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Kriszta Bódis

Artiste

(Extracts)

TAPE: Johnny Boy

When you're small, the bad thing is that the bigger ones fool around with you all the time.

When you wind up here as a teenager, you already dig what's going down. While you're still little, you can't, not as much.

True, here in the Transitional Behavioral Center, the preschool kids are in the other wing. So this here is the can us older ones are in. Dudes, chicks. If someone wants to be left alone 'cos they're not strong enough and some droid gets to messing around with them, they go over to the little kids. It does no good going to some bozo attendant, they don't do a thing. And if you stir up shit all the time, you get sucked right in, you do.

They brought me in on account of my teachers. I was fourteen, I wasn't showing my face at school, I was bumming around, stuff like that. And that meant my folks weren't fit to be raising me.

They brought me in. Well, that was sweet. If I go and tell someone about it, they straight away need an ambulance. And that locked up feeling. Like being at a picnic, except the grill's in the window. The hair stood up on the back of my neck, I swear. That's the least of it Johnny Boy, I tell myself, you're caught, like Bugs Bunny in a snare.

They tried breaking me. You know, the way I figured, there's some folks you can talk to and others it's not worth even trying to. Here an opinion's like an asshole, everyone's got one, but no one's interested in anyone else's.

The dudes and chicks stay apart. I mean we don't mix much. Some chicks are cool, not like the others... But it's not like we go out of the way to talk much.

Kriszta Bódis

is a novelist, poet and maker of documentary films. Her second novel, Artista, *from which the first four chapters are extracted here, was published in 2006.*

You know, Judit, there's rules. Miz Mary Jane, for example, or snow. Just who gets their hands on grass or blow, how they do it, and how they slip it in here, we don't talk about that. Not even with each other. With no one. Dope, it's no issue. Let's just say you'll get wind first of how Laci is humping Rozi like the hot bike she is... Not like we go making a big deal about that, either, but it comes up sooner than dope, that's for sure. Dope, it's no issue.

Or that you're a Roma? No issue, not here. No one gives a hoot if you're a soot-faced Gypsy or a Magyar. Skin color doesn't count, not here. Either they can talk to you, or they can't. That's what matters. It don't matter if you're a Roma chav or a hick or a Magyar, no one here's interested, and I mean no one. Sure, there are some retards—it's like they're walking around brain-dead—they say something to your face, but if you got a brain, what sense is it even giving the time of day to someone without one?

The difference is that the Roma are the hard men, the Magyars not as much. Maybe that's the only difference. But it's no rule. One of my pals, he's a Magyar, but when he talks, they listen, so anyway, here it's no matter that your old lady is Magyar and your old man is Roma or both. No one here gives a shit about that.

So I figure it's better here than in some other homes. But this is a Transitional Behavioral Center. You can tell by the name it's an institution, but it's temporary. Yeah, I really was in trouble at the beginning here, like Adam wondering what he's supposed to do on Mother's Day, when they banged me in, but it seems you're put in the Transitional when they haven't yet decided where to dump you, and you keep winding up back here until you reach a certain age. Yep, this is like some uncool centre for passing the parcel. Once you're such-and-such years old, then you go somewhere else. If there's room in some place halfway across the country, then it's there, or twice as far, and if some piss-poor foster parents apply, then they get you. You follow me?

Sure, I could go for staying here, but that's just about impossible. Once they decide where you're going, you're gone.

What goes on upstairs, let's just keep that between ourselves... Miss... Judit? ... All right, Judit. Anyway, what's up there on the very top floor, now that would be a chance. And then there's the director's crew... That's different. Makes me green as puke, them being able to stay. It's like they're the teacher's pets. But on account of my bad grades and dope, I have no chance. Like a one-legged cripple in an ass-kicking competition. Gelencsér, he's the director here, he even told me it's not the dope, no, he won't go getting on my case about stuff like that, he's a pal. Sometimes he says to me:

"So who's the fuckin man, Johnny Boy?" Just like that.

I say to him:

"You're the fuckin man, boss."

Now you go laughing 'cos I'm such a funny dude, but you're the sort of lady who digs that a little, huh? Anyway, Gelencsér then says to me:

"Put your hand on your heart, Johnny Boy."

Well, I know how to talk the talk. But it doesn't do any good, me yapping away, 'cos I'm in a fix. Giving the spiel will get me out of this and that, but it's no rule. So it's for sure I'll get sent packing somewhere else. The ones with good grades are the ones who get to stay. They've got opportunities in life: school, integration. If they get tossed around from one institution to the next like here, then it's harder, to study, everything else.

When I skip outta here for good, when I'm legal age, I can move right into a homeliness shelter... *Got no one, just got the street, metro pulling in under your feet, all day you slaving just to get raving, then you come down, done by a dealing clown 'just a line free' so let's all party so let's all party life's fucking me—you too, you'll see, but still got the street, still got a no-no from all the folks you do know.*

That's my new number... We got this band, you know. Sure, nowadays they're all for us performing. Ever since what happened to Pinkler, they have these programs for us, filmmaking and that, but it's not all that kosher, you know, so don't go lapping it up.

Anyway, since you started sniffing around here and then skipped off, I got taken off one time to reform school in the sticks. There was this dumbass disco fashion king there who carried a cell phone everywhere he went and wore these fancy clothes, he was an attendant, and there were a few bigger ones, too, and it wasn't just once they beat up the guys there. Me, not so much, 'cos I'm a hard dude. So laid back I'm not coming back. Those shitheads were always beating up on the little kids. They kicked ass good, even someone coming to lift you up qualified for disability money. Wet towels, boots, you name it. Rape. But it came out. True, those scum-suckers never get caught, but one kid got taken to hospital, a bit late, true, and then it came out. There was a big stink about it, not that it did that sucker any good, no, 'cos the kid got kicked up good at the breaking-in ceremony. Better I don't go telling you about that just now, I don't feel like puking all over myself. Then he didn't get to a doctor on time, and his wounds got all full of puss, he looked as pretty as a dead horse's ass, and then we heard that they had to cut off one of his legs and then the other, and, uh, his thingamajig, there sure was a big stink about it.

It was only guys in that can. You can't even imagine. We were really locked up in there. Like in a prison. You couldn't go out, and they took away your pocket change if they wanted, they said your grades had dropped. You had no bread, you didn't have your own stuff, not even one pair of pants. Once a week they gave out clean clothes. We were raggedy-ass, dying of hunger, the bones were just about stuck through my skin. Well, I really spazzed out there. I got into a little mess. Then I pulled out of there. In the end they brought me back here again, to the Transitional, so they can go throw me somewhere else.

Even back then, the old meat wagon would come by in the morning. You figure it out at the last second. Before the sun's even up. When the fog is still so thick that the pigs are sitting on the traffic lamp and calling out the colors.

Sure, even here in the Transitional it's like in the other places, you don't go leaving your stuff in your closet. What little you manage to scrounge up. They'll pinch it, they will. You keep your best stuff on you, and that's that.

Okay, there's programs for us here, now they're giving it a try. But like I say, it's still way too little.

Pinkler screwed that up for them. Then came the cops, which you can imagine, 'cos by then the TV folks and everyone else was buzzing about here. They were all over Gelencsér, the Director.

So you... Judit? I can call you Judit? They'd just brought Pinkler back. She must've been out for three months. Or not that long? Then two on the run for sure, nonstop. That's when you did that whatchamacallit... the interrogation for some organization? Investigation... for that scummy agency, yeah. You were the one who gave Pinkler the spiel for the last time, and then you didn't come back again, even though what happened to Pinkler after that could have used some investigating. You were coming here before Pinkler's big stink for maybe six months, or was it more? Something was up, huh? About how bad it is for the inmates... About how they don't have their rights... Blablabla... 'cos what you cared about was our rights... Well, Pinkler had no interest in her rights. You noticed, you did... You know, Pinkler is exactly the same as me. You gave me the third degree, too. Remember? I even told you about Kati... And now you're telling me you got it in you to come back here after a year? To check if anything changed about our situation? Yeah, for sure, that's why they sent you back, huh?... But I think the reason you came back and not someone else is 'cos you didn't look into Pinkler! Fact! You were the last person Pinkler spoke to... And all the time since, your conscience won't leave you alone. You're caught up in this like a hedgehog in chewing gum. And anyway, no one knows even now what happened. Not even the cops. They're not interested. Case closed. I figure you must be real busy, too. And then there's your family... You saw Pinkler in the papers and on TV, you saw how she looked? It was everywhere... Okay, I don't want to... You, of all people? I can tell I hurt your feelings, so forget it... My mama taught me you got to give everybody respect. I'll give it to you, too. No, I'm in no mood to act like some prick.

The bad thing is, I got a real good memory even though it's been a year since the whole thing happened. You said to me then,

"Johnny Boy, you are a talented young man..." Just like that.

I even got to thinking about that, about why you said it. 'Cos of what I say? But then you didn't ask me to come shoot the breeze no more.

Everybody stood in line to see you, just waiting to give you the spiel. They could hardly think up what to tell you. Did you know?

Now you're telling me you knew? Brilliant... Or you just giving me bull?

No, I don't think that maybe you didn't know 'cos you're a broad, no, that would be a dumb thing to think, that's not what I was saying... You're on the ball. If you knew, you knew.

Okay, let's go back. Pinkler had been out for a month when she got herself brought back in by Tomkruz. You know who I mean, huh? He's a cop, but that don't matter, 'cos he's decent—not the sort of chav who kicks ass just like that, you know. Anyway, he brought Pinkler back to the Transitional.

Pinkler? Where was she all that time? Why are you pretending you didn't ask already?!

Hell, I was just about freaking out when you did that.

Where was she? With Jocó and them, plus with some Romas, I figure, but that's another story, and I bet she was looking for her mama. But I'm just guessing, when you're the one who knows... You were the last one she saw. I bet she spoke about her mama... So now I'll tell you something heavy. Pinkler and I, we were cruising, I don't know where anymore, and I don't know when, it's all the same, it was sometime or other... Both of us made a run, and then the two of us bummed around with her pops and his pals, and we hung out over at that guy Arsenic and them, but like I was saying, it doesn't matter, so we're cruising down some hill in my big bro's bitch, and I'm giving it as much gas as she'll take... I stop at the pumperoonee, and I say to Pinkler, "Time for me to put a thousand's worth in her at least..."

It's not like I use wheels that much, only when I have to. Other fuckers beep when they see me.

Anyway, we get out, and here comes this big spavined dude in a leather jacket, hair all long and he's belting along just like he's alone, as if the broad he's dragging beside him wasn't clinging to his arm, She's limping, but this beanpole isn't bothering about her, no wonder, 'cos the broad is as pretty as a car wreck. Well that's bull,'cos I could tell she'd be a fine little lady overall. Would be, could be. All of a sudden I notice I'm standing there all alone, 'cos it's like Pinkler jumps right over there to them. She grabs the birdie's hand. You got that? At first the beanpole doesn't want to stop, but then he does. But I notice that she's not even looking at Pinkler, as if that hand Pinkler is latched onto isn't hers, no, this ugly old chuck is just squinting to the side out from under the eyeshade on her head, not so much at Pinkler as at her hand up in the air.

Yep, I say to myself, this beanpole is Kálmán, Pinkler's foster father—'cos he was standing like Kálmán, from what I could figure. You know, Kálmán got dished out more than his share of aggression back in his mommy's belly. He's dumb, really strong, gotta watch it with him. Anyway, in no time he starts waving his hands around and he's telling Pinkler she'd do well to get lost, or else he'll call the cops. So Pinkler gives the broad's hand a kiss, and then she waves at Kálmán and skips outta there, and I'm just left standing there.

"Hey there, candy-ass," I say to Kálmán, "a carved-out pumpkin's got more brains than you."

So he snaps out,

"You want a fist in your face or you want to fight for it?"

That's how Kálmán is... But the broad with the hand? Pinkler's mama! Who I knew from before, from Tompa Street. She was one cool broad, I'm telling you. You wouldn't believe it. Back then she sometimes took Pinkler out of the institution, even though she went to slave away at five in the morning on the street corner. Then this hick Kálmán ends up there. It's like there's no one at home up there. "Why you crying, little girl?" "I swallowed a thumb-tack." "Here's another." That's all Kálmán knows about raising a kid.

You know, Pinkler was just waiting for her mama to take her out of that institution once and for all. Well, she sure had some waiting to do.

That last time, too, Pinkler must have been out for three months when Tomkruz fetched her back. But this Tomkruz, I swear... you never saw a cop like this. Looks just like the actor dude. The way he gels his hair, I mean, the way he moves... The chicks really go for him, you can imagine. He liked Pinkler too, I guess. Yep, he had to. Pinkler always looked him up if she wanted to be fetched back to the institution, if she didn't have anywhere to sack out and her belly was giving her hell. If she was hungry, I mean. Of course she didn't want to end up with some starter cop, 'cos they had a warrant out for her. So Pinkler always stopped by at Tomkruz's place, and he brought her back to the institution. She even knew his cell phone number.

Nah, I don't think he, how d'ya say it, abused his situation, nope, not Tomkruz, but don't mind me, a little sex isn't the end of the world, no one's ever died from it. And Pinkler definitely wasn't the sort who'd make a big deal out of it.

You know, my mama told me they taught her to swim by taking her out to the middle of a lake and throwing her in. I said to her,

"Mama, it's not swimming they wanted to teach you."

My big brother says,

"Careful, take it easy, 'cos if a shark eats from your hand, fuckit, it'll eat from your legs too."

You ought to know my family... Forget it.

So you only got the details from the papers? About what happened to Pinkler at that utility pole and afterward? Then you don't know a thing. But if you want to find out anything now, a year later... That's the same as not knowing nothing.

One thing's for sure: Pinkler ran away straight back to that other place, in Sodrás Street. The home for girls. Even though by then they'd decided she had to stay here in the Transitional, that Sodrás Street wouldn't take her back, she could go right on to the Correctional from there. Anyway, she goes and runs back to the girls' home, but no one knows why she and Mariann then went out to the utility poles, if they sniffed themselves up or what, 'cos that's what the sissy attendants and everyone else are trying to sell. But I figure, just between ourselves, maybe she really did just go and climb that fucking pole... You follow?

Well, personally speaking, things haven't got better for me since then.

Sure, there's re-lax-a-tion, that's good, that really was something as far as

I'm concerned. These new programs. Okay, maybe we can thank your investigation a little, but to be honest, we had stuff like this before, too, yeah, Uncle Dénes held those, uh... wait a sec... yeah, self-awareness groups or whatever, well, that really did the trick for me, Uncle Dénes is cool, but it's not like I want to take away your sense of achievement, 'cos maybe I seem mean, but that's not really me at all.

Relaxation is like, how to put it... Like you're free. You shut your eyes and everything is so calm... Dope, that's different. That winds you up.

So what do I think Pinkler was like? Pinkler was like, well, let's just say she came back when her belly was giving her hell. She fueled up, got clean clothes, then she skipped. She was always on a run. I mean, there wasn't any place where the attendants knew how to start, they just got used to it. A closed door and bars didn't mean a thing to her. Even at the Sodrás she climbed that high wall, no problem. That's no lie. They couldn't lock her in. And when she was here with us in the Transitional, she got Gelencsér all wound up by bringing in dope and being a bad influence on the others. She gave the attendants the freaks. Let her stay out there, on a run, I bet that's what they were thinking to themselves.

Yep, my daughter was born. Well, this topic is pretty... rotten, seeing how not even then did I feel... Like I told myself, even I'm still a kid. But the chick, my gal, Kati, said she'd keep the kid and could raise her.

My mama can go on saying Johnny this, Johnny that all she wants, 'cos she's happy about it, now don't go thinking she isn't! It's a pretty little fix. But I didn't say a thing. I don't have a say in this.

"You'll have the kid," I said to Kati, "and I'll buy a double stroller and tell the kid it had a twin that didn't do like it was told."

Kati just doesn't get jokes, either.... I don't see her much, 'cos you're locked up in here. Anyway, I've had it up to here, and like I was telling you, 'specially with these grills they got in the windows here.

Kati isn't doing so well, I think, but it's like nowadays I fall asleep so fast that I got to wake up to take a rest.

Good thing Kati's got her mama and family, 'cos if Kati goes slip-sliding all over, so much for the kid. 'Course she always was borderline, yep, even when I got to know her I told her more than once, what you all wound up for, gal? You didn't take the pills for your brain?

You should go ask her instead how she could have fallen for a twelve-year-old guy when she was eighteen. Yep, that's how old I was when we hooked up, we were nuts about each other. Five years! 'cos in spite of everything, Kati and me, there's no separating us to this day, but why that is, don't go asking me, 'cos I don't even get it myself. One time I asked her how she could have fallen for me. She said she doesn't know either.

About what happened to Pinkler... I was just past sixteen, Pinkler was past thirteen, Kati was twenty. One look at us three and you'd think we're a family. With one little difference: everyone in our family did what they wanted. No one got on our case, 'cos if they did, we'd skip out on them if we wanted. That one week when we didn't know a thing about Pinkler's condition, what's going on and what happened at the utility pole, well, that flipped us out, all of us. We got blitzed every day, like we were brain-dead or something.

Uncle Dénes. He's the only one who even mentions her these days.

Not even that douche bag Mariann, her best friend, who was there with her at the pole... I mean, just look at her, all worked up about Uncle Dénes, saying "he's such a zero that not even an automatic door will open for him." Well, calling that slut Mariann a zero is nothing, nothing at all.

And you, what do you want with this interrogation a year later? What's it you're checking into?

Like I was saying, what changes there are around here are thanks only to Gelencsér and Uncle Dénes. And, that's why I have a good word for them.

The hell with our rights.

Here in the Transitional we're making this film. Worth checking out, 'I'm in it. Singing. My own tune. Own lyrics.

In it they asked everyone this question, what they want for Christmas. No one wanted nothing. Tape player, stuff like that? All anyone wanted was to go home to their family. They cried. I cried, too. I wasn't bothered that the camera was rolling. Well, that's us. We all just want to go home.

Morning

She jumped. Without even looking around she headed off right along the brick wall. It had morning glory twining all over and yellow flowers jutting out from the mortar holding together the unplastered bricks. As soon as she turned the corner, she ran straight in to a man's chest.

"Fucking hell," she snarled, but without even raising her head, she stepped back to break into a run. But the man grabbed her wrist and slapped on a handcuff.

"Fucking hell! Uncle Dénes?"

"Pinkler, that's a rich vocabulary you have," said Uncle Dénes, with no surprise in his voice, rapped out a laugh and locked the other handcuff on his own wrist.

It wasn't often that anyone walked the almost endless and dead straight sidewalk along the wall of the Transitional Behavioral Center. A tram was just rattling down the tracks on the road, but had no reason to stop.

Uncle Dénes stood there without a word and produced a cigarette. Pinkler was certain he'd been waiting for her.

"You enjoying this?" she asked, lifting her handcuffed wrist.

Uncle Dénes gave a sly smile. Pinkler shrugged her shoulders.

"I know you, Pinkler," he said, touching his index finger to the underside of her

chin. "Better than you know yourself." Reluctantly Pinkler looked up into his eyes.

Uncle Dénes, Pinkler's attendant at the Sodrás Street Girls' Home, had brought her back the day before to the Transitional. Pinkler was supposed to wait there for word on whether they would take her back in Sodrás Street or send her to a delinquent center. Once she arrived, she was taken straight to the infirmary and went through the routine medical check-up she knew so well. Never before had Pinkler hoped so much that her mother would show up for once, take her away, and end this nightmare, all at once. But her mother didn't show up. On running into Uncle Dénes's arms she didn't suspect that this was to be her final escape. All she could focus on was finding her mother. Then she thought of freedom. She thought of no one and nothing else. Although a moment later Uncle Dénes had her in his grip, they did not head back toward the entrance of the Transitional Behavioral Center.

Just then, Gelencsér, the center's Director, was getting out of his car at the corner of a side street a few steps away from them. He looked at them and hesitated. Uncle Dénes was first to get in a greeting that Gelencsér returned with some uncertainty and then hurried toward the entrance.

Uncle Dénes and Pinkler exchanged a grin.

It was a sunny morning, the strips of glass visible between the window bars of the Transitional Behavioral Center shone a dull gold.

Gelencsér reached the top of the stairs. He stepped into his office, he felt the smell of espresso hitting his sinuses, and all at once exhaustion overcame him. All night he'd been sitting in front of his computer, arranging and printing new pictures he'd taken of his students.

The sun scorched the children's photos on the walls of his office into a blinding metallic surface, and by the time Gelencsér realized that he'd seen Dénes with Pinkler, it was too late.

Having survived her brief encounter with Gelencsér without consequence, Pinkler's mood improved. Not that Uncle Dénes said a thing as they walked along on a seemingly endless sidewalk. But after only a few steps, all at once they stopped beside a flashy car.

"Hey, don't just stand there with your mouth open," grinned Uncle Dénes. "It's the soul, it's what's inside that counts."

Kati was sitting inside the car. With a swollen face she stared before her, and then made as if she'd never met Pinkler before.

TAPE: Pinkler

Sure, I knew Uncle Dénes had a car. It's not like he kept it a secret, but he just doesn't look the type. He went partners with this guy in the catering business. Not that Uncle Dénes forgets who he is. No, he'll always have the soul of an artist. Dresses that way, too. It doesn't matter he struck it rich, he kept working at the girls' home. He could have left, like that, but he wouldn't leave us high and dry. Not him.

And it's not just any car he's got. It's a Porsche. At least I think so.

It's been at least a few weeks since he caught me there outside the Transitional. He said:

"Don't try anything dumb, Pinkler."

Then we got in his car. And there was Kati, too. That took me for a loop. When we got in, Uncle Dénes only took the cuff off his own wrist, I figured that if I got the chance, I'd slip away and have my very own set of handcuffs.

"I don't even care if my mama locks me out," Kati grumbled to Uncle Dénes as we got in, because even now she was caught up in her own problems. She was dressed really nice, miniskirt, high-heeled shoes, chains. When I got in the car, Uncle Dénes introduced her to me, because he didn't know that Kati and I were like sisters. But we didn't stick that under his nose. He told Kati that we just about ran right into Gelencsér's arms. But Kati wasn't paying attention. Uncle Dénes pressed something into her hand, I didn't see what, maybe money, and Kati calmed down a bit. Kati has it good, getting rides from Uncle Dénes too, if she's in trouble... Because Kati's got her regular man to drive her around. She gave Johnny Boy this spiel about how that guy, whoever he is, is her dad's best friend, how he's like a relative. Of course she admitted to me later that he's no relative, that she just hooked up with him one time. An older dude. He's got a bar or something. She can always count on him. Her guardian angel. All she's got to do is call him up, and then this guy takes her everywhere, gives her lifts here and there. Takes care of her. She just calls him, and that's that. Along the way, Kati pockets a bit of spending money, a few cigarettes, a little booze, this and that. And that dude buys her anything she wants. She can talk over everything with him, and he gives her good advice. In return for a little compensation... Kati hates him when that happens, yeah, she's all grossed out by him and by herself too, but the only way she can get her hands on money is by doing everything he asks for. For money. Not that you can understand. I mean, this doesn't mean a thing to me. If you've been into so much, anyway, you don't care no more. All you can think of is you're hungry. Or that you need cigs. Nothing else counts for shit.

Sure, maybe it was different for Kati. Maybe it got to her more, because she thought about it. I mean, she told me, and then of course begged me to keep it our secret. I got a few... not secrets, really... stuff I couldn't give a shit about... Anyway, what she told me, I put that there, too. Kati gave me all sorts of things. I didn't even have to ask; all I had to do was listen to her. She even cried, asking me to get it through my head that her guardian angel always pulls her out of trouble when she turns to him, and that's why she feels like she owes him. And that's how her guardian angel feels too, seeing as he helped so much, with money or whatever, when it was needed. But nowdays it's not just Kati's body on his mind. The last few weeks, when I ended up sacking out with Kati and that guy Arsenic and them, she told me her guardian angel was acting funny. He was giving her more and more, and wanting—demanding—more and more of

Kati's time. He badmouthed every friend of hers she told him about, and sometimes he locked her in the car, and that's not all. He went dead nuts over Kati. We were worried he'd break down the door on us and go ape shit, and then Johnny Boy would find out. Well, then either Johnny Boy would send Kati packing, or else her guardian angel would bump her off. But the guy wasn't completely cracked, no, he just got a kick out of giving Kati the creeps. He was grilling her all the time and pawing away at her. She told me he'd go grubbing into her sex life especially:

"What did you and your pals do?"

He meant with us, where we were staying, with Arsenic and them. And with Johnny.

"Nothing. We just hit the booze and party."

"And of course you are all screwing away."

"Like I told you, I didn't make it with him!"

"You can lie all you want!"

It went on like this, because after a while Kati told her guardian angel everything about us, she let him in on everything, and it's not like she could have done anything else, because the guy just didn't let up on her. Some guardian angel!

"You'd be better off looking somewhere else for Mr. Right," the guy would shout at her.

I didn't tell Kati what to do, though. No, I just listened. She could tell me what she wanted, and what she didn't want to tell me, well, she didn't. I don't even know the guardian angel's name, never saw him. When he rang the doorbell, Kati went running. Sometimes he dragged her down for a quickie just out of jealousy.

"That's not the bunch for you... and that little shit..." he'd say, meaning Johnny Boy. "Hell, girl... he's a Roma."

But already the guy would be pulling down Kati's panties and then he'd get to banging away.... That's how he is. It did no good, Kati reminding him that he agreed not to butt into her life, by then the rat got out the booze and had her drink up, and soon the mood mellowed. And Kati would say:

"Thanks for the lift. And I'm going to thank you."

And he:

"You'd better."

So that's what their kind is like. I never could stand that bastard, Kati's secret guardian angel... Disgusting. True, I never did see him.

If you don't want me to I won't talk about Kati. But it's like, she was sitting there in Uncle Dénes's car.

Uncle Dénes, he's something else, he's really cool. The best I ever met. Everyone knows and loves him. But all I could fix on just then as I sat there in that classy car of his was, when could I slip away?

"I've been asked to play the lead in an art film," Uncle Dénes told Kati with a look of satisfaction.

The car snaked its way forward through the jam. Uncle Dénes drove impatiently, cutting out of the lane and then forcing his way back in. The sunlight bounced erratically off the windshields of the cars they passed, reddish spears under Pinkler's closed eyelids. Whenever she opened her eyes, there was always someone watching from the car beside: a sad-looking pony-tailed girl, a schoolboy, the unworried face of a baby. As the sun penetrated the gaps between the buildings lining the road, a peculiar web of images and sounds took shape in each dismembered molten space, the crude assault of colors still had a lulling effect.

"The role fits me to a tee," explained Uncle Dénes, "like it was made for me. I practically don't have to act, but just be myself." His glance shot back from the rear-view mirror into his words. His hand fluttered from the gearshift onto Kati's knee.

"It's a modern Don Quixote story."

Uncle Dénes's words cut through the engine's drone. Pinkler leaned her head against the quivering window.

"It all seems to be coming together all at once," said Uncle Dénes, suddenly pressing the gas and shouting, "Stop puttering around, cocksucker!"

With the stopping and starting, the street, the snippets of words from Uncle Dénes, Kati's over-eager expression, the repeated cycle of acceleration and braking morphed into a chain of tired disjointed signs, a broken string of pearls scattered about the car's leather seats and floor carpeting.

"The business is taking off, better still, my career as a creative artist is taking off too."

Uncle Dénes's smile swam toward Kati and Pinkler from out of the rear-view mirror, the windshield, the windows.

"Hajni is a dumb slut, and that's that. She's got it coming to her," growled Mariann.

"Cut it out, you're all jealous," said Pinkler, waking up.

In the bedroom at the Sodrás Street Home for Girls, Márti was painting her nails, and Berti, Hajni's younger sister, was drawing in a crumpled-up notebook. Hajni was sitting on the edge of her bed, lined with Teddy bears, talking with Uncle Dénes, but her words congealed instantly in the evening's smudgy silence, freezing into the stillness of the walls towering above her.

"Time to decide who your best friend is, Pinkler, for fuck's sake, and act like it," snapped Mariann. Her voice was just as clear and exaggerated, like a crazy person's, as Pinkler remembered it.

Uncle Dénes laughed, but neither his lips nor eyes quivered, the laugh wasn't his, no one heard it, it came from nowhere at all. Night was plunging clumsily

down with shades of blue that seemed to shatter the windows, leaving slivers of sun like sharp blades scattered over the floor, the windowsills, and the musty bed sheets smelling of earth.

Pinkler's eyelids drooped once again. Hajni was still snivelling away so softly that she seemed to be her own invisible, unrecognisable form: inextricably tangled cords or etchings on a diaphanous sheet of paper. Hajni's shadow was cast beside Uncle Dénes's on the linoleum, and the meaning of what Pinkler heard had nothing to do with what she thought she saw.

"Dad killed Mum. After locking the door to the clinic, Dad sat down in the kitchen. And that's when it began." Hajni's whispering voice faded and then grew strong, her words both tapping about like crutches that hold you steady and scratching about like the white ants that chew through and destroy everything in their way. "'Come here and sit in my lap, my girl,' said Dad. 'Maybe you love me, at least.' Mum didn't say a thing. She stood with her back to him and went on washing the dishes. She kept splashing more and more water so we wouldn't hear her crying. She had to be careful, because Dad didn't like clattering. It was the same that night. 'What are you crying for? Maybe I'm not good enough for the two of you? Maybe I don't bring home the money? I don't help you along in your career, do I? Do I let you correspond with your colleagues? Wouldn't I deserve a bit of love from my family? A little peace? Why don't you go in and quiet down that kid? Can't you hear she's crying?' The snow behind the garage had just about melted. Our feet sank all the way into the slush. The winter fields seemed lit up, in the ditches scrub pierced the whiteness. The baby plopped into the snow like a tiny sack, turned all red and started to sob hysterically. 'Take it, take it all from me, scram, fuckit, take off after your lover!' Dad kicked Mum before stooping right there on the threshold and whimpering away. The next morning all the neighbors invited the crazy mailman inside as he made his rounds and sat him down at their kitchen tables, everyone in every single house made him tell everything he'd seen, and then he had to sit there over and over again listening to what everyone said: 'That lady, the doctor's wife, was strange, she was, and that's not saying much. She didn't say nothing to nobody.' 'The doctor's wife, she kept her nose stuck up high. She figured her kids were eighth wonders of the world, with those brains of theirs.'"

It was as if bird feathers were fluttering against the steep walls of the bedroom.

