commemorations of 1948. A few months earlier, a conference of composers and critics in Prague, the aim of which was to create a unified ideological platform for the countries of the Soviet bloc, had produced a resolution[7] that stated that one possible response to the crisis in musical composition would be for composers to establish strong ties to their own national traditions, since internationalism was not possible in music.

Hungary's position was special: it was Kodály who had claimed the espousal of national traditions for new Hungarian music early in the century—and thus the following generations could feel confident about being on the right path. This is why Szabolcsi invoked the great role models. At the same time, his article contains a number of hidden allusions. He respects the framework provided by the resolution—witness the references to "different messages", a Hungarian idiom or questions posed by a world in motion. On the other hand, his formulations reveal his pride in the Kodály school. Indeed, he comes close to implicitly criticizing the resolution when he contrasts the call for uniformity with a characteristic of the Bartók-Kodály school, which is its individuality, and when he stresses the Europeanness of the Hungarian musical idiom.

András Mihály and Endre Székely, two prominent exponents of the new "politically correct" musical policies of the day, tried to distance themselves from the Hungarian tradition of the 1930s and 1940s, while salvaging from it whatever they thought could still be useful.[8] Total rejection was out of the question, since both Bartók and Kodály were unassailable and rejecting them would have been tantamount to blasphemy. Kodály's special status (reinforced by his physical presence) is seen in an article by Mihály. Here Mihály avoids any attack on Kodály through the lame excuse that

6 ■ Szabolcsi, op.cit.
7 ■ "A zeneszerzők és zenekritikusok prágai tanácskozásának határozata" [The Resolution of the Prague Conference of Composers and Critics]. *Zenei szemle,* Vol. 2, no. 6, pp. 293–296, esp. p. 294.
8 ■ Endre Székely: "Zeneművészetünk fejlődésének következő láncszeme" [The Next Stage in the Development of Our Art Music]. *Új zenei szemle,* Vol. 2, no. 4–5, pp. 16–23.

Kodály's oeuvre is not completed and therefore not open to criticism—unlike Bartók's, from which the works that may serve as examples for the younger generation can now be selected.[9]

In effect, modern Hungarian music as a tradition had been manipulated and appropriated by the Communist regime, and this inevitably brought on a crisis in Hungarian musical life at the time of the new opening following the 1956 cataclysm. Theorists, critics and composers alike seemed to wish to make amends for the guilt they felt at having betrayed the school. Once more, they were trying to deal with the past without rejecting it in its entirety—in this they were in line with the demagogy and responses prevailing in the Kádár era. While criticizing "excesses," they constantly invoked the Kodály tradition and the Kodály school. Given that the school had its origins in the 1930s, they were able to absolve themselves of any guilt. But alongside this self-criticism and self-absolution, they had something new to deal with: after 1956, the gates had been flung open to the new music of the West. Reviews of new premieres began to appear in the most important forums for contemporary music, such as the new journal *Magyar Zene,* founded in 1960. They posed the question of how to create a modern musical language incorporating the new Western trends while remaining true to the Hungarian tradition; how can music be both modern and specifically Hungarian?

The synthesis between new Western music and the Hungarian tradition, which Kodály had called for half a century earlier, thus was once again on the agenda. The younger musicologists thought that the composers of their own generation, dubbed "Thirty-somethings" by Imre Földes,[10] would be those who would bring about this synthesis. The older pupils of Kodály were also being discussed along the same lines, and much attention was devoted to their attempts at this synthesis. For a while it seemed that Gyula Dávid would become a paradigmatic figure. The critics found that Dávid, who had started out as a typical representative of the Kodály school, couldn't deny his Hungarian heritage even as he flirted with serialism by the 1960s.[11] However, writing on Dávid's *Sinfonietta* as early as 1962, András Pernye found that the experiment was unsuccessful:

> At the première of the latest work by Gyula Dávid, we found to our chagrin that this excellent, highly imaginative composer, who had enriched new Hungarian music by many fine works written in the traditional style, had become another victim of the resounding call for innovation, without ever going beyond the messages of the old school.[12]

Pernye's reference to the "messages of the old school" explains the connection between the new-music debates of the Sixties and the meaning now, and to this day still, attached to the term "Kodály school". József Ujfalussy and György Kroó also adopted this usage, as did the authors of the *Contemporary Hungarian Composers series* (most of whose volumes were devoted to Kodály's students), published between 1965 and

9 ■ András Mihály: "Bartók Béla és az utána következő nemzedék" [Béla Bartók and the Next Generation]. *Zenei szemle,* Vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 2–15.

10 ■ Imre Földes: *Harmincasok. Beszélgetések magyar zeneszerzőkkel* [Thirty-somethings: Conversations with Hungarian Composers]. Budapest: Editio Musica, 1969.

11 ■ Jenő A. Molnár: "Dávid Gyula: III. szimfónia" [Gyula Dávid's Third Symphony]. *Magyar Zene,* Vol. 1, no. 3, pp. 450–452; András Székely: "Dávid Gyula: Vonósnégyes" ["Gyula Dávid's String Quartet"], *Magyar Zene.* Vol. 5, no. 5, pp. 526–527.

12 ■ András Pernye: "Dávid Gyula: Szimfonietta kamarazenekarra" [Gyula Dávid's Sinfonietta for Chamber Orchestra]. *Magyar Zene,* Vol. 3, no. 4, pp. 386–388. Quote on p. 386.

1968.[13] By assessing the Kodály school and defining their own attitudes towards it, Hungarian composers and musicologists came to terms with their past and their present. All this gave rise to a vigorous public debate[14] and is reflected in the prophetic fervour of Kroó's book.[15] The school was both a point of reference and a model to be rejected. What had to be rejected was the illusion that the artistic significance of Bartók and Kodály guaranteed their followers a leading role in the music history of the 20th century. There was new hope in the new generation, but critics were anxious whether this renewal would also turn out to be illusionary.

The idea that the pupils of the two leading figures in Hungarian music should form a group was already current in the early 1920s, even if the name "Kodály school" had not been coined. Aladár Tóth, an important music critic with strong ties to the Kodály circle, wrote as early as 1922: "The preservation and cultivation of the Bartók-Kodály tradition is one of the most important tasks of our musical life."[16] And in December 1923, reporting on a concert devoted to Kodály's works, he offered an idealized Romantic portrait of the revolutionary creator surrounded by a group of devoted disciples:

> We are at the workshop where Hungarian culture is being produced. Here are the greatest performers, serving the greatest genius. The hall is filled with all those of importance on the serious arts scene and an enthusiastic throng of disciples. It is an image fit for biographies, illustrating how the artist's extreme loneliness can be alleviated.[17]

However, when Tóth was committing this cliché to paper, Kodály could hardly have been surrounded by an enthusiastic throng of disciples. He had just begun to teach at the Academy again, after an enforced leave of absence, due to his part in the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic. His very first class, which was to become famous later on, may have only been studying the fundamentals of counterpoint at this moment; they were far from being a "school", in the sense of sharing the same aesthetic values and creating their own works to express those values.

In the early 1920s, the "school" consisted of three Kodály apologists—Szabolcsi, Tóth and Antal Molnár. After the resounding success of *Psalmus Hungaricus* in 1923, however, Kodály's position changed overnight. His great reputation and the way his music united modernity with national traditions were decisive inducements for the young generation to study with him. It is significant, however, that Aladár Tóth was talking about the tradition of new Hungarian music at a time when that tradition meant only two names, Bartók and Kodály—who had been prominent for only a dozen or so years themselves. Clearly, Tóth was pursuing a fantasy: he wished Bartók and Kodály would represent more than a brief, passing

13 ■ Ferenc Bónis: *Kadosa Pál.* Budapest: Editio Musica, 1965; János Breuer: *Dávid Gyula.* Budapest: Editio Musica, 1966; Kálmán Dobos: *Viski János.* Budapest: Editio Musica, 1968; István Kecskeméti: *Járdányi Pál.* Budapest: Editio Musica, 1967; András Pernye: *Szabó Ferenc.* Budapest: Editio Musica, 1965; Péter Várnai: *Tardos Béla;* Budapest: Editio Musica, 1966; Péter Várnai: *Maros Rudolf.* Budapest: Editio Musica, 1967.
14 ■ See János Breuer: "Bécsi utazás új magyar zenével" [A Journey to Vienna with New Hungarian Music]. *Muzsika,* Vol. 12, no. 2 , pp. 9–11; András Mihály: "A 'hangos magyar nyelvújító csoport'-ról" [On the 'Loud Hungarian Language Reformers']. *Muzsika*, Vol. 12, no. 4, p. 9–11, esp. p. 10.
15 ■ György Kroó: *A magyar zeneszerzés 30 éve* [Hungarian Composition of the Last Thirty Years]. Budapest: Editio Musica, 1975, esp. pp. 40–46.
16 ■ Aladár Tóth: "Filharmónia" [Philharmony]. *Pesti Napló,* Vol. 73, no. 277, p. 7.
17 ■ Aladár Tóth: "Kodály szerzői estje" [An Evening of Kodály's Works]. *Pesti Napló,* Vol. 74, no. 280, p. 6.

efflorescence in the history of Hungarian music, and was hoping for a first golden age of a national music that would endure for many years to come. It is almost as if the significance of the music of Bartók and Kodály, indeed its very *raison d'être,* had hinged on whether or not they would have successors. No wonder Tóth had been anticipating a new generation long before they would have appeared on the scene.[18]

As for Szabolcsi, he showed little concern for successors at the time. He made no reference to Kodály's students until as late as 1934[19] and his first mention of a Kodály student by name—Lajos Bárdos—did not come until 1937.[20] As a scholar of early music history, he obviously couldn't react to newly composed music in the same way as his friend the music critic Tóth could. However, there have been other reasons for his silence on the subject. For Szabolcsi, Hungarian national classicism in music was already a reality thanks to Kodály, and no disciples, indeed not even Bartók, could compete with the perfection Kodály had achieved. Even in a late article Szabolcsi emphasized what he called the master's "universal Hungarianness"; that quality, he claimed, set him apart from everyone else.

> At the beginning of the century, the thought and the possibility [of a universal Hungarianness] had just been born; by mid-century, it entered a period of crisis. By that time, Kodály was alone in proclaiming and representing it; he was lonely even among his disciples and followers. It seemed as though he had been the last, at least for a long time, to possess this quality; most artists of the time preserve a few fragments, at most, of the previous totality. Yet the Whole does not reside in the parts; even the sum of all the parts is not identical with it.[21]

Antal Molnár, the musicologist and aesthetician, took a different approach from Aladár Tóth. Molnár's writing on new music had a certain "messianic expectancy".[22] He was waiting for the arrival of a new classicism imbued with the collectivist spirit of a new society. Bartók and Kodály, Molnár wrote in 1927, were

> the first harbingers of a new artistic era, who of course are still only experimenting as they strive to create the formal ideals of the new society; they are the heralds and the harbingers of a new classicism that is yet to come.[23]

For Molnár the classicism of Bartók and Kodály had become the key-word for a future style, whose arrival, he felt, was so far in the future that he never thought of connecting it in any way to the young composers Kodály was training in his classroom while he was writing. Molnár did say in 1947: "The works of the new Hungarian generation are unthinkable without Bartók and Kodály; they have lit their torches from the fire of the [two masters]"[24]. Yet he never suggested that any member of the new generation might actually

18 ■ Aladár Tóth: "Szerzői est" [Author's Night]. *Pesti Napló,* Vol. 77, no. 10 (14 January 1926), p. 15; "Az U.M.Z.E. hangversenye" [The Concert of the Association for New Hungarian Music]. *Pesti Napló,* Vol. 84, no. 90, p. 8; "Serly Tibor szerzői estje" [An Evening of Works by Tibor]. *Pesti Napló,* Vol. 86, no. 109, p. 14.

19 ■ Szabolcsi Bence: "Harc az új zenéért Magyarországon" [Struggle for New Music in Hungary]. In *Bartókról és Kodályról* (see fn. 4), pp.117–120, esp. p. 120.

20 ■ Bence Szabolcsi: "Énekkari est" [A Choral Evening]. In *Bartókról és Kodályról* (see fn.4), pp. 139–141, esp. p. 141.

21 ■ Bence Szabolcsi: "Úton Kodályhoz" [On the Road to Kodály]. In *Bartókról és Kodályról* (see fn. 4), pp. 372–404. Quote on p. 380.

22 ■ József Ujfalussy: "Molnár Antal zeneesztétikai szemlélete" [Antal Molnár's Views on the Aesthetics of Music]. *Zenetudományi dolgozatok,* Budapest: MTA Zenetudományi Intézet, 1999, pp. 305–310. Quote on p. 310.

23 ■ Antal Molnár: *Bevezetés a zenekultúrába* [An Introduction to Musical Culture]. Budapest: Dante, n.d. [1927], p. 96

24 ■ Antal Molnár: *Az új muzsika szelleme* [The Spirit of New Music]. Budapest: Dante, n.d. [1947], p. 120.

have done more than follow in Bartók's and Kodály's footsteps to help bring on that long-awaited classicism.

All three, however, agreed on the leading role of Hungarian music on the European scene.[25] Surveying that scene in 1928, Tóth attempted to sketch out the state of new music and the position of new Hungarian music within it[26]. He rejected Schoenberg, Hindemith and Stravinsky and praised Bartók as the new Siegfried of music. He closed his article with an enthusiastic appraisal of the life-affirming, humanistic art of Kodály and the young Hungarians just coming out of his classroom:

> Whoever listens to this music and immerses himself in its grandiose spirit will be unable to resist the inherent imperative, and will know that we must fill our lives with this music.[27]

This review by Aladár Tóth exemplifies the militant intolerance characteristic of Hungarian discussions of new music in the 1920s and 1930s. Expressions such as "grandiose spirit", "imperative" and "must" are simply commands for everyone to accept the primacy of Hungarian music. Szabolcsi, too, expressed his fanaticism and bias quite openly; indeed, they became the premise for his scholarship:

> Yes, we are biased, we are fanatical, we are "one-sided and ahistorical," opposed to all Holy Music History. Our attackers are right on this point, for this is no longer a question of aesthetics and history, but rather a question of where you belong. One can only fight for an idea to which one is innerly connected; aesthetic viewpoints then become subservient to a more powerful idea. One can only fight for what is better, for what is truer. But for those things one must fight ceaselessly, relentlessly and uncompromisingly. We must fight all champions of darkness, even if we are accused of putting up a "Chinese Wall," of being "conservative reactionaries" and "insane revolutionaries"; for we know that we are the bearers of what is better and what is true.[28]

In the same year he formulated a blueprint for new Hungarian music, based on Kodály's dictates: "The man who bestows such art on his nation is more than just an outstanding musician: he is a spiritual leader whose work gives direction, defines a programme, and shows the way."[29] For many years, these three apologists led the effort to turn that programme into reality. Szabolcsi offered interpretations of Kodály's works[30], Molnár proclaimed and popularized the ideas and explained new

25 ■ Even Ottó Gombosi, who was hardly partial to Kodály, emphasized the primacy of Hungarian music and, in a 1926 editorial, claimed with confident superiority that "the young Hungarians will be the saviours of modern music." Ottó Gombosi: "Nyílt levél a magyar muzsikáról (Válasz Adolf Weissmann berlini zenekritikusnak)" [An Open Letter about Hungarian Music (Reply to Berlin Music Critic Adolf Weissmann)]. *Crescendo,* Vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 16–19, esp. p. 19.

26 ■ Aladár Tóth: "Modern zene Budapesten" [Modern Music in Budapest]. *Zenei szemle,* Vol. 12, no. 3–4, pp. 79–92.

27 ■ op. cit, p. 90.

28 ■ Bence Szabolcsi: "A szent zenetörténet zsoldosai" [The Mercenaries of Holy Music History]. *Zenei szemle,* Vol.11, no. 1, pp. 2–6. Quote on p. 5.

29 ■ Bence Szabolcsi: "Kodály Zoltán". In *Bartókról és Kodályról* (see fn.4), pp. 60–63. Quote on p. 60.

30 ■ See the writings collected in *Bartókról és Kodályról* (see fn. 4.).

31 ■ His most important works from those years are: "Európa zenéje a háború előtt. A Társadalomtudományi Társaság Szabad Iskolájában 1917. dec. 12-én tartott előadás" [The Music of Europe before the War: Lecture at the Free School of the Society for Social Sciences, 12 December 1917]. *XX. Század,* March 1918; *Az új zene. A zeneművészet legújabb irányának ismertetése kultúretikai megvilágításban* [New Music: The most recent trends, explained from the standpoint of cultural ethics]. Budapest: Révai, n.d. [1925]; *Az új magyar zene* [New Hungarian Music]. Budapest: Dante, 1926; *Bevezetés a zenekultúrába* (see fn. 23); *Bevezetés a mai muzsikába* [Introduction to the Music of Today]. Budapest: [the author], 1929; *Kodály Zoltán.* Népszerű zenefüzetek [Popular Paperbacks on Music] 4. Budapest: Somló Béla, n.d. [1936]; *A ma zenéje* [The Music of Today]. Népszerű zenefüzetek 7. Budapest: Somló Béla, 1937.

music,[31] while Tóth published polemical articles and propaganda in *Zenei szemle* and *Pesti napló*.[32] We might compare their writings to the synoptic Gospels: they literally repeat or paraphrase Kodály's writings between 1925 and 1929.[33]

This Biblical parallel shows another stylistic and conceptual characteristic of these early studies on Kodály. Besides the militant vocabulary, the imagery is also derived from Christian rhetoric: Aladár Tóth calls Kodály a "prophet"; every one of his concerts is a "resurrection and eternal life".[34] Szabolcsi, too, sees the Master as one who "preaches the Word".[35] If Kodály came to be seen as Christ-like, it was not only becuse of his near-charismaticc appearance but also because of the rhetoric of his apologists in the 1930s. The thinking of the Kodály disciples was profoundly marked by the image of Jesus, as can be seen in György Kerényi's manuscript autobiography, *The Disciple,* redolent of the Imitatio Christi motif at almost every turn.[36]