"They were already outside in the yard, in the dark..." Hajni went on, "and all I could hear were Dad's fingers digging into Mum, and Mum rattling on in this frantic voice. 'This won't do you any good, either,' says Dad. 'You make me puke.' Then something cracked. The crazy mailman told me everything the neighbors said. He didn't believe a thing. Sure, they talked it up in the village, 'She must have had a lover. For sure. Otherwise where would she have gone all dressed up like that all the time? You never did see an apron or a dressing-gown on her, nope. Why, she washed the dishes in shorts. She was a stranger. Not from here. A foreigner.' When the mailman shouted, the neighbors came up really close. They

looked in the fridge and in the closets and tried turning the knob of the clinic door—it was locked. Then they called the ambulance and the police. They all wanted to talk at the same time: 'I swear that woman could have spelled even more trouble. She didn't feed her kids or husband right. Seeds, herbs, whatever, she mixed into their food. She was sly, she was smart. Some foreign professor. Left all that for this good doctor, it's no wonder, is it, giving up her career. If this hadn't happened, I swear, she would have done something or other with those unfortunate children. Why, the way she dragged that little baby along with her in the snow. Terrible.' 'The doctor, he deserved a better wife. He was decent from head to toe. You could go to see him any time, he never told you to go away. His wife had him licking her ass, she did. And he was like an angel with his kids. That's a lot for one man. Terrible. It wasn't right, the way they were living.' 'Why, sure. Who's normal round here these days? Madness, it's like an epidemic, like TB used to be.' 'It's no use leaving here if you don't know what to do with yourself. That's how things are. Fear, force. The menfolk are panicking, the women too. Everyone. Force is good, it sets limits. A slap on the face is nothing, you can live with that. We know all about that. That's us.'"

Hajni fell silent, and then came the sound of Uncle Dénes's even breathing.

"I don't know what we were thinking..." Hajni's voice now seemed to come from somewhere farther off.

Maybe she'd leaned her head on Uncle Dénes, and her words were smothered into his neck. "What were the others thinking? How can you live like that? Mum said, 'This is like an incurable disease. But it doesn't kill you, either. You can learn to live with it.' And, in the end, she was the one who had to do everything. Mum. Dad could complain all he wanted about doing everything, but he didn't do a thing. Mum did everything. 'I was wrong', said Mum, 'but there's nothing to be done anymore'".

"Mum's in heaven, right?" asked Berti, without opening her eyes.

"Yeah," said Pinkler, half asleep, turning.

"They're taking us for a prison visit tomorrow," Hajni went on. "And Dad's gonna say, 'I'll be out in no time, and then we'll be a real family at last. Don't you two worry, you won't have to stay in the institution for long'".

Uncle Dénes kept quiet. Hajni's voice had a peculiar ring to it, strange and shiny once again.

"I dream the same thing all the time."

"Me too," thought Pinkler, the cold plastic buttons of the light cotton-case around her pillow pressing against her face.

"My fingers curl tight around his throat. Clutching his neck like that I start pounding his head against the trunk of the apple tree. Dad doesn't even try to defend himself. The crumbly bark comes off in mossy green flakes that stick to his forehead, but before they can fall to the ground, I bang them against the tree trunk. Dad doesn't get injured, though, because the tree's too springy. Dad doesn't defend himself. Not even when I am grabbing his throat. There's just one throbbing vein, right in the middle of his neck, soft, like a sponge. I can feel my

own nails pressing against my palm. His eyes are open and his nostrils are wide, hard, pulsating. He's still breathing. His eyes are unmoving, red slits..."

Pinkler awakened from her own restless dream to the sound of sobbing. Turning on her side, she saw what seemed like a whale thrashing on Hajni's bed in the dark. The sniffling now faded away, and Pinkler's merciful sense of ambiguity saved her from comprehension and returned her to the realm of dreams.

It was only at the third time he drove through Blaha Lujza Square that Uncle Dénes finally found a parking space in a side street. While Kati stayed in the car, Uncle Dénes woke up Pinkler and pulled her off the back seat before clicking the empty cuff hanging from her hand once again around his own wrist.

"Do you really need to go and do that?" cried Pinkler, jerking away her hand. "I mean it now, it's not like this is some movie. Get that through your head."

Uncle Dénes gave a laugh and headed off without a word. They walked for twenty minutes all the way to the Oktogon. Uncle Dénes stopped at a stone bench in front of the statue of Ady.

"It's in your own interest," he said, looking meaningful at Pinkler and then the handcuffs. He then sat down. "Whenever I sit here, I can feel the poet behind me."

Pinkler shrugged, and sat down beside Uncle Dénes.

"We'll talk over what next, because it's not so simple. You want to come back to the Sodrás Street Home? Well, you have to deserve it."

Pinkler pursed her lips. Uncle Dénes's face told Pinkler he hadn't noticed.

"You won't believe it," he drawled. "All that traffic out there, all that commotion and noise—but here, inside me, it's quiet." Uncle Dénes tapped two fingers against his chest, right about where his heart was. The spiralling form of the snail pictured on his batik shirt seemed to swallow the gesture whole. The city sizzled in the sweltering heat. "I can sit here for an hour or two, just as if I'm sitting on a bench in a cemetery." Uncle Dénes looked right through the tangle of pedestrians scurrying by and the clamorous shuddering mass of stop-and-go traffic. "You know, one of your problems is that you are in serious need of suitable examples to steer by."

Pinkler didn't know what to say to this. Maybe she did have someone, something, some place, she thought to herself—or, more precisely, she felt this, for the sensations flitted about inside her without either words or images to accompany them. Someone, something, or some place, even more enormous than it seemed, that ripped right through the fabric of her present life, leaving a bottomless depth and a resounding height: a space without points of reference, like...

Uncle Dénes stared straight ahead, unperturbed—but suddenly his eyes latched on to a conspicuously raw-boned, warmly dressed boy hurrying along the opposite side of the street. Pinkler knew Sweater, who dressed even on the hottest summer days in a sweater and long pants or a sweat-suit.

Uncle Dénes was just mumbling this under his breath about how, "if I was sitting at a cemetery... if there's quiet in today's world even in cemeteries. Who knows..." And about how Pinkler was still hopelessly gaga over Attila József when Sweater suddenly appeared before them.

Uncle Dénes gave Sweater a wad of cash as he snatched a package from Sweater's hand lightning-fast. And then he continued, "Who knows..." But not once did he look at Sweater. No, Uncle Dénes looked right through Sweater's brown T-shirt, right through his sickly-looking skin, his scraggy ribs, and his tiny heart, though it seemed his eyes paused there momentarily, perhaps caught up by the pulse and swept along by Sweater's tired blood pumping its way through poisoned internal organs. Uncle Dénes's inexplicable behaviour now cut through Pinkler's cool indifference. She feared that everything would collapse in no time, that this morning of hers was about to come apart at the seams, and that nothing would remain even of her bygone fleeting life except for debris scattered all over the place. Sure, she'd go charging somewhere or other in the turmoil, but all the while the serenity of freedom would float motionless above her, out of reach, like a balloon. And then Sweater vanished, as if he'd never been there to begin with. Uncle Dénes gave a big, sad sigh, and everything that Sweater had uncovered, confused, or covered up for a few moments now became crystal-clear anew. ❧

Translated by Paul Olchvary

Szilárd Borbély

Poems

Translated by Daniel Hoffman

Psyché, If She Returned

Pszichè, ha visszatérne

Whenever a dream is not fulfilled,
at waking a cell dies in the brain.
Its memories then disappear.
The one who wakens can no longer

remember it. At such times
in computer-enhanced exposures, tiny
ultramarine blue dots appear, which,
like the stars of a distant galaxy

already dead, flare up from time to time.
In the beginning these were thought to be
imperfections of the monitor. With time

the flare-ups' radiation darkens, darkens.
They send a coded, undeciphered message.
The darkest one researchers have named Psyché.

Szilárd Borbély,
a poet and essayist, studied at Kossuth Lajos University in his native Debrecen, a city on the edge of the Great Plain, where he still lives. He has published eight volumes. These poems appeared in Halotti pompa *(Funeral Pomp), 2nd edition, 2006.*

The Bodyless Birth

Az anyagtalan magzat

By mimicking, the human face is capable
of expressing two hundred emotional states.
Of sounds, the infant can produce an equal
number. But for speech, however, he needs

only a few dozen. He forgets the rest.
It's not rules of the language the child learns,
but inaccurate examples. From inaccuracies
he deduces the correct rules. Then

personality, too, is shaped through language.
That's why, in the crematorium, the ego
is not consumed by fire, where, before cremation,

laid out on a marble slab, the large tendons are cut through,
the skull trepanned lest it explode. The knees and hips
still, in the end, have to be ground.

The Music of Patterns

Mintázatok zenéje

When someone suffers deep pain,
researchers' observations have confirmed,
certain cells in the brain commit
mass suicide. The death

of a single cell does not cause tragedy.
At such a time, however, several hundred
or even several thousand cells destroy
themselves. These flare-ups, their frequency

and spatial location, were modelled
by computer. It was shown, with regularity,
certain details repeat themselves.

After the pattern thus revealed was transmuted
into sound, its organization was recognised
to be composed like music.

To Be Living in a Body

Testben élni

In the course of human evolution, language
became the instrument of isolation.
Namely, parallelling the objects of the actual world,
consciousness is capable of depicting virtual things

through mental representation. When brought up
in consciousness, language is the third
plane of representation. Its help makes it possible
to make the picture of the object be present in

another consciousness. On that level of representation,
the experience of metaphors will be transferable
through conversation. And when lovers

meet at night, it's their souls communicating
in the dark. Existence inhabits a higher plane.
Because to be living in a body itself is death.

Christological Epistle

Krisztológiai episztola

In the beginning the Christians disliked
the over-subtlety of the Greek world. Likewise,
the Latin culture of success and the power
of the imperial period. Their epiphany, the secret they
were harbouring, was about despair and the sympathy
the humiliated felt for one another.

And yet, the language of the gospels became
Greek: tongue of miracle, language
of the arts. The Greek Christ, who was living
in Arcadia, spread the words of peace and true
friendship. Balancing on the border
between the human and the divine,

he put no great store by suffering. Suffering
is, specifically, like death, which has no weight
as nothing follows it. He was the Good
Shepherd, the friend of the lambs.
The philosophers of the Stoa knew
what the horror of life is like, which only a man

forsaken by all must face. That's what at the height
of the Cross, the Body, hovering
between Heaven and Earth, teaches. But
the philosophers already knew what it meant
to be standing before Nothingness. In language
the Greeks discovered gods, while Europe studied

the connection between the Word and the Object.
Europeans wanted to know what becomes of the words
after the Soul has stepped out into death. And what
becomes of the objects—the Body, as object, as well—
after the last judgment? The Christians, however, studied
the connections of words and movements. What

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interested them most was the meaning
of Christ's founding movements. This
is the continuation of the realization
that we are One. This understanding filled them
with endless joy. They experienced it as proof
that we are all one. And that the power

of love is capable of conquering death.
The philosophers of the Hellenistic age and
the pragmatic Romans couldn't understand
that the Christians went happily to die
for Christ. Those who wouldn't budge
even if the gods of Olympus entered their houses

stood baffled before the new order of movements
and words. The movements of Christ
as he turned to the Thief on his right
and prayed for him. And then, as he turned
left and lifted the Humiliated Sinner up
to himself. To them, all that was nonsense. The

followers of Christ kept their knowledge secret. And,
as the early Christians had to hide and
conceal themselves, the meaning of the words
in their talk gained a spiritual, hermetic notion, always
denoting something else. And became inexhaustible,
like the vanished memory of the Orphic sects. The

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gods of the secret initiated, too, became concealed,
their language the secret tongue of allegories.
Meanwhile, however, one that is not secret, but
subject to interpretation. That is to say, conversation
and discussion, the inexhaustibility of love.
Interpreting texts became allegorical even where

before, it had not been so. In Hellenic times
Christ was represented as Hermes:
shaped like the herald, the god who searches for
the meaning of the messages, its form in art is
the Greek god with a noble profile. No sign of
the long, matted hair. The curly head

is of a healthy, desirable young man: the Good
Shepherd, with a little lamb at his feet. The later
indispensible cross is still nowhere.
The arch of the groin gently slants toward the
gracefully hidden, barely indicated male member.
Later, Byzantine iconology

standardised the transfigured male face with fervent gaze
and the halo around the head that bathes in the light
of immaculate, timeless brilliance,
radiating it around itself. That is when
in Europe, smitten by plague, epidemic,
famine and wars, the passion-mysticism

focussed on suffering and the Bearing
of the Cross, and the elevation implied in humiliating
suffering, appears. The representation of blood and sweat
that transforms the history of Europe. The Greek god, coming
from Arcady, was seized by barbarians: They humiliated him.
Executed him. Tore his heart out too.

Epicedium

When the Greek World came to its end,
it was the sarcophagus of a Dead God they placed
in the Garden of Pleasures. The Nymphs,
the Naiads, the Satyrs, the Centaurs,

the Sphynx, the Gorgon, the creature with the
Medusa-head, and all the monsters
that could be found, the scholars of Rome
placed in formaldehyde and organized them into

collections. The sacred gardens were museums now,
sometimes visited only
by curious foreigners. No reminders
of the blood spilled there, its slimy, slippery

touch. The grass grew green. The trees
as green as elsewhere. The sacrifice
of the innocent for the Cult
turned out to have been entirely needless.

The Garden of Laughter was pervaded now by ominous
silence. What became of the Joy
they formerly felt over the sacrificed prisoners?
Or the satisfaction of the razed cities of

Asia Minor, where everyone, from sucklings to
salivating old people were slaughtered?
The sight of bodies that could be wounded,
tortured, raped, no longer brought

reconciliation. And from beneath the stone block of the sarcophagus
a soft sound similar to infants crying,
to the whining of mice sucking,
or the gurgling of throats cut through.

Read the inscription backwards on the Dead God's
sarcophagus, and see: The Unborn God. *Because,*
after all, the Body is the Grave of Life, and, after
the Time of the Fathers comes the Age of the Mater Dolorosa.

András Török

István Orosz, Artist of a Silver Age

István Orosz, born in 1951, is an illustrator, poster designer, creator of anamorphoses and director of animated films. He has also made excursions into stamp design, art history and teaching. The age he was trained in, the Seventies and Eighties, retrospectively now appears to some as a golden age in Hungary, allowing much that was new to emerge and develop in literature, in music and in the visual arts.

Orosz was perhaps fortunate in attending the University of Art and Design in Budapest, where he studied graphic design, not painting proper. Unlike the other Budapest academy for the arts (the more "academic" one), he did not have to work under an influential master/professor, and did not have to sign up to any trend. He set out in the by-waters, making ends meet by designing a monthly journal for museums called *Múzsák* (The Muses), where he was admired, encouraged and stimulated by the editors and even the printers. Early on, Orosz found inspiration in Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1530–1593), the painter of bizarre portraits, and Maurits Cornelius Escher (1898–1972), an amateur mathematician, the master of visual paradox. Both of them were artists with larger than life visions, who found the world of art too narrow for their talents. Both of them wanted to reveal the secret and the concealed. This they did with wit and nonchalance. Although both Arcimboldo and Escher lived in bleak times, torn by war and social unrest, they imposed no dark visions on their spectators and refused to indulge in horror and tragedy. In their place the spectator is confronted with the absurd and the intellect, and immaculate draughtsmanship, all of which distinguish Orosz's graphic works, too. At the opening of his phenomenally successful 2004 exhibition in the Escher Museum in the Hague, a visitor exclaimed, "Jesus, he is like Escher, but can draw so much better!"

From early on Orosz was fascinated by drawing the improbable and even the impossible. The deceptive perspective of his etchings and drawings demonstrates

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András Török

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both the capriciousness of our vision and the insubstantiality of what we think of as reality. Orosz raises doubts, and in this, though no innovator, he proves to be an artist whose work is deeply embedded in our troubled times.

In the Orwellian year of 1984, Orosz decided he needed a pseudonym and came up with OUTIS, the name Odysseus used when he introduced himself to Polyphemos, the cyclops. It means No-one. After the Greek hero had blinded the cyclops, and the other giants asked Polyphemus who had hurt him, he answered "No-one hurt me." So Utisz, as he calls himself in the Hungarian form, is someone who attacks the eye. Indeed, his target is human vision and Orosz attacks it with various devices. On one series of prints, Orosz pays hommage to Dürer, Liszt, Escher and Dalí, masters he admires, using a *trompe l'oeil* device which creates a whole out of thousands of tiny details as we approach the picture. Minutely drawn objects, trees, parts of buildings are combined in a landscape to portray the "sitter". Superior draughtsmanship and affection for his subjects are the hallmark of these prints. Unsurprisingly, they have caught the attention of the international community of designers and illustrators.

Throughout his career Orosz has never stopped pondering on illusion and perspective, their theory and practice. The genre he ultimately found most suited to him is anamorphosis, a distorted projection or perspective requiring the viewer to use special devices or occupy a specific vantage point to reconstitute the image. Orosz's experiments with anamorphosis are virtuoso and thought-provoking. One cannot help feeling that one is shifting between dimensions, dimensions of space and of time. For him, anamorphosis is a metaphor:

> anamorphosis can be the symbol of the culture of crisis—the culture of changing viewpoints—but if it is the symbol of this crisis it is also the solution of this crisis. It is decomposition and resurrection, death and rebirth at the same time. The image must be first annihilated, dissolved in the distorting prison of the grid of a perspective trap in order to be revived, in a more perfect form than ever before, to create the illusion of spatiality.

In Orosz's mirror anamorphoses, a chromium-plated brass cylinder is placed on a circle that has been left blank on the print. The actual anamorphosis is the reflection of the print on the surface of the cylinder as on *Anamorphosis with Column,* an etching which also demonstrates Orosz's admiration for classical antiquity as distilled through the temples and columns of Rome and the Renaissance, and also Neo-Classicism, very much in the spirit of Piranesi.

The first anamorphosis, an over-exaggeration of perspective, was possibly conceived by Leonardo. Some consider it a medium just halfway between painting and sculpture. Orosz doubts that. "It is nothing but a piece of perception, an optical trick that lifts the image off the reality and puts it on the roller-coaster between the retina and the brain".

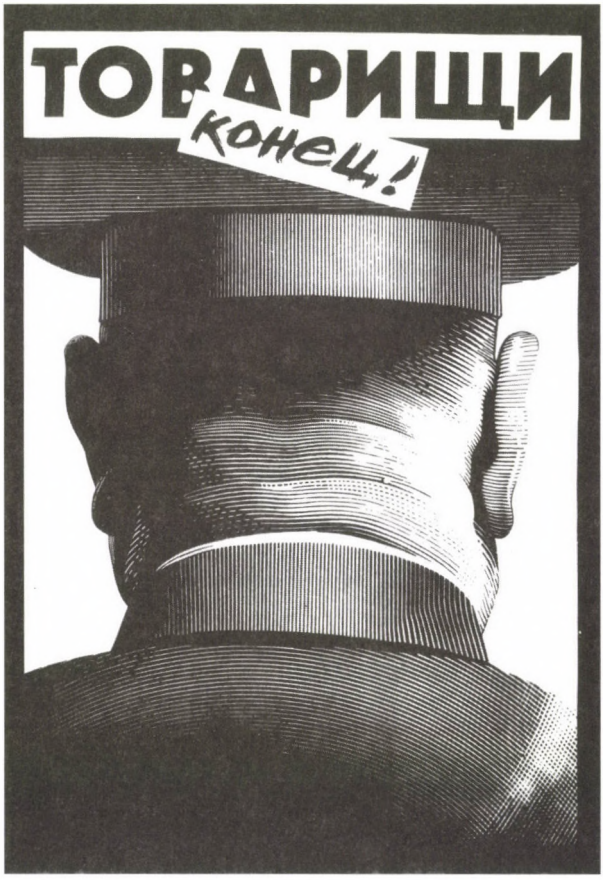
In the mid-Nineties Orosz summarised his lengthy investigations into the history of anamorphosis in a delightful small book written in the form of a dialogue. He actually twinned himself, creating a person to talk to, to test ideas on, to argue with,

to be asked by. A Renaissance device from a Renaissance artist, to be used while writing on a Renaissance subject. The manuscript should be published, as Orosz is a wonderful teacher who can explain highly complicated things while pretending that you and he share the basic knowledge while all he has to do is gently add comments.

Dalí and the Holy Family, *1988, copperplate etching, 510x373 mm*

When Orosz appeared on the arts scene, some critics dismissed his work as light entertainment. No wonder. Virtuosity and fun went very much against the grain when minds and the galleries were being conquered by concept art and, later, by the huge, emotional canvases of the New Sensibility. In the meantime, Orosz had retreated to the animated film studios where he only learnt the rules of that craft in order to deviate from them right away. His first film to attract universal critical acclaim, a blend of documentary and animation, was *Towards the Salt Cellar,* based on a slyly absurd short story by István Örkény. A further experiment with mixed technique was his thirty-minute *Ah! America!,* made for Hungarian Television. The film meditated on the one and a half million citizens of Hungary who emigrated to the United States in the years just before the First World War. Original documents, letters sent home, newsreel footage plus fabricated documentary shots were used together with Orosz's drawings and animations to produce an emotionally strong, evocative and visually satisfying film.

In the meanwhile, he was getting more and more commissions from theatres in the provinces, and by the mid-80s Orosz had emerged as a trend-setting poster designer, especially through the series he designed for the annual shows of the Young Artists' Studio. Then, after half a dozen animated films, traditional and experimental, Orosz felt the need to combine his fatal attraction to Escher-invented impossible spaces with the animation language he developed. This time he was the script writer, the graphic designer and the animator. *Mind the Step* is a sort of *Hundred Years of Solitude* of the genre—a local story of universal importance. In a little over six minutes, the film encapsulates the bleak and uninspiring world of Communist dictatorship: first the oppressive, then the "soft" versions, with the 1956 Revolution in between. He uses a small boy (conspicuously resembling himself), a ball, and the narrow, dark space of the inner courtyard of a traditional Budapest block of flats, one of the thousands on the Pest side. Orosz is delving into the world of descriptive sociology fully armed in his craft as a graphic artist, with each frame of the film masterful in its execution. The plot moves forward smoothly, with fewer and fewer elements of horror and more and more touches of absurdity. The boy finds his way more and more naturally in the Kafkaesque labyrinth of the courtyard, a space of improbable configurations, as he is helped by a congenial harmonica on the soundtrack. This film is nothing short of an Orwellian Hungary condensed into a dense visual image. In the last shot the boy gathers the courage to kick the ball down the rectangular staircase. Which is an impossible staircase, of course. The ball is bouncing around, a perpetuum mobile as it were. Frustrating, but also safe and familiar, as the dictatorship seemed to be in its later, milder, years. The film was completed in 1989, the year communism fell, or rather withered away.



Tovarishi Koniets, *1989, offset, 70x100 mm*

In his later films, Orosz returned to his own self-created universe. *Time-sights* (2004) is a marvellous point in his animation work, needless to say produced

without recourse to computer wizardry. (Clips from his films can be downloaded from www.utisz.hu)

Never particularly interested in politics, István Orosz created the poster which was to become the emblem of the changeover in Hungary. A friend passed him a commission by the Hungarian Democratic Forum he could not resist: a poster for the first free elections in 1990. The result was a fat-necked Russian officer seen from behind. The caption was two words, one in bold printed Cyrillic letters: *"Tovarishi"* (i.e. comrades, in Russian) and a light-hearted yellow, hand-written note across: *"adieu"* (goodbye, in French).

Then party strategists asked for a "tiny" change: they persuaded him to replace the word *"adieu"* with the Russian word *"koniets"* (the end), implying, "Comrades, it's over!". The Democratic Forum won the elections, and the poster was later used in the Baltic states and Ukraine—it was even rumoured to have been smuggled into Cuba. No Hungarian poster has ever had a larger print-run.

The smallest in scale of any work by him so far came in 1992, his designs for the stamps Hungarian Mail issued for Columbus Year, a meticulously crafted *trompe l'oeil* in the style of the early cartographers. It is truly an orchid in the desert of boring Hungarian stamp design.

In 1992 the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and Letters re-launched its section for artists and named it the Széchenyi Art Academy. In typical Hungarian fashion a counter-Academy, the Hungarian Art Academy, soon followed. There were very few artists who were invited to join both: Orosz was one of them. He was persuaded to serve for the last three years as executive president of the latter, a post he resigned from in 2007. He may have failed in bridging differences between the two art academies but his art and thinking is followed with interest both by those committed to contemporary trends and also by artists from the 'heritage' camp.

It would be difficult not to sympathize with the idea that we are living in a Silver Age. The long years of peace (at least in Europe) have pushed heroism and the quest for the ultimate questions into the background. Irony, wit and laughter made their appearance as indispensable ingredients in great art, partly in a desperate struggle for attention in the glitzy media-driven world. Much has changed since István Orosz started out: the pendulum has swung towards story, figurativity and melody. Though the art of Orosz has matured, his skills demonstrated in more and more genres, deep down it has not shifted an inch. The global scene did.

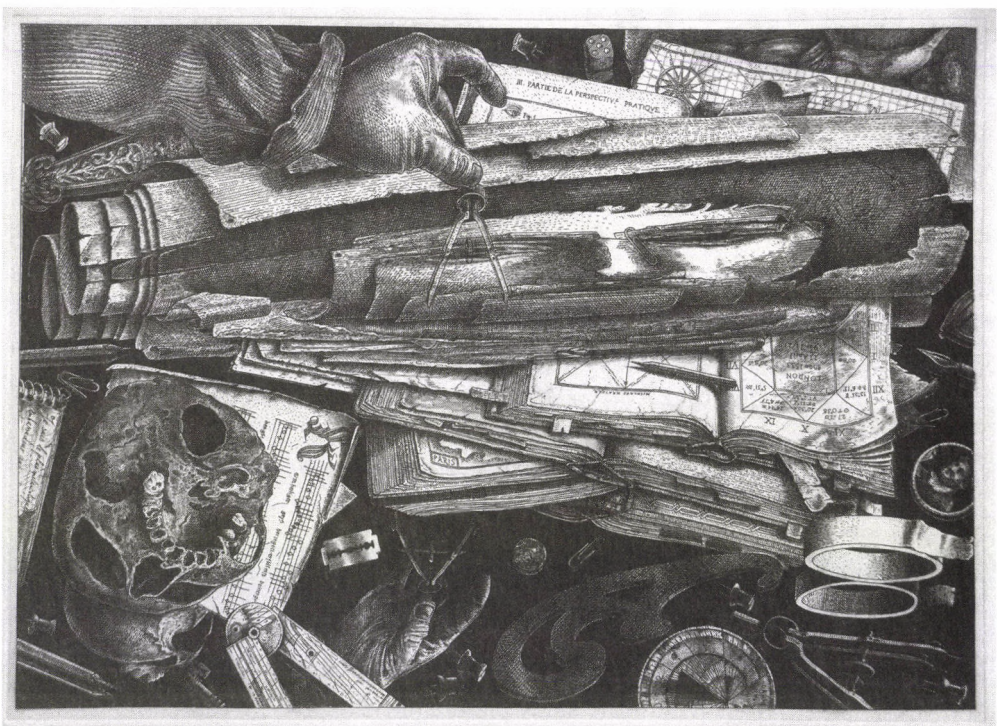
Meanwhile, Orosz has remained a truly pan-European artist all along.

With a lot more to be expected from. ❧

István Orosz

How to Pull *"The Raven"* Out of a Hat

The hat (a cylinder) of the title is a standard magician's prop for producing an illusion, and a cylinder is a prop I have been experimenting with for quite some time to produce an optical illusion. The technique I employ is called anamorphosis.



István Orosz

was born in 1951 and after training as a graphic designer, he first gained recognition as a stage designer and for his work in animated film as animator and director. His posters and graphic art have featured in countless international design exhibitions, and he is well-known as a printmaker and illustrator too. He is perhaps best known for his renewal of the technique of anamorphosis. This is an edited version of a lecture delivered at the AGIdeas Festival in Melbourne on 5 April, 2007.

Anamorphosis is the Greek term for retransformation. In art history it refers to works that were made distorted and unrecognizable through ingenious geometrical constructions but when viewed from a certain point, or through a reflecting object (usually a cylindrical mirror), a hidden image appears in its true shape, that is, it undergoes retransformation. There are two main types of anamorphoses: perspective or oblique anamorphosis, already in use during the early Renaissance, and mirror or catoptric anamorphosis, which emerged during the Baroque and gained particular popularity in the Mannerist period.

Hans Holbein the Younger's painting, *The Ambassadors,* is arguably the most famous early example of an anamorphosis. In it, a distorted shape lies diagonally across the bottom of the frame and when viewed from an acute angle, it transforms into a plastic and almost three-dimensional image of a skull. Holbein's many epigones were so inspired by this 1533 painting that the oblique anamorphosis technique was in common use by the end of the sixteenth century. William Shakespeare must have known it. In *Richard II,* his reference to anamorphic distortion is so evident that it is clear that London theatre-goers were familiar with the technique, at that time referred to as 'the perspective'.

István Orosz: Hommage à Jean Dinteville, *2005, India ink, watercolour, 1000 x 700 mm.*

> *For sorrow's eye, glazed with blinding tears,*
> *Divides one thing entire to many objects;*
> *Like perspectives, which rightly gaz'd upon,*
> *Show nothing but confusion; eyed awry*
> *Distinguish form:*

Shakespeare's "nothing but confusion" implies that the picture "rightly gazed upon" shows only a disarranged, unrecognizable image. Instead of a confused image, what I try to do is allow the basic anamorphic picture to have a logical meaning, which can then acquire a second, revealing, reading, when looked at from a different viewpoint, for example by using a special mirror. Ambiguous layers of meaning will make use of the connection, or contrast, between the two independent images contained within the same picture. This approach, therefore, lends a philosophical content to these anamorphoses.

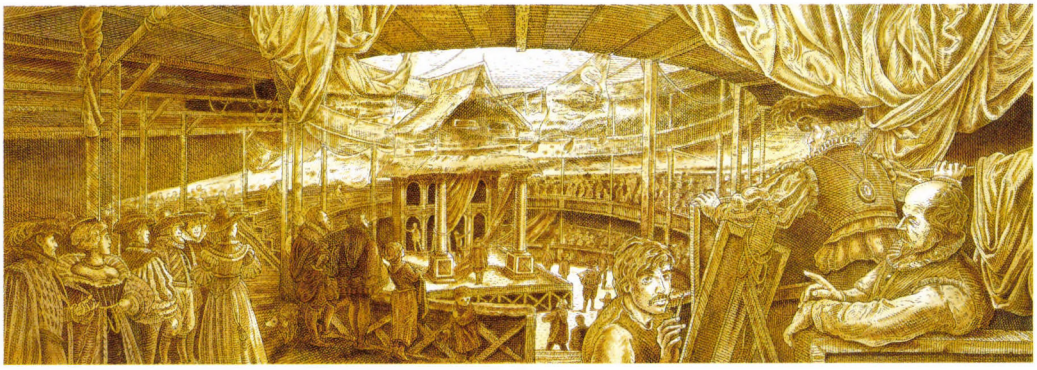
In my etching *The Theatre of Shakespeare* the two images complement each other thematically. Looked at straight on, as a picture is normally looked at, a late sixteenth-century theatre with actors, audience and onlookers appears. (From the evidence of a contemporary drawing, we imagine this is what the Swan Theatre might have looked like.) If we step to the right side of the exceptionally

wide panoramic picture and view it from an acute angle, from which the picture is seen as a narrow strip, the elements of the theatre disappear and transform themselves into a portrait of Shakespeare. The building becomes a portrait.