This rhetoric, however, is more than just a matter of style. The writings of Szabolcsi and Molnár abound in religious language; both felt that the new art had to be religious in order to be moral. Szabolcsi wrote:

> The new art which Europe is now thinking about is ethical—in addition to taking a stand concerning human life, it proclaims human renewal. The new art is religious and addresses everyone. The new art must love humankind and must show it the two roads to salvation, which are essentially one: the Earth and God.[37]

The same ideas are to be found in Molnár, who emphasized faith and piety as the principal element in the new culture.[38] He found the most powerful manifestation of this moral position in Kodály's choral works:

32 ■ His most important works from those years are: "Van-e magyar zene?" [Is There a Hungarian Music?]. *Pesti Napló,* Vol. 77, no. 59, p. 12; "Kodály Zoltán és a magyar kultúra" [Zoltán Kodály and Hungarian Culture]. *Pesti Napló,* Vol. 77, no. 64; "Magyar zene – magyar zenekultúra" ["Hungarian Music – Hungarian Musical Culture"]. *Pesti Napló,* Vol. 79, nos. 186 and 189; "Zenekultúránk alapja: a népzene!" [The Basis of Our Musical Culture is Folk Music!]. *Zenei szemle,* Vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 2–7; "A magyar toll feladata a magyar zenei élet szolgálatában" [The Task of the Hungarian Pen in the Service of Hungarian Musical Life]. *Zenei szemle,* Vol. 13, nos. 3–4, pp. 29–36.

33 ■ Kodály's most important writings from those years are: "A magyar népzene" [Hungarian Folk Music]; "Magyar zene" [Hungarian Music]; "Mit akarok a régi székely dalokkal?" [What Do I Want with the Old Székler Songs?]; "Népzene" [Folk Music]; "A magyar népdal művészi jelentősége" [The Artistic Significance of Hungarian Folk Song], all collected in *Visszatekintés. Összegyűjtött írások, beszédek, nyilatkozatok* [Looking Back. Collected writings, speeches, declarations"] Vol. 1, ed. Ferenc Bónis. Budapest: Editio Musica, 1974, pp. 21–35; "Tizenhárom fiatal muzsikus" [Thirteen Young Musicians]. *Visszatekintés. Összegyűjtött írások, beszédek, nyilatkozatok,* Vol. 3, ed. Ferenc Bónis. Budapest: Editio Musica, 1989, pp. 447–451.

34 ■ Aladár Tóth: "A XVI-XVIII. század magyar lírája és Kodály Zoltán" [Zoltán Kodály and Hungarian Poetry from the 16th to the 18th centuries]. *Pesti Napló,* Vol. 76, no. 77, p. 12.

35 ■ Bence Szabolcsi: "Kodály Zoltán" (see fn.4), p. 61.

36 ■ The manuscript contains passages such as: "Kodály withdrew by himself, as he always did. Is this possible? After all, he was always surrounded by those who loved him, yet he was lonely, as Christ would have been without His disciples. Why didn't he, too, have twelve disciples? Then again, how would they have functioned in today's world? Oh, he did have disciples, certainly! Bence Szabolcsi, Aladár Tóth, Sándor Veress, [Zoltán] Vásárhelyi, [Lajos] Bárdos, [Mátyás] Seiber, [Dezső] Keresztury, [György] Kerényi—they all walked with him and would have walked with him forever. Yet they couldn't keep up; they could only whisper silently: my life, my All, the joy of my dreams, the fantasy of my designs, the goal of my journey, the hero of my novel, Goodness with a golden face, your stature is like Christ's, your gait like the angels', your voice like Jesus', the miracle of my life, Kodály, my All!" György Kerényi: *A tanítvány. Egy élet Kodály mellett* [The Disciple: A Life with Kodály]. Ms. at the Budapest Kodály Archives. p. II.

37 ■ Bence Szabolcsi: "Kodály–dalok" [Kodály's Songs]. In *Bartókról és Kodályról* (see fn. 4), pp. 9–14. Quote on p. 9.

38 ■ Antal Molnár: *Bevezetés a zenekultúrába* (see fn. 23), p. 28.

> [Kodály] has created a new, original and independent *a cappella* world, inheriting the ethical quality of the old. To be capable of practising the classical choral style is to possess an ethical force, since this requires an extreme economy of means in every respect."[39]

Aladár Tóth spoke about the "moral foundations" of composition that manifested themselves paradigmatically in the pure forms and style of these works:

> Kodály's choruses are magisterial lessons in how a serious and pure soul and a serious and pure musical form are interconnected. Kodály's followers, therefore, need to study, first of all, those solid musical foundations upon which the heaven-storming towers of Kodály's music are built. A healthy-sounding choral writing, a pure and concise melodic style, a sure and organic harmonic technique: these are the preconditions of any work of the imagination. These qualities represent the moral foundations of composition; no music can ennoble the soul unless it rests on these premises.[40]

The goals of the new art, formulated by Kodály's theoreticians in the 1920s—religious feeling and a moral position manifested in the economy of means—led directly to plans about the renewal of Catholic church music in Hungary, as well as to new developments in musical education and the impetus for a choral movement: three areas in which the Kodály apologists saw the manifestation of the Kodály school of composition, even if they didn't say so explicitly.

On 6 April 1925, Bence Szabolcsi sent a long letter to his mentor, Zoltán Kodály, in which he reported on a debut concert of some young poets and composers at the Academy of Music. In the letter, Szabolcsi vehemently rejected the cosmopolitanism represented that evening by his boyhood friend György Kósa, exclaiming bitterly: "The 'will of the generation' is not as universal as we had believed."[41]

In January 1928, Modern Hungarian Musicians (MoMaMu) was founded by Pál Kadosa, Hugó Kelen, György Kósa, Ferenc Szabó and István Szelényi. The very fact of organizing themselves showed the growing self-awareness of the new generation. Concurrently, some new critical forums were being created by young musicologists. The inaugural issue of the journal *Crescendo,* edited by Ottó Gombosi and committed to promote new music, appeared in September 1926. Just at that time, Szabolcsi and Tóth took over the direction of *Zenei szemle.* Yet the time was not ripe for the fulfilment of the new generation's potentials. MoMaMu disbanded after only four concerts. *Zenei szemle,* even though Kodály's disciples had turned it into an important scholarly journal, lost its readership and folded in 1929. That same year, *Crescendo,* too, ceased publication after Gombosi left the country.

Szabolcsi and Tóth had considered *Crescendo* a rival.[42] Gombosi's journal had a Western orientation and published news

39 ■ Antal Molnár: *Kodály Zoltán* (see fn. 31). p. 42.

40 ■ Aladár Tóth: "Új gyermekkar komponisták" [New Composers of Children's Choruses]. *Pesti Napló,* Vol. 82, no. 95, p. 17.

41 ■ Quoted after György Kroó: *Szabolcsi Bence I. rész* [Bence Szabolcsi, Part I]. Budapest: Liszt Ferenc Zeneművészeti Főiskola, 1994, pp. 241–242.

42 ■ The antipathy seemed to have been mutual, since *Crescendo* published some strong anti-Kodály statements. For instance, Sándor Jemnitz called Kodály a "national craftsman of local significance" in 1927, and was openly hostile to the Kodály movement and Szabolcsi's intolerance: "[Schoenberg's] music is not for relatively young and primitive cultures that protect their own existence by erecting 'Chinese Walls' to guard against foreign influences; overestimating themselves and underestimating others, they save their peace of mind by sticking their heads in the sand." Sándor Jemnitz: "Kollektív áramlatok Európa mai zenéjében" [General Tendencies in Contemporary European Music]. *Crescendo,* Vol. 1, no. 10, pp. 7–10. Quote on p. 7.

from the Western centres of contemporary music in addition to popularizing new Hungarian works. One of its reviewers, discussing a piano recital by György Kósa in 1927, referred to the young composers on the programme as the "*Kulturträger* generation" and called them "our precious treasures".[43] Nevertheless, he pointed to Bartók's influence as one of the most salient features of their music.

The members of MoMaMu were no followers of Kodály, even though three of them (Kadosa, Szabó and Szelényi) had studied with him. Although *Crescendo* was not their official organ, it did give them a forum. In early 1928, Szelényi published in it an article, which may be considered as a manifesto for the group.[44] Szelényi set as his goal the creation of pure absolute music that would address itself exclusively to the ear. Like Molnár, he saw this music as the new art form of a new human being, but his idea of the future diverged from that of his older colleague. His prophecy—"New forms will be born out of the laws of pitch, timbre, rhythm and dynamics. The music will be nothing but music, but it will be music!"[45]—almost sounds like an anticipation of 1950s serialism.

This aesthetic conflicted with Kodály's views, as Aladár Tóth was quick to realize. His reviews make it clear that he didn't consider MoMaMu to be the young representatives of the newly founded Hungarian musical tradition; for him, they were what Szabolcsi called "rootless Westernizers".[46] In April 1930, Tóth chastised Kadosa and Szabó for not following their natural inclinations and for giving in to fashionable new trends: Kadosa was forcing his innate, harmonic sense of form, which craved equilibrium, into a dense, coarse and fragmented expressionism, while Szabó was trying to conceal his lyrical and melodic gifts in the disguise of objectivism.[47] In other words, Tóth rejected both Schoenberg's Expressionism and Hindemith's *Neue Sachlichkeit*. While he could hardly object to the Bartók influence in the young composers' works (Bartók, after all, was the other hero of new Hungarian music, and Tóth counted himself among his champions), he still couldn't accept it as the true path of new Hungarian music in the Kodályian sense. To him, the stylistic difference between Bartók and Kodály was made clear in their respective positions vis-à-vis the West: in Bartók he recognized the "eternal Hungarian longing for European companionship," while in Kodály he celebrated the "builder of a Hungarian edifice".[48]

This is also why they greeted so enthusiastically the launching of *Magyar Kórus* (Hungarian Chorus, 1931) and *Énekszó* (Singing, 1933). The two journals shared many of the same collaborators; they, and the circle forming around *Magyar Kórus,* brought together Kodály's closest colleagues and followers. While the apologists were busy writing the gospel of Kodály's life, the disciples working in *Magyar Kórus* were engaged on the Acts of the Apostles. Or so, at least, is the impression produced by György Kerényi:[49]

43 ■ László Pollatsek: "Fiatal magyar zeneszerzők. Kósa György zongoraestje" [Young Hungarian Composers: A Piano Recital by György Kósa]. *Crescendo,* Vol. 1, no. 9, pp. 18–20. Quote on p. 18.
44 ■ István Szelényi: "A modern zene főbb áramlatai" [The Main Tendencies of Modern Music], *Crescendo,* Vol. 2, no. 6–7, pp. 3–11.
45 ■ Op. cit., p. 11.
46 ■ Bence Szabolcsi: "A cigányzenétől a népzenéig" [From Gypsy Music to Folk Music]. In *Bartókról és Kodályról* (see fn. 4), pp. 121–128, esp. p. 127.
47 ■ Aladár Tóth: "Modern szerzői est" [An Evening of Modern Music]. *Pesti Napló,* Vol. 81, no. 89, p. 15.
48 ■ Aladár Tóth: "Kodály szerzői estje" [An Evening of Kodály's Music]. *Pesti Napló,* Vol. 75, no. 84, p. 12.
49 ■ György Kerényi: "Kodály és a magyar kórus" [Kodály and the Hungarian Choral Movement]. *Magyar Kórus,* Vol. 2, no. 8, pp. 94–97.

> Kodály's example is not limited to his compositions: all his activities and his entire personality make him the leader of Hungarian church music. Without him, there would be no *Magyar Kórus*. This movement was founded, developed and propagated by his students; the new voice that emanates from it, becoming gradually stronger and stronger, comes from his school. Polyphony is the art of the Church, and it is Kodály who is teaching this art—Palestrina's counterpoint —to the musicians of tomorrow at the Academy of Music.[50]

In this view, Kodály's primary goal was the creation of a new, Hungarian, style of church music: the choral movement and the general improvement of musical education were means towards that goal. In this Kodály was followed by his students with a Catholic commintment, Lajos Bárdos, Gyula Kertész and György Kerényi.

This is the context that explains why Szabolcsi caricatured so mercilessly the Hungarian choral movement and Kodály's closest followers. In a 1938 pamphlet[51], he showed how the master's original idea disappeared in the work of his disciples, who all placed themselves in the foreground. Aladár Tóth, who had for a long time considered Lajos Bárdos to be Kodály's most gifted student[52], realized the danger of epigonism inherent in the movement at much the same time as Szabolcsi did. Turning his attention to the "Westernizer" Sándor Veress, of whom he had initially said that he was a "talent deserving of a better fate"[53], he was soon to celebrate Veress as one of the few followers really worthy of Kodály, after the première of Veress's *Aria* for violin and orchestra (1937) in which he saw the signs of great assurance and musical independence.[54] A similar change is to be observed in Antal Molnár, who was working on his Kodály book at the time. In it, Molnár conspicuously avoided mentioning his hero as teacher or, indeed, the names of any of his disciples. Similarly, in a 1937 article he merely said: "There are a great many who are trying to follow Kodály, but they can barely get beneath the surface; following him is a difficult task that takes ascetic self-discipline."[55]

As the apologists grew more disillusioned, skirmishing between the various factions became more frequent.[56]

50 ■ Kerényi, op. cit., p. 95.

51 ■ Bence Szabolcsi: "A tanitványok avagy a Palestrina-mozgalom története" [The Disciples: The History of the Palestrina Movement]. In *Bartókról és Kodályról* [see fn. 4]. pp. 146–153.

52 ■ Aladár Tóth: "A Cecília-kórus hangversenye Bárdos Lajos vezényletével" [The Concert of the Cecilia Choir under Lajos Bárdos]. *Pesti Napló,* Vol. 86, no. 87. Reprinted in *Tóth Aladár válogatott zenekritikái* [Aladár Tóth. Selected Music Reviews]. Budapest: Editio Musica, 1968, pp. 123–125.

53 ■ Aladár Tóth: "Szerzői est" [Composer's Evening]. *Pesti Napló,* Vol. 86, no. 110, p. 11.

54 ■ Aladár Tóth: "Fiatal magyar zeneszerzők a Székesfővárosi Zenekar hangversenyén" [Young Hungarian Composers at the Concert of the Budapest Municipal Symphony]. *Pesti Napló,* Vol. 88, no. 58, p. 14.

55 ■ Antal Molnár: *A ma zenéje* (see fn.31), p. 9.

56 ■ In spite of all that disillusionment and internal disputes, they presented a common front against the attacks of Father Bangha's journal *Magyar kultúra* in the summer of 1937. See [Anonymous], "Tollheggyel" [With a Sharp Pen]. *Magyar kultúra,* Vol. 24, nos. 13–14, pp. 47–48. The journal returned to the subject in its next issue, trying to defend its position; see Vol. 24, nos. 15–16. Among the participants of this discussion, we find Molnár ("Van-e destruktív zene? Levél a szerkesztőhöz" [Can Music Be Destructive? Letter to the Editor]). *Pesti Napló*; György Bálint ("Bartók és Kodály—vagy Horst Wessel?" [Bartók and Kodály—or Horst Wessel?]) *Népszava*; Aladár Tóth ("Hogyan destruálja Bartók és Kodály a magyar ifjúságot?" [How Bartók and Kodály demoralise Hungarian Youth?]). *Magyarország. Magyar Kórus* devoted a special issue to the debate, publishing, among others, the article by Attila Péczely "Egymást ütjük" [We Are Only Hitting Each Other]. *Magyar Kórus,* Vol. 7, no. 27, pp.1–6.

On 1 January 1938, Zoltán Horusitzky took over the editorship of the journal *A zene,* which strengthened the position of the *Magyar Kórus* circle in the forums that influenced the audience for music at large. This journal became an important *place d'armes.* The first major debate occurred in 1939–40 between the "Westernizer" Ferenc Farkas and the *Magyar Kórus* supporter Ferenc Ottó.[57] Writing in *Magyar Élet,* Farkas attacked young composers who wrote large-scale works beyond their abilities, and encouraged his colleagues to undertake shorter, more practical projects. Ferenc Ottó found Farkas's comments insulting, and charged Farkas (a pupil of Respighi) with trying to foist the aesthetics of "Applied Music" *(Gebrauchsmusik)* on his Hungarian colleagues. Farkas argued for a pluralism in an almost postmodern spirit, and pointed out that it did no harm if every member of the post-Bartók-Kodály generation found a personal style that suited him the best—after all, a true musical culture thrived on diversity.

Concurrently with this exchange between Farkas and Ottó, another debate, between Sándor Veress and Zoltán Horusitzky, revolved around the responsibility of music critics.[58]

Horusitzky praised the opera *Júlia szép leány* (Julia the Fair Maiden) by Ferenc Ottó as an important experiment in the creation of a Hungarian recitative. An outraged Veress replied: "We must take a strong stand against the view, which becomes more and more prevalent, that the mere appearance of a Hungarian folk song confers a special aesthetic value on a piece of music."[59] According to Veress, using a folk song as raw material is of no value in itself; what counts is its treatment. Responding to Horusitzky's second article, he emphasized that under no circumstances should flawed works be praised even in the name of a larger aesthetic goal; one should only defend true values.