For another work, I tried to draw one of the figures in the famous painting by Holbein already mentioned, the French ambassador Jean de Dinteville. I suspect that Jean de Dinteville not only commissioned the painting and modelled for it, but also played a role in shaping its philosophical background. First look at my portrait from a low angle, then observe the way it becomes a still life when you turn to face it straight on. You will see—in a state of confusion—a set of objects also in Holbein's painting, or referring to them in some way. Still, the thematic connection between the two images is less direct than it was in the case of *The Theatre of Shakespeare.*

This method is not unprecedented, within my own oeuvre nor in art history. Since an exhibition in Venice in 1987, it has been called the Arcimboldo-effect after the sixteenth-century Milanese painter, Giuseppe Arcimboldo. What you see is "an image within an image" or a "picture of paranoia", a title suggested by Salvador Dalí, who had an important role in the rediscovery of Arcimboldo in the twentieth century. My early works applying this technique are actually references to Dalí, Albrecht Dürer, who also drew portraits hidden within landscapes, and M.C. Escher, who was not strictly speaking a designer of "ambiguous" pictures but reference to him is justified by his many experiments with geometrical complexes with multiple viewpoints. These works of mine are not real anamorphoses, because the angle of viewing does not have to be changed in order to make a new picture emerge; this is achieved by changing the distance from which the piece is viewed. From close up, details dominate (thus viewed, my etching *Dürer in the Forest* is simply a landscape) while from far-off, you get a more complex impression of the whole picture and a portrait of Albrecht Dürer emerges. Instead of moving a step further or closer you can narrow your eyes and the whole portrait prevails over the details. The situation becomes a bit more complicated if it is not the viewer but the picture that changes its 'point of view'. In my illustration *Mysterious Island,* there is a seashore with a sail pushed along by the wind. But if the image is turned upside down, a portrait of Jules Verne, my favourite childhood author, appears.

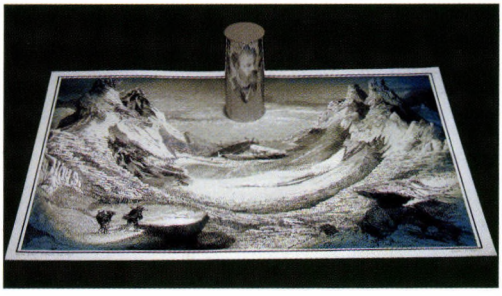
I created another illustration for Verne's novel, *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras,* a polar landscape with snow at sunset. If you place a mirror cylinder on the sun-disk when the picture is horizontal, it will reflect the face of the author. And this brings us to mirror anamorphoses. The best-known are those which use cylindrical mirrors, but cone- or pyramid-shaped mirrors are also possible. The first book on anamorphoses, *La perspective curieuse,* published in Paris in 1638, by the Franciscan friar Francois Niceron (a scientist and an artist) gives a detailed description of almost all the strategies of draughtsmanship. I also follow Niceron's descriptions; somehow it is reassuring to know that your technique is the same as Leonardo's, Holbein's, Dürer's and their followers.

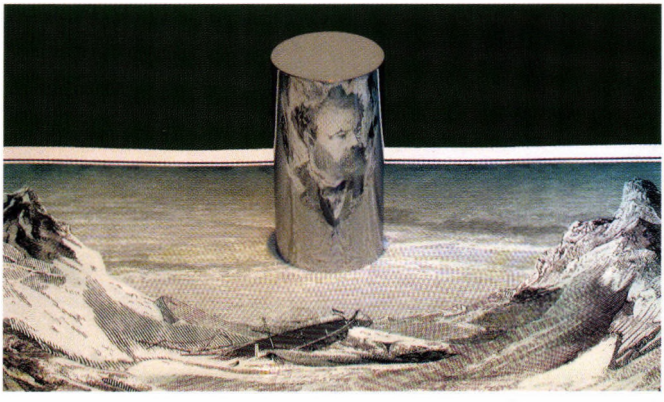


István Orosz:
The Theatre of Shakespeare
1998, India ink, watercolour,
1000 x 360 mm.

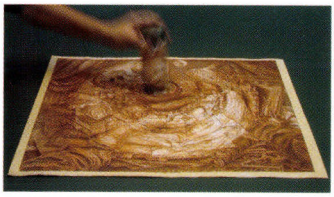
(Viewed straight on
and viewed from the right.)

István Orosz: *Three Islands,* 1992, etching, 105 x 142 mm.





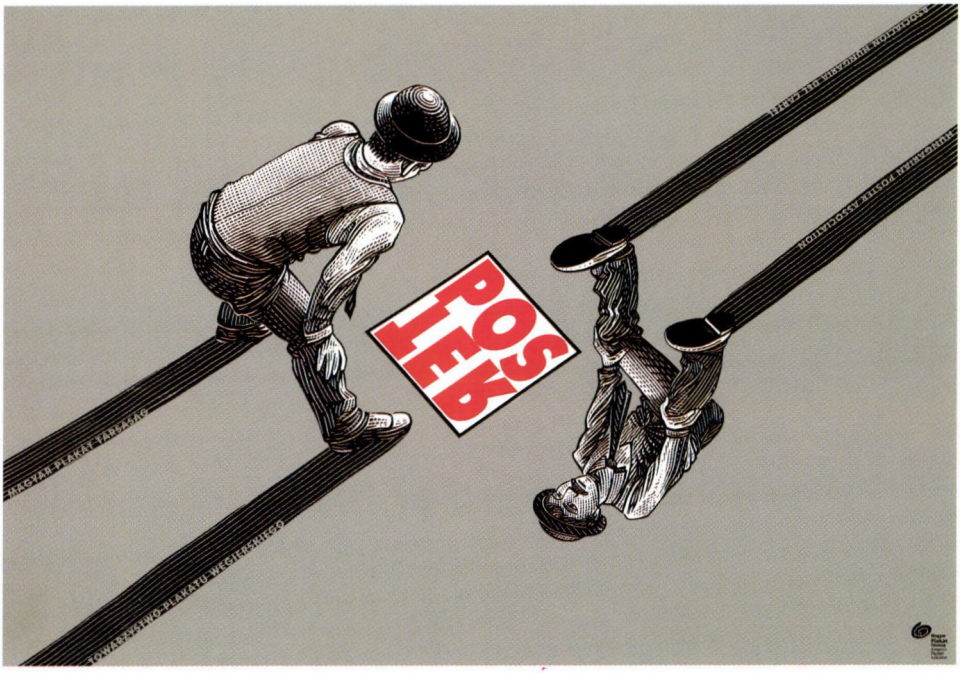
István Orosz:
Jules Verne Anamorphosis
1983, offset print and
chrome-plated brass cylinder,
500 x 700 x 140 mm.



István Orosz:
Self-Portrait with Albert Einstein
2002, copperplate etching and
chrome-plated brass cylinder
585 x 458, 120 x 70 mm.

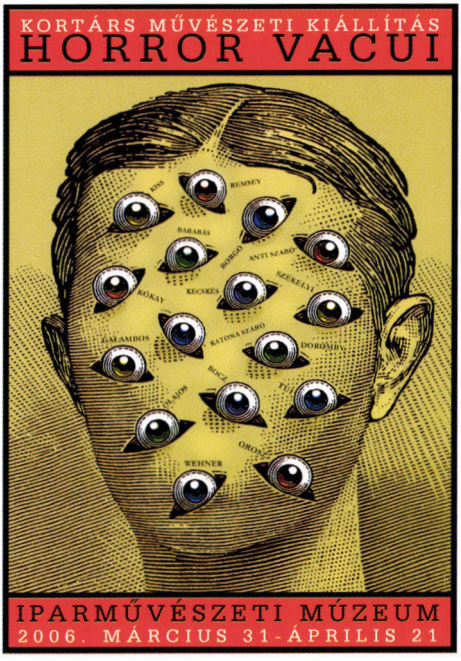
István Orosz:
Edgar Allan Poe: "The Raven"
2007, India ink, watercolour and chrome-plated brass cylinder,
600 x 700, 120 x 70 mm.

István Orosz: *Anna (In memoriam Giotto di Bondone),* 1999,
pencil paper and chrome-plated brass cylinder, 700 x 700, 700 x 700, 200 x 80 mm.



István Orosz: *Poster,* 2004, digital print, 1000 x 700 mm.

István Orosz: *Berlin Wall,* 2005,
digital print, 700 x 1000 mm.



István Orosz: *Horror vacui,* 2006,
offset, 700 x 1000 mm.

István Orosz: *Shakespeare in the Victoria and Albert Museum,* 1999, offset, 500 x 700 mm.

I use Niceron's technique, even at a time when superb computer programs are available (like Kent's Anamorph Me!) and distortions can be designed more quickly and more easily. Some years ago I worried that with Photoshop Polar Coordinates anybody could produce in a few minutes something very similar to works I spent weeks on. But it is far from being the same. Even the best computer programs are only able to solve the problem of distortion. Technical background alone will never provide a distorted image with meaning or a message connected with the original meaning of the base picture. "Nothing but confusion" is a task for an artist. At least for the time being... and hopefully for the enduring future.

My etching *Self-Portrait with Albert Einstein* presents a true scientist, though both what you see on it and the title are meant to be misleading. The chaos on my

István Orosz: Dürer in the Forest, *1987, copperplate etching, 500 x 358 mm.*

desk is drawn from my point of view (and it is not at all exaggerated), and I also appear in the round mirror I put in the centre of the etching. The cylindrical mirror should be placed right on this mirror, that is, on my face, in order to transform the chaos on my desk into a distorted image of Albert Einstein. Between the two layers of the picture, that is, the horizontal and the vertical, there is no relationship unless we think about such universal ideas as the contrast between order and chaos, between natural laws and human freedom.

Inspiration or design? When speaking about a work of art, you may want to know which of these predominated in its creation. The author of one work I chose to illustrate also asked this question, and his answer was that a work of art can be created consciously "with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem". The writer was Edgar Allan Poe and the work was *"The Raven"*. Poe wrote an essay, "The Philosophy of Composition", in which he offers a radical theory on the creative process as he describes what lies behind his poem.

"The Raven" remains one of the most widely recognized and respected poems in any literature. How the situation is established is astonishing, embarrassing and, it has to be admitted, faintly comic as well. A talking raven lands in a room: at a first reading (or listening), you can hardly take it or the situation seriously. However, with Poe, you can never tell what he takes seriously and how seriously he takes it. An idea making no sense could end in a question of life and death, and sentences that sound straightforward may be intended as parodies. Therefore "The Philosophy of Composition" too has to be read with certain reservations. Who would believe Poe's claim that intuition is not needed to compose poems, that inspiration does not exist? That all you need to compose a poetical work is a logical, step-by-step design and that effects have to be cautiously and precisely calculated?

When translating the poem visually, my first step was to show the time and the place, or at least what we know of it from the text. Clearly, it is the home of the narrator, easily depicted through "homely" disorder (shoes kicked off, books all over the place etc., at least my home looks like this). I didn't want to use these objects as a reference to the fact that the poem was written in 1845; I depicted them as of today and, quite selfishly, I "left" there some of the devices that I needed for creating illustrations and for designing my anamorphoses. Although this kind of self-reflection does connect to the Romanticism of Poe and to twentieth-century Postmodernism, the fine, etching-like character of the coloured drawing unmistakenly indicates the nineteenth-century time frame. Picturing the precise time of day, however, is more complex—the poem says it is midnight. The geometrical equivalent of midnight in the image is symmetry, so I used a sphere within a square as the basic structure of the composition and distinctly highlighted its centre. The symmetry, present in Poe's poem as well, is the result of viewing from above, a bird's-eye perspective. Of course, if we were to be satisfied with the top view, with the raven's eye view of the milieu, that would definitely not be enough to fully interpret the situation; but to depict the raven itself would be perhaps going too far. This problem also goes back to the question whether a raven really does make its appearance, or is only the product of the narrator's imagination. The greatest virtue of the poem is that it does not come down decisively on either side. If a real raven is depicted, then a side is taken. Is it possible for the illustrator, as it was for Poe, to keep an open mind? Yes, it is, if a depiction of the bird is avoided, and only its shadow, its image in a mirror is represented, or anything that refers to a raven—in this way an open mind is kept.

My illustration presents all three possibilities. The dark shade in the middle of the picture can be taken as the shadow of the bird hovering above; in the wine cup, the beat of a wing is reflected; the illustrations in a natural history book lying open on the table also depict a raven.

The next issue is the identity of the narrator. He hovers between sleep and wakefulness, hence he is shown as slumped over the table *("While I nodded, nearly napping")*, and this also circumvents the question whether Poe and the narrator are the same. The empty armchair opposite this figure and the drapery on it refer to the loss of the lady in the poem. To symbolise love, two books are intertwined.

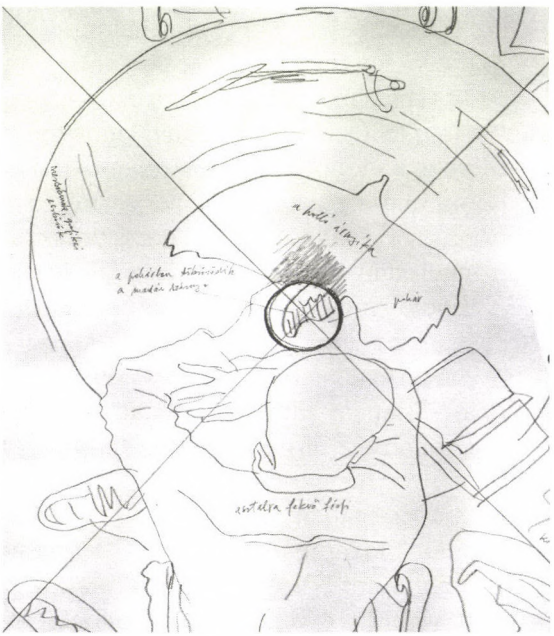
In "The Philosophy of Composition" Poe argues at length that the monotony of the frequently repeated refrain lends the poem its melancholy. In the illustration, there is a monotony in the repetitive pattern of the parquetry floor, and in the books and the sheets of paper scattered everywhere. The books and the illustrations on the pages bear out Poe's notion that consciousness and calculation, that is intellect instead of "fine frenzy", leads the creative process; it is also crucial that it should allow none of the important details to be omitted. I would have been sorry to leave out the bust of Pallas Athene, highlighted by Poe in his essay.

On re-reading the poem or Poe's comments on its creation, one senses that he is intentionally hiding something. The blurred mystical-metaphysicality of the poem and the provocative brainstorming of "The Philosophy of Composition" seem to be there to distract. So that you wouldn't recognize a soul torn by fear and doubt, so that you wouldn't take the first-person narrator seriously, so that you shouldn't identify him with Poe. He did not have a dead lover called Lenore, his room did not contain a bust of Pallas Athene; yet there is no doubt that the shadow of the raven hovers over Poe's soul, destiny and life. If you have not been aware of this, the fifth line of the penultimate stanza *("Take thy beak from out my heart")* will reveal that here it is the poet speaking and not his narrator, slumped over his books. This is the first metaphor that re-interprets the whole poem as it has developed and clarifies the symbolic character of the bird.

Someone viewing my illustration (I would call any such person a co-creator) will place a cylindrical mirror onto that point which covers the bird's reflection in the wine glass; in so doing, my co-creator will emphasise the metaphoric interpretation of the poem and of the picture. In the mirror is reflected Edgar Allan Poe's virtual face, made up of the objects lying horizontally, the requisites of the illustration for *"The Raven"*. Once the cylinder is raised, the face disappears, what is left are these scattered objects, the shades, the man lying on his face and the empty room.

Poe claims in his essay that the most important effect to be created in a work of art is that which allows it to be interpreted backwards. The conclusion explains all the parts of the composition and their role in the whole. Poe was true to this in most of his works. In fact, the same compositional scheme is at work for an anamorphosis that has a second meaning, since by placing a cylindrical mirror onto the centre of the paper, the viewer will realise why certain objects have been placed in the picture.

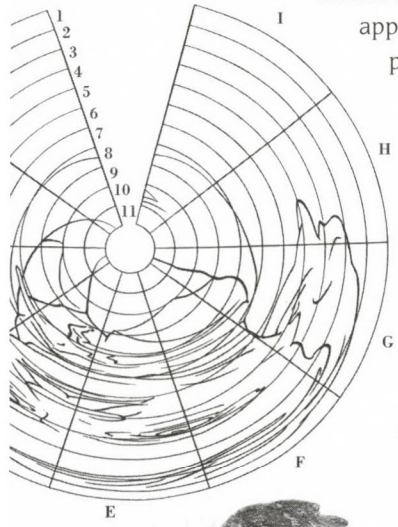
How can you distort an image so that it only becomes visible and recognizable in a mirror of the right size and from a certain angle? This is what I did: I selected a photograph of Poe and made a line-drawing from it. Then I produced a reflection of the picture (so that when its reflection appears in the mirror, the original image can be seen). I drew a grid of 11 columns and 9 rows upon the picture, adding numbers and letters for the sake of clarity. Then I drew eleven concentric circles from the centre of the illustration and split the area into nine pies. In other words I made a distorted form of the grid of squares. I then had to redraw the image in the small squares in the exact deformation into the exact plane figure. I placed the cylindrical mirror from time to time onto the centre to check the work. Once the squares are filled in correctly, Poe's image appears in the mirror. Now came the most interesting part: what I had to figure out was how the elements of the distorted image can be exchanged for other details, for other objects in the picture. How can a round desk-top stand for the curve of the forehead, a pen or a pencil for the eyebrow, a watch for a necktie, the shadow of the raven for the writer's waistcoat, etc. If we recall "The Philosophy of Composition", this is what artistic creation involves—logical composition and systematic sorting out within the possible solutions.



The procedure I have followed in composing an anamorphosis is actually what Poe suggested in his essay. What the artist should do is first to dismantle in order to deform reality and create a new but unreal world out of these realities with the help of his imagination. This creative process does not require inspiration—at least not according to Poe—and there is no place for irrational melancholy or for subconscious instincts. Art should stand apart from the uncontrollable flow of emotions, creativity should be led intellectually, so that pure art can be created merely on a mathematical basis.

I find it interesting that Poe expressed great interest in the characteristics of optics and visual perception. In his short story, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", the detective, Auguste Dupin, explains how the details and the different viewpoints should be used to examine something as a whole—and then, with surprising precision, describes the technique of distorted perception:

Truth is not always in a well. In fact, as regards the more important knowledge, I do believe that she is invariably superficial. The depth lies in the valleys where we seek her, and not upon the mountain-tops where she is found. The modes and sources of this kind of error are well typified in the contemplation of the heavenly bodies. To look at a star by glances—to view it in a side-long way, by turning toward it the exterior portions of the retina (more susceptible of feeble impressions of light than the interior), is to behold the star distinctly—is to have the best appreciation of its lustre—a lustre which grows dim just in proportion as we turn our vision fully upon it. A greater number of rays actually fall upon the eye in the latter case, but in the former, there is the more refined capacity for comprehension.



When designing my anamorphosis to Poe's poem, I attempted to work with a conscious and calculating mind, but I was also aware of the traps such childish logic might lead me into. All I could hope for was that the 'inexplicable', too, always has and will have a role in all kinds of creative work. ❧

István Orosz: Sketches for the anamorphosis of Edgar Allan Poe's: "The Raven"

András Schweitzer

At the Peak and on the Edge

The Hungarian School of Graph Theory

Over the past century Hungarians have made contributions in mathematics, and one field—graph theory, a part of combinatorics—is inconceivable without their contribution. Graph theory is of increasing interest to the mathematical community and is now applied to more and more.

"Hungarian mathematicians have ideas and solve riddles" is a stereotype widespread in the mathematical community. "In other parts of the world people tend to concern themselves more with weighty theories, the elegant unravelling of difficult problems is the norm here. Towards the end of the nineteenth century competitions had already begun in secondary schools, and since 1893 the journal for secondary school students, *Középiskolai Matematikai Lapok,* has been published for those who craved additional problems," explains László Lovász, director of the Mathematics Institute of the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest and a winner of the Wolf Prize, often referred to as the Nobel Prize for mathematics. Lovász himself secured nationwide fame when, in his final year at the elite Fazekas *Gimnázium* in Pest, he beat his classmate, Lajos Pósa, who also went on to a brilliant career, in Hungarian Television's competition for talented students in mathematics (Ki miben tudós?) in 1966.

The final result was not easily arrived at. The programme was running long over time, but the eighteen-year-olds in the final round were solving the problems with equal facility, until finally Lovász solved a problem his competitor could not, one that could be solved with the use of graph theory.

This branch of mathematics came into being in the wake of a Swiss mathematician Leonhard Euler. In the early eighteenth century the residents of Königsberg in East Prussia (today Kaliningrad) were preoccupied with the question of whether it was possible to travel through the city in such a way that each of the seven bridges over the River Pregel would only be crossed once. In 1736 Euler showed that this was impossible and deduced where new bridges would have to be built in order to make this possible. The most important feature of his demonstration was the simplifying method that he used in his proof: he substituted points for the different parts of the city and lines drawn between them for the bridges.

It was thus that network systems, so-called graphs, consisting of points and lines

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(vertices and edges, to use the technical terms) came into being, the study of which was not considered to be mathematics for over a century and a half. Mathematicians felt that problems involving the properties of graphs were easily contrived and their derivation did not demand the scholarship proper to a university, but simply clever ideas; they felt that solving these problems did not really lead to more general results that could be of practical use, for instance, in the study of functions, necessary, among other things, for the description of the motion of the planets.

Nevertheless, Hungarian mathematicians were unusually preoccupied with the field. One part of graph theory, extremal graph theory, is greatly indebted to the work of Pál Turán. In the early 1940s, during the war, he was in the forced labour service. Allegedly, even while working as an electrician on top of poles he racked his brains over mathematical problems, taking advantage of the fact that their study sometimes did not even require paper and pencil. The world's first book on graph theory was published (in German) in Hungary in 1936 by Dénes Kőnig, who taught at the Technical University in Budapest, and the first international conference was held in 1959 at Dobogókő near Budapest.

In the bipolar order dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union, the meetings regularly organized following the conference at Dobogókő were important in drawing mathematicians from both sides of the Iron Curtain to Hungary. Pál Erdős, called the new Euler, counted as a sort of institution himself, comparable to an international conference. Erdős is reckoned by many to be among the ten greatest mathematicians of the twentieth century. He had completed his doctoral dissertation at the age of nineteen, though he received his doctorate only two years later upon completion of his studies in 1934. Then he was invited to the University of Manchester, but returned to Hungary three times a year. Following the Anschluss, scenting a second world war, he decided to leave Hungary permanently. He pursued his researches at Princeton University, later travelling the world from one mathematics institute to another. He had neither job, family nor home. He did, however, have numerous mathematician friends all over the world whom he continuously beleaguered, both in person and by letter, with problems. "Where there's a roof, there's a proof," he would say, playing on the Hungarian proverb *"Ahány ház, annyi szokás,"* or "there are as many customs as there are houses," or more figuratively, "so many lands, so many customs." His friends would say, "if you want to get together with Erdős just stay where you are. He'll soon turn up." Erdős usually lodged with his mathematician friends, who with only some exaggeration alleged that all of his belongings could fit into a half-full suitcase and that he never stayed anywhere for more than a week.

Given his atypical career, he left behind an atypical oeuvre. At the time of his death in 1996 at the age of 83, Erdős had published, in collaboration with more than 500 mathematicians, some 1,500 papers. (In terms of the number of papers he wrote, he was thought of as the most prolific scholar, though in terms of the number of pages it was Euler who took the first prize.) By collaborating with others, Erdős continued what one might call a Hungarian tradition. "Collaborating in work and in the writing of papers was at the beginning of the 1930s a Hungarian specialty. Erdős, Tibor Gallai and Pál Turán were members of a large circle of friends, most of whom as Jews were excluded from the academic hierarchy under the Horthy regime. They met by the statue of Anonymous in the City Park or else walked in the Buda hills and discussed mathematics. In the 1930s and 40s the three of them wrote fundamental

papers on graph theory which were of considerable influence and are still often cited today. This was an essential contribution to the creation of the Hungarian school of graph theory," says academician Vera T. Sós of the Alfréd Rényi Institute of Mathematics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Another factor in the prominence of Hungarian mathematicians is the role of the great individual teachers who nurtured talents. Tibor Gallai, for example, taught Vera Sós at secondary school (who, in turn, taught several generations of mathematicians at university level) and later was the mentor of László Lovász at university. Lajos Pósa, his one-time rival at the Fazekas *Gimnázium*, spent so much time with his students that Erdős allegedly resented it, and when Pósa finally published a paper Erdős wrote in a letter, "Pósa has risen from the dead. Something like this is supposed to have happened 2,000 years ago."

It was thanks to Erdős that the world of mathematics turned into one network: mathematicians playfully came up with the idea of an Erdős number in his honour. Those who had collaborated on one or more articles with him carried the Erdős number 1. (for example Pál Turán or Vera T. Sós, as well as younger mathematicians such as László Lovász and Lajos Pósa), and those who had published with the latter were Erdős-2, and so on. This has become common practice worldwide. Some estimates indicate that the Erdős number of the majority of active mathematicians around the world is less than six.

This playful numbering in fact harmonises with an observation linked to graph theory: namely, that one can trace a personal relationship between two people anywhere in the world through relatively few degrees of separation, usually five or six. This has come to be recognised and has inspired social networking Internet portals. Immediate credit for this is due to the research of Harvard psychologist Stanley Milgram, of Hungarian parentage on one side, though a 1929 short story by Frigyes Karinthy, "Láncszemek" (Chain Links) had already touched on it. The story proposed that among the one and a half billion people in the world, one individual had a link with any other through a chain of personal acquaintances numbering only five; this proved to be true, at least on the fictional plane, whether the person was a recent Nobel Prize winner or someone in the Ford plant.

Over recent decades, innumerable serious results have been achieved in graph theory that have had practical applications. Through graph theory, logistical problems can be solved, such as how a given number of shoe factories can supply retail outlets in the most cost-effective manner. To this day the algorithm, universally recognized as the Hungarian Method, is adopted in the optimization of transport and logistics networks—for instance in planning the frequency of service on subway lines in big cities. It was named by an American mathematician W. Harold Kuhn in 1955 on the basis of the earlier work of Dénes Kőnig and Jenő Egerváry at the Budapest Technical University. So interested was Kuhn in Egerváry's work that he spent two weeks battling his way through one of the latter's Hungarian articles with the help of a dictionary and a grammar book.

"Sometimes when mathematicians of other nationalities would try to describe the results of their work to us," recounts Béla Bollobás, a fellow of Cambridge University in England and Jabie Hardin Professor at the University of Memphis in the United States, "Uncle Paul [Erdős] would from time to time interrupt the conversation and ask me in Hungarian, 'Béla, do you understand that?' If the answer was yes, Erdős generally asked me to explain the argument to him later. But sometimes we agreed in

Hungarian that what they were explaining to us was almost certainly nonsense."

Béla Bollobás first met Erdős in the spring of 1957 as the winner of all the national mathematics competitions for students, and he was much moved that the established scholar immediately began to converse with him as if he were a serious mathematician—naturally, about mathematical problems. "Our first joint article was written in 1961," commented Bollobás. "I was seventeen years old. Uncle Paul brought me a little problem. Two days later I told him that I had the solution. He told me he did too. It turned out that we had both come up with different solutions." It was in part thanks to Erdős' intercession, in part to their collaborative publications, that in 1963 Béla Bollobás was invited to Trinity College in Cambridge, one of the world's bastions of mathematics. "There too I racked my brains over Uncle Pali's problems. He sent problems to everyone, somehow he had a sense of who understood what best." Bollobás and Erdős published more than a dozen articles together, though, as Bollobás remarks, while they enjoyed collaborating, these papers are not among their outstanding works.

Erdős published one of his most influential works jointly with Alfréd Rényi, founder and director of the Budapest Institute of Mathematics. (Following his death the Institute took Rényi's name.) The two published a series of eight papers on so-called random graphs. These are networks in which edges occur randomly between the points. "When they published their series of papers on random graphs in 1960, the mathematics world did not realise that this constituted an epoch-making discovery," commented Bollobás. "Indeed, it was physicists who first took notice of their results. They noticed what happens if one first positions the points of a graph onto a plane and then draws lines haphazardly between them." The result is similar to when one haphazardly lays down the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle individually, immediately connecting those that fit together. At first the pieces are connected to one another as islands consisting of a few parts. Then, however, these small islands suddenly, with only a few steps, come together as a large connected network. "In the beginning it was the physicists who saw the value of this mathematical model, called phase transformation, because it describes quite precisely the process whereby, for instance, water freezes," explained Bollobás, who twenty years later himself produced the mathematical model describing that phenomenon precisely.

Connecting various pieces could indeed be a metaphor for the method so characteristic of Hungarian mathematics. "Mathematics is divided into fields, but it attempts to offer an understanding of phenomena," explains László Lovász. There were many Hungarians who strove to arrive at new results by connecting completely different fields. Random graphs are an example of this. Their origins lie in the wedding of combinatorics to random numerics. The first was more Erdős' field, the later Rényi's. Lovász himself often used approaches taken from graph theory in computer science.

Something else which is thought to be characteristic of Hungarian mathematicians is that they adopt the unexpected rather than the customary tools. The lemma of Endre Szemerédi of the Rényi Institute, which enables mathematicians to examine complex networks by breaking them into smaller random graphs, is an example of this. Like random graph theory, the lemma did not meet with general recognition for decades. Today, however, it is a central precept in graph theory and one of the most researched fields in all mathematics.

"For decades there was an unjustified prejudice that graph theory is a relatively young field of mathematics and consequently it is not difficult to come up with and solve new problems related to it," Miklós Simonovits (also of the Rényi Institute, a student of Vera Sós and a friend of Erdős) notes. "Today, however, this has passed." This is indicated by the fact that graph theory (combinatorics) now has its own session at the International Mathematical Congress of the International Mathematical Union (IMU). Also revealing is that the president of the IMU is now László Lovász, which he attributes to the increasing appreciation for this branch (his ownfield) and for Hungarians, with such proud traditions in this field and in mathematics in general.

Graph theory was advanced by the spread of computers and computer science, chip design and research into complex networks such as neuron systems, telecommunication networks, and the Internet. However, most of the networks in actual use, such as the Internet, are not random graphs of the Erdős-Rényi kind; this discovery comes from Albert-László Barabási, a Transylvanian-born physicist at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana. In 1999 he and his colleagues examined the system of web pages and the traffic between them through hyperlinks; they discovered that the web is not a random network, but rather—in his expression—a scale-free network. In these graphs, points with connections far exceeding the average are relatively common. If the Internet were to develop according to the Erdős-Rényi model, then the question of which web pages a new page would come into connection with would be entirely a matter of chance. In fact, new pages added to the web are "snobs," which is to say that they are more likely to come into contact with points (pages) that are already popular. This is also the way, according to the Barabási model, that the global air route system functions. New routes are more often established between already busy airports. And it is thus, a Swedish survey discovered one year after the publication of Barabási's study, that the network of human sexual relations develops. The Swedish survey may offer data for the arrest of the spread of the AIDS virus (it would pay screening programs to target individuals with a large number of contacts), while the more precise overview of the structure of the Internet helps in refining search engines.