Both debates touched on crucial issues that seem to have been central to the general discourse on new music in the 1930s and 1940s. Should one—need one—write large-scale compositions imitating the heroic tone of Kodály's national romanticism? Is writing in Kodály's style, or arranging folk music of value in itself? What considerations should one follow in utilizing folk melodies? What makes a folk-song arrangement good? In discussing these issues, András Szőllősy, one of the youngest Kodály students, called into question the very *raison d'être* of the Kodály school. In his 1943 dissertation he strove to separate Kodály from his epigones.[60] Three years later, he demolished the "bedazzled enthusiasts"[61] who did not understand the guidance inherent in Kodály's works. He emphasized that for Kodály, folk culture was simply universal European culture

57 ■ Ferenc Farkas: "Remekmű és irányított zene" [Masterwork and Controlled Music]. *Magyar Élet*, Vol. 4, no. 7, pp. 25–26; Ferenc Ottó: "Remekmű vagy irányított zene? Válasz Farkas Ferencnek" [Masterwork or Controlled Music? Reply to Ferenc Farkas]. *A zene,* Vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 13–14; Ferenc Farkas: "Viszontválasz Ottó Ferencnek" [Reply to Ferenc Ottó]. *A zene,* Vol. 21, no. 3, pp. 43–45.

58 ■ [Zoltán] H[orusitzky]: "Júlia szép leány. Új magyar opera. Bemutató az Operaházban." [Julia the Fair Maiden: A new Hungarian opera premiered at the Opera House]. *A zene,* Vol. 21, no. 3, pp. 45–46; Sándor Veress: "Hozzászólás egy operához és annak bírálatához" [Comments on an Opera and its Review]. *Énekszó,* Vol. 7, no. 3; [Zoltán] H[orusitzky]: "Hozzászólás egy hozzászóláshoz" [Comments on Some Comments]. *A zene,* Vol. 21, no. 5, pp. 79–80; Sándor Veress: "Még egy szó a hozzászólásról" [One More Word on the Comments]. *Énekszó,* Vol. 7, no. 4, pp. 703–704.

59 ■ Sándor Veress, "Hozzászólás egy operához" [A Comment on an Opera]. p. 692.

60 ■ András Szőllősy, *Kodály művészete* [The Art of Kodály]. Budapest: Károly Pósa, 1943, p. 129.

61 ■ András Szőllősy: "Bartók, Kodály, és ami utánuk következik" [Bartók, Kodály, and What Comes After]. *Újhold*, Vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 69–72.

in microcosm. This was precisely what the disciples had failed to acknowledge. Consequently, they missed two fundamental features of their folk sources: the fact that folk music pointed beyond itself—in other words, it belonged to Europe—and that it imbued music with a humanistic message. By 1946, Szőllősy felt the need to defend Kodály against his own disciples.

Kodály's famous article of 1925, "Thirteen Young Musicians",[62] is often seen as a defence of his own school of composition.[63] In reality, it is simply an explanation of his pedagogical principles. While stressing the need for a specifically Hungarian musical culture to assert itself, he contrasts the "conservatism of a provincial small town in Germany" with the "Hungarian conservatism nourished by the culture of the world."[64] He never employs the word "school"—as is clear from the foregoing, he couldn't possibly have used it in the sense of a unified aesthetic orientation.

But he would have guarded against making statements of that sort in any event. When, around the same time, he wrote a report on contemporary Hungarian music for the American journal *Modern Music,* he did not rule out the possibility of a strong group of young composers emerging eventually. Yet he described how the First World War had influenced the personalities and working attitudes of the young people, and concluded that the new generation had yet to appear on the scene.

> The question has often been asked: how about the younger generation? Are there any [young composers] who will continue the work? Are there any who, perhaps, are striking out in new directions?
>
> One has to stress the fact that there was such an abundance of talent among those born in Hungary between 1875 and 1885 (not only in music but in all fields), that it would be fully understandable if Nature had taken a break—a phenomenon often observed in the history of the arts. Aside from that, the war destroyed an entire generation, and this in more ways than one. Some perished on the battlefield; in addition, the young people who came of age in this abnormal era never learnt to work hard, and their sense of moral responsibility was considerably weakened. On the other hand, there are age groups who have spent their best years in more consolidated times, in terms of personal growth and evolution, and they give us hope once more. There are some promising beginnings—some serious work is being done.
>
> It would serve no purpose to mention the names who might arouse expectations since these might not be fulfilled, especially since none of them has completed a representative work that could count as a positive result. In a few years, we shall know whether the seeds that have been sown will be allowed to ripen.[65]

Even later, Kodály refrained from using the expression "Kodály school". To the best of my knowledge, he did so only once, in a short note published posthumously:

> What is the Kodály school?
>
> The Kodály school has never pigeonholed anyone, and has always striven to help everyone develop their personalities (if they had one).
>
> [...] In addition to their individual differences, the composers differ from one another in the extent to which they feel

62 ■ Zoltán Kodály: "Tizenhárom fiatal muzsikus" [Thirteen Young Musicians]. In *Visszatekintés 3* (see fn. 33), pp. 69–72, esp. p. 69.
63 ■ László Eősze: Kodály Zoltán. Budapest: Gondolat, 1967, p. 63; Ferenc Bónis: "A vitázó Kodály" [Kodály the Polemicist]. In Mihály Ittzés, ed. *A Kodály Intézet Évkönyve* [The Yearbook of the Kodály Institute] III. Kecskemét: Kodály Intézet, 1986, pp. 6–22, esp. p. 6
64 ■ Zoltán Kodály: "Tizenhárom fiatal muzsikus," p. 450.
65 ■ Zoltán Kodály: "Magyar zene" [Hungarian Music]. In *Visszatekintés I* (see fn. 33), pp. 24–28, esp. pp. 27–28.

Hungarian. That feeling cannot be acquired in the cosmopolitan capital, only by contact with those who live in the countryside, indeed in the small villages. The only way Hungarianness can survive is if the spirit of the villages penetrates the capital and pervades Hungarian life in its entirety.

[Gyula] Dávid has experienced all this. And even if he occasionally dons the fashionable uniform of twelve-tone writing, one can still feel something in the way he moves. [...]

There are only three of us (with Ádám and Járdányi as fourth and fifth) whose experience of Hungarianness has the same intensity. It is not a Kodály school, but it is Hungarian—and how different the results and manifestations are in the compositions![66]

It is clear from the context (the mention of Gyula Dávid's dodecaphonic experiments) that the note must have been written in the 1960s.[67] The very use of the expression "Kodály school" is an echo of the debates of those years, presented above. The exclamation "it is not a Kodály school, but it is Hungarian" shows Kodály's dissatisfaction with, even irritation at, this usage, and the entire note may have been prompted by his being fed up with this now-ubiquitous turn of phrase. He was opposed to the concept of "Kodály school" current in the Sixties. He emphasized Hungarianness as the defining feature of the "school", whose most important representatives were Jenő Ádám, Gyula Dávid and Pál Járdányi. In so doing, Kodály stressed the national aspect whereas others had spoken of a shared musical style; at the same time, he noted that Hungarianness could manifest itself very differently in the work of each composer.

His writings indicate that he never wanted to form a "school". In his writings there are several entries where he expresses reservations about his own work as a teacher.[68] Back in the late 1930s and early 1940s, he had reacted to the growing circle of his students with some surprise. Even though he didn't call them a "school", their existence as such did preoccupy him, as we know from several influential writings from that period. He alluded to it more and more often, returning to the same questions over and over again: what is the role of minor composers in musical culture? How do their works relate to those of the major figures, and what intrinsic value do they possess?

In a 1941 study, the comparison of these two forms of music gave Kodály the opportunity to state his views on the activities of minor artists working alongside the great masters:

> Even the great masters start out as imitators, their work barely distinguishable from that of their predecessors. We might say that they write "variants," not new works. Their originality develops by stages, they find their voices only gradually. And even in their most original works, the influences of others may be detected. [...] Artists do not live in a vacuum but in human society. They feel and think what others feel and think; only they are able to express it better. But what about the majority of artists who are not inspired to produce anything new, only more of the old? Those who remain imitators and epigones all their lives? The multitudes of schools, groupings and followers in art history have the same function as variants do in folk music. In every community there are leading

66 ■ Zoltán Kodály: *Magyar zene, magyar nyelv, magyar vers. Kodály Zoltán hátrahagyott írásai* [Hungarian Music, Hungarian Language, Hungarian Verse: Posthumous writings by Zoltán Kodály]. Ed. Lajos Vargyas. Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1993, pp. 88–89.
67 ■ Lajos Vargyas dated it to 1954. His error was first pointed out by Mihály Ittzés: "Egy magyarságkutató műhelyében" [In the Workshop of a Hungarianist]. *BUKSZ,* Vol. 7, no. 1 (Spring 1995), pp. 63–65.
68 ■ Zoltán Kodály: *Közélet, vallomások, zeneélet. Kodály Zoltán hátrahagyott írásai* [Public Life, Testimonies, Musical Life: Posthumous writings by Zoltán Kodály]. Ed. Lajos Vargyas. Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1989, p. 142, 157.

> singers, followed by their imitators. Their songs, their manners, even their mannerisms, are picked up by others—it is a veritable school.[69]

According to Kodály, then, followers only produce less perfect variants of the great masterworks. Yet his comparison with folk music makes it clear that the works of the epigones are part of a national culture, in the same way as variants concurrent with the accomplishments of "leading singers" enrich folk-music culture. For Kodály, a school of composers was an element of a unified musical culture, and he integrated that into his overall concept of Hungarian music. In a 1939 article he stressed that for national music cultures founded upon a synthesis of folk music and European tradition, the final goal is always a "new national school of composition."[70] (In that article, he intentionally avoided discussing Hungary and cited the examples of Japan, Russia, Scandinavia and America instead.)