Interdisciplinary collaboration, however, is today potential rather than real: mathematicians and natural scientists researching networks do not really speak the same language. According to Dezső Miklós, assistant director of the Rényi Institute, this was one of the conclusions that could be drawn from the international graph theory conference held last August, involving—atypically—physicists, biologists and neuro-scientists.

It was held, unsurprisingly, in Budapest. ❧

Zoltán Barotányi

Turtles, Eggs and the "Gömböc"

Why and how do things balance? Archimedes was the first we know of to have approached the question in a manner that we would call scientific, by setting down the statics for ship-building. Knowledge of these statics is essential to shipwrights and boatwrights, since a ship has to have a single position of equilibrium to which it normally reverts—except in extreme, and usually regrettable, circumstances.

Less obvious, perhaps, is how equilibrium applies to the wheel. But making a wheel and understanding how it works involves an understanding of the existence of a sustained and contiguous position of equilibrium. For another historical example, we have Christopher Columbus, who challenged his dinner companions to make an egg stand on one end; when they had all failed, Columbus made a slight break at the small end and succeeded. In other words, he slightly modified the shape to stabilise the egg's balance.

Another good example is a cube, which has six stable points of equilibrium. If one side is weighted, it may not only have less stable points but one of them is, unlike the uniform case, the 'preferred' choice. This produces loaded dice. (Both gaming authorities and gamblers who have been so cheated react punitively to their use.)

Two Hungarian mathematicians have recently created something of a sensation by proving the existence of a three-dimensional shape which has one stable and one unstable point of equilibrium (a mono-monostatic body) and, furthermore, by constructing such a body. The two are Gábor Domokos (one of the youngest members of the Hungarian Academy, who holds a chair at the Budapest University of Technology) and Péter Várkonyi, a former PhD student of Domokos's.

It is nothing new for Hungarian mathematicians to make notable contributions. In the 19th century, the most celebrated was János Bolyai (for his non-Euclidean geometry); the most famous in the 20th was John von Neumann (for lasting contributions to computer science and game theory) but Pál Erdős, Alfréd Rényi and László Lovász, to name but three, are also known to their fellows the world over. Nor is it entirely a novelty for an object which seems to be outside the 'typical' sphere of mathematical research to acquire exceptional relevance in mathematics. A good example here is Rubik's cube, which back in 1979

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My Lunch with Arnold

The conference organizers were advertising special lunches. For an exorbitant fee one could buy a ticket to eat with a math celebrity. [...] I calculated that if I reduced my eating from two hotdogs a day to one I could afford a lunch ticket with the great Professor.

The lunch was a disaster, both from my point of view and Arnold's. The organizers had tried to maximize their profit rather than the ticket-buyers' pleasure. At the big round table with Arnold were ten eager young mathematicians. Each was carrying one or two "highly important" scientific papers which were full of "highly relevant" results they wanted to share with Arnold. He could not eat as they held out their papers and made claims about their great original contributions. And unless I was willing to butt into this noisy whining, as each of the people was doing to the others, I could not speak. I sat and tried to look attentive at the pathetic scene.

At the end of the meal Arnold finally asked me, "And what is *your* paper about?"

I said, "Nothing."

"Surely you have something to ask or say," he said.

But I was depressed by the fray and said no, I had just wanted to listen. I ate one hot dog a day and I went to a hundred fifteen-minute talks that I didn't understand.

On the last day I packed my suitcase and headed for the airport. The main lobby of the conference centre was deserted, maintenance people were taking down posters, the buffet was closed, people were fading out. As I strolled across the big hall I noticed, next to a young Asian man, leaning on a counter

featured on the cover of the *Mathematical Intelligencer*. The same prestigious journal recently devoted another cover to something called the "Gömböc" and published Várkonyi and Domokos's article describing a convex object with one stable and one unstable point of equilibrium, thus confirming a conjecture made some years earlier by the Russian mathematician V. I. Arnold.

It should be added, incidentally, that in 1979, when Ernő Rubik's cube made its debut, its designer (then teaching at the Budapest University of Crafts and Design) set his students a paper-folding assignment. One of them, Dániel Erdély, presented him with a planar flat figure composed of alternating sequences of isosceles triangles which, when folded and joined, had extraordinary properties. He named it a 'spidron', combining 'spider' and 'polygon'. For a long time, Erdély himself only saw his figure as having aesthetic and metaphysical appeal until, in the 1990s, a Romanian crystallographer discovered its scientific relevance. It has since become clear that spidrons can be used to depict number theory and algebraic systems, and are also suitable for the demonstration and resolution of problems in crystal physics and certain philosophical propositions. Interdisciplinary research with spidrons is now truly international, involving both theoretical mathematicians and artists.

Domokos and Várkonyi have playfully named their three-dimensional mono-monostatic shape a "Gömböc". (The word is the familiar diminutive of *gömb,* a sphere, and means something like 'plumpy' when applied to a person.) A prototype of the object is now on display at the Hungarian Technical Museum in Budapest. The shape is captivating: from a roundish base rises a crested superstructure, almost like the helmet of the Spanish Conquistadors, with symmetric protrusions on each side. The shape has two median planes at right

near the closed buffet, Professor V. I. Arnold. The young Asian man was talking excitedly in the tone I had noted at the disastrous lunch. As I walked closer, Arnold raised his voice slightly.

"As I told you already several times, there is nothing new in what you are telling me. I published this in 1980. Look it up. I do not want to discuss this further; moreover, I have an appointment with the gentleman carrying the suitcase over there. Good-bye."

The disappointed young mathematician got up to leave and Arnold turned to me. "You wanted to talk to me, right?" Stunned that he even remembered me, but aware of the part I suddenly was supposed to play, I pretended that the discussion was expected. "You sat at the lunch table, right? You must have had a reason. What is it about? Tell me fast. I have to catch my train."

We sat down. I collected my thoughts and explained about the plywood and the wire [constructions] and how they gave the number two, which really meant four. He stared off without saying a word. After five minutes I asked him if he wanted to know how we proved that the plywood had at least four equilibria. He waved me away. "Of course I know how you proved it" and then he breezily outlined the proof in a few phrases. "That's not what I am thinking about. The question is whether your result follows from the Jacobi theorem or not."

He stared off again.

[...] "Send me a letter when you find a body with less than four equilibria in the three-dimensional case," he said, "I have to catch my train. Good-bye, young man, and good luck to you!"

From: "My Lunch with Arnold" by Gábor Domokos, *Mathematical Intellligencer,* 2006, vol. 28, no. 4.

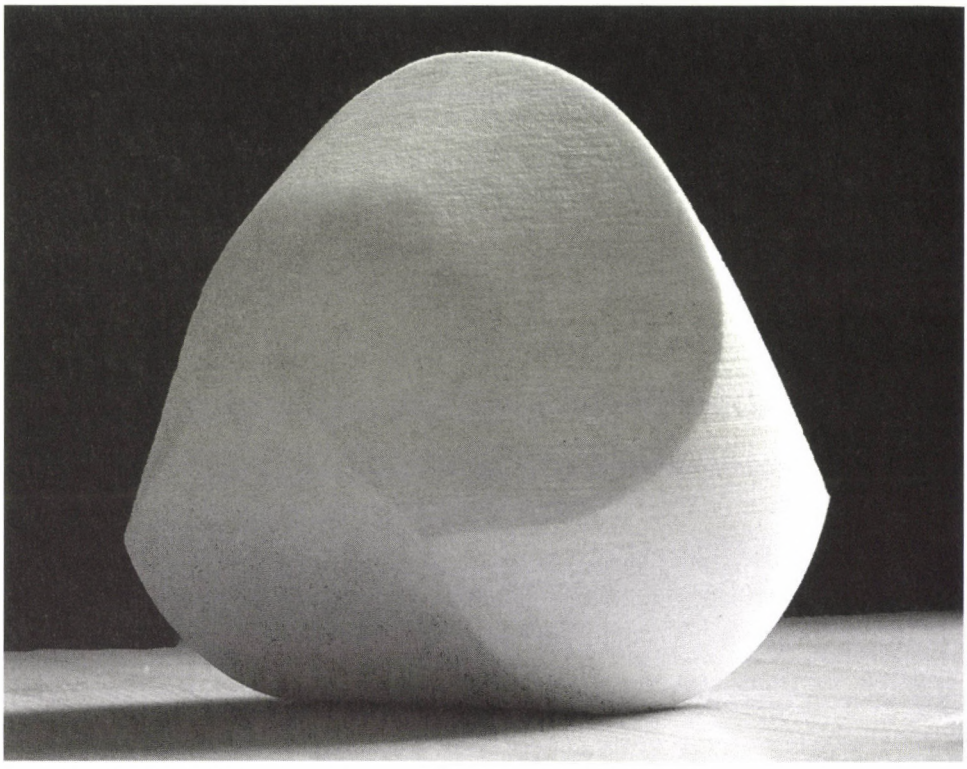
angles to one another. The most important feature of the graceful "Gömböc" (or "Gomboc" as it will inevitably be called in English) is that it is self-righting. For a short time it is possible to balance it on its unstable point of equilibrium, i.e. the top, but it takes only the slightest breath of wind, a fleck of dust, or an uneven table, to restore it to its upright stance.

The Comeback Kid, a toy very similar to the "Gömböc", also has one stable and one unstable point of equilibrium. The toy can be balanced on its head, but the slightest disturbance will make it revert to its normal position; the head is thus its unstable point. Although the Comeback Kid can be used for modelling certain mathematical problems connected to equilibrium, it is not a homogeneous body since it has a weight at its bottom. But Várkonyi and Domokos were interested in complex, homogeneous bodies, and for a reason.*

The basic problem comes from V. I. Arnold, one of the greatest living mathematicians, who has made important contributions to topology, chaos theory, mechanics and catastrophe theory—subdisciplines in mathematics which are quite distant from one another. Arnold was the first to conjecture the existence of a homogeneous, convex body with one stable and one unstable point of equilibrium (more precisely, he reckoned there were complex, homogeneous bodies with less than four points of equilibrium).

This is, in fact, a topological problem and a very interesting one at that. Topology is a fairly recent research area of mathematics, a geometry concerned with the mapping of sections, curves, circles and discs. It is also referred to ironically as "rubber sheet geometry", and topologists are described as mathematicians who are unable to tell a tyre from a coffee cup—

* Further reading: http://www.gomboc.eu



The "Gömböc", the first homogenous convex object having just one stable and one unstable point of equilibrium.

since the two objects can be transformed into each other by means of topological geometry. However, the relevance of the "Gömböc", the 1.1 mono-monostatic body, will probably extend beyond topology.

Domokos and Várkonyi set about confirming Arnold's conjecture in an astute way. They first envisaged a flat shape rolling on a horizontal plane with exactly two positions of equilibrium (one stable, one unstable) in the plane of rolling, and they promptly managed to prove that no such shape exists. The refutation, however, did not hold up when it comes to three-dimensional shapes. They therefore had to assume that such a body exists, but was yet to be constructed. They had to allow for several considerations. They supposed, and proved mathematically, that such a three-dimensional figure had to be of minimal flatness and thinness. Proceeding along these lines, Domokos and Várkonyi got closer and closer to resolving the problem, the essence of which is this: a homogeneous mono-monostatic body in class 1.1 (i.e. with two equilibria altogether) must be envisaged as consisting of two three-dimensional elements conjoined, the one delineated from the other by a spatial pattern something like that found on a tennis ball. Their *Mathematical Intelligencer* article does not provide exact and detailed parameters for the shape, as their research is still at too early a stage. They have, however, put up a prize of $10,000 for the mathematician who can identify a self-righting, mono-monostatic polyhedral object (an object with flat sides) similar to the Gömböc with the least number of sides. (The actual prize money will be $10,000

divided by the number of the sides of this object. It is unlikely that anyone will strike it rich, however, as they believe that any such three-dimensional figure would have several thousand sides.)

Will there be any practical application for the "Gömböc"? In laymen's eyes, spinoffs from mathematical discoveries often seem disappointingly slow to arrive. However, mathematical discoveries, especially those where several branches of this or other disciplines overlap, may yield answers to questions that their discoverers may never even have dreamed of. Such answers might seem abstract to those less versed in mathematics but, sooner or later, most of them will affect our everyday lives.

It looks as if the "Gömböc" may soon provide solutions to several problems of symmetry occurring in nature. For instance, as an object it is strikingly similar to the shell of the Indian Star Turtle. The helmet-like shape of the shell helps the turtle to right itself if a wave turns it onto its back. (But the turtle is not a homogeneous object since it has both a shell and body.)

Gábor Domokos and his wife spent their honeymoon on Rhodes collecting and testing pebbles on the beach. His paper in the *Journal of Nonlinear Science* expands on this peculiar way of collecting data (which, he also admits, some women might consider grounds for divorce). Of the eligible shapes, the flattish, disk-like pebbles (the best for skipping across water) have at least two stable points of equilibrium, while elongated, bar-like pebbles have at least two unstable points of equilibrium. However, the spherical shapes are sensitive to erosion and incision, which results in several new points of equilibrium. On the other hand, 2.2 situations (two stable, two unstable points of equilibrium) are a lot more common, even dominant, since they are to be found among pebbles with arbitrary flatness and thinness.

This indicates that the number of mono-monostatic, homogeneous bodies in class 1.1 in nature is extremely low. This may explain the fate that awaits the "Gömböcs" that have been constructed so far. Manufactured with layers of plaster and resin, they are highly sensitive and go "out of order" easily. A little dirt, grease, the wear-and-tear of being touched, or an uneven surface, and the expensive model may end up with as many as ten stable points of equilibrium.

It is, however, proven rigorously that after their prototype, any combinations of equilibrium can be devised, both as a mathematical model and a real object. In other words, based on the "Gömböc", any number and type of complex, homogeneous bodies with stable and unstable positions of equilibrium can be constructed. This justifies the claim that the "Gömböc" is a mathematical stem cell. The longer Várkonyi and Domokos study their new Comeback Kid, the closer they will be to understanding what lies behind the door they have managed to unlock. ❧

PERSONAL

András Gerő

Hungary Compelled to Reform

Reforms are usually born of necessity. No one really wants to change the status quo, even if there is a good reason to do so. People generally avoid change if doing so imperils a relatively functioning stability. Indeed both the general public and politicians value stability for its own sake.

As history shows, however, when the old stability no longer works, a new equilibrium must be created.

If there had not been a peasant revolt in 1831 in northern Hungary then Count István Széchenyi's book, *Hitel* (Credit), published in 1830, would not have led to a comprehensive reform process. Had inheritance right not become impenetrable by the 1890's, civil marriage—another step in the separation of church and state—would probably not have been introduced. Without the Trianon Treaty of 1920, which concluded the First World War and forced Hungary to rethink its entire state and economic apparatus after losing two thirds of its territory, Prime Minister Count István Bethlen's reforms could not have taken place. If by 2006 the budget deficit had not reached almost ten per cent of the gross domestic product, the ruling Socialist-Liberal coalition would not have had to start radically curtailing the welfare system.

Compulsion and reform go hand in hand in Hungarian history.

But needs signal opportunities. Necessity allows us to revise our whole way of thinking and develop a new, or partially new, approach. Problems once pushed into the background by an outworn way of thinking can be made into priorities. What is different has to be done differently.

This gives all the more reason to secure the right intellectual framework before addressing changes born of necessity. Hungary's current political climate of changes is born of constraints, yet its politicians are bereft of ideas.

Lest it be misunderstood, I don't mean to equate a dearth of ideas with an

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absence of grandiose utopias. In the Europe of today there are no grand, coherent utopias or world-redeeming social-political visions. There are obviously many reasons for this lack of vision, but the most important is surely that we have got to the point where there are no alternatives to democratic institutions and the market economy. At the most, there may be alternative ways of practising democracy or running a market economy.

Nonetheless, in my opinion there are two areas which do require a new framework of ideas.

The almost two decades since the change of regime have been about a new society taking shape. This process, however, is intertwined with those challenges which the whole of Europe, including Hungary, has to face. The challenges are global, but the answers are rooted in the local culture, thus providing an opportunity to give answers with an intellectual content, adjusted to local culture.

Hungarian politics are bipolar. The government's approach is fundamentally technocratic and etatist. Any talk of reform on the part of the government is aimed at cutting spending to reduce the budget deficit. They think in terms of a more rational and effectively functioning structure and organisation, mainly because it has become obvious that the old ways cost more than the country can afford.

The opposition is content merely to oppose. It insists there is no need for reform: changes are unnecessary, every step taken by the government leads to national tragedy. Essentially, the opposition reflects the traditions of resistance of the Hungarian nobility, but resistance and grievance politics have never achieved anything. Such opposition thinking is dominated by the desire for short-term political gains and is devoid of intellectual content.

As I see it, there is technocracy on one side and intellectual vacuity on the other. Obviously, the two are connected. What binds them is that neither bothers with the spectrum of opportunities born of necessity.

The "technocratic" approach and the "intellectual void" are the cancer at the heart of Hungarian politics. Both are based on the belief that long-term political survival is possible without hard thinking.

I question that.

Over the past seventeen years we have failed to formulate any vision in response to basic questions such as: What sort of society does the new Hungarian democracy want? What is demanded of a society whose welfare hinges on the market economy? During the Communist period, there was a clear social vision. It failed when hard economic facts smashed the illusion of its own self-professed utopia. Since the change of regime, however, Hungary's political elite has simply avoided the question of what kind of society is desirable. I know it is not possible to realize completely any goal set by politics—reality always intervenes. But the fact that no goal has even been envisioned is an indication of an intellectual vacuum. A shortage of ideas is generally masked by clichés. The prime minister on the left says these days that he wants a Hungary of the middle class. The leader of the opposition on the right, who has lost two elections, dreams of a Hungary of the people.

Both statements are meaningless absurdities.

The real question, I think, is whether the political elite should picture Hungarian society in the shape of an egg or a pyramid. In an evolving capitalist world, the egg model envisages a relatively thin stratum of the poor at the bottom and an even thinner layer of the rich at the top, with the bulk of society fitting into an increasingly bulging petit-bourgeois middle class. With the pyramid, on the other hand, social groups are markedly, hierarchically stratified: the main body of society is poor, a tiny body is rich. Those capable of achieving a sort of petit bourgeois middle-class lifestyle are present in diminishing numbers as we move up the pyramid. How can government measures be implemented without taking the sociopolitical and political consequences into consideration, or weighing up the effects of these measures on people's behaviour and interests?

This problem is a characteristic of post-Communist societies, including Hungary, and that is why the political elite should at last take the question seriously. All this could be ignored while the social services system inherited from the socialist period could be maintained without any great structural changes. But now that the need for reform is pressing, this issue is all the more urgent. As some of these systems of provision now have to be reconsidered, there is an obvious need for an overarching intellectual framework. I don't believe that either the intellectual vacuity epitomised in the statement that "the village is the way of life for the future", to quote the leader of the opposition (in a country in which by now 70 per cent of the population is urban), or the government's "technocratic rationalism" are particularly promising answers to the question of what kind of society we want.

On top of all these problems, Hungarian society is presented with daunting civilizational challenges. In this respect, too, it lacks a coherent intellectual answer. Let us look at some of these challenges.

Two out of every five Hungarians live in polluted and noisy areas. By now a fifth of the population, two million people, suffer from allergies. Hungary's use of renewable energy sources is a sixth of the average of the 25 EU member states. The proportion of Hungarians who enjoy higher and further education is one third of the EU average. In 23 EU countries half the population can speak English at a conversational level; in Hungary only 16 per cent can. The proportion of those who never use the Internet is 34 per cent in the 25 EU member states; in Hungary it is 57 per cent. And then there is the problem of old age. In Hungary there are over three million pensioners. All that the imagination of Hungarian politicians can come up with is to think of buying votes. If one side offers 13 monthly pension payments in a year, then the other promises 14. Meanwhile the country spends 50 per cent less on care for the elderly than the EU average. Men wait a year and a half, women a year, to get into a municipal-run home. Caring for the elderly falls mainly onto relatives, a new form of slave labour for those involved.

Naturally, these are only examples, mere indications of what is needed for Hungarian society to catch up. Still, none of this has become a burning political

topic. Hungarian politics is incapable of translating the civilizational questions into issues. Yet, if there is compulsion—and there is a great deal—we cannot forego making it explicit. Intellectual vacuity refuses to tackle the question. But neither do the narrow-minded "technocrats" seek solutions to the problems affecting the quality of life.

Let me mention an example that is particularly timely. It concerns the healthcare system. I basically dislike this term: the way it is used hides a technocratic obsession with the economically viable functioning of institutions—which is, of course, not to be taken for granted. But the basic question still concerns how long Hungarians want to live. The term "health policy" is, to my taste, more apt, because it captures two problems: on the one hand it sees the task as helping us to stay healthy as long as possible, and on the other it ensures that if we do become ill, we receive decent care.

On average, in the EU, people enjoy 10 more years of healthy living than Hungarians. In the Union the proportion of the overweight is five per cent lower than in Hungary. A Hungarian eats eighty kilos less fruit per year than the EU average, but (in terms of pure alcohol) drinks approximately two litres more. It is hardly surprising that Hungarians die relatively early, and thus live fewer years as pensioners than the EU average, even though the average European retires later. It is no wonder that the average annual death rate from cancer is 180 per 100,000 in the EU, while in Hungary it is 260. The same indicator for cardiovascular diseases is 233 for Hungarians, while in the EU it is under 100. Yet in Hungary the number of hospital beds per 100,000 inhabitants and spending on pharmaceuticals far exceeds the EU average.

Of course, it is possible to reduce the number of beds and streamline the pharmaceutical subsidies—these are the central aims of the current healthcare reform. But this will not lead to the consumption of more fruit, nor will it lower the incidence of cancer and make Hungarians healthier or let them live longer.

So I would expect Hungary's political elite to set as its goal a very simple demand: "Long live Hungarians!" Or put in another way, "Let Hungarians live longer!"

I realise that this problem does not overly preocupy those thinking in terms of cost efficiency, and is of even less interest to those content to mouth empty slogans. But to me and many others it is important.

On the basis of all this, I believe that the time has come to fill the void with competing visions which, without being utopian, seriously address our problems.

In my humble opinion, trying every four years to win the majority of votes is not a particularly ambitious agenda.

The fundamental question for me is: what will become of us? What kind of society do we wish to live in, and what kind of answers can we find to the civilizational challenges facing us?

I believe that democracy has no alternatives, but its quality has. Quality can be denoted by an adjective. The adjective is "enlightened".

I want an enlightened democracy. ❧

István Tanács

On the Border

Hungarians feared that when Romania acceded to the European Union in 2007, millions of Romanians seeking work would flood the country. The reality has proved otherwise: it is Hungarians who are now setting off from Hungary's eastern periphery to work in a western Romania, which is catching up economically with its neighbour at full speed.

Battonya is a small town of about 8,000 in south-eastern Hungary, on the Romanian border. Several co-operative farms and the depots of a number of large industrial firms operated in the area, but since 1989–90 these have shut down. The operations of the old large agricultural estates have been rationalised, leading to a rise in unemployment. The main employers now are various local government institutions, but with retrenchment proceeding apace in the state sector more and more of these jobs are being lopped. The scarcity of jobs not only affects people right now but on their reaching retirement age, too, since without the minimum job-related years of contributions the prospect is one of receiving a pathetically inadequate pension—or no pension at all.

Little wonder, then, that many in Battonya were delighted that, not long ago, the industrial estate of nearby Pecica, in Arad County in Romania, was looking for manpower. Four or five years ago the rate of unemployment in Pecica itself was running at around 20–25 per cent—much the same as across most of southern Békés County on the Hungarian side of the border. That has fundamentally changed over the last few years. The western region of Romania—thus the counties of Arad and Timiş—effectively faces a labour shortage. So many foreign (mainly Italian and German) investors have set up shop in the region that the official unemployment rate has sunk to 2 per cent, and new industrial units are now jostling for space in even the smaller settlements across the region. The bulk of these enterprises manufacture components or sub-assemblies, and they are looking for reliable workers rather than highly qualified staff. In other words the work available in these plants is very similar to the sort of thing that co-operative sub-units were doing in Hungary during the Eighties. Lots of these were wound up after Hungary moved to democracy and a market

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economy in 1990. In sum, the new ventures may not be in any sense knowledge-based or high-tech, but they are at least more than just fantasies or political catchwords.

One reason behind the sudden burst of development over the border is that the minimum wage in Romania is only €98 whereas in Hungary it stands at €200 per month, with appropriately higher employer's contributions to social security and other charges on labour. Consequently, if someone in Milan looks at a map, he is more likely to opt for Pecica than Battonya, a few kilometres across the border.

The situation in eastern Hungary has meanwhile stayed unchanged. In Battonya, for example, the unemployment level is stuck around 22 per cent, with close to 500 people drawing regular social-security payments. For the town's working-age population there is little chance of finding work locally. They could try their luck in western Hungary and Budapest, but then relocation, the higher cost-of-living and travel expenses are likely to make a big dent in any wages they would make, even in Western Europe, where the supply of manpower from even poorer areas of Poland, Romania and Bulgaria is relentlessly driving down wages for unskilled labour and in the black economy. Under those circumstances, even a poorly paid but steady job just a few miles away over a border that can now be freely crossed can look very attractive.

"With Romania's accession to the EU, its borders are effectively open, and crossing over every day poses no problem," says László Horváth. "In Pecica, about 7 miles from Battonya, they are always on the look-out for workers with some technical skills who are willing to work in a disciplined environment. The firms operating here are concerned primarily with the manufacture of car parts and the production of moulds for metals and plastics. There has been a survey into how many of Battonya's unemployed might be able to find a job in Romania. Sixty who are on the unemployment register were identified and sent a questionnaire. After checking their qualifications, practical experience and fitness to enter regular employment, 15 appeared to be suitable. The jobs are to start in 2008. The Italian employer undertakes to train the semi-skilled, paying them a fixed wage throughout the training period, after which pay is to be performance-related."

I met Péter Czirka on a building site. A qualified agricultural mechanic, he worked for 24 years in various sections of one of Battonya's co-operative farms. He has built his own house, reared a variety of domestic animals and brought up his daughters. What happened to him after 1990 is fairly typical of many in eastern Hungary. Almost, but not quite, because Péter Czirka never gave up, he did not take to drink, and he accepted any job that was going. Those opportunities never really came to anything, which is why he is now hoping for a job in Romania. As Czirka recounts, "I have worked in various metallurgical shops. I am qualified as an agricultural mechanic, I have also been employed as a welder and as a fitter in a knitwear factory. I am formally qualified to do some of the jobs, but not all. I would just pick up the know-how whenever it was necessary."

Czirka was self-employed for a while in the early Nineties, when the talk was that capitalism had arrived and that entrepreneurs were going to inherit the world: "I didn't dare set up as a contractor in the metallurgical business. For that you need to have a workshop and machines but I didn't have the money for that, I would have had to borrow. But that would have meant mortgaging the roof over my family's head. I didn't dare take the risk, I knew of cases where metal-working businesses already in

Employment during the Socialist Era and since the Change of Regime

Hungary experienced full employment during the Socialist era; indeed, for decades, anyone not in what was considered officially to be gainful employment was subject to criminal prosecution. A job of some kind was to be found anywhere across the country, in both large and small settlements. By the latter part of the Eighties, however, a more mixed economy had emerged with the spread of the so-called 'second' or 'black' economy.

This meant that virtually every able-bodied Hungarian of working age had a workplace where the pay was not great but at least it was dependable and also paid in the contributions needed to qualify for social security and medical care. It was permissible to undertake supplementary work, which for those with their main job in a factory often took the form of overtime in what were called economic teams. In general, this would involve work that was related to the full-time occupation but was better paid and team members had a direct incentive to work efficiently. In agricultural areas, where typically people would be members of a local co-operative farm, extra income came from working their own land, whether a garden attached to the home or the household plot (typically half a hectare, or about one acre) that the co-operative allocated to each member, where they would grow labour-intensive vegetables, fruit or medicinal plants. The co-operative would purchase these crops and sell them on to food-processing firms.

The economic impact of Hungary becoming a democracy brought a total breakdown of the existing employment system. Industrial firms used to meeting the needs of markets in the East that were accustomed to low-quality goods suddenly found that their products had to be updated, but this could only be achieved at a very high price. In the early Nineties that involved major lay-offs and many bankrupcies. There were huge regional differences in how this affected jobs. The average rate of unemployment across the country in recent years has been running at around 7 per cent (one in five of all the unemployed are 15–24 years old). However, whereas there are plenty of job opportunities in the rapidly developing towns of western Hungary, unemployment is rife in northern and eastern Hungary, above all in areas where many Roma live.

operation had gone bust. In the end, I set up as an insurance agent, selling mostly life insurance. The only trouble was that right then many people were losing their jobs. They weren't worried about what would happen twenty years from now but what would happen tomorrow. In other words, they couldn't afford substantial monthly premiums, and if someone breaks that sort of policy early on in the term, the insurance company does not return the money paid in. But then if I didn't manage to persuade people to take the plunge, even though it wasn't in their interest to do so, I wouldn't earn a penny. On the other hand, if I managed to persuade them, I would have it on my conscience because I was well aware of their situation and knew it was something that they couldn't afford."

Later, he worked in a plant in Battonya, which extracted industrial fat from animal bones. When that closed, he was told that he ought to look for work in western Hungary, because jobs were going there. "I called at a plant in the same industry there, but that didn't offer any great prospects, because they were having to lay off staff," Czirka recollects. "What I found was that the wages I would get in western Hungary would not be enough to pay for lodgings during the week plus the costs of travel home regularly at the weekends. At that point I still owned a bit of land and we

The big losers in the country's change of regime have been those employed in agriculture living in rural areas. Co-operative farms were deliberately undermined by political means instead of being assisted to modernise. As a result, unemployment in Hungary's villages has been horrendously high. The real rate is much worse than the official figures for the registered unemployed. With no hope of getting a regular job, many of the long-term unemployed do not bother turning up at job centres but attempt to scratch a living off social assistance and/or casual labour in the 'black' economy. Ownership of land in Hungary is also gradually becoming concentrated. Although there are still many smallholders, the majority of them do not own the tools they need to work their land and so they lease it out. The production of labour-intensive crops is now confined to certain areas of the country: wherever there is no chance of growing such crops profitably, the land is given over to grain or oil-seed crops. The concentration of land ownership has further accelerated since Hungary became an EU member, with the spread of industrial plants for manufacturing 'biodiesel' and 'bioethanol' fuels, as they are major purchasers of these crops.

The Communist regime gave priority to social security over economic efficiency; full employment was more important than profitability. The market economy has reversed this, and the gap between high- and low-income families is rapidly widening. Apart from level of schooling, the factor that is most decisive in determining a person's chances of getting on in life is where they happen to live. If one lives in an economically declining fringe area that lacks a regional centre, the only solution is moving away. That, however, is not as easy as it may sound, because one of the effects of that downward spiral is to depress property prices, whereas in economically thriving areas real estate prices are continually rising.