If Kodály emphasized the synthesis of national and European musical forms in 1939—in the shadow of the Second World War—this may well have been a reaction to the political situation. In the fascist climate then reigning in Hungary, he had to take a firm stand in defense of general European values; musical life was naturally a reflection of the society at large. Whereas in the 1920s and 1930s he had championed the primacy of the Hungarian tradition—as he did in "Thirteen Young Musicians"—he now insisted on showing that Hungarian music was part and parcel of European civilization. He devoted a lengthy passage to this question in another essay of 1939:

> I hope that in the past thirty years, we have succeeded in making the general public aware of the significance of folk traditions. As a result, there may no longer be any doubt that no one can be a Hungarian composer without this awareness.
>
> Yet, Hungary is an integral part of Europe, whose traditions she shares fully. Any country lying on the borderline of East and West must take it for its mission to belong to both and to reconcile their contrasts. Therefore, Hungarianness is worthless if it is not European, and to us, Europeanness is worthless if it is not Hungarian at the same time.[71]

In the article, Kodály passed a more negative judgment on his followers than he did elsewhere:

> The greatest masters—Bach or Mozart—maintain ties to all the trends of their own age and of the preceding ages, while their influence reaches far into posterity. Yet, many-faceted though these masters are, they still express their own national character far more strongly than do minor figures who rely only on their national traditions, one-sidedly excluding others.[72]

The "minor figures"—and Kodály means his own students here—are charged with "one-sidedly excluding others." Thecharge shows that he harboured no illusions about the significance of his students' work and that he felt the need to defend his own views on "a Hungarian conservatism nourished by the culture of the world" first formulated in the 1920s, against his own students and against an entire country that had gone astray. ❧

69 ■ Zoltán Kodály: "Népzene és műzene" [Folk Music and Art Music]. *Visszatekintés. Összegyűjtött írások, beszédek, nyilatkozatok* [Looking Back: Collected Writings, Speeches, Declarations], Vol. 2. Ed.: Ferenc Bónis. Budapest: Editio Musica, 1974, pp. 261–267. Quote on p. 264.

70 ■ Zoltán Kodály: "Magyarság a zenében" [Hungarianness in music]. *Visszatekintés 2* (see fn. 69), pp. 235–260. Quote on p. 239.

71 ■ Zoltán Kodály: "Mi a magyar a zenében?" [What is Hungarianness in Music?] *Visszatekintés 1* (see fn. 33), pp. 75–80. Quote on p. 78.

72 ■ op. cit.

Tamás Koltai

Roofless

József Katona: *Bánk bán*

The Krétakör Theatre is one of the most exciting of our theatre companies and the one that travels most, with the company and their manager, Árpád Schilling, now constantly featuring at international festivals. This is a status they do not regard as one of their main goals, being well aware of its attendant dangers. It is easy enough to get into an élite, but fashions are fickle and interest switches soon to new faces, new names, new groups, as if the festival market were subject to an unwritten law: "Be original and flashy; there's no need to strive all the time for profundity as well." To judge by what they have achieved to date, the Krétakör have no wish to play by that rule.

A distinctive feature of the company is that they have no fixed abode, which is highly unusual in Hungary. Most people associate theatre with what happens on a proscenium stage with burgundy-red velvet curtains in a large, multi-balconied auditorium. In Hungary during the mid-nineteenth century Hungarian- and German-language companies competed with each other to see who could settle into a shiny, new permanent edifice. By the end of that century and the early part of the twentieth century, in Hungary and across the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, a growing number of palatial theatres had been built, many of them designed by the partnership of Fellner and Helmer. Any city with pretensions wanted a bigger theatre than the one constructed most recently by their neighbours. From the 1960s on, however, reconstruction projects aimed to reduce capacity—from one thousand to eight hundred, from seven hundred to six hundred, and so on. When pocket arenas became all the rage across Europe, the response was to turn a space within an existing building—a rehearsal room, for instance—into a studio, and if that was not feasible, to use a nearby cellar or attic space. These new spaces would be used by the company's actors, which meant that the mother-theatres would spawn a string of small theatres that were generally not free to develop an independent aesthetic of their own.

This, with few exceptions, has been the situation down to the present day. Thus, Budapest has one company that operates three small-scale studios on separate premises, and the biggest headache for fringe groups is to find a place where they can rehearse and perform. They are not in a position to seek a home just anywhere since any funding that they may acquire is sufficient for, at most, the occasional per-

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

formance of a production and not for renting premises. The innovative is not particularly welcome in the existing locations. (Meanwhile, five years ago Budapest saw the opening of the National Theatre's tasteless, exorbitant new building, unsuited to the needs of contemporary approaches to theatre.)

That being the case, it has become timely to advert to the example of the Scottish National Theatre, which gets by without its own premises and has renounced ideas of major subsidies, along with much of the administrative apparatus and heavy running costs that this entails, in favour of running several companies that tour the country, bringing productions to local audiences.

The fact that the Krétakör does not have a performance space of its own can be looked at from two points of view. On the one hand, it exemplifies the indifference that Hungary's cultural supremos display towards the new, be they new aspirations, new forms or new groupings. Preference is given to those who are already 'in', whether that be inside a domain, a building, or an administrative structure. In short, the subsidy game is played with cards that have already been dealt. The state sponsors many permanent companies. Thus, in the capital, apart from the National Theatre and the State Opera House, there are another three theatre companies that operate under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Culture, purely on the grounds that this was how it was worked out 'once', 'some time ago'. For the last fifteen years there have been repeated attempts to transfer these three companies to the tender care of the local authority; each time, thanks to their dogged lobbying, their managers have managed to fend the move off (they feel they are financially better off within the ministerial bosom). In addition to these, there are around a dozen other bricks-and-mortar theatres in Budapest, and more in the provinces, that come under the stewardship of local authorities, which means that a certain percentage of their funding (more in the provinces, less in the capital) comes from the civic purse, the rest from central funds, with the two combined making up some 50 to 70 per cent of the total budget. Companies that operate with no permanent premises, and are thus 'outside' (also called 'alternative' theatres here), receive funding at a much lower level from a separate ministerial allocation. Several of these companies, including the Krétakör, enjoy a pre-eminent status and receive a relatively large grant, but nothing like even the most miserly of the subsidies given to bricks-and-mortar theatres. Many regard the pittance given to Krétakör as shameful. They think that in view of its achievements and international reputation the company deserves a permanent base of its own. Krétakör have applied to take over theatres whose franchise has run out, but so far without success. Presumably, this is due to fears that they were not going to offer the usual 'user-friendly', entertaining, middlebrow bill of fare. As a result, Krétakör have remained 'roofless' (the title of the *Big Issue*-style paper sold by Budapest's homeless).

From another aspect, the lack of an exclusive permanent base can—paradoxically—be advantageous (let us call it the 'Scottish effect'). It is not just a matter of not having permanent overheads. Comfort and the cramping of the variety on offer can lead, over time, to uniformity, a dearth of inspiration and hidebound approaches. It is perfectly feasible to set performances in, let's say, the foyer, a buffet or a corridor, and even conceivable to sit the audience on the stage and use the auditorium as the stage, but if the will to try them out is not there from the start, the possibility of ever doing so will gradually fade. In fact, many directors are now seeking venues that lie outside the theatre, because they prefer

arrangements that replace the traditional separation of stage and auditorium. Theatre can be experienced in warehouses, tram depots, factory halls or railway stations. Having to search for a new location for a new production is both energising and a great spur to the imagination. Krétakör has performed in a wide range of settings. One of their greatest successes internationally, *The Seagull,* was first put on in the tiny circular bar of a Budapest artist's club to reflect the 'socialist realist' style of the 1950s (in the manner of *LUV,* Murray Schisgal's 1964 hit comedy, they employed a deliberately misspelled and hideously ironic title). This is far from the only such morsel that hints at the company's non-conformist credentials; indeed, it is hard to say now whether they actually want a permanent home of their own. One plan prepared some while ago proposed that they would operate such a as a platform for visiting foreign companies, but nothing materialised and the plan seems to have been abandoned. Currently, part of their financing necessarily derives from continual appearances outside Hungary and the larger-scale shared productions.

Their most recent venture is József Katona's early nineteenth-century tragedy, *Bánk bán.* A patriotic, nationalist drama, it is one of the most frequently performed Hungarian works for the stage, a fixture of school curricula, and a piece redolent of pathos-laden ideals of independence. By taking its subject from medieval history—the assassination of the foreign-born consort of a thirteenth-century Hungarian king—the play reminded the domestic audiences of the day of their own political battles, and specifically the general opposition to the ruling Austrian house of Habsburg. The Bánk of the title, who as the *bán,* or viceroy, of Hungary, is deputising for Andrew II in the latter's absence on a military campaign outside the country; he is able to take double vengeance by killing Queen Gertrude, thus carrying out the nation's sentence on the oppressor and revenging himself for Gertrude's role in the seduction and ultimate death of Bánk's wife.

Modern stagings of the play seek to confront the present with the past; or in other words, to clarify our relationship to historical ideologies and nationalist ideals. Krétakör were looking for a locale for their production which in itself would suggest that. They inspected public buildings that were constructed in Budapest around the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century, a period that was marked by an awakening of jingoistic notions of the nation-state all over Europe and the flowering of an architectural style in Hungary that was called 'national'. Some of the largest and most striking edifices in Hungary were designed in this spirit, or as the director and set designer of the production expressed it, they raised epic and emotionally charged buildings that grabbed any and every device in order to conjure up and revive the architectural forms of the splendid national past in a glorious light. In the end, they chose the assembly hall of the National Institute and School for the Blind, built between 1899 and 1904. This stands at the intersection of two busy thoroughfares, close to the City Park and hence the city centre, with the assembly hall located behind the main façade, occupying a prime position just inside the main entrance and framed by the main staircase. The most conspicuous element in the hall is a 5 x 8 metre stained-glass window in which incoming light passes through translucent pieces of glass set in a tracery resembling plant tendrils. The window depicts a historical tableau, with coats of arms, emblems, allegorical and real-life figures. "Looking to the past through large rose-tinted spectacles" is how those who staged the production describe it. The figures depicted in the window—Hungarian saints, nuns and the

Archduke Joseph Palatine of Hungary, himself a patron of the building—are teachers of blind children. The interior shaping of the hall, with its barrel vault, gallery and carved wainscoting and doorframes was intended to be both decorative and to aid the orientation of the visually impaired.

This production of the play is light years from any that have gone before, despite the fact that the original text is given virtually uncut and unchanged (which is not usually the case with conventional productions, to the extent that several decades ago Gyula Illyés, in his time considered the greatest living Hungarian poet, actually rewrote passages that he felt were difficult or incomprehensible). The tiered rows of seats were re-arranged in the three parts of the production; in the first two they make use of the longitudinal axis, while in the third the audience sits with their backs to the entrance, facing the sprawling stained-glass windows. The lighting is provided by both natural and artificial sources. When the characters in the play refer to a person who figures in the window (when mentioning the king, for instance, they address one of the royal images), the light falling on them also changes. This strange, almost comic-strip 'scenery' of the architectural milieu, hovering between the past of the play and the present of the performance, dominates. When Bánk says (or rather murmurs) "my Magyar homeland!" he flings open the historical stained-glass window and looks out onto the street and the office building on the far side, meanwhile letting in the din of traffic and emergency-services sirens.

This is all in tune with a postmodern aesthetic. To top it all, the most provocative element of the performance are three specially made, life-size models of standing or recumbent Hungarian Grey cattle that are on the stage throughout. These become important, discharging a variety of functions. Thus, there are points where they can be said to 'act', insofar as they can be moved around; the actors speak to them and even (by crouching behind them) speak 'from inside' them; they serve as thrones on which the Queen sits; a Hungarian aristocrat demonstrates his mettle by attacking and riding on one of them. They can also be used to kill if they 'gore' the victim with their horns, while the removed head of one of the animals stands in for the murdered Queen's corpse—a symbolic totem figure. Clearly, we are dealing here with a symbol of Hungarianness, a romantic iconographic representation of the *puszta* that is cultivated by the tourist industry to this day. It is intended to be derisive and self-ironic, especially if one bears in mind the typical traits of Hungarian Greys: long-lived, undemanding yoked animals. The 'specimens' taking part in this production are particularly placid, patient and hard to shift—all attributes cited in Katona's play as typifying the Hungarian national character.

Sándor Zsótér, one of the best-known and most controversial of our current directors, staged this production. It is likely that much of the stage business, character sketches and allusions will only make sense to a Hungarian audience, and even then one must question whether that audience will be prepared to accept, or even engage in constructive debate with this singular theatrical offering. The portents are not encouraging. The sentiments and emotions that are currently invested in theatre are rather artificial: the debate is not so much about performances as about administrative, political and financial issues. With economic constraints and cutbacks the rule in Hungary, substantial subsidies are being withdrawn from cultural institutions in general and political affiliations are taking the place of competence as the criterion when making appointments to leading positions in theatre management. Many are hoping to

find relative security in an even greater commercialisation of the theatre. On the other hand, in order to keep the composer's name alive, within the frame of last year's Mozart celebrations an appeal was launched for private funding for a day-long performance of Balázs Kovalik's brilliant staging of the three operas that Mozart wrote to librettos by Da Ponte, in a mini-marathon that ran from morning till late at night. Despite that precedent, it has proved possible to repeat that undoubtedly intriguing trilogy on only one occasion this year, because it came into being outside the customary institutional structures, with the support of the Budapest Spring Festival. There is no cover for this sort of initiative. Money is needed, the backing of a foundation, a new system of support that will provide a place for the 'roofless' productions often far superior to those safe on the (covered) inside track. ❧

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Erzsébet Bori

Otherworlds

János Szász: *Opium*
Zoltán Kamondi: *Dolina*

At this year's Hungarian Film Week, János Szász and Zoltán Kamondi premiered their much anticipated films. Neither disappointed: both *Opium* and *Dolina* are crowning achievements for both directors. Crowning in the sense of marking the end of a road: the cinematic styles they bring to perfection in the two films cannot be taken any further. (It is noteworthy that Attila Janisch, another director of their generation, reached a similar point some years ago with *After the Day Before:* see *HQ* 176.) Both *Dolina* and *Opium* are costume pieces, though not merely, in the sense of being historical. Even for Szász, more important than his evocation of the past is the depiction of a very different reality from the here and now. Indeed, what is common in both films is that they both depict a world artificially created by their directors. It is in this, above all, that I find the impeccable achievement, and it is in this I look for reasons for my feeling that something is lacking, as if these two perfect, self-contained worlds had somehow made captives of their creators.

Following his 1997 The *Witman Boys,* János Szász again turned to the writer Géza Csáth for inspiration. Csáth (the pen name of József Brenner) was a child of the declining years of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, born in 1887 to a middle-class family living in Szabadka (Subotica, Serbia). He was something of a *wunderkind;* his music-loving father intended him to be a solo violinist, while Csáth himself had more of a penchant for painting. Yet his earliest successes were as a writer; he was published while still attending *gimnázium.* His musical talent alone might have provided him a career as a performing artist, composer or music critic, his literary skills as a novelist, playwright or journalist. After applying unsuccessfully to the Academy of Music in Budapest, he made the surprising decision to switch to medicine, and soon attracted professional attention with his study in neurology, *Az elmebetegségek psychikus mechanizmusa* (The Psychic Mechanism in Mental Disorders, 1911). Republished more recently under the title *Diary of a Madwoman,* Csáth was groundbreaking at the time in his marrying conventional treatments for mental illness with the still new and controversial Freudian psychoanalytic approach. But the great promise of Csáth the psychiatrist, the writer, the music critic was not borne out in the end. The 26-year-old Csáth confided to his diary:

Erzsébet Bori
is the regular film critic of this journal.

> World literary success is something I still see before me, a leisurely and splendidly remunerative medical post, in a fine, terraced hotel, white tennis shoes, a good cigar, a refined bedroom, an amazingly elegant consulting room, books, a refined, none too industrious yet always progressive literary activity, music, a first opera or pantomime with full orchestral score by the age of 35, Munich, Paris, travel, German premières for my plays, later on children, 1 or 2—all that is the happiness that at this instant, when I am mildly nauseous as a result of today's big dose, are unattainable, seem never to be likely to come true.

Csáth did not live to see 35 years. In 1919, having been opium-dependent for ten years, broken in both mind and body, he killed his wife and then himself. He left behind a novel that he wrote collectively with a group of friends, a volume of superb short stories, a slim selection of which was published in 1980 under the title *The Magician's Garden and Other Stories*—in the UK under the title *Opium and Other Stories* (Penguin)—as part of the series Writers from the Other Europe under the general editorship of Philip Roth. There were also a number of very perceptive reviews that anticipated new trends, and a handful of completed works for the stage including the puppet play *Hamvazószerda* (Ash Wednesday, 1911). His re-discovery in Hungary dates to the 1970s, when the hitherto heavily politicised literary canon was undergoing substantial revision.

The main protagonist of the film, drawn on *Diary of a Madwoman,* on some of the short stories (especially *Opium*) and on more private writings such as Csáth's own Diary (also available in English translation) is called József Brenner. That is almost as contentious as attaching the events to the year 1912, for although the published *Diary of a Madwoman* does indeed begin in 1912, Brenner/Csáth actually started the work in Professor Moravcsik's clinic that yielded the 'case notes' in 1910. The screenplay is therefore fairly loose with the facts and chronology of the real-life József Brenner (as with his patient, known as G.A.), but that freedom is utilised to establish a marvellous premise. The successful protagonist, who not so long before had shown such great promise, has for quite some time suffered from writer's block, medicine no longer enthuses him, and all this is bound up with a drug habit that is now full-scale addiction. Unable to write fiction, he starts to keep a diary, which progresses into a moving document of his cracking-up.