In spite of all this, some of the younger, more ambitious and better-qualified are bound to relocate. That has the consequence that after a while, even if investors were to look at setting up shop there, they would not find enough potential employees of the right quality. The chronically unemployed are now used to this lifestyle. For one thing, there is no great difference between the minimum level of social security payment that is needed to procure a bare subsistence and the wages that are being offered these days for unskilled labour, with the result that there is little incentive to seek such work.

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had been rearing livestock to supplement our income. But then if I wasn't at home, I couldn't feed the animals and my wife would be saddled with all the work. I returned to Battonya and took whatever work I could get. Meanwhile the price for pork dropped so low that it was no longer worth rearing pigs. We sold the land while we were at it and used the proceeds to help my daughter buy a home of her own."

There is no guarantee that Péter Czirka will secure a job in Pecica. Those I wished to interview were made singularly uncommunicative by the deepening domestic political crisis in Romania. Thus, it proved impossible to interview any of Pecica's ethnic Magyar politicians; nor was anything worthwhile forthcoming from some Italian recruiters who were visiting Hungary on a fact-finding tour on behalf of western European investors and whom I met in the office of the mayor of Battonya. They would not divulge the human resources they were looking for or what firms they were working on behalf of—all came under the heading of business confidentiality. I therefore turned to an old acquaintance, Gábor Kaba, the popular ethnic-Magyar mayor of the town of Jimbolia, in Timiş County, close to Romania's border with Serbia. Jimbolia, like the rest of the county, is short of manpower, whereas masses of people in villages just a few miles away, on the other side of the frontier in Serbia, are twiddling

East Europe through Investors' Eyes

Since the collapse of Communism capital has typically flowed from West to East, but labour from East to West. Investors seek to drive down production costs, and labour is the biggest component of those costs. The main attraction of the former Eastern bloc is a skilled, non-unionised, compliant labour pool that has been habituated to monotonous jobs—all at just 15–20 per cent of West European wage levels. There are other motivating factors too. Before entry into the European Union, there were no limits to the tax incentives that could be offered foreign investors. Furthermore, national governments might dip into their budgetary resources, and local governments place land and buildings at their disposal. In many of the Eastern economies there was a division between foreign-owned, capital-rich, competitive firms with a small labour force, and small and middle-sized domestically owned enterprises. The most widely cherished illusion was that multinational companies would choose as their suppliers local firms that employed many workers, thereby enabling them to become well-capitalised and acquire advanced technology. The reality, however, is different. Multinational companies tend to use their existing suppliers, because in their view local entrepreneurs will be unable to meet their quality standards. The local enterprises in turn complain that they are not granted credit facilities or training opportunities, or a genuine chance.

The truth is that investors take many factors into consideration. The strength and impartiality of the legal system, the security of investments and the right to repatriate profits are all major concerns; so too are language or intergovernmental relations. Thus, in western Romania, for example, the main factor driving the present-day rapid development is the fact that the owners of the supplier companies are former middle managers of Italian and German companies who have the required know-how, are good credit risks back home, and are willing to move to a foreign country. National boundaries are also boundaries of

their thumbs. Kaba, elected mayor in a town with a population that is 85 per cent ethnic Romanian, points out: "In the year 2000, when I was first elected, Jimbolia was having its mains water supply cut off for 11 hours every day. The newspapers in Timişoara wrote us off as a ghost town. Now there are 15 foreign firms who have invested in Jimbolia—ten German, three Italian and two Swiss. In 2002, the state of North Rhine-Westphalia helped us to set up a modern industrial training school in which instruction and training was designed around the needs of the businesses that are operating in the locality. There could be jobs for another 600 to 800 this year, but this region of Romania has insufficient manpower resources."

Jimbolia's mayor has appealed to the country's labour minister to relax the conditions that govern the employment of non-citizens, "I requested that they drop the requirement that an employer has to clear permits through three separate offices, and that instead he could make do with just one. Currently an employer has to pay an annual fee of €230 to the state for each and every non-citizen on the payroll—that too ought to be eased. The biggest block, though, is the requirement for foreign employers to pay a minimum wage of €400 per month, regardless of the job. That's a lot. In Romania the minimum wage is currently a net €90 per month, but in Jimbolia, where pay is performance-related, even the most skilful or those who are willing to put in overtime are only earning a net of about €300–350 per month. Anyone who has gone abroad to work in Italy or Spain will be earning around €1,000 per month, so they are not going to come back to earn a third of that. In Serbia, wages are

opportunities. It is invariably the case that the western region of a country will develop more rapidly simply because it lies closer to Western Europe. With a shorter delivery chain, top managers may be able to live in Vienna if their wives are unwilling to move to some back-of-beyond place.

The geopolitical climate also sets a limit to the eastward flow of investment capital. To this day, it is far riskier to put money into Ukraine as compared with Romania which, despite long being a byword for corruption, has adopted EU legal norms. Moldova is likewise seen as a high risk; Belarus and Russia are perceived as having too autocratic or over-mighty governments to permit multinationals to protect their own interests.

Foreign investors tended to establish themselves in Hungary first and foremost in the capital or in the corridor around the Vienna–Budapest motorway. Thus, cities such as Győr, Tatabánya and Székesfehérvár nowadays count as advanced industrial centres. More recently big towns lying to the east of the Danube, such as Nyíregyháza, Debrecen and Jászberény, have been acting as islands of development to pull in investment. A lot has depended on the international political situation and also on the infrastructure that earlier years have bequeathed. As one example, Kecskemét, a city of 100,000 inhabitants lying to the south-east of Budapest and tied to the capital by a motorway since 1995, has been able to shake off its former image as a sleepy agricultural town and pull in a substantial machine industry. By contrast, Pécs in the south-west and Szeged in the south-east of Hungary both lay close to what, during the Nineties, was the disintegrating and war-torn former state of Yugoslavia; on top of this neither place had a motorway connection, and so neither city has been able to lure major industrial investment. Having distinguished universities in their backyards, both cities had been hopeful of persuading high-tech industry to move there, but to date neither has been able to tip the balance decisively so that private investors see a chance for winning a genuine return on their capital.

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even lower then in Romania. What we are looking for is that special regulations should be brought in, at least for the immediate cross-border areas, but it seems it's not going to be an easy matter to achieve that."

It's easy to understand the policy of the Romanian labour ministry, whose €400 per month rule is designed to protect the domestic job market, because the rates of unemployment at some distance from the country's western border are sky-high. "Well, foreign employers will just have to go a bit further to set up shop" best characterises the attitude of some politicians. Imre Gnandt, who is manager of Jimbolia's biggest foreign-owned company, Wittronic, outlines the thinking of foreign investors: "The Germans call it an 'extended workbench' when all they do is outsource the work itself. Vogt, the firm from which the company that I am now working for was spun off, set up here very explicitly for the cheap labour that was available. Minute components and sub-assemblies require a lot of tricky manual work, which calls for a young workforce, females above all, with good eyesight and high dexterity. Later on they're going to need more highly skilled people who have management skills and are able to develop the technical aspects. Still later it will become worthwhile to look for and organise local suppliers—again that calls for specialised skills and experience. People with the necessary skills will either come to the fore within the company, or will have to be brought in from outside. There are now entire years at the Engineering Faculty of the University of Timişoara where all the students have an employment contract in their pocket by the time they qualify. Jimbolia, and actually the whole of

County Timiş, is now short of manpower, so if we don't manage to bring in labour from Serbia, that is going to cramp further growth."

I wonder why the companies do not invest in eastern Hungary, or indeed move deeper into Romania. "As far as eastern Hungary goes", Imre Gnandt explains, "what matters is higher average wages in the country as such. Romania is much cheaper. The car industry these days uses 'just in time' production methods by which every nut and bolt has to reach the assembly site precisely when it is needed. If there is a hold-up at borders, or duties have to be paid, those are extra costs, so there's a risk that deliveries will be unreliable. Since Romania joined the EU, more and more companies are looking at sites deeper in the interior, but even so only in those regions that have an industrial background and local politicians who are willing to offer suitable inducements to potential investors. Because the position in western Romania has reached the point where there are no more human resources on which firms can draw and the number of workplaces is growing all the time. The chief reason for employing Hungarians or Serbians in Romania is extremely simple: everything, up to and including engineering R&D is far cheaper in Romania than if one were to carry it out in, say, Germany or Switzerland or northern Italy, from which the work is being outsourced."

So, for the time being, Péter Czirka is placing a lot of faith in a workplace in Romania. "We have never looked for hand-outs. My wife works and the two of us together take home about Ft70,000 (€280) a month. That's bare subsistence, never mind a living! I've heard that in Pecica it's possible to make around €400, or something like Ft100,000, which would mean not having to watch where every last penny was going. I'm not scared of work, or that the bosses will be Romanians and Italians. What I'm longing for more than anything else is to end all this insecurity. What I want is to be able to spend the eight years that are left until I reach retirement in reasonable security." ❧

András Mink

Kádár's Shadow

Roger Gough: *A Good Comrade: János Kádár, Communism and Hungary*, London, I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 320 pp.

> *"The plea in extenuation of guilt and mitigation of punishment is perpetual. At every step we are met by arguments which go to excuse, to palliate, to confound right and wrong, and reduce the just man to the level of the reprobate. The men who plot to baffle and resist us are, first of all, those who made history what it has become."*
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> *Lord Acton,* Inaugural Lecture on the Study of History, *Cambridge, 1895.*

The fiftieth anniversary of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution helped to cast new light on János Kádár, whose rise to power on the debris of the crushed uprising was to cement him as the country's leader for the next thirty years. Much has been written about his life, his deeds and misdeeds and his last, almost incoherent speech to the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party in April, 1989. These writings traverse total repudiation, impartial scholarly analysis and uncritical apologia. Unsurprisingly, the greatest hit among them was a two-volume panegyric written by György Moldova, a popular and populist writer, known for his critical ultra-left, though pro-regime, bias since the late 1960s.

Memories of Kádár also cropped up recently in another respect. Discussion of last autumn's political and financial crisis seethed with the politics of reform. All of a sudden the main camps found themselves tussling with the "heritage" of Kádárism. They offer totally different versions of the nature of this poisoned heritage.

The coalition of the Socialist Party (successor to Kádár's Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party) and the Free Democrats (heirs to the former democratic opposition of the 1980s) won a second term of office in 2002, on the back of unsustainable social-welfare promises. Partially meeting these electoral promises almost emptied the state's coffers by the end of 2005. Although many observers warned that serious cuts were inevitable in welfare spending, and fundamental reforms to the health service and other parts of the welfare system were needed to avoid national bankruptcy, the government kept silent on these issues during the next election campaign and refused to admit the situation was all that menacing. This tactic worked: the Socialist-Liberal coalition won a second consecutive term in 2006.

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Then, shortly after their electoral victory, at a closed meeting of the Socialists' parliamentary caucus, in a dramatic speech, the prime minister declared that he and his party had been "lying day and night" (an ironic reference to a famous statement broadcast by Magyar Radio after it had been taken over by the insurgents in 1956.) The government had no choice but to implement austerity measures. The speech was leaked in September and sparked mass protests and riots. Government partisans saw this speech as an historical attempt to sever ties with the Kádárist past—i.e. belief in, and reliance on, the omnipotent state's ability to take care of everyone. The country needed reforms and a fundamental cultural change: a break with the illusions of socialism. Competition and self-provision should replace state paternalism and parasitism. They also argued that the "populist" opposition was the real transmitter of the Kádár-nostalgia, since by blocking the indispensable reforms to the social welfare system it is maintaining unrealistic hopes that etatist paternalism will offer protection from global competition.

The opposition scoffed at these accusations, pointing out that the recent administration featured "parachuters" from the closing years of the Kádárist party-state, responsible for driving the country into its second economic, political and moral bankruptcy in the space of two decades. They had been able to stay in power only through barefaced lies during a campaign that amounted to election fraud. Thus, the opposition argues, the government is illegitimate. Irresponsible, ultraliberal policies disguised as 'reforms' solely serve the selfish financial interests of the post-Kádárist elite, again at the cost of the man in the street.

Addressing a mass rally on 23 October, 2006, Viktor Orbán, leader of FIDESZ, the main opposition party, promised to initiate a referendum on issues that had provoked the public's greatest ire against reform-dictatorship. Its purpose, he insisted, was to restore democracy and popular sovereignty, both of which had been put in jeopardy by those in power. The rally was held on the very day marking the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of the Revolution, as the police were battling a few hundred yards away with gangs of far-right protesters. The clear political message he conveyed was that a real regime change, the removal of the old clique from power, still lay ahead.

For many, the heritage of the Kádár era stands for individual selfishness and indifference to public affairs. It also means corrupted political morals and the break-down of national and community values. Some observers add to these maladies a number of unbroken and damaging historical traditions: a parasitical political elite and its clientele plundering public wealth, state paternalism, authoritarian tendencies and the related powerlessness of ordinary citizens. All of this was characteristic of the one-party state before 1989. They, however, were not created by the Kádár regime. At worst, it prolonged and strengthened them. These more recent views of Kádárism therefore signal disillusionment: in 1989-90, the country made only a semi-aborted attempt to dispose of these traditional social and political evils.

A final consideration: János Kádár was the greatest historical figure of the twentieth century, according to opinion polls of the late 1990s. He ranked third in

the Hungarian pantheon after Saint Stephen, the king who founded the Hungarian Christian state, and István Széchenyi, the great nineteenth-century reformer. All in all, Hungarians still live in Kádár's shadow.

There are two pitfalls awaiting any biographer of Kádár: one is the danger of writing an apology for his system and attempting to justify unjustifiable criminal acts; the other is to engage in rancorous abuse that takes no consideration of the realities of the period. A Kádár biography is successful if it does not try to defend the indefensible and can accurately reveal the difference between what was possible and what actually happened. A description of Kádár's life cannot forego a utilitarian calculus, an examination of his hunger for power and a consideration of the realities of the Cold War. However, it would be a mistake to place these factors in the context of a neutral political pragmatism, ignoring the ideological nature of his regime and the way Kádár and his political elite related to the ideology of the system: communism.

Roger Gough's intelligent book deals with these nuances superbly. He has consulted extensively the relevant Hungarian and foreign sources and conducted numerous interviews with key figures of the Kádár era on both sides. His account is not at all indifferent to the political and moral dilemmas that have, until recently, impeded a fruitful discourse of the Kádár case, but his approach is always distanced and even-tempered. This biography, written by an "outsider", may help Hungarians to better understand their recent history and even ease their discomfort about a controversial period.

Political biographies are most penetrating when the biographer is capable of pointing out those basic traits in personality and political habitude that are representative of the subject amid all his intellectual or political shifts and about-turns. With Kádár, a biographer is confronted with unusual difficulties. Kádár was not a writer: he did not leave behind personal memoranda, manuscripts, journals or any other records that might shed light on his personal feelings, thoughts or motivations. Nor was he forthcoming otherwise: his public speeches were more or less statements of the official party line and do not tell us much about the background, and he was always reluctant to speak about himself or his private feelings and ideas.

Indeed, before 1956 János Kádár simply did not exist as an independent personality in politics. He made no remarks, either publicly or in closed party-meetings, that reflected anything like an original idea or aptitude for independent political thought. Gough evokes one of his speeches at a Central Committee meeting in March 1956: "He had never, he said, slept so well as in the days when he had simply to divine the wishes of Rákosi and the 'quartet' and then carry them out." (p. 71.)

The Rákosi era did not exactly encourage the development of autonomous personalities, even at the top level of the Party. But this tabula rasa is perplexing: one of the cadres at the very top of the ruling Communist Party (quondam minister of the interior, member of the state security committee, deputy secretary-general

of the Party) seems to have no intellectual history to speak of. His political career is, of course, more eventful. But any biographer would be hard pressed to find a connection between Kádár's political actions and his pre-1956 progress in the hierarchy, or with his imprisonment in the Fifties. Kádár was never promoted or dropped because he did something or represented something. He may well have advanced, as Gough suggests, solely because he was one of the handful of survivors of the pre-war underground Hungarian Communist movement and one of the few who were not Jews—something the men in Moscow were very conscious of. The personality which emerges seems neither of stature, nor of talent, nor engaging. This is all the more surprising since it contrasts with how many of his contemporaries remembered him: a charismatic, likeable personality, who may not have been highly educated but was of sound judgment.

Two major events marked Kádár's pre-1956 political career: his brutal and merciless role as interior minister in the Rajk show trial and his own stint in prison after trumped-up charges were laid against him in 1951. He was released in 1954 upon the initiative of Imre Nagy who, overcoming Rákosi's resistance, pushed ahead the rehabilitation of those Communist cadres who had previously fallen victim to show trials. Both of these events present Kádár in a bad light. The first shows clearly that Kádár was anything but a simple-minded and naive outsider unfamiliar with the system he served in the highest positions with such servility. After 1956 Kádár was often presented as someone who, like everybody else, was misled by the obsessions and manipulations of Stalinism. If we look at the records, this claim is hardly credible. Although he was not the initiator or architect of the Rajk trial, he was involved in its execution from the very beginning.

His behaviour during and after his release from prison in 1954 puts him in an even less favourable light. Unlike many of his fellow sufferers, it seems he failed to draw any conclusions about the nature of the regime that had treated him so unjustly. He was solely pre-occupied with his own sufferings and humiliation. He did not indicate, then or later, that, for instance, the Rajk trial was a crime, and there was no sign whatsoever of weighing his own responsibility for its preparation. Kádár never tried to promote the release of Communists imprisoned in show trials—excluding himself, of course. After his release he sought for support from Rákosi and, as Gough shows, turned against his former master only after he felt that the "compensation" offered him was inadequate. Although many in the party apparatus regarded him as one of Rákosi's potential successors, he did not openly criticize him, at a meeting of the Central Committee in July, 1956, until after Rákosi's fate had already been decided. All of this shows the reader a politician who lacked stature, had no particular moral principles and always kept the interests of his own career in focus. One might be forgiven the impression that little of Kádár's pre-1956 character could possibly foreshadow the politician who came to power after the 1956 Revolution.

Still, it is fair to conclude that by the end of 1955 Kádár had already realised that whatever came after Rákosi, his methods of exercising power could not be

maintained any longer. First and foremost, the terror that kept all of society, including the party apparatus, under perpetual threat, had to be abandoned. As Gough puts it,

> He urged further changes to the ÁVH [State Security Authority] and an effort to broaden the regime's base, building 'alliances' that would maintain party control while co-opting some social groups and prominent individuals. He wanted a more flexible system, but one whose essential pillars would remain unchanged. This would be the lasting core of what would become 'Kádárism'. (p. 75)

This kind of moderate reformism had two unshakable pillars: the unity of the Party and the maintenance of its hegemony in power. Both were questioned by the 1956 Revolution as it unfolded.

Kádár's role in the Revolution and his treachery are among the most discussed issues in recent Hungarian history. On November 2, Kádár shrewdly realized that he had been summoned before the Soviet Politburo not to be admonished, but to be assessed as the future leader of the country. Gough reconstructs in detail what happened in Moscow. The Soviet leaders were in disagreement; Khrushchev and others supported Kádár, while the Stalinist faction within the Politburo was in favour of Ferenc Münnich. Rákosi and his associates were actually sitting in the next room, hatching plans, certain of their return. Initially, and probably wholeheartedly, Kádár acted as the representative of the Imre Nagy government. At the first meeting he categorically objected to military intervention. The next day Kádár took Münnich's side and agreed to head a puppet government. He knew that his task was not the restoration of order, but to make it known that any kind of order was possible only under conditions dictated by the Soviets. Khrushchev opted for Kádár because he needed a politician who could establish order in Hungary without restoring the Stalinist system. He did not want his "secret speech" to the Soviet Party Congress and his policy of de-Stalinization to be discredited by the events in Hungary.

Hungarian historiographical debate usually centres around speculations that, given the available sources, are almost impossible to confirm or deny: was Kádár's treachery motivated by fear (if Rákosi returned, he would be hanged alongside Imre Nagy) and by his own hunger for power, or did he honestly believe that in the given circumstances his decision was in the best interests of the country, as the Soviets had already decided in favour of military intervention—a decision that Kádár had no influence on or responsibility for.

Gough offers a refreshingly clear and straightforward view of this issue: Kádár's choice could not be justified retrospectively by the argument that this was the only way to prevent the return to power of Rákosi and his accomplices. This, the excuse most frequently put forward for Kádár, sounds sophistical, since the Soviet leaders had never seriously considered re-establishing Rákosi. Gough has this to say:

> Fear and ambition probably played a part too: acceptance meant that he would have at least some leadership, and he can have few illusions as to likely long-term consequences of refusal. Yet to view siding with Moscow as a betrayal is to use a moral calculus quite alien to Kádár. He was most unlikely to opt for martyrdom based on defiance of the Soviet Union. He may have doubted the wisdom of military action (...); but there was nothing in his thinking that made the Soviet intervention wrong *in itself.* (p. 97)

At this point Gough is sketching us a portrait of Kádár's political personality that connects his pre-1956 self to the one that surfaced after the Revolution. In this light, his shift seems less enigmatic.

However, this approach does not put aside the moral aspects of Kádár's choice. Kádár could not have prevented the Soviet intervention, but he could have influenced its outcome. There are no sources to suggest that his conciliatory promises—the offer of amnesty, the re-adoption of the Kossuth coat of arms, or reinstituting March 15 as a national holiday—were intended as eyewash from the start. Most probably, he hoped the country would understand there was no other option given the circumstances. However, his hopes were frustrated. His offer was rejected by everyone; only the former state security police and the Soviet army supported him. The two Politburo envoys, Suslov and Malenkov, supervised what he was doing from a nearby secret headquarters in Leányfalu, twenty-five kilometres from Budapest, and urged him to re-evaluate his "false" views on the nature of the "counter-revolution". In other words, they exerted strong pressure on him to use violence to break resistance in the country as soon as possible. Similar warnings came from the Bloc's other capitals.

Kádár was able to justify his decision to accept the deal he was offered in Moscow by claiming that he was the only one who was capable of consolidating the situation without resorting to terror. In this he failed. By opting for terror instead of resigning, he dealt a fatal blow to his own moral integrity. From this point on the utilitarian justification is void. We cannot tell whether Münnich (or anyone else) would have been more (or less) brutal than Kádár, but the fact is that this does not matter. Among other things because we certainly know retaliations went far beyond what was necessary for the restoration of order. There was no need to fire into crowds, or to carry out executions. Armed resistance, sporadic and weak in any case, had ceased everywhere by mid-November. Moreover, Kádár's anger at being rejected by Hungarians was palpable. "We must set up the people's court, and whenever we find Horthyists or other counter-revolutionaries who dared to do such dirty things we shall put them on trial one by one, sentence them to death and execute them one by one", he said to the Central Committee in April, 1957 on returning from a visit to Moscow.[1]

The reference to "Horthyists" was pure demagogy, part of the official myth of "counter-revolution", which was trying to disguise the fact that those targeted

1 ■ Tibor Huszár, *Kádár János politikai életrajza* (A Political Biography of János Kádár), vol. 2. Budapest, Kossuth Kiadó/Szabad Tér Kiadó, 2003, p. 45.

were mainly workers, students and intellectuals who had nothing to do with the pre-war regime. And if it is true that there was enormous pressure on Kádár from late November on, continuing executions until as late as 1962 was not only unnecessary, but was even discouraged by Khrushchev after a time. Ultimately, the trial of Imre Nagy was not demanded by Moscow.

The most hideous characteristic of totalitarian systems is that their maintenance rests on terror. The "restoration of order" after 1956 inevitably pushed the system towards the Stalinist structure. The intensity of the terror was also an attempt to demonstrate that 1956 was a counter-revolution of the most dangerous type. Otherwise it could not be explained why a people's democracy was unable to defend itself and why Soviet intervention was necessary. On 16 June 1989, when Imre Nagy and his associates were reburied, the public were probably right to focus on the post-1956 crimes. The truly symbolic day of Kádár's sin is not November 4, 1956, the day when he returned to Hungary under the escort of Soviet tanks, but June 16, 1958, the day when Imre Nagy was hanged.

Like many observers, Roger Gough also highlights the peculiarity that, despite its bloody debut, the Kádár regime was remarkably popular for most its duration. This is far from being without parallel in Hungarian history. Francis Joseph also began his reign in bloodshed after suppressing the Hungarian attempt to achieve independence in 1848–49; he had became everybody's *ferencjóska* by the early 1870s. Similarly, Miklós Horthy, the inter-war Regent of Hungary, violently seized power after the post-1918 revolutions; soon most Hungarians were regarding him as the saviour of the nation. There is an analogous pattern in all the three cases. The leader's reputation rested on the fact that his rule brought relative peace and security after a long period of war, suffering, insecurity and distress. It is an attitude that is understandable and it partly explains the paternalist tendencies in Hungarian political culture.

If we compare Kádár's era to those of his predecessors, we may conclude that his achievements were probably not the lesser. They were, of course, highly ambiguous and contradictory. As Sándor Révész put it, his regime "opened the way for the majority in society towards the lifestyle, security and civilization model of modern Europe, and reconciled them to the paternalist dictatorship which alienated the country from the modern democratic Europe of welfare states."[2]

During the Kádár era, living conditions, infrastructure, the standard of living, consumption, the civilizatory standards, developed at a rate unprecedented in Hungarian history. On the other hand, this rapid growth, with a few (and extreme) exceptions, was characteristic of the whole of the Soviet bloc and socialist modernization lagged well behind the post-Second World War boom in the West. Yet, although Kádár's road was a cul-de-sac, the collapse of his regime was not followed by years of horror and misery, as happened in the wake of Francis Joseph or Horthy.

There are some other specific factors behind the popularity of Kádár's rule. Its

2 ■ Sándor Révész, "Gyászkor és aranykor" [An Age of Mourning and a Golden Age], in *Beszélő évek, 1957–1968* (Talking Years, 1957–1968), Budapest, Stencil Alapítvány, 2000, p. 614.

legitimacy partly derived from the fact that, from the 1960s, the system that Kádár fundamentally restored and reconstructed had a kinder face than before 1956. From the early 1960s, it was the Rákosi period Kádár's regime wanted to distinguish itself from. It was no easy task. It had to be claimed that the Rákosi era had laid the foundations of socialism, fostered what was essentially a socialist system, and the post-1956 regime was its successor. Otherwise 1956 could not be called a counter-revolution. But it also had to be shown that the Kádár regime was not a continuation of Mátyás Rákosi's. The Kádár regime consequently acted as if it were simultaneously the same and different. In this sense, the memory of the Rákosi regime served to legitimise Kádár's.

Moreover, Kádár's regime was better both in comparison with Rákosi's and when measured against its own beginnings. The post-1956 retaliation was the last wave of Stalinist mass terror. Hungary's prime minister was hanged after a show trial, and the retribution targeted, consciously and with calculated cynicism, all layers and groups in society. No wonder that, in view of the violence of the retribution, everybody was expecting something worse. But, belying its devastating early years, this regime became the softest, not the hardest, dictatorship in the region.

However, continuity versus discontinuity was a fundamental difficulty for the entire Soviet bloc after the death of Stalin, and remained as such for Kádár until the end of his rule: how could one break with Stalinism, yet not break with the system? For a critique of Stalinism could not be a political critique, as Stalinism was not to be regarded as a political system, but a temporary slip that was the result of the personality and political temperament of a particular individual. This was why Khrushchev, and later Kádár, spoke exclusively of the personality cult. In a deeper sense, what had to be done was even more precarious: how to improve the efficiency and adaptability of the economy and to minimize political oppression without endangering the basis of the system, the absolute authority of the Party and the privileges of the nomenklatura. This was initially, as Gough clearly indicates, Khrushchev's programme. Since then, Communist and anti-Communist theoreticians have frequently pointed out that this was the squaring of a circle. The slogan, "Back to Lenin!" that resounded all over the Soviet bloc after the 21st Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1961 was both an illusion and a smoke-screen. The close, organic ties between the Leninist revision of Marxism and Stalinism were all too obvious. Theoretical attempts to redefine socialism from the early Sixties were made, without exception, on the margins of the system, then outside it and against it, in samizdat form. Their common feature was the questioning, whether in a cautious or a radical manner, of the one-party system. But the leading role of the Party was the essential thesis of the ideology of Leninism and not of Stalinism. Revising Stalinism should thus have implied a revision of Leninism and of Communist eschatology, which was impossible.

In spite of this, the system was apparently unthreatened by internal or external danger. The cold-war status quo seemed permanent. 1956 is now generally held to have been the Stalingrad of the Communist world order, the first jolt which set it

off towards its grave. But after 1956 the opposite seemed to be the case. It was the crushing of the Revolution that made both the East and the West realize that the system was not transitory and that the Soviets would remain for a long time. This recognition also contributed to the quick suppression of resistance in Hungary.

Despite its stability, the system nevertheless seemed an interim one, as it was unclear where it was heading. People thought all this could last only as long as the Soviet Union existed and Soviet troops were stationed in the country. But no one had any idea exactly how long this would be. The fact that the ideology was losing its substance led to a strange form of hide-and-seek. Social order in the Kádár era rested on a scheme of communication according to which the parties involved—those in power and the general public—held opposing convictions, but it was not in the interest of either to openly express this discrepancy. Those in power pretended the people were supporting socialism and hence the regime, while the people acted as if those in power were doing their best to make the Soviet occupation more tolerable, an aim which deserved tacit support.

It is a commonplace that the Kádárian compromise was based upon two essential factors. One of them was a relief from everyday terror (as the slogan put it, "Those who are not against us, are with us"). The other was the guarantee of a modest, but continuous, progress in living standards (goulash communism). After the restoration of the system, it became obvious very soon that the latter could not be accomplished without reshaping the centrally planned economy. The history of the reform and its political aspects, the analysis of its paradoxical nature is one of the main strengths of Gough's account (he is an economist by profession).

The case of agricultural policy was revealing. The accomplishment of collectivisation was vital for the regime in order to prove symbolically that the foundations of a socialist society had been successfully established. However, this could be accomplished only at the price of permitting a greater role for private plots if the food supply was not to collapse. The same paradoxical pattern characterised the subsequent waves of attempted reforms from the mid-1960s up to the 1980s. The measures that might have contributed to increased productivity and improved management helped the regime to survive and, at the same time, threatened to undermine the ideological and political ground underneath it. Therefore, the story of the reforms was the story of periodical chassés forward and backwards. It is true that there were tensions and conflicts between Kádár and the Soviet leadership, particularly after the removal of Krushchev. Yet, it would be a grave mistake to evaluate these confrontations as frenzied efforts by Kádár (or his party for that matter) to acquire more independence from Soviet domination. As the events of the late 1980s demonstrated, the internal ideological limits were far more crucial.

The Faustian legend of Kádár became popular from the early 1970s and remained influential even after 1989. It goes roughly like this: the goals of the 1956 Revolution, independence and democracy, were outside what constituted a possible reality, which were set by the conditions of the Cold War. The Revolution

had to be betrayed and defeated. Kádár dirtied his hands and sacrificed his moral integrity in order to secure what would have remained unattainable within the given circumstances: material progress and relative freedom. Thus, Kádár and the Kádárist elite carried a secret, underground mission as they worked to accomplish the goals of 1956: no less than the gradual self-liquidation of the regime behind the Soviet leaders' back. Kádár vanished in June, 1989—into the eternity of historical memory—at the same time his victim, Imre Nagy, was reborn during a ceremonial and highly public reburial. It, indeed, sounds like a Shakespearian tragedy.

Gough leaves no doubt that the core of this legend is absurd. The hesitant steps towards imitating market conditions, the reconciliatory gestures towards the West, the efforts to integrate into the international economic system and gain access to the financial resources vital for survival, all served the same purpose: the stabilisation and consolidation of a system that was exhausting its own reserves at an ever faster pace. For Hungarian readers it may sound unusual that Hungary, a political colony of the Soviet Empire, ceased to be a colony in an economic sense after 1956. The Hungarian economy heavily depended upon the subsidies that arrived from the Soviet Union via transfers of energy sources and raw materials much below international prices. In this manner, the Soviets financed social peace in Hungary (and in Poland) which they did with an increasing reluctance as their economic difficulties also grew from the mid-1970s.

But Kádár remained a faithful and "good comrade"[3] until the very end: he always opted for the interests of "the Party"; he was furious with the Soviets when, as he saw it, they were unable to understand that the system required fine tuning in order to survive; he regarded himself a cunning tactician in international affairs, who always promoted the cause of socialism. There is no doubt that he played his role as a Communist leader in dead earnest.

Kádár's authority and prestige was shaken during the last few years of his rule. Gough points out that his was a contingent reputation. It could be maintained only as long as the conditions provoking his rule existed and the Hungarians believed that he represented the best available option for Hungary. The Kádár regime lost ground when Gorbachev appeared on the scene and the end of the Soviet Empire appeared on the horizon. Kádár's former comrades tried to make him the scapegoat and hastily abandoned him. His famous last speech of despair in April 1989 reflected not only a sense of guilt but also loneliness and fear, and a sense of futility. His regime proved to be transient with no meaning for the future.

It is not due to his life and deeds that his reputation has partly revived since 1989. "To remember and to forget both mean to escape, more precisely, to attempt to escape," wrote László Márton in his novella *Árnyas főutca* (Shady High Street), in 1999. It seems that many Hungarians wish to remember solely the halcyon days, forget about the unease, and have no idea where to escape. ❧

3 ■ I do not understand why the editors of the 2006 Hungarian version (*Kádár János, a jó elvtárs?*, Budapest, Alexandra) chose to add a question mark to this phrase.

Ignác Romsics

Economic Reforms in the Kádár Era

János Kádár ruled over Hungary for thirty years, from the suppression of the revolution of 1956 until a few months before the country's transition to a post-Communist regime in 1989. Unlike Mátyás Rákosi, his heartily loathed Stalinist predecessor, Kádár all along set an improvement in living standards as one of his chief aspirations. As a pragmatic politician who had once known what it was like to struggle as a pariah at the very edge of society, he was fully aware that "For a significant portion of the working masses, the main issues are not questions of politics but decent remedies for the economic and cultural issues that affect their everyday lives."[1] That was why he did more than simply tolerate efforts to improve the efficiency of the economy, shackled by Soviet expectations and by central planning based upon the state ownership of all major resources: he also usually, and up to a certain limit, actively supported these efforts.

There were three waves of reform. The considerations behind the first, that of 1956–57, were realised to only a minimal degree, if at all; the adoption of proposals that came with a wave that began in the mid-1960s was part of the package known as the New Economic Mechanism (NEM), introduced in 1968; finally, there were the post-1978 reforms, which in many respects exceeded the NEM in their scale and included the potential for a radical change in the model. (There was a fourth wave too, getting under way in the latter half of the 1980s; this, however, was no longer aimed at reforming the state socialist economy but at laying the groundwork for a return to a market economy and private property.)

1 ■ János Kádár: *Válogatott beszédek és cikkek 1957–1974* (Selected Speeches and Articles, 1957–74), 2nd edn. Budapest, Kossuth, 1975, p. 81.

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The thinking behind the 1956–57 reform had as its point of departure correctional measures that had been proposed during the economic debates in pre-revolutionary times. Its essence was to rationalize and thus increase the efficiency of Hungary's centralised command economy. Among the advocates of such reforms, as far back as Imre Nagy's first premiership of 1953–55, were György Péter, Director of the Central Statistical Office; Tamás Nagy, of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences' Institute for Economics; the agricultural economist and sociologist Ferenc Erdei; and among younger economists, Tibor Liska, Péter Erdős, Kálmán Szabó and Sándor Kopátsy. And then, of course, there was János Kornai, whose dissertation for his advanced doctorate (or Candidate's degree as it was then called), bearing the title *Overcentralisation in Economic Administration,* had already become a subject of debate amongst economists in September 1956.

The discussions were rejoined as soon as the Revolution had been crushed. At first they were even encouraged by the new leadership. In December 1956 the reorganising Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP) resolved that

> the government is to engage the competent state organs and the country's top economics experts in working out an economic policy that is appropriate to the new situation. This economic policy should in every respect build on our [i.e. Hungary's] economic resources and characteristics. It should facilitate the assertion of individual initiative and expert knowledge. Financial incentives need to be employed in all areas in line with the interests of the people's economy, thus promoting technological development, ameliorating quality, reducing the costs of production, and raising the productivity of labour... The chief issue of our entire economic policy is to make the gradual raising of the workers' standard of living the primary standpoint in the distribution of the gross national product and in the preparation of investment plans.[2]

A number of expert committees were set up to work out what specifically needed to be done, and their work in turn was co-ordinated by two steering committees that were headed by György Péter and Professor István Varga, an economist formerly of the Smallholders' Party who had been passed over in the early Fifties.

The proposals that they came up with by the spring of 1957 aimed at a radical overhaul of the command economy. Essentially they were aimed at ensuring the autonomy of enterprises, to replace direct plan-based orders with economic incentives, and to bring in a new value-related pricing structure. The centre would retain a wide scope for itself in just one area, that of investment policy. Setting themselves against these radical proposals, which in the discussions at the time were often branded as revisionist, Andor Berei, István Friss, Géza Ripp and other economic policy experts favoured maintaining the old system or making only

2 ■ Henrik Vass & Ágnes Ságvári (eds): *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt határozatai és dokumentumai 1956–1962* (Resolutions and Documents of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, 1956–62), 2nd edn. Budapest, Kossuth, 1973, p. 22.

insignificant adjustments to it. In the October 2nd, 1957 issue of *Népszabadság*, the Party's daily newspaper, Friss went so far as to write of Kornai that "he rejects our entire socialist-style economic system. For want of other alternatives, he presumably wishes to exchange it for capitalism."[3]

The upshot of these disputes was that the radical proposals were shelved and a few none too major corrective measures were implemented, among which were a cut in the quantity of centrally set plan indicators, a more flexible approach towards the quantitative fulfilment of planned norms and the introduction of a profit-sharing element into the wage system. Fixed pricing and the rigid separation of producer and consumer prices were left unchanged, though the subsidised prices of domestically sourced raw materials were replaced by actual prime costs of production.

So when it comes to drawing a balance of the first post-revolutionary attempt at reform, the mountains went into labour and produced a mouse. The putting aside of that December Party resolution and Kádár's backing off may be explained by a number of factors, the most important of which must have been Soviet reluctance and the strength Hungarian hardliners drew from that to mount a counterattack. This was not only aimed at the reforms as such but at Kádár personally. If Khrushchev had been toppled and his opponents had allowed Mátyás Rákosi and his fellow Stalinists to return from their enforced sojourn in the Soviet Union after 1956, "In the best case Kádár would have been given his marching orders, and in the worst case he would have shared the fate of Imre Nagy and his associates," Tibor Huszár, Kádár's biographer, ventures on this episode.[4] A further factor must have been the spectacular results of the reconstruction set in motion in the months immediately following the Revolution; for many, these results covered up the regime's organic sickness and gave the impression that radical intervention was unnecessary. Accordingly, the National Party Conference that convened in June 1957 adopted a motion that

> In regard to the system of economic leadership, the Party conference wishes to place it on record that it attributes decisive significance to the central guiding role of the state. For that reason, the Party conference rejects those mistaken views which deny that the state needs central guidance and control.[5]

That negative balance had to be adjusted in two respects. One is that, though no overall reform took place, connective measures were introduced to increase welfare. The most important here was a pay increase of, on average, 18 per cent, which was achieved through a 20 per cent reduction of the tax rates levied on self-employed artisans, followed soon afterwards by concessions to retail shopkeepers

3 ■ Cited by Iván T. Berend: *A magyar gazdasági reform útja* (The Path of the Hungarian Economic Reform). Budapest, Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1988, p. 114.
4 ■ Tibor Huszár: *Kádár János politikai életrajza* (A Political Biography of János Kádár), vol. 2. Budapest, Kossuth Kiadó/Szabad Tér Kiadó, 2003, p. 43.
5 ■ Vass & Ságvári (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 85.

and self-employed professionals. Pensions were restored or regularized for state employees, people were allowed to choose their job and workplace, wide-ranging fare concessions were introduced for public transport. Thus, in 1957, out of the total number of railway passenger-kilometres travelled, only 27 per cent were subject to full fare and 15 per cent were completely free of charge under these concessions.

In agriculture the scope of concessions reached still further. Compulsory deliveries of produce to the state were once again rescinded, while by the spring of 1957 the state's purchase prices had risen by more than 80 per cent on those prior to the Revolution. The sale and purchase of plots of land up to 5 *hold* (2.8 hectares or 7 acres) was permitted, which led to the emergence of a limited property market in the agricultural sector. The resulting duality of the Hungarian economy—that is to say, the dominance of the state in industry, in finance and, in part, in retail trade, as against the dominance of the private sector in agriculture—temporarily deepened. These riders need to be recalled, because these pragmatic "welfare" measures contributed at least as much, if not more, to the relatively speedy consolidation of the Kádár regime as the harsh retributions that were being inflicted at the same time. Whereas the retributions directly affected tens of thousands in the Hungarian population, the reforms affected millions.

This dual structure of the economy and property ownership was brought to an end by a surge of collectivisation in agriculture that was driven through between 1959 and 1961. The mechanism on which agricultural co-operatives were operated, however—and this was the second essential rider—did not at all follow the model of the earlier collectivisation drives in the Soviet Union or in Hungary under Rákosi early in the Fifties; instead, it was based in many respects on the reformist ideas of the 1954–57 period. The features observable in the agrarian sector during the first half of the 1960s in fact link the radical pre- and post-revolutionary reform ideas and the real reforms that were to come in 1968. These reforms were necessitated by the fall in yields that followed collectivisation. Due to the migration of the best manpower from the land into manufacturing industry, inadequate mechanisation, management inexperience and lack of motivation on the part of co-operative farm members, a significant portion of crops went unharvested during the early 1960s, and much of the rest was brought in by school and college students or by (conscript) soldiers drafted in to assist. In total, net agricultural output dropped by around 10 per cent. In order to alleviate supply shortages, Hungary had to import significant amounts of wheat and maize from overseas in 1960–62.

Perceiving how chaotic conditions had become in rural areas, Kádár gave free rein to the corrective steps that were being urged chiefly by Lajos Fehér (Secretary of the Central Committee of the HSWP and from 1962 Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers) and Ferenc Erdei. The most important of these was a keener appreciation of the role that was played by household plots, which was a

shrewd adjustment to the land- and property-oriented mentality of the peasantry. In a departure from earlier practice, every member of a family (and not just the family as a unit) was entitled to roughly one *hold* of land to farm in his or her own name; along with this, the restrictions on families keeping livestock were relaxed. As a result, it was possible, from the mid-Sixties onwards, for mini stock-farms to rear their animals on fodder produced on the household plot or on the collective's land. Not only did these private farms account for a large proportion of the food demand of the rural population, but by the latter half of the Sixties they were supplying 22 per cent of the produce purchased by the state.

Another important innovation, as compared with the way collective farms functioned (by organizing work in brigades and remuneration based on work units done by such teams), was a shift to a system of share-tenancy system. Under this, on an annual leasehold basis, a family or kinship group, even a cluster of neighbours, was allowed to take over sole responsibility for the cultivation of specific parcels of the collective land—generally for root crops that require regular hoeing—on an annual leasehold. Such groups would be paid not only the centrally determined sum for the work units they had supplied, but could retain as much as 25–50 per cent of the value of any surplus production. This gave a co-operative's members a very direct stake in improving crop yields. By the mid-Sixties, more than one third of the cultivation of collective land was organized in this way; the system, of course, had a long history, albeit under very different patterns of land ownership. Its role declined as mechanization advanced, but even in 1970 it accounted for 27 per cent of all output.

The adding of greater flexibility to wages was a third innovation. In places where people were unable or did not wish to go in for share-tenancy, or where the nature of the activities—animal husbandry, for instance—did not allow this, cash- or produce-based bonus schemes were resorted to, and these similarly rewarded overfulfilment of the work units dictated by plan targets. Eventually, the payment in cash or produce of regular monthly advances became a general rule. One of the enterprises that was in the forefront of these innovations was the Red Star Co-operative at Nádudvar, a village outside Debrecen in eastern Hungary, which was headed by István Szabó, who later became president of the National Council of Co-operative Farms, the other that at Barcs headed by Pál Losonczi, later Chairman of the Presidential Council. In 1960 Losonczi succeeded Imre Dögei as Minister of Agriculture. Dögei was unable to accept the idea that co-operative farms should be run like business enterprises.[6]

Authorisation of the farming of household plots and share-tenancy, along with the greater flexibility that was given to the system of remuneration—opponents, it goes almost without saying, deemed them to be "capitalist deviations"—resulted in a speedy improvement in yields and a regeneration of the agricultural

6 ■ Iván T. Berend: *op. cit.*, pp. 150–176 and Zsuzsanna Varga: *Politika, paraszti érdekérvényesítés és szövetkezetek Magyarországon 1956–1967* (Politics, Enforcing the Interests of Peasants and Co-operative Farms in Hungary, 1956–67). Budapest, Napvilág, 2001.

sector. These were spectacular results and they played a big part in the December 1964 decision of the HSWP Central Committee to undertake reform of controls across the whole state sector, that is the whole of the economy. Kádár, who was more secure in power by this point in time, felt able to see off his dogmatic adversaries and so set the ball rolling; he was further encouraged by the fact that just before him Khrushchev had embarked on a similar reform package in the Soviet Union. In other words, it seemed at first that a favourable wind was blowing from Moscow. Another impetus was the slackening in the rate at which manpower from agriculture was bleeding into manufacturing, a prime source of economic growth: the proportion of the workforce employed in agriculture had fallen from 54 per cent in 1949 to 25 per cent by 1970, which likewise was an argument for undertaking a comprehensive general reform of the economy.

The responsibility for reforming the system of central planning was given to Rezső Nyers, a former Social Democrat, who was then in his forties and serving as the Central Committee's secretary for economic policy. Reform-minded economists had already been gathering round Nyers back in 1963-64—a group which included not just György Péter, Tamás Nagy, Lajos Fehér and Ferenc Erdei, but also the professor of economics Imre Vajda, József Bognár, who was a former Smallholders' Party politician, Miklós Ajtai, Director of the National Planning Bureau, and other economists, including Béla Csikós-Nagy, Mátyás Tímár and István Hetényi. The preliminary analysis was carried out by 11 working groups; by March 1965 they had completed their critique of the existing regimen and by October of that year they were able to put forward an initial draft of the basic principles of reform. Their preliminary studies had been preceeded by fierce internal disputes which attracted fairly widespread attention. Party leaders like Béla Biszku, Gyula Kállai and Dezső Nemes and a substantial number of cadres together with many leading lights among the country's intelligentsia, such as the writer Péter Veres, saw in this thinking an abandonment of fundamental socialist principles and the ceding of ground to undesirable "petty bourgeois" attitudes. By contrast, and on varying grounds, people such as György Lukács, then the doyen of Marxist philosophy in Hungary, and Gyula Illyés, a living classic as a poet and the most prominent of the country's populist writers, stood solidly behind reform. Kádár opted for the cautious balancing act that typified him and took issue both with the "conservatives" and with Nyers. Thus, the resolution passed by the Central Committee in November 1966 was a compromise, but it still envisaged significant changes. A key passage in this document runs:

> It must be made possible that the supply and demand of goods and contingent economic categories—the market, prices, production costs, profit, credit, etc.—be given a significantly greater, active scope in the socialist economy than has been the case hitherto.[7]

7 ■ Henrik Vass (ed.): *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt határozatai és dokumentumai 1963–1966* (Resolutions and Documents of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, 1963–66). Budapest, Kossuth, 1968, pp. 238–239.

Ultimately, the "New Economic Mechanism" that came into force on January 1st, 1968—the NEM—ushered in three essential changes. It reduced the role of central planning in production and investment, thereby increasing the autonomy of enterprises, some of them being granted foreign trade rights; it introduced distinctions between consumer goods that were sold at centrally fixed prices, at ceiling ("maximal") prices and at market-driven prices; and finally it gave much more scope than previously for pay and incomes to be linked to performance.

Under the reform as originally conceived by Nyers and his fellow economists, the economic reform was supposed to be followed by a wider reform of the political system, which would have comprised two major prongs: greater independence for local government (councils), in line with the autonomy granted to co-operative enterprises, and the conversion of the existing counties into regional administrations. The thinking behind this, however, envisaged an eventual separation of powers. This was explicitly acknowledged by Nyers on a Party platform in the spring of 1969. An overwhelming majority of Party leaders, however, would have none of this, nor did it receive support from Kádár himself.[8]

Thus, economic reform, rather than being rounded off by political reform, eventually lost its impetus and entered a phase of stagnation and temporary retrenchment from 1972 on. As with most of the major about-faces in Hungarian politics between 1945 and 1989, the Soviet Union lay behind this one. Under Brezhnev's leadership from 1964 on, the Soviet supremos had not been enamoured of the NEM, but had not vetoed it outright. Their standpoint, as communicated to Mátyás Tímár and Nyers, amounted to "it is not advisable".[9] However, in talks at Zavidovo in the Ukraine, in February 1972, Brezhnev made it clear to Kádár in no uncertain terms that changes would have to be made because "dangerous tendencies", as he put it, were asserting themselves in Hungary.[10]

On this occasion too, albeit not immediately or completely, Kádár submitted to the Soviet diktat. This adversely affected many in politics and in the ranks of the intelligentsia. The reformers in the most exposed positions—Nyers and Lajos Fehér among them—were sidetracked and "Lukácsist" thinkers, who were toiling over the renewal of Marxism—János Kis and Mihály Vajda, among them—were expelled from the Party and/or dismissed from their posts. That was the price that had to be paid to enable the essential components of the 1968 reform—the dropping of obligatory central planning targets, greater entrepreneurship and market-orientation for enterprises, partially liberalized prices, etc.—to stay in place. This half-turn was attended by serious downswings. As a result of state intervention in regard to incomes, the number of people who were lifted into the highest tax bracket doubled, even trebled, in 1973–74. This came with a drop of purchase prices for produce and a raising of prices for fodder; owners of livestock

8 ■ Tibor Huszár: op. cit., p. 43.
9 ■ Ibid., p. 320.
10 ■ Tibor Huszár: *Kádár. A hatalom évei 1956–1989* (Kádár: the Years in Power, 1956–89), Budapest, Corvina, 2006, p. 193.

responded by slaughtering their animals. In the second half of 1974 the national stock of sows fell from 417,000 to 290,000. Increasingly, Hungary turned to the international markets for loans to offset its balance of payment deficits.

Pressed by the return of perceptible supply-chain difficulties from 1975 onwards, foremost among which were two massive hikes in oil prices charged by the OPEC oil-producing countries, Kádár and the bulk of the other Hungarian leaders opted to go back to reform. The Central Committee, at its October 20th, 1977 session, stated that "sources of additional manpower for economic growth have been exhausted," that "sustainably dynamic and balanced economic growth can only be achieved by vigorously stepping up efficiency," and that to this end "The stakeholder system needs to be widened in such a way that differences in efficiency increasingly find expression in earnings."[11]

Again, it was in agriculture that reform started up, though by then it only accounted for one sixth of the national income and employed just 15 per cent of the working-age population (of those in full-time employment). It became possible for members of co-operative farms with entrepreneurial flair and good creditworthiness to expand the amount of land that they permanently rented from the co-operative, from the two- to four-*hold* household plots that had been permitted hitherto, into essentially private farms that produced directly for the market. They were also now at liberty to keep horses alongside raising cattle and sheep as well as pigs. These steps were then followed by a truly radical reform of the price system in 1979–80, as it brought domestic prices even more closely into line with their market value and freed prices for around 70 per cent of consumer goods. The key item in this package was the support that it gave to small businesses (hitherto treated in a half-hearted manner), embracing also services and manufacturing, and permitting new types of business entities. In February 1980, the Central Committee declared that "activity in the secondary economy is, in general, useful, plugging gaps as it does." On that basis, thousands of new small commercial and manufacturing businesses, including "Economic Work Partnerships" (known by their acronym *gmk* in Hungarian), were established during the early Eighties, engaging in production and supply activities with minimal administration and a rapid response to market needs. By 1985 there were ten thousand such *gmk*-s and a further 20,000 Enterprise Economic Work Partnerships (known as *vgmk*) operating in Hungary. The number of shops and catering entities that operated on a contractual basis, and therefore with a view to making a profit and at the owner's risk, as permitted by a 1980 government decree, likewise ran into the thousands (about 2,000 in 1981 and 12,000 by 1985). Private taxicab drivers, who were permitted from 1982, made up another distinct group of small entrepreneurs. It has been estimated that by the mid-Eighties something like two

11 ■ Henrik Vass (ed.): *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt határozatai és dokumentumai 1975–1980* (Resolutions and Documents of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, 1975–80). Budapest, Kossuth, 1968, pp. 561–591.

thirds (but perhaps as many as three quarters) of Hungarian families were operating in one thicket or another of this impenetrable "second economy".[12]

Moscow had mixed feelings towards this new burst of reforms, unprecedented as they were within the socialist camp, but it did not stand in the way. Affected by ill health for years, L.I. Brezhnev, the General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, was effectively unfit to take decisions by the beginning of the Eighties. On his death in November 1982, he was succeeded by Yuri Andropov (Ambassador in Budapest in 1956), who had been one of those urging Kádár's installation as Hungarian Party leader once the 1956 Revolution was put down, and who thus always accorded him special licence. In 1983 he gave his blessing to the reforms that had been introduced to date and to the introduction of still newer measures. With that reassurance the Central Committee in April 1984 decided to continue the reform process. Their resolution stated that the goal being sought was the emergence of a "controlled market economy" founded on mixed—state, co-operative and private—ownership of property and means of production. The government accordingly, on October 31st, 1984, ordained a decentralisation of state ownership rights, which in practical terms required that enterprises set up councils, half the members of which would be employees' delegates and half the firm's managers (reminiscent of the Yugoslav workers' self-government in the self-management of industrial enterprises), with these boards being able to decide on such matters as the firm's marketing strategy and on the appointment of its managing director. The Central Committee's resolution was also used to bring in a bankruptcy law that allowed the winding-up of loss-making enterprises; a two-tier banking system, in which the roles of the national bank and commercial banks were separated, as was appropriate to meet the monetary needs of a market economy; and to undertake the preparatory work for introducing a taxation system of the kind seen in market economies.[13]

One of the champions of pursuing further economic reform was Rezső Nyers, who had been sidelined in 1974. In a 1984 interview, Nyers did not merely emphasise that "socialist economic practice as a whole" had to be reconstructed, but, dusting off the initiative he had headed in 1969, went so far as to raise the need for a political reform that would mean the administrative power of the state taking a back seat to elected bodies, and allowing the formation of distinct groups within the Party: "If in the times to come we are unable to give greater scope to this pluralism of views and opinions within the Party, and in political life in general, then there is a real danger of growing conservatism and, above all, of disengaging from the youth of today."[14]

12 ■ Iván T. Berend: *op. cit.*, pp. 421–439.
13 ■ István Kollega Tarsoly (ed.): *Magyarország a XX. században* (Hungary in the Twentieth Century), vol. 2. Szekszárd, Babits Kiadó, 1997, pp. 674–675, and Lajos Faluvégi: *Tervezés: egyensúly és megújulás 1986–1990* (Planning: Balance and Regeneration, 1986–90). Budapest, Kossuth, 1986, pp. 285–287.
14 ■ Rezső Nyers: *Útkeresés—reformok* (Searching for Paths—Reforms). Budapest, Magvető, 1988, pp. 436–465.

By the early Eighties, besides Nyers, many younger economists, sociologists, political scientists and other intellectuals were urging, often in lively dispute with each other, an all-embracing reform process. A key issue of these discussions was property rights, while the other was extending reform to the political arena. The debate about property rights had begun in 1974–75, in the columns of the economic journal *Közgazdasági Szemle*, involving the likes of Tamás Sárközy, László Lengyel and others, with Tibor Liska, who counted as a veteran by comparison, weighing in later with his lectures at the University of Economics from 1978 onwards. The young economists, who were later to gain a major role in shaping economic policy in the years after Hungary's change of regime, first expounded their views in the context of those lectures. (Among others, Tamás Bauer and Károly Attila Soós on self-governing enterprises and business property rights, István Csillag, László Lengyel and György Matolcsy on how a pluralistic structure of ownership could be detached from the "omnipotence" of state ownership.)[15]

The third wave of reforms of the Kádár era once again had the brakes applied temporarily in 1985, despite the fact that this was after Gorbachev's rise to power in March of that year and despite the signals that Moscow was now sending. Under pressure from Kádár himself, who was horrified by the social impact and political consequences of the reforms, the 13th Party Congress in that year resolved that measures should be taken to stimulate the economy by boosting credit-financed consumer spending. There was a measure of backtracking to the reform policies under the new prime minister, Károly Grósz, from 1987 on, as signalled by the introduction of a purchase tax on businesses and of a personal income tax on January 1st, 1988. Like Kádár and most of the rest of the Party leadership, however, Grósz had no wish to meddle with fundamental principles. "The foundation," he stressed, "must remain unshakeable," or in other words, "state and co-operative ownership of property will be unchanged as the mainstay of our economic system."[16] Reform of the political institutional structure and sharing of the Party's authority were even more anathema to him. In the meantime work on *Social Reform* as well as *Reform and Democracy,* key programmes pushed by opposition or semi-opposition groupings, was going ahead, to join *Turning-Point and Reform.* Power sharing, and hence setting severe limits to the Party's influence, were central issues, along with the reform of property rights. This fourth wave, as hinted here at the beginning, really belongs to the prehistory of Hungary's Third Republic rather than the history of economic reforms in the Kádár era. The ever-apposite Budapest wisecracks concluded: Hungary had reached the final leg of its long and winding road to capitalism.

15 ■ László Lengyel: *Végkifejlet* (Finale). Budapest, Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1989, pp. 153–185.

16 ■ *A Minisztertanács munkaprogramja* (The Hungarian Presidium's Work Programme). Budapest, Kossuth, 1987, pp. 5–28 (Grósz's speech) and pp. 58–80 (the government programme).

The 1989–90 change of regime demarcated itself from the entire Kádár era, ranking it to be, along with the early Fifties, no more than a historical detour. Nevertheless, research into the economic structure of that period is bound to ask what success Hungary's reforms enjoyed, unique as they were within the socialist bloc. According to data provided by the most recent international comparison—not too impressive. Angus Maddison has calculated that per capita GDP grew 2.8-fold over the period between 1950 and 1988, whereas the figure for Czechoslovakia, which set out from a similar point of departure but, by and large, was held back from the introduction of any substantial reforms, was 2.5-fold, and that for Poland, which did not dabble with any reforms, it was 2.4-fold.[17] Is it therefore quite possible that even without reforms Hungary would have been the socialist bloc's "merriest barracks", with its population rising to become one of the world's leading consumers of fat and eggs? Is the link between per capita GDP and living standards, quality of life and attitudes towards life much more indirect than we are accustomed to think? Or could this eminent writer on economic history have simply got it wrong? Those are questions that will have to be addressed by anyone who undertakes the job of a comprehensive assessment of the Kádár era. ❧

17 ■ Angus Maddison: *Monitoring the World Economy 1820–1992.* Paris, OECD, n.d.

Krisztián Ungváry

The Kádár Regime and the Roman Catholic Hierarchy

"Warding off clerical reaction" was arguably the most contradictory aspect of repression under the Kádár regime. From the crushing of the 1956 Revolution until the end of the Sixties, dozens of proceedings against Church figures were initiated that resulted in heavy prison sentences; from the beginning of the Seventies, by contrast, this was the sole area in which overt state security intervention (i.e. conspicuous house searches or legal proceedings) almost never took place. All religious denominations were persecuted, with the security service even paying special attention to sects such as the Hare Krishna movement. The biggest successes, however, were achieved in the case of the major historical denominations, as a result of which the Reformed Church (the Calvinists), the Lutherans, the Jewish community and the Roman Catholic Church lost virtually all the independence they had previously enjoyed.

Many authors have already looked at relations between the Catholic Church and the party state in Hungary.[1] None, however, have been in a position to assess systematically the security services archives. In what follows, relations between the Church and the state will be examined purely in terms of contacts with the State Security Services.

1 ■ The key works are: Margit Balogh & Jenő Gergely: *Egyházak az újkori Magyarországon* [Churches in Hungary in the Modern Era], 1996; István Elmer: *Börtönkereszt* [Prison Cross], METEM, 1994; Gyula Havasy: *A magyar katolikusok szenvedései 1944–1989* [The Tribulations of Hungarian Catholics, 1944-89], 1990; Károly Hetényi Varga: *Papi sorsok a horogkereszt és a vörös csillag árnyékában* [The Fate of Priests in the Shadow of the Swastika and the Red Star], 2005; Szilvia Köbel: *"Oszd meg és uralkodj!"* ["Divide and Rule!"] 2005; István Mészáros: *Kimaradt tananyag I–III* [Omitted curriculum material, 3 vols.], 1994; Alajos Németh: *Papok a rács mögött* [Priests Behind Bars], 1991; József Gyula Orbán: *Katolikus papok békemozgalma Magyarországon. 1950–56* [The Peace Movement of Roman Catholic Priests in Hungary, 1950–56], 2001; Gábor Salacz: *A magyar katolikus egyház tizenhét esztendeje 1948–64* [Seventeen Years of the Roman Catholic Church in Hungary, 1948-64], 1988, Munich; Konrád Szántó: *A kommunizmusnak sem sikerült* [Communism Did Not Succeed Either], Budapest, 1992; Gábor Adriányi: *A Vatikán keleti politikája és Magyarország 1939–1978* [The Vatican's Eastern European Policy and Hungary, 1939–78]. Budapest: Kairosz, 2004; Gábor Adriányi: *A katholikus egyház története a XX. században* [History of the Roman Catholic Church in the Twentieth Century]. Budapest: Kairosz, 2005.