The other main character is 20-year-old Gizella, who at this point has not set foot outside the mental hospital for ten years. According to Brenner's diagnosis, her case is only of moderate severity, but the effects of hospitalisation have been aggravated by the drastic therapy to which she is subjected: ECT, cold-water hydrotherapy and so on. The conservative-minded director of the clinic becomes increasingly sceptical about his new colleague's psychoanalytic approach, even though it might prove fruitful in Gizella's case since the young woman has instinctively been seeking along these lines through her obsession with writing. The doctor, his creativity blocked for all his wish to write, observes this graphomania, this unstoppable flood of words, with astonishment and envy, hoping to win fresh inspiration from it. The attraction that the two leading characters have for one another, as well as their tussles, leads us to expect a love-story, but for the two pathologically self-absorbed individuals—the doctor hiding the secret of his illicit craving, the patient with her delusions of persecution—there is no salvation. The chemistry of that era keeps the doctor supplied with the means of his self-destruction, but he is unable to help Gizella.

Nor does Brenner's Faustian pact work for him: the doctor has done his deal with evil, but he receives neither creative energies nor happiness in return and thus enters a (private) hell, all for nothing.

The film's visual world seems to be trying to meet an aching need. At the time of the story the seventh art, brought into being around the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, had not yet attained a standard that allowed it to follow the dominant style of the era. The audience sees an Art Nouveau motion picture with many highly crafted details—the frightful medical instruments, realistic and contemporaneous as they may look, are actually invented objects (the work of Géza Szöllősy, who also designed Pálfi's prize-winning *Taxidermia,* which was first screened during last year's Hungarian Film Week). Szász's regular cinematographer, the much-laureled Tibor Máthé, once again pulls off wonders with his conjuring-up of scene. The film was shot in the complex of fortifications at Komárom, and there is something to marvel at any given moment, in any given frame. That presents a danger of aesthetic pleasure diverting attention away from the human drama, the astonishing battery of props standing in the way of identification on the part of the viewer. The fact that the film avoids this danger is largely due to the principal actors. Szász always did have a superb feel for selecting and directing actors, both on the stage and on the film set. Here, he has turned to Ulrich Thomsen and Kirsti Stubo, both well known from their work with the Dogma group of film-makers. They pull off the virtually impossible task of putting body and soul into their respective roles, both extraordinarily complex figures who depart so very far from reality.

With *Dolina* Zoltán Kamondi found himself in a rather similar trap. The director has been engaged in filming the Ádám Bodor novel, *Az érsek látogatása* (The Archbishop's Visit), virtually since its publication in 1999. He and Bodor worked on the screenplay, which in itself can have been no easy task given the book's highly distinctive handling of time and its multi-layered structure. What emerged however is a more or less linear plot and a decision to build this around a protagonist to prevent audiences from losing themselves hopelessly in a tangle of storylines.

The film is set in Bogdanska Dolina, situated far off the beaten track somewhere in East Europe. A river that once wound past the village broke its banks in 1920 and never returned to its previous bed; instead it began to flow in the opposite direction and the old bed started to be filled in with rubbish. Ever since, an ever-growing volume of waste has been arriving for disposal and Dolina lives permanently under a dreadful stench. The locals have grown used to it, but strangers are either felled by it on the spot or lapse into a sleep that can last for days. Not that anyone ever comes to Bogdanska Dolina. At the time of this story, however, a newcomer arrives to head the monastery that runs the village. Having failed to awake one morning, the abbot has been in a state of suspended animation. A peculiar stranger suddenly pops up who, it emerges, comes from the area: he is the son of Viktor Ventuza, once notorious for trafficking in human beings. He has come to collect his father's earthly remains. Adopted by the proprietress of the local hairdressing salon, the village's informal social centre, he now resurfaces. The residents are also awaiting a visit from the archbishop and the preparations for his grand reception are turning the whole community upside down—though which archbishop and exactly when are moot points, if only because time stands still in Bogdanska Dolina.

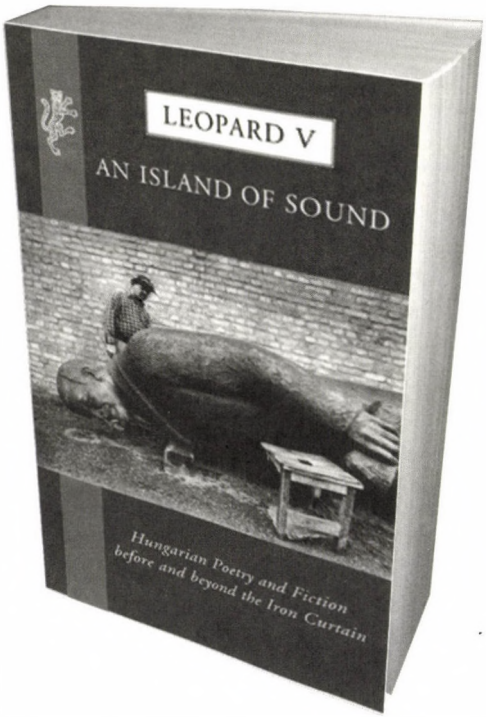
Gabriel Ventuza is an apt choice to play the central character since, as someone

from the outside, he no more understands the rules of this almost hermetically sealed-off world than the audience, and yet as a native he has roots and memories that tie him to the place, which perhaps explains the astonishing ease with which he fits in.

Bogdanska Dolina is an offshoot of the same Bodor mythology as the earlier short novel *Sinistra körzet* (Sinistra District, 1992) and the short story *A részleg* (published as "The Outpost" in *HQ* 101), which Péter Gothár filmed as *The Section* in 1994. Himself Transylvanian, a native of Kolozsvár (Cluj, Romania), Bodor had a taste of the country's prisons while still a schoolboy, then completed his education at a Calvinist theological college (see *HQ* 165-167 for excerpts from his autobiographical interview, *The Smell of Prison*). After several further hard years in Romania, he moved to Hungary in the Eighties, since when he has become a confirmed traveller, writing beautifully tailored 'travel reports' about a transfigured yet somehow familiar world. It is this mythology that the film endeavours to portray cinematically and does so triumphantly. On the down side, though, Kamondi seems to have become so absorbed in evoking the material and visual aspects of this world that the need to endow it with meaning is overlooked. For the fact is that there is a passage from our world into Bodor's self-enclosed universes: his strange figures are to be found living among us; indeed, they stare back at us every time from our mirrors, and the forces that direct their fates also operate here. Nearly three hundred years ago, Dean Swift took irreverent advantage of the blank spots on maps of the world to place the countries into which Lemuel Gulliver was cast. In a similar way, *The Archbishop's Visit* and Bodor's other writings adumbrate blank spots on the virtual map of latter-day Europe. Bogdanska Dolina represents at least as great a cultural shock to anyone who arrives from the cultivated West as the Lilliputians or the Yahoos provided for Gulliver.

The proposition that Bogdanska Dolina may be located somewhere on today's maps is suggested by a range of devices that have the feel of witty anachronisms, like an incoming car, Ventuza's calculator, the ring of a telephone in the monastery, or the TV sets (the screen shows a grainy black-and-white picture, not that this matters: the reason nobody watches it is that it offers not even a nodding acknowledgement of their actual life). Other more indirect aspects further reinforce the idea that Dolina is not merely a figment of the imagination: the almost transcendental nature of the local powers that be, divorced from any apparatus of political institutions and legitimation, alludes to the constitutionally nebulous concept of rule by a party-state—neither legislative nor executive, not ecclesiastical but not secular either (and ideologically neutral)—like some of the bizarre phantasms of cadre politics (a colonel appointed as archimandrite), the baffling titles and ranks, leaders in suspended animation (cf. embalmed and battery-operated), the mineworkers' militia—and against that the ordinary individual's total defencelessness and the warped forms of behaviour that this defencelessness induces. The great Romanian director Lucian Pintilie portrays a near spitting image of this world, albeit in much more concrete form, in his own wilder, earthier films. The heroine of *The Oak Tree* (1992) returns, Ventuza-style, to her absurd native land, whereas the English aristocratic lady of *Un été inoubliable* (1994), starring Kristin Scott Thomas, could at best only have been armoured by a Hungarian ancestor for what awaits her at the edge of Europe. ❧

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



AN ISLAND OF SOUND

Hungarian Poetry and Fiction before and beyond the Iron Curtain

Edited by George Szirtes & Miklós Vajda

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The night is silent and deep, it is only the roar of the occasional lion that wakes me around midnight. Elsewhere I am woken by the hooting of car horns or the clatter of trams. Nothing surprises me in London.

"Can you hear the lions?" I ask half asleep. My travelling companion is astonished. That sound is unmistakably the bitter, proud roaring of a lion at night. "What sort of lion?" she asks, as she has never been to London before. I am very sleepy. "The British lion," I answer and fall asleep.

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