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It would be a mistake to believe that responsibility for running the dictatorship was solely the concern of employees of the Interior Ministry's Section III, alone among the organs of the party-state. Many others, from local councils to the Central Health Office, worked for them under the auspices of an integrated internal affairs approach if their own leaders were not sufficiently vigorous. They were the ones who would step into action after a person had been "flagged" by the Interior Ministry, getting people fired from their jobs or implementing measures "to put the squeeze on" and "crack" people. In a debate about a resolution on the handling of oppositionist forces in the Politburo during 1982, János Kádár actually spelled out in typically forthright fashion what he understood by this:

> Get at them, just get at the mothers, for God's sake, that's what they do the world over, and not administrative measures as yet, but making life difficult for them, like they have lost their driving licence for a third time, or, what the hell do I know—well, why can't that be done. It is found that their apartment is in a dangerous condition, so they are placed in an emergency home, or I don't know what. There's a million ways of what one calls making life difficult for them.[2]

Church leaders and some historians are anxious to portray events as showing that the Kádár regime implacably persecuted the institutions run by the Roman Catholic Church, which in turn resisted the policies of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP). The impression is thereby created that no member of the hierarchy sided with the persecutors, as for instance in Ferenc Tomka's recently published—with the consent of the Hungarian Catholic hierarchy—memoir under the title *They Intended Us To Die, But We're Still Alive*.[3] Statements by members of the hierarchy have been similar in tone. Bishop András Veres admitted that there were a few collaborators, but in 2002 he was still claiming, "The individuals whom the party state forced into collaborating back then no longer play a part in the Church's life, or are now dead."[4] In 2006, when the involvement of several bishops became public knowledge, he stated that this came as no surprise to him.[5] Although the Church's leadership recently set up the Lénárd Ödön Foundation to throw light on this past, the Foundation has so far not engaged in any substantial activity due to a lack of funds and the appropriate authorisations.

The hierarchy continues, to the present day, to maintain that it played an insignificant role in sustaining the dictatorship, preferring to emphasise the militant faith of most of the prelates. Documents on internal security that stem from the Interior Ministry and from the Party, however, paint a quite different picture: their own assessment is that the Catholic Church hierarchy provided solid support for Party policy after 1970.

2 ■ Magyar Országos Levéltár (National Archives of Hungary, hereafter MOL), 288.f., 5.cs., 848-850.öe.
3 ■ Ferenc Tomka: *Halálra szántak, mégis élünk* [They Intended Us To Die, But We're Still Alive]. Budapest, 2005, 366 pp. He published his own security file in the third edition. In the book's index, Tomka does not include the names of agents who are mentioned in the text. In the third edition, he specifically mentions László Paskai but gives a totally misleading explanation. In the course of his research Tomka had no recourse to the archives of the State Office for Religious Affairs or the Interior Ministry's Directorate III/III or central organs; nor does he say anything about collaboration on the part of the Church.
4 ■ See the communiqué by Bishop Veres: "Így semmi értelme az átvilágításnak (In this Way Screening Makes No Sense)," *Népszabadság*, 3 September 2002.
5 ■ The text of the statement released by Bishop Veres to MTI, the Hungarian Press Agency, was published in the 2 February 2006 issue of the daily *Népszabadság*.

It was not only the heads of the Interior Ministry's Section III with responsibility for intelligence who were actively involved in implementing party resolutions; after 1964, through corruption, intimidation and other ways of breaking down resistance, the Roman Catholic bishops were, with few exceptions, also involved. The secret service wished to control the appointment of all bishops after 1964. (That they succeeded was in no small measure due to the fact that here, too, as we shall see, the Church was following Vatican instructions.)

Clearly, campaigns against the Churches, in particular against the Catholic Church, were a top priority. If we consider the number of subjects under surveillance, then it was here that the Interior Ministry mobilised the greatest number of agents in relative terms. By 1977, they were employing just four agents to keep tabs on members of the former "ruling classes" (i.e. aristocrats and financial tycoons); a total of 489 agents to keep an eye on the tens of thousands kept under observation under the heading of Youth Protection; 485 for the entire cultural domain; but as many as 421 persons were engaged[6] in the relatively easily monitored sphere of Church affairs.

During the Rákosi dictatorship of the early Fifties and the first few years after 1956 when János Kádár was striving to consolidate his hold on power, the Vatican was not prepared to yield an inch on its principles, and accordingly urged priests to resist rather than buckle under. Pius XII, for example, excommunicated Miklós Beresztóczy, Richárd Horváth and Imre Várkonyi[7] who, as "peace priests", became members of parliament. The majority of the Catholic clergy stood firm and many bishops were imprisoned.

The state employed a number of agencies to undermine the Churches. Within the State Security Office, the Internal Security Directorate's Department III/III–1, which dealt specifically with Hungarian Church affairs, collaborated closely with the Intelligence Directorate's Department III/I–4, which had responsibility for Israel, the Vatican and affairs of émigré Church officials.[8] The State Office for Religious Affairs (Állami Egyházügyi Hivatal) was established in 1950.[9] The ÁEH had offices in Budapest and in every county; its operatives conveyed the will of the Party (and hence of the State Security Office) to the clergy. The head of the ÁEH was in weekly contact with the heads of the aforementioned departments and himself held the rank of colonel in one of the security services.

The persecution of the Catholic Church in Hungary stands out among the socialist countries for, as compared with Czechoslovakia, East Germany or Poland, it was here, between 1945 and 1956, that the Church was hardest hit.[10] The clampdown began soon after the end of the war, when not only Cardinal József Mindszenty, the Primate, but virtually every bishop was

6 ■ These ratios hardly varied over the period 1960–89 (Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security [Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történelmi Levéltára, hereafter ÁSZTL], 1.11.1. box 152, supplement no. 2).

7 ■ Imre Várkonyi (1916–83), a prior, canon, rector of the Theological College at Szeged (1953–58), then chairman of Actio Catholica, was from 1956 a part of the informer network, under the codename "Rózsa", and from 1963 a member of parliament.

8 ■ See the standing orders for Directorate III/III at www.th.hu/forrasok/ugyrend_3.doc, p. 12, section VI. 17.e.

9 ■ Act 24/1957 mandated prior approval by the ÁEH of all appointments to the post of dean or higher; in 1971 it was modified so as to give it the right to approve retrospectively.

10 ■ Many accounts have been published of the oppression of the Catholic Church in the German Democratic Republic and Poland, but there is no book which compares the various countries in any detail. For a review of the current position see "Vermintes Gelände: Kirchen im Osten," in: *Halbjahreszeitschrift für südosteuropäische Geschichte, Literatur und Politik.* 2006, no.1.

imprisoned or interned. From the outset priests were tortured.[11] As a result of the harshness of these proceedings, brutal even by the standards of the Eastern bloc, the 1956 Revolution found the Church in poor shape, and that may explain why, with the exception of Cardinal Mindszenty, the Catholic clergy in general took no part in the Revolution. The wave of retribution that followed the crushing of the Revolution accordingly hit a Church that had already been far more thoroughly cowed than had the Polish or Czech or Slovak Churches, for instance.

Coming as it did in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, an agreement signed by the Hungarian state and the Vatican on 15 September 1964 signalled a radical change: it meant that the Church was willing to accept the Hungarian state's right of advowson; that is to say, the Church could appoint to vacant bishoprics only persons whose nomination had received the prior approval of the state. Basically this agreement amounted to the Vatican abandoning the hierarchy behind the Iron Curtain. All that the Vatican got in return was a formal promise that the Hungarian state would not put administrative obstacles in the way of the operation of existing Church institutions.

Evaluation of the Vatican's East European policy is hampered by the fact that those who were responsible for it, such as Cardinals Casaroli and Sodano, remained in high-ranking posts even after 1989. Casaroli only died in 1998 (his memoirs were published shortly afterwards[12]) and Sodano retired in 2006. The Vatican for its part has a 70-year rule governing the confidentiality of papers in its archives, which means that documents relating to the 1964 agreement are not accessible to scholars. Casaroli's aforementioned memoirs contain no self-criticism whatever. Most peculiarly, in 1998 the Vatican asked the Hungarian government to classify these documents for a further 75 years and the government complied.[13]

Supporters of the agreement argue that the very existence of the Church in Hungary was under threat. Most of the episcopal and archiepiscopal sees were vacant and Bishops József Pétery and Bertalan Badalik were living under house arrest in the village of Hejce. In the absence of an agreement, administrators appointed by the state were running dioceses. Casaroli claims that the "collapse of the Church would have been inevitable in the absence of an agreement."[14] Gábor Adriányi, who is an internationally recognised authority on the subject, has come to a different conclusion. He reckons that the agreement resulted in the Hungarian Roman Catholic Church "sinking to the lowest point in its thousand-year history."[15]

Although neither the GDR nor Romania entered into agreements of this kind with the Vatican, the Church did not founder there. In the case of Czechoslovakia, the Vatican in 1966 was unwilling to enter into an understanding on the same conditions as in Hungary, despite the fact that there were 13 vacant episcopal sees. Finally, in 1973, the

11 ■ The procedures adopted against the Roman Catholic Church are discussed by many of the authors listed in footnote 1.

12 ■ Agostino Casaroli: *Il martirio della pazienza: la Santa Sede e i paesi communisti, 1963–89.* Einaudi, 2000. This has not been translated into English but there is a Hungarian edition under the title *A türelem vértanúsága. A szentszék és a kommunista államok (1963–1989).* [The Martyrdom of Patience. The Holy See and the Communist States (1963–1989)]. Budapest, Szent István Társulat, 2001.

13 ■ Adriányi, *op. cit.*, p. 46, footnote 4.

14 ■ Casaroli: *A türelem vértanúsága,* p. 125.

15 ■ Adriányi, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

Vatican appointed four bishops who had been proposed by the state, but this did not silence critical voices within the Czech and the Slovak Churches. In fact, it enabled the Catholic Church to play a leading role in the Czechoslovak 'Velvet' revolution of 1989.[16]

Not a single socialist state managed to liquidate the Churches completely. Casaroli fails to acknowledge that, as a result of the 1964 agreement, it was the earlier administrators and/or security service plants who were appointed bishop and archbishop (of the five appointees three were already working as recruited agents and another was a candidate agent).[17] The assertions that Casaroli makes regarding the agreement are also at odds with the Holy See's official position. In 1972 the Vatican itself acknowledged that it did not regard the model satisfactory for other Eastern European countries, which of course is precisely why it did not enter into such an agreement with Czechoslovakia.

In 1966 Endre Hamvas, Archbishop of Kalocsa, Lajos Shvoy, Bishop of Székesfehérvár, József Pétery, Bishop of Vác, and Artúr Schwartz-Eggenhoffer, Vicar Apostolic of Esztergom, all "requested" retirement "on account of age". To fill the vacancies, the Hungarian state only nominated individuals who had been recruited as agents. The Vatican was initially unwilling to accept these. In 1968 Archabbot Norbert Legánti of Pannonhalma and a year later Vince Kovács Auxiliary Bishop of Vác also resigned. Finally in 1969 appointments were made to eight top posts; only three of the appointees were not state security agents.

In order to install the bishops it preferred, the Interior Ministry gradually wore the Church down. For years on end "candidate agents" would be regularly sought out for "discussions" and so gradually drawn into state security work. In the case of László Cardinal Paskai (a bishop, then archbishop between 1978–87, afterwards until 2002 Archbishop of Esztergom–Budapest) this conditioning lasted for around six years and only bore fruit from 1979 on, after his consecration as bishop.

It should be made clear that under the Kádár regime physical terror was used for recruitment purposes in only a small proportion of cases. Indeed, it was considered an option only with those recruited prior to 1964; but even then, as in the case of Pál Brezanóczy (Archbishop of Eger 1969–72), no force was employed to recruit him in 1958. There may have been occasional use of blackmail, improper relations with nuns being the presumed ground in one known case,[18] but by the Seventies recruitment of this sort was uncalled for as those put forward for appointment had already been intimidated or were loyal supporters of the regime and so did not need to be broken following installation. Overall, 90 per cent of the archbishops and a minimum of two-thirds of the bishops were at least formally members of the security service's informer network though they collaborated at very different levels.

Recruitment as an agent was just one of the devices for making prelates toe the line. The ÁEH held all bishops under constant, highly overt surveillance, and appointed their immediate aides and chief administrators. Prior to every episcopal conference, individually tailored "targets" would be worked out for everyone, which would then form the basis for discussions with them.

16 ■ Otto Mádr: *Wie die Kirche nicht stirbt. Zeugnis aus bedrängten Zeiten der tschechischen Kirche.* Leipzig, 1993, pp. 17–20; Jan Stribrny: "Tschechoslowakei," in: Walter Kasper (ed.): *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche,* 10th edn, Freiburg, Basel, Rome & Vienna, 2001, vol. 10, pp. 279–282.

17 ■ The four in question were Bishops Brezanóczy, Ijjas, Bánk and Cserháti; only Bishop József Winkler was not an agent.

18 ■ ÁSZTL O-13405/2, Hungarian Catholic Episcopate, p. 97.

These discussions were to clarify what subjects they were allowed to broach at the conference; the sessions were bugged and this record was compared with what the agents themselves reported. Thus, the ÁEH did essentially the same thing as the officers running the informer network—with the difference that the ÁEH staff had the right to call on prelates. In practice they behaved as the bosses of the particular bishops.

The recruited prelates naturally worked in a variety of capacities for the state security organs. There were cases where the ÁEH became so dissatisfied with an individual—for instance with Archbishop József Szendi in 1984—that serious consideration was given to having him replaced. There is not a shadow of doubt that the general climate of fear was such as to cow the Church at its highest level, the episcopal conference. A report by Kornél Pataky (at the time an Apostolic Administrator, later Bishop of Győr) gives a sense of how this worked:

> Bishop Udvardy has made complaints more than once in the recent past that he no longer has a role to play in the episcopate; on every single occasion he is left on his own, whether it comes to a vote, a contrary opinion, or whatever else, they always leave him isolated... This is rather getting on his nerves, and he looks on the episcopate as a "hot-air shop". For that reason he does not hold a high opinion of his colleagues. He says that it is impossible to get anywhere with the episcopate. Even a set of minutes seems too much to ask for, and even when they do get them, these do not contain what was decided, because by the time it is minuted, the text has been altered. He keeps his own notes, and that is why he is often amazed by the minutes, because many times the conclusion and resolution are diametrically opposed to what he himself has made a note of. As a result, he sits around like a lone wolf and he is slowly beginning to get tired even of undertaking counter-attacks.[19]

It is striking how Pataky's "handler", Major István Molnár, assessed this report:

> The bishop is beginning to judge his role and position in the episcopate and the conferences in a realistic manner. He senses that he is getting nowhere with his unrealistic, oppositional thinking because his proposals are received with indifference, rejected or voted down.[20]

It is clear that the officer had accurately gauged the thinking of the episcopate where the opposition of an isolated bishop like Udvardy was ineffectual. One reason why Bishop György Udvardy is of particular interest is that between 1970 and 1988 he was the only one actually named as a hostile Church leader in the annual summation reports of the state security services.[21]

As to what would have happened if no accommodation had been reached between the Hungarian state and the Vatican, one can only speculate. It is highly unlikely that the Kádár regime would have locked the doors of churches or put an end to the eight surviving Church-run secondary schools and four religious orders. Christianity had survived far worse persecutions than those between 1964 and 1989. Furthermore, anyone who believed that the agreement would produce a thaw was to be disappointed. The agreement yielded not the slightest restraint on the part of the Kádár regime. To the contrary, in the very year of its signing the Political Committee passed a resolution that applicants to teacher training colleges who were from church-

19 ■ ÁSZTL M-3627/1, report by "Kerekes", 10 February 1972.
20 ■ *Idem.*
21 ■ MOL XX-B-1-ai, 1-a-726/76, Jelentés a belső reakció ellenséges tevékenységéről [Report on the Hostile Activities of the Internal Reaction], 10 May 1976.

going families were to be rejected. The number of priests also began to decline, from a total of 3,990 active in 1959 to 3,679 in 1969.[22]

Rome's open renunciation of its rights over the Hungarian Roman Catholic Church toppled an important pillar of resistance to the party state. The security services even had the satisfaction of seeing the Vatican cease to support the victims of show trials, as it should not be thought that the agreement marked an end to such proceedings. A total of 11 such trials involving the clergy were staged between 1957 and 1972, three of which took place after 1964, with extraordinarily severe sentences handed out—19 years 3 months to Ödön Lénárd,[23] 19 years to István Tabódy[24] and 18 years to Imre Szigeti,[25] all of which were served to the very last day.

Colonel Sándor Geréb, head of the department spearheading the struggle against clerical reaction, noted in his report for 1965 in connection with a trial that was in progress against the Regnum Marianum religious community:

> The Vatican... regards this as an internal matter for the People's Republic of Hungary and does not question the legality of the proceedings under Hungarian law. They emphasise that they do not look upon it as an infraction of the agreement between the Hungarian government and the Vatican. They have offered their co-operation if they can be of any service in similar cases.[26]

The betrayal of József Cardinal Mindszenty was a clear-cut case of open abandonment. Mindszenty, the victim of a show trial in 1949, was only liberated from house arrest during the 1956 Revolution. When it was crushed he took refuge in the American Legation.

While he was still living in this form of internal exile, Mindszenty was assured by Pope Paul VI that he was regarded as the head of the Church in Hungary. In 1971,

22 ■ Jenő Gergely: *A katolikus egyház Magyarországon* [The Catholic Church in Hungary], Budapest: Zrínyi, 1985, p. 179.

23 ■ Ödön Lénárd (1911–2003) entered the Piarist Order in 1926, took monastic vows in 1933 and was ordained in 1936. Up till 1945 he was a teacher at the Piarist grammar school in Szeged, from 1946 national culture secretary for Actio Catholica in Budapest. He was arrested in 1948 and sentenced to 6 years' imprisonment, which he served in full. In 1961 he was again arrested and this time sentenced to 7 years 6 months, but he was released under an amnesty in 1963. Arrested for a third time in April 1966, he was sentenced to 8 years' imprisonment, but this was extended to 19 years by adding on his earlier sentences. He was finally released in 1977, the last priest serving a prison sentence in Hungary. On his release, not only did he receive no assistance from the episcopate but efforts were actually made to have him removed from Hungary. These did not succeed as this was against Lénárd's own wishes, which were supported by his superior in Rome. In fact, he served the longest prison sentence of anyone under the Kádár regime. He was rehabilitated by Hungary's Supreme Court in 1993.

24 ■ István Tabódy (1921–2000) was a hussar officer and served as commander of a heavy armoured squadron during the Second World War. He stayed in the army after the war but was interned on suspicion of espionage in 1947. He was held in the notorious labour camps at Kistarcsa and Recsk, where he made the decision to become a priest. Released in 1953, he was again arrested in 1957 and sentenced to 7 months' imprisonment. He was secretly ordained a priest in July 1958 but in 1959 was expelled from the central seminary for "insubordination". In 1961 he was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment on charges of maintaining contact with the Holy See and of "espionage and illegally organising". On his release in 1972 he was first a chaplain in Székesfehérvár then a parish priest in Bicske. After Hungary's change of regime in 1989 he was the first person to be appointed field-bishop of the Hungarian Army, with the rank of general.

25 ■ Imre József Szigeti (1907–2001) was ordained in Graz in 1931. In 1951 he joined the illegal organisation known as the Christian Front and in 1957 was given a life sentence of penal servitude. He was released in 1975.

26 ■ MOL XIX-b-1-x, 10/489/4/1964 BM országos értekezlet [Interior Ministry National Meeting]. 22 January 1965, p.19.

however, in the wake of the Vatican's agreement with Hungary, Mindszenty was obliged to quit the apartment where he had been living since 1956. It speaks volumes that the Pope chose 5 February 1974—the 25th anniversary of Mindszenty's show trial—as the day to announce that the archiepiscopal see of Esztergom was "vacant" and that the excommunications of the three "peace priests" mentioned earlier were lifted. From then on, there was no disapproval whatever on the part of the Vatican when such priests spoke up at mass rallies in support of Communist peace policy and enthusiastically acclaimed the Party's "wise and peace-loving" leadership. It is hard to imagine how offensive that must have been to those who had accepted imprisonment, torture and poverty for their faith so as not to live a lie. They can surely only have concluded that their sacrifice had been in vain as far as the Vatican was concerned.

The Vatican did not even shrink from putting pressure on bishops judged by the state security organs to be recalcitrant in displaying more loyalty to the regime. A good example is the visit that the Vatican prelate Giovanni Chéli[27] paid on Bishop Udvardy. According to a report by Kornél Pataky (code-name "Kerekes"), Chéli's main efforts were directed at convincing his Hungarian interlocutor that Kádárism stood for freedom and prosperity. According to his report dated 13 June 1973,

> Signor Miklós,[28] his negotiating partner, is a congenial gentleman and they are well able to explain to one another both their problems and appropriate means for their solution...
>
> The rise in general prosperity that has occurred here over the years is evident in outward appearances, in construction work, the whole way that people look. He affirmed emphatically that this standard of general prosperity in the socialist countries is far more stable and superior to that in capitalist countries. According to Prelate Chéli, this was Archbishop Casaroli's view.
>
> Otherwise, he was delighted that people are cheerful and well-dressed, that the children also are in good spirits. This gives the lie to the propaganda that is still harped on about abroad in some cases when they say that here we have a Church of silence with a frozen smile on their faces. One has to come here and see for oneself—frozen smiles are not to be experienced.[29]

It would be a mistake to think that "Kerekes" submitted his report in these terms in order to pull the wool over his handlers' eyes by writing things that would be to their taste. The accusations made in his reports show that he was dedicated to his role, grabbing at any opportunity to paint others in a bad light. In evaluating what Chéli supposedly said, one needs to bear in mind that there had been a rash of defections and sackings of priests in the see that Chéli was visiting.[30] The only reason why Chéli could possibly have made such absurd pronouncements is that he was acting under Vatican orders, as in 1973—the year in which the March 15th commemorations were broken up by the police with particular brutality—the oppressive climate must have been conspicuous to any visitor to the country. With the Vatican on its side, the

27 ■ Giovanni Chéli (b. 1918) was ordained in 1942 and thereafter worked as a diplomat for the Holy See. From 1967 he was on Casaroli's staff and from 1973 was the Vatican's representative at the UN. In 1978 he was appointed bishop and apostolic nuncio. As the Vatican's "roving diplomat" he too played a part in inducing Mindszenty to resign. From 1986 to 1998 he headed the Vatican's council dealing with refugee affairs.

28 ■ Imre Miklós, the head of the State Office for Religious Affairs and a colonel in the security services.

29 ■ ÁSZTL M-24178/1, "Kerekes", pp. 88–89.

30 ■ "Kerekes's" reports mention the removal of András Pelle and the defection of István Dévény within one year; ÁSZTL M-24178/1, p. 43.

power enjoyed by the ÁEH was such that it could force Udvardy to dismiss priests merely for not having sought prior approval to send out invitations to attend catechism classes in church.[31] The metaphor of "frozen smiles" in fact very precisely reflects the situation that the Catholic Church was grappling with during the Seventies.

Pataky's handler appended the following evaluation to his report:

> it may be stated that the Vatican diplomat's skilfully positive utterance about his experiences in Hungary may have been deliberate, probably seeking to curb precisely Udvardy's crude pig-headedness.[32]

All the signs point to the Vatican being in tune with the ÁEH's position and taking its own steps to ensure that Udvardy was aware that he could not count on their backing should he resist.

With the agreement signed, and under circumstances that only grew more favourable as time wore on, Hungary's security services could safely go about the business of cowing the Church. Mindszenty's successor as Archbishop of Esztergom, László Cardinal Lékai, who was appointed in 1974, proved to be a willing tool in the hands of the ÁEH. By the early 1970s, even before he came on the scene, the security services could have total confidence that the Hungarian Catholic hierarchy would carry out their wishes as the balance of power was continually shifting in their favour. The history of the illegal Basilian monastic order of the Byzantine-Rite Catholic Church provides an example of this, when the matter of "recruitment" into the order became the object of widespread inquiries launched by the security services. Bertalan Dudás, the provincial, and those close to him did indeed maintain contacts with 33 monks of the Basilian order and were engaged in proselytising, despite the fact that their order had officially been disbanded. The Interior Ministry felt it was sufficient to "signal" the matter and to close the case after those concerned had been given a police warning. They also hoped that a bishop of the Hungarian Byzantine-Rite Catholics, whom they failed to recruit as an agent, could at least be held in check by making it clear that any failure to toe the line on his part would mean having to reckon on a wave of arrests. Their hope was that the bishop himself would be willing to take on the disciplining of the miscreant members of his flock, so that no overt accusations would be necessary in the first place. According to a note by Department III/III's agency in Szabolcs County: "our goal was that this gesture should force Bishop [Miklós] Dudás [i.e. Bertalan Dudás's elder brother] towards greater loyalty [sic!]."[33] This strategy worked in part; the intimidated bishop "did not obstruct the hierarchy passing decisions of a progressive leaning", or in other words he did not set himself up against his fellow-bishops, the majority of them agents, because he feared that those implicated in the affair of the Basilian order might be punished more severely. From another angle, however, the security services miscalculated, as the bishop did not reproach his flock for becoming involved with an illegal order, only for doing so without due caution. It is striking, though, that for the security service it was worthwhile to refrain from "effecting" the matter (i.e. taking legal action) because it was able to take care of everything much more effectively through the hierarchy.

The action taken against András Pelle, a curate in the parish of Újszeged, gives a vivid illustration. Agent "Kerekes", who had reported on the illegal religious instruction

31 ■ ÁSZTL M-3624/1, "Kerekes", p. 131.
32 ■ ÁSZTL M-24170, p. 94.
33 ■ Frigyes Kahler, *Kis állambiztonsági könyv* [Concise Reader on State Security], vol. 3, p. 76. [n.d.].

being provided by Pelle,[34] on 8 March 1972 was given the task by his handler of inducing Udvardy to prohibit Pelle from undertaking this clandestine pastoral work and either to have him posted away from Szeged or retire from the priesthood—a measure that the intimidated bishop duly took. The comment appended to the report is instructive:

> Comment: The measures to be taken by the bishop set in motion the disruption of Pelle's activity. The measures taken from above by the Church authority will at the same time have a restraining force not just on Pelle but the other RC priests who are acting in an overzealous and irregular manner (e.g. László Galgóczi, Antal Lotz, etc.). It will serve as a prelude to a planned series of actions for bringing further discredit on A. Pelle, which the Church authorities too will accept as being the state of things.[35]

By the time of a 1978 conference of county police chiefs only "external disruption" was being blamed as the source for any "hostile activity" by the Church:

> To all appearances, the change in imperialist tactics and *the continued positive changes* in the Churches at home *favouring loyal forces* [my italics] are forcing reactionary Church personalities at home and abroad to focus on the growth of "oppositional sentiments" within the Church.
>
> The oppositional activities of Church reactionaries are fundamentally under the ideological direction and influence of reactionary forces abroad.
>
> They have set at the centre of their attack the aim of disturbing settled state and Church relations and preventing their further improvement.[36]

In 1979 Szilveszter Harangozó, at the time head of the Internal Protection Directorate III/III, gave the following appraisal of "Church reactionaries" to the conference of police chiefs:

> In the overwhelming majority of cases their suppression is being realised by employing political means, with the collaboration of loyal forces and fundamentally as an internal matter for the Churches. We have also initiated our state security measures within this framework.
>
> We are pursuing our state security work along three main lines:
>
> – the uncovering and prevention of the plans and activities of external and internal reactionary forces on the basis of a broad-based and continuous co-ordination of the proper organs;
>
> – the protection and development of the loyal forces of the Churches and their support by operative means against reactionary elements;
>
> – the support by operative methods of the international activities of loyal members of the Churches.[37]

Harangozó went on to stress that "reactionaries" were not able to

> create a significant base in clerical or lay circles. They could not produce tensions over the question of human rights and freedom of religion such that these would grow into a significant socio-political problem. We have successfully obstructed them in the training of 'standard-bearers', or leading personalities, capable of uniting their forces.[38]

Harangozó's positive evaluation is in stark contrast with the dramatic tone of his report on oppositional activity, though in 1979 it was of little significance in Hungary. It is obvious that state security organs were

34 ■ ÁSZTL M-36278/1, pp. 7–13, 24–26 & 35–42.
35 ■ ÁSZTL M-36278/1, 8 March 1972 report of "Kerekes".
36 ■ MOL XIX-b-1-x, box 30, 10-36/6-1978, Conference of county police chiefs, 30 June 1978; state security work and internal opposition, pp. 13–14.
37 ■ MOL XIX-b-1-x, box 32, 10-38/7–1979, Conference of county police chiefs, the struggle against Church reaction, pp. 1-2.
38 ■ *Idem*, p. 2.

by and large satisfied with the Churches. Harangozó's sketch of the need to protect the "present loyal Church hierarchy" gives food for thought.[39] Though he does not specify anyone, it is obvious that what he means is that they had used state security devices to "defend" traitors within the Church against those who were critical of them in the community of the faithful. The collaboration also worked superbly in influencing their target. In the case of the Regnum Marianum Community and the Bokor ("Bush") movement

> success was achieved in proving to the leaders of the domestic Churches the splitting and anti-Church nature of these groups. On this basis, it has been possible to activate loyal forces to put their foot down against them. As a result, uncertainty and strong signs of disintegration can be observed in those circles.[40]

In other words, by convincing the Catholic hierarchy that the operations of the Regnum Marianum and Bokor groups were harmful, the Church itself took the administrative steps needed to suppress their activities. What makes this all the sadder is that the persecution of Regnum Marianum and Bokor was not demanded by the Vatican.

As this demonstrates, Hungary's state security agencies had every reason to believe that they could depend on "loyal forces", this being shorthand for their agents and the peace priests, with the majority of the bishops being part of their informer network and, willingly or unwillingly, playing their role.

The aims of the battle against the Church were adjusted accordingly. Harangozó and his colleagues did not have to fight the Hungarian Church hierarchy but to protect it against what were thought to be harmful influences. As Harangozó put it in his 1979 review, the greatest threat was seen in the possible "missionary" activity by the Polish Church in Hungary, as a result of which "the Hungarian Church abandons the loyalty to the state that it has shown heretofore and follows their example."[41]

According to the statement of future tasks presented to the 1981 conference of police chiefs:

> By employing our operative means and methods, we must ensure that Church reactionaries should continue to be incapable of making the Churches of Hungary act as hostile social forces. We must also ensure that the struggle against Church reactionaries should be conducted within the framework of the Churches. It continues to be necessary to devote great attention to uncovering and restraining persons and groups who are displaying specific hostile 'oppositional' activity within the framework of the Churches.
>
> By employing our operative capabilities, to continue promoting the growth of the progressive forces in the Churches. To exercise influence so that in future their role should remain positive.[42]

In an address to a meeting of state security organisations of the "friendly socialist states" Deputy Minister Jenő Földesi assessed the role played by the Hungarian Church as follows:

> Loyal priests set the standard within the Churches... At the same time, within the Churches there exist reactionary groups possessing great experience in the political struggle that, under present conditions, are intensifying their efforts to break out of their isolation. Among these, the most significant are so-called "small groups", comprising around 2,500 individuals and 60

39 ■ *Idem*, p. 8.
40 ■ *Idem*, p. 12.
41 ■ *Idem*, p. 19.
42 ■ MOL XIX-B-1-x, 10-38/2/1981, 27 February 1981, Tájékoztató a belső ellenséges tevékenység egyes kérdéseiről [Guide to certain aspects of internal oppositional activity], Col. Szilveszter Harangozó.

> priests, that are working within the Catholic Church but stand in opposition to the hierarchy. The loyal forces of the Churches are acting against these reactionary groups with determination and with success, making it difficult for international centres of the Church to give official support to them; indeed, in certain instances they can be prevailed on to condemn those activities. For instance, in an open letter sent to Cardinal Lékai on behalf of the Pope, Vatican State Secretary Casarolli [sic] was obliged to condemn the activity of reactionary small groups since the Hungarian episcopate had done so unanimously on several occasions. Papal condemnation caused a crisis for the reactionary small groupings. This remains a fact, although certain individuals within the Vatican continue to support them illegally.[43]

Even Paul VI could not do anything about the wrecking of the Roman Catholic Church in Hungary. Although he removed responsibility for the socialist countries out of Chéli's hands, he did not take any further steps. His successor, John Paul II, was also obliged to recognise that he was helpless to do anything about a structure that had become established.[44] This was registered with great accuracy by the ÁEH: "Even the Vatican has been obliged to take notice of and acknowledge what is for us the favourable political transformation of the Hungarian Roman Catholic Church."[45]

The special position of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Hungary explains why they were among the last to recognise the end of the Communist regime. Even during the period when the potential changeover to democracy was in the air, the Catholic press was unwilling to publish any articles that would have promoted political change to the slightest degree. In 1988 Bishop Endre Gyulay, who had himself earlier been a member of the informer network, wrote a brave article with political overtones about the martyrdom of St Sebastian under the title "Tolerantly and Patiently", but the whole of the Church press refused to publish it and in the end it was one of the national dailies that did so.[46] József Szendi was the only bishop who, in 1988, took anything resembling a firm line in negotiations with Communist representatives.[47]

This made it possible for Major General János Bogye, the head of Intelligence Section III, to report to a conference of deputy ministers on ongoing counter- Vatican work in the summer of 1988 that only the small communities, sects and a few "reactionary" parish priests who had prison records were considered a threat, but he was completely relaxed about the episcopate, having only praise for them:

> Our Church policy is one of the firmest points in our policy of alliances... The signs are that the significance of Churches in resolving tensions may grow in the coming period. The Hungarian Church policy model has so far been successful in contributing to our internal political stability and, indeed, has won international recognition and respect.[48]

To put it another way, Bogye was asserting that the Kádár regime in no small part owed a debt of thanks for its stability to the loyalty of the upper echelons of the Roman Catholic Church. ❧

43 ■ ÁSZTL 1.11.1. box 90, Jenő Földesi's speech to the conference on state security, Sofia, 14–18 October 1983, pp. 8-10.
44 ■ Ödön Lénárd, Ágnes Tímár, Gyula Szabó & Viktor Attila Soós: *Utak és útvesztők* [Paths and Mazes]. Budapest, Kairosz, 2006, p. 207.
45 ■ MOL XIX-A-21-d 002/a-3/a-1979, box 113.
46 ■ Personal communication from Endre Gyulay, 16 January 2007.
47 ■ Adriányi, *op. cit.*, p. 203.
48 ■ MOL XIX-B-1-x, 10–38/1–1988.

MEMOIR

Zoltán Peskó

Tamás Blum and His Journeys

We first met when I was two and a half years old, in 1939. Tamás Blum must have been about twelve and attending that famous Lutheran *Gimnázium* on Városligeti fasor—City Park Avenue—which was where my father taught singing and music and was organist at the church beside. One day he took me into school, where I apparently met Tamás. My father said about him that he was a hyperactive boy, constantly fidgeting and, what was worse, a "rude boy", who had the impudence to interrupt his teachers during lessons, loudly and maliciously, in a manner that implied some sort of superiority. At the Fodor School of Music he was always under the piano annoying girls as they used the pedals and even brought the angelically tempered Pál Kadosa, his piano teacher, to the end of his tether so that he clipped him round the ear.

I heard the story of our first meeting from Tamás himself around 1960. Later on, shortly before his death, he put it in writing in his autobiography in connection with three events that involved me. I must have mislaid the sheaf of papers somewhere and I have only just had the chance to read the original copy that came to light recently amongst the papers of his widow. Tamás based his reminiscences on a notebook in which he kept a brief record of the times and

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Zoltán Peskó

is Music Director of the Lisbon Opera and leading conductor of the Portuguese Symphony Orchestra. He studied at the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music in Budapest and left Hungary in 1964 to attend master classes with Petrassi. Following his 1970 debut at La Scala (where he has been a regular guest ever since), he has travelled far and wide, making opera and concert appearances with, among others, the Berliner Philharmoniker, the French National Radio Orchestra, the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Amsterdam. In 1973 Zoltán Peskó was named Chief Conductor of the Teatro Communale, Bologna, in 1976 the Teatro La Fenice, Venice. From 1978 to 1983 he was Music Director of the RAI Orchestra in Milan and working as the Music Director of the Deutsche Oper am Rhein Düsseldorf/Duisburg. His repertoire extends from the Renaissance to the avant-garde and is documented by numerous recordings.

circumstances of all his journeys. Autobiography or memoir may, in fact, be somewhat of an exaggeration for the some 40–45 pages that have been rounded out of this and that, which is soon to be published under the title *Itinerary,* in a memorial volume dedicated to Tamás Blum. The title, given by the editor, appropriately refers to journeys, with their departure and arrival times, journeys that, for the most part, were determined or stipulated by others, and in some cases were forced upon him, as I hardly suppose he set off for Bergen-Belsen of his own free will. Individual choice rarely had much of a chance to play a part in determining the direction of progress, or when it did, the decisions were minute and truly insignificant (as on rare holiday jaunts to the West), but then they would make a dramatic impression on him. These were steps in "forced marches", some of them of several hundred kilometers, sometimes alone, sometimes accompanied, small steps forward, or back, or sideways, and one huge step that was taken of his own accord—the decision, in 1972, to spend the rest of his life in Switzerland rather than Hungary. Fate was kind enough after that bailing-out to allow him free rein for a while, although it was to backfire decisively later. To this day, friends argue—who can tell for sure—whether it would have been better for him to stay on in Hungary and carry on marching instead of jumping.

What we have is a short collection of memorable anecdotes that are darkly amusing in a Chaplinesque way, some with an exceedingly sour outcome. We know that Chekhov thought of his plays as comedies, and we have learned that jokes often compensate for humiliation, insult and injury. Tamás no doubt considered these events in his life worth recording because they were funny and frequently absurd, he is wide-eyed in surprise at the patent oddities that befell him. Anyone who met him as a musician will know what an exceptional artist he was, of a vast and profound culture and, in his more inspired moments, much more than that.

Re-reading the text after fifteen years, I at first searched in vain for several details that I could have sworn he recorded and of which I had a quite distinct recollection. I was beginning to think that his widow, who until her own death in February 2007 collected what mementoes Tamás left behind, may have done some editing of her own of the *Itinerary* manuscript. That is, until one or two circumstances that completely dispelled all doubts surfaced in my memory. The reason why I wrongly remembered on first re-reading is that, back in 1991, I received my copy by post. I started reading straight away, and that same evening I had a long telephone conversation lasting an hour or two with him. What was recorded in the manuscript and the telephone conversation became conflated in my mind, so I was looking for details that we had only talked about on the 'phone. For instance, how he had come to know our home on Rottenbiller Street (I can't imagine why he had turned up there, possibly he played the piano for my father, or he came by to borrow some music), or else that we had spoken about Márta Sárközi (née Molnár), whom both of us were very fond of, and who, along with her son, Mátyás Sárközi, was distantly related to him.

György Kurtág Jr confirmed my suspicion, as he had paid a visit to Tamás's wife Józsa not long before she died. György Jr, who is fully familiar with modern recording techniques, went there to update two "obsolete" cassettes of lectures of Tamás on *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Tristan and Isolde,* brilliant dramaturge as he was. While there, he looked through Blum's papers, and he too reckoned that *Itinerary* was certainly authentic. Besides that, not only had his own parents, György and Márta Kurtág, been close friends of the Blums from the Fifties onward, but young György had also maintained contact, especially in the later years, so that his ties with Józsa were almost those of a member of the family.

Tamás was appointed Music Director of the Csokonai Theatre in Debrecen in 1953, before György Jr was born, but György "Snr" spent a lot of time there with the Blums, "to find out about the theatre", in all likelihood with the aim (sadly never realised) of himself writing an opera. A year or two later in Budapest, though, the time they spent together in Debrecen did bear fruit in that Kurtág composed very fine incidental music for *The Tempest.* A somewhat "tempestuous" rumour about one particular visit went the rounds in music circles in Budapest given that it was well known how reluctant Kurtág was to let any new work out of his hands and how he hated working to a specific deadline. Later he became unwilling even to promise anything, but at that time he would still commit himself to delivering a score earmarked for a particular theatre season, for some unpostponable deadline, and he would then simply be late with it—something about which Tamás Blum had his own fairly trenchant opinion.

It is not by chance that this comes to my mind, because one thing that was part and parcel of Tamás Blum's personality was the motor-mouthed speed of his verbal aggressiveness, which some people found quite hard to take. He simply had no inhibitions about lecturing people, even if he did so cleverly and amusingly, in most cases with every justification, but quite frequently offensively. I escaped this, perhaps in part because he and I (sadly) did not often meet, and even then not for any length of time, apart from some magical weeks that we spent together in the October of 1964 at the Hungarian Academy in Rome—something that he too writes about in his autobiography. There I did not experience anything of the kind.

Interrupting his studies in 1945, immediately after the war, as a young man of just eighteen years, he started working as a répétiteur at the Hungarian State Opera House in Budapest, prompted no doubt by the need to earn money. All the directors of the Opera of his time, Aladár Tóth, Imre Palló, Kálmán Nádasdy and Miklós Lukács, marvelled at him and lent their support, acting on the opinion of Otto Klemperer, the Opera House's *Generalmusikdirektor* from 1947 to 1950, who idolised him. Many a time did Klemperer enter the Opera House and shout at the porter's lodge, *"Wo ist der Blum?",* and even after they were forced to leave Budapest he and his daughter Lotte remained friends with him for the rest of their lives. Tamás's nickname in the Opera House at the time was in fact "Blumperer",

and many a tale went around about the close professional and friendly relations between the two. I only understood what those initial eight years as a répétiteur at the State Opera House meant because I too worked in opera houses for many years, in all sorts of capacities right up to the present. In my experience, one can sometimes find people working in minor jobs, with others in charge, who have a major role in the running of the theatre as a whole. That was the case during my years at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice, and before that, during the early Seventies, at the Teatro Communale in Bologna and at La Scala, in the Sixties at the Deutsche Oper in Berlin, then again not so long ago at Barcelona's marvellous Liceu opera house. In Bologna that person was a prompter. (He had originally been a conductor, but a grenade lying around from the war exploded in his hand. His right arm had been amputated at the shoulder and he was left with only the thumb of his left hand, which was not enough for conducting purposes but perfectly satisfactory for guiding singers on stage from the prompt box). In La Scala it was two of the management's enchanting secretaries and in La Fenice another "duo", this time comprising a half-crazy assistant director and the person in charge of on-stage music; in Berlin it was the theatre's artistic secretary; in Barcelona the lady chief supervisor, and so on. The role that such people play is comparable to that of a sound-post—a small stick of spruce, invisible from the outside, which stands inside the instruments of the violin family, wedged between the top and back plates and held roughly under the treble edge of the bridge, thereby transmitting the vibrations produced by the strings to the whole instrument and amplifying the sound. Without a sound-post, instruments would not have a voice of true fullness and warmth, but one that is hollow and rough-sounding, "dead", lacking in *"anima"*, or soul, as the Italians say, which chimes in poetically with Carl Jung's language.

Right from the start of his work as a young répétiteur, Tamás Blum held that sort of position: he had a highly significant and tangible influence not only on his immediate colleagues but on the management as well. Not only did Aladár Tóth, the director, listen to him, so too did even the fearsome Mrs István Barna, the all-powerful Party secretary at the Opera House and the conductor András Kórodi, whose word also carried a lot of weight in the Party. All three of them accepted Tamás's judgement. Although Tamás himself remained a Party member only till the Revolution in 1956, when he was 29, and did not rejoin subsequently, there was complete political trust in him right up to his abrupt departure for Switzerland—a trust to which he certainly owed his appointment to the post in Debrecen.

Beyond any kind of politics, though, what counted was his quite staggering musical gifts. In the course of my career I have come across few musicians blessed with similar talents. Owing to Klemperer's confidence in him, when he was around 20 or 21 he too was spoken of by others as being a genius—something that in itself was extraordinarily helpful in the early years of his career. He also showed brilliance in associated areas that strictly speaking have no direct bearing on the

day-to-day work of a practising conductor, such as translating opera librettos. (To mention but a few of his translations: the complete *Ring, Die Meistersingers, Tristan, Rigoletto, Otello,* Berg's *Wozzeck,* Britten's *Albert Herring.*)

There are sentences in *Itinerary* that I think every Hungarian musician agrees with: "Whether or not Hungarian geniuses—and I'm not thinking of Bartók—are a bit flaky, a bit superficial, whether or not they can truly play the piano or the violin or sing, they have only been able to prove that abroad. In Budapest one is allowed to play a little out of tune if public opinion has pronounced one to be a genius."

The strange thing was that he knew a huge amount about conducting technique when talking about it, but his gestures were not fully "drilled" or "imbedded" as a matter of routine. That was of no consequence in Hungary, due to his prestige, but in Switzerland, where he was entrusted with many performances without orchestral rehearsals, it caused problems. In Hungary, up to his departure, thanks to his extraordinary talent and intelligence, many things had proceeded smoothly, including his conducting career. He was given the biggest assignments, both in the State Opera House itself and as a guest conductor with the Hungarian State Symphony Orchestra. Right up to the moment when, to everyone's total surprise, he and all his family stayed abroad. He did this suddenly, a catharsis as it were, when he was at the very peak of his success in Hungary. His own explanation was that he wished to ensure the success of, and a future for his son János, but in truth he had reached the end of his itinerary. Through his trips abroad he had become fully alive to the true nature of the mendacious regime in his homeland, and he wished to spend the rest of his life living in freedom with his family. The decision was the product of a kind of disgust that he chose not to examine in any detail but which the present author, if anyone, can very much empathise with, and indeed did so, although not from so high a vantage point as Tamás Blum, who could have expected a Kossuth Prize, this country's highest honour for achievement in the arts.

Itinerary only concerns trips abroad, which may reflect a nostalgia for the life of an international conductor, but, first and foremost, for living somewhere else. In Zurich he started by conducting at the Opera House, then applied for the post of Music Director at the International Opera Studio in Zurich, which had a close relationship with the main house—a post which he obtained. There are now many singers in opera houses all over Europe whose careers started off under Blum, and some of the world's top singers continually flew to Zurich to consult him on their understanding of the roles they sang. Unlike a great many, he had no money problems as an exile. Some twinges of nostalgia for the career he had left behind in Hungary may have lingered, so he would often make comparisons of careers in Hungary with those abroad. Certainly what struck me about those years in exile was the particular attention he gave to Hungarian colleagues who had found their feet, one way or another, in the West, and he mentions them more than a few times, having obviously devoted much thought to them, as the above quote indicates.

Arriving at Zurich Central Railway Station on January 8th, 1992, I had to queue for a taxi and was almost late for a rehearsal that was set for three o'clock that afternoon, which is something approaching a crime in a theatre of any pretensions in a German-speaking country (though elsewhere too, of course), even if Alban Berg insists to the contrary in *Lulu,* as if he were citing a proverb: *"Er lässt auf sich warten wie ein Kapellmeister"* ("He keeps people hanging around for him like a conductor"). I arrived just in time at the Opera House entrance to take the solo singers through a first run through Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre.* All I had in mind was getting to the rehearsal room on time, but before I had reached the upper floor, Jóska Dene, one of the Opera House's distinguished soloists (we had been in the same year at the Music Academy in Budapest, in this opera he was cast in the role of the astronomer Astradamor) happened to be coming down towards me on the stairs. It must have been thirty years since I had last seen him. I have no idea why, but the moment I looked at him, Tamás sprang to mind. Maybe it was because, as he himself notes toward the end of his memoir, before he set off for Switzerland and exile, an official from the Institute for Cultural Relations (in reality a security man who organised undercover agents) had tried to persuade him to keep an eye on the political behaviour in Zurich of someone who had defected there from the Hungarian State Opera House—a certain József Dene. I hurriedly greeted him as I raced to avoid being late and asked him, "Look here, Jóska! Your turn only comes in an hour and a half, at the beginning of the second act, so you'll be free until the interval. Do me a favour and call the Blums and tell them that I'd love to see them. Let's take a bottle of wine round this evening, after the rehearsal, and drop in on them." During the first half of the rehearsal, despite the excruciating difficulties of the conducting, all I could think of, oddly enough, was Tamás, and then most surprisingly the baritone who was taking the leading role of Nekrotzar started rambling on about him, quite out of the blue, perhaps prompted by my Hungarian accent in German. (In the libretto Nekrotzar personifies death and comes over as something of a swindler, though in the very last words of the opera he declares that the day will come when he pays a visit, and in earnest.) During the interval Jóska was very agitated when he called me out of the rehearsal room, "You know, Zoli, Józsa was very odd when I called, dismissive. She said that we should talk about it later, and before she put the receiver down she laughed out, or maybe it was not laughing but sobbing... I don't know what it was..."

As I found out that evening, what had actually happened was one of those things of which there are more in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in my philosophy. Tamás had died by the telephone just before Jóska made that call (he had leant on the back of his wife who tried to lessen his pain)—at just the time when I had been hurrying up the Opera House stairs.

On June 19th of 2007 he would have turned eighty. ❧

Tamás Blum

Itinerary

Part 1

Now that I regularly travel from Switzerland back to Hungary to be gladdened and annoyed, to work and to rest, I often meet people who talk to me about events that we went through together, matters that relate to me. Some of these I recollect, but not others, though some of the latter I know for sure are untrue. It is amusing how speedily legends grow up around people who have left a place, the curious way in which earlier sympathies and antipathies take shape in memories, both negative and positive.

I was never one for saving posters, reviews, letters or receipts. I have never made a record of anything apart from the itineraries of my trips abroad, but these were put down accurately, in a big orange notebook. Those data being reliable, I feel like putting flesh on the bones.

1937, Austria

Father (Béla B.), Juszti, the cook and I. Father was then forty-four, Juszti must have been about twenty-five, and I was eight years old.

The reason for the trip was that Mother (Mariska, or Mári to my father) had needed to have two front teeth extracted. She didn't want anyone to see her before she had a bridge put in. It was summer and we travelled by train to Vienna; father stayed there, Juszti and I were taken by car to the Rax (a mountain near Vienna). A week later some people came to pick us up and take us back to Vienna, where we spent a day before taking the boat to Budapest.

There was a deer at a little guest-house on the Rax. Salad was served at lunch, but not the same as back at home; they chopped in bits of a hard-boiled egg. The

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Tamás Blum (1927–1992).

conductor, translator of libretti. 1945–53 répétiteur at the Hungarian State Opera House, Budapest; 1953–59 music director at the Csokonai Theatre, Debrecen; 1959–72 conductor at the Hungarian State Opera House, Budapest; 1972–77 conductor at the Zurich Opera House; 1977–92 music director at the International Opera Studio, Zurich.

Viennese trams are red; that was what stood out most for me. The boat on the return journey let its funnel down to pass under every bridge. I stood by it in advance so I could watch.

Another reason why father made the trip was because he wanted to meet Mr Sachsl, who had been his boss while he was living in Vienna. My parents originally came over from Vienna to Budapest when Mother became pregnant, because she wanted me to grow up in a Hungarian milieu. The chauffeur-driven car was also Sachsl's. The business where father worked (the bookseller Braumüller's) still exists. As I discovered subsequently, what they talked about was whether it might not be best to leave Europe. They were thinking of Manila, where a Viennese friend of theirs had gone the previous year to set up a printing business.

1938, Vágújhely [Nové Mesto nad Váhom, Slovakia]

Father took his own life; the Germans marched into Austria. In July Mother and I went to the Fuchses in Vágújhely. I think their daughter, who lived in Pest and liked playing cards with Mother, asked her parents to invite us to stay with them to take our minds off things.

Mother was totally disturbed; her unimaginably abrupt and unexpected widowhood robbed her of even the most basic vital instincts. She did not even manage to look after me, never mind herself. I had got over the shock when I grasped that life goes on. The Fuchses were not relatives; they had not even known Father, so they didn't talk about him. [...]

The Fuchses' son, Pali, came to visit them. A jolly-looking man of about thirty, he had a car and he took us off for day trips. In Pöstyén [Pieštany, Slovakia] I saw a statue of a man breaking his crutch over his own leg. It was explained to me that that was because the waters had cured him, so he could now walk. That brought Father to mind, who liked teasing me and once swore that the reason chemists' have snakes as their shop sign is because chemists sn(e)akily heal people. "Don't muck the boy around, he's daft enough as it is!" Mother said, and I loved the way they did not speak to me the way the parents of my classmates spoke to them. Father even warned me before I started my first day at school to be careful because the schoolmistress would try to instill the fear of God and a sense of patriotism in me. He was pretty serious when he said it. That was despite his having served for four years during the First World War. He was a pilot and he came down from 5,000 feet but his small plane got caught in the branches of a tree, which saved his life. He avowed himself to be Hungarian. He travelled from Vienna to vote in the Sopron plebiscite. He had been born there and noted down names from gravestones so as to be able to vote in different places under several different names for Sopron to remain in Hungary.

He professed his Jewishness because "where there's a dunces' bench a decent man will sit on it." When he asked the writer Ferenc Herczeg to put in a word for

me to be accepted as a pupil at the famous Calvinist grammar school in Sárospatak, from which it would be possible to gain entrance to a university in Britain, Herczeg responded that he would do so if I would convert to Calvinism. Father would not hear of it. Every year when we visited my Aunt Adél, his elder sister, to celebrate Seder he would take me beforehand to eat some ham lest I believe Aunt Adél when she said that no decent Jew eats pork in any form. He had me enrolled at the Lutheran *Gimnázium* in Budapest (he himself had been a pupil at the Lutheran school in Sopron), hoping that a solid schooling in the natural sciences would knock out of my head any leaning I had for music.

Pál Fuchs also took us to Pozsony [Bratislava, Slovakia]. There was more traffic on the roads there than in Budapest. It was the first time that I sat in a coffee-house and the first time that I saw a shoe shop (Bata). I was told that clothes were cheaper than in Hungary—and better too. I saw the rails for the Pozsony–Vienna tramway, though no trams had run since Austria was occupied.

I was very fond of 'Uncle' and 'Auntie' Fuchs. They would sit with me in the arbour in their garden while Mother rested. Rye bread with milk curds is something I have gladly eaten ever since I was constantly plied with it at their place.

I never saw them again—or Pali Fuchs either.

1944–45, Bergen-Belsen, Switzerland, with Mother

We set off from Rákosrendező goods yard on 30 June 1944. We arrived back in Budapest more than a year later, at the beginning of August 1945.

Scholarly papers, even a whole book, have been written about that trip, the journey of the so-called Kastner group. But even though this concerns Hungarians, the book was published in Canada, or so I have heard.

Some rich Kolozsvár [Cluj, Romania] Jews, most of them Zionists, bribed Eichmann to get them and their families out of the war. Roughly 600 people were supposed to be transported to the port of Barcelona. Those selected assembled in Budapest, at yellow-star houses (designated for Jews). Our friends, the Kolbs, were among those who paid to be included. Since what was meant by a family was not precisely defined, they managed, at considerable financial sacrifice to themselves, to get Mother and me added to the list. A similar thought occurred to others too, so as a result, instead of 600, 1,609 reported as voluntary deportees at the assembly point on Kolumbusz Street. At Rákosrendező goods yard we were loaded onto freight wagons and then set off. The first stop was Ács, outside Komárom. Here the rumour spread that we were being taken to Auschwitz rather than Barcelona (we understood the place to be Auspitz; no one had ever heard of an Auschwitz). That turned out to be scaremongering, but what it did mean was that even more had to be paid for the extra people. My information about the financial shenanigans is completely unreliable; they did not tell a seventeen-year-old much.

We travelled for a week, but northwards, not southwards. The whole lot of us were held in pawn, as it were, at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, which

was as big as a large town. After six weeks, 600 were picked out at random—the original number, in other words—and taken away to Switzerland—as we learned later. The remaining thousand, ourselves included, followed six months later, first to a barracks at St Gallen, then from there to the Hotel Esplanade at Caux-sur-Montreux, which had a splendid view over Lake Geneva. I was granted a special dispensation to attend the Lausanne Conservatory (formally, here too we were interned). Later on I was moved, along with a violinist by the name of Morpurgo and a cellist by the name of Basevi, both Italian army deserters, to the nearby village of Blonay, and we used to go visiting the homes of various refugees to play piano trios. Of course, life was far from rosy even for refugees in Switzerland until it became clear that the Germans were going to lose the war. But then that too is something about which books have been written.

Mother developed cancer of the pancreas, which she found out when she took the report from my pocket. Zoltán, Mother's younger brother, who was lying low in Buda using forged papers, somehow managed at the height of the Russian siege (27 December 1944) to get a telegram sent to me at Caux-sur-Montreux, because he learned from a BBC broadcast that our group had arrived there. I still have the telegram to this day, and I'm taking it out of the box now so as to get it right: *All well, Borcsa in Crimea.* Borcsa was the third of them. She had been carried off from Balassagyarmat and was no longer alive by then; she too fetched up in Bergen-Belsen, though not as a member of our privileged group, of course. Anikó (I shall write about her later on), who was with her there and later on became the wife of the proprietor of Switzerland's most exclusive hotel (she still is), told me that they knew about our group. Borcsa suspected that we might be among them and tried to get a message to us by concealing it in the backside of the horse that drew the refuse cart, but we didn't receive it.

So Uncle Zoltán's telegram was not true but it still prompted my dying mother, eight months later, to make the return trip to Budapest. There were six Red Cross motor coaches to take 180 returnees from a devastated Germany via a by-and-large shattered Austria. (The other members of the group have since become scattered around the world.) [...]

All I will say further about the other stops on that long journey is that we halted for a long time at Ács, in the county of Komárom. We were allowed to alight from the wagons to relieve ourselves in the fields. We still had provisions, and I gave the German guard some cherries. We must have been about the same age; he was called Fritz, and I was ashamed of finding him highly likeable.

In Linz we were all made to bathe together, men and women, in a communal shower. There were two dogs pacing between us. There were canisters of Zyklon B lying in front of the facility, but we didn't know what they were for.

The train passed through Göttingen. It was the fifth day that we had been in the cattle wagons. In the morning civilians were sent packing from the station so they would not see the yellow-star bunch—which meant we could go to the station's rest rooms to clean ourselves up. As it was safe to assume that none of us would

wish to escape, they didn't bother too much with keeping an eye on us. As a result, I was able to stroll out of the entrance to the station and buy a copy of the *Völkischer Beobachter* from a newspaper vendor as I still had on me some German coins from Budapest. As well as my shirt I had taken off the star so as not to give the vendor anything to wonder about. July 6, 1944 was a hot day anyway.

It was a similar story on 5 December at Nuremberg, on the way from Bergen-Belsen to Switzerland. The difference then was that the Germans had us travelling in first-class carriages and gave us white bread with butter and tins of ham, and by way of parting charged us to tell the Swiss, for the good of the half million people still left in captivity, that we had been well treated. That struck me as being somewhat irrational when the Swiss medical orderly, just two days later, recorded me as weighing only 42 kilos. The torn summer clothes that I was still wearing in December would also hardly have persuaded anyone that I had been treated particularly well. [...]

In the evening we arrived at Lindau, near the Swiss border. One last session was held there with Eichmann's people. The train stood there for hours, with us not knowing if we were going to be taken back or not. At one point the train, all of a sudden, started rolling backwards. Several people tried to jump off, and some people fainted. But then twenty minutes later we found ourselves in Switzerland after all. (When I went by train once from Munich to Zurich, 35 years later, and we again left Lindau moving backwards, I saw that the line didn't run any further because Lake Constance was in the way, so the train could only set off in reverse.) The trip from Switzerland back to Budapest on the six coaches took 12 days (6–18 August). At Dornbirn we wanted to give a number of begging Austrian children some Swiss biscuits, but a Zouave (this was in the French sector) drove them away by brandishing his rifle. We took a look around Munich but not much was left of the city. In Salzburg the only soup to be had was at the canteens for the Allied soldiers. Mozart's birthplace was open, and one even had to purchase an entrance ticket. I had a one thousand mark note that I was given for a dollar. The entrance was supposed to be only one mark, but the woman at the cash desk gave no change because, as she put it, there was nothing to buy with money in any case. The only quarters that the Red Cross was able to locate in Vienna was an isolation hospital. As Mother was feeling a bit better, we slept for preference on a bench on the grounds of Schönbrunn Palace. There was no border between Austria and Hungary. On the last stage our bus went in front, and I was given a seat next to the Swiss driver so that I could show him the way. We came into Budapest on Vienna Road, so I told him to turn left, because that would take us to the Margaret Bridge. It was gone. In the end, in order to reach our destination, the Gizella girls' boarding school, we crossed over to the Pest side of the river at what had been the Franz Josef Bridge, or perhaps it was called Freedom Bridge by then, on a strange extempore boardwalk. After Switzerland the beds at the school looked filthy. We were therefore surprised when everyone was made to show that they had no lice in their hair.

1950, Bucharest

On April 4th, for the fifth anniversary of the liberation of Hungary from the Germans, a gala concert was mounted in Bucharest, for which the Opera House chorus provided the whole programme. There was a selection of operatic excerpts conducted by the chorus master, László Pless, with me as his assistant to provide a piano accompaniment. There was a reception after the concert. One of the members of the chorus went over to Gheorghiu-Dej, the Romanian President (who was scented like a hairdresser) to autograph a postcard that was going to be sent back to the family. As soon as he had signed it, however, the man standing next to him asked to be given the card and he ripped it in two. Since I was the deputy leader of our group, I had my own interpreter, Zsuzsa, a highly intelligent and highly disagreeable lady. I was not allowed to do anything on my own; it was even she who refilled my cigarette lighter when it ran out of lighter fluid. We were not even given any Romanian money. Next morning the concert was recorded for the cinema newsreels. The reason for it being the next day was that arcs would have been distracting at the formal concert itself. The chorus was arranged on the podium, in full formal rig, just as on the previous day, with everyone there but me, yet they couldn't do anything without me. I was tucked up in my hotel bed until one o'clock. They looked everywhere for me except there. In the end they forced the door, although that was quite unnecessary because it wasn't locked. With them wearing forced smiles, I slipped straight into my tails without having a wash and a big limo took me to the concert hall.

We were supposed to have lunch at Dr Petru Groza's[1] place, but that became an afternoon tea because of me. Half the Romanian government were there. I sat next to Ana Pauker[2]. Groza was very good-humoured, showing us a photo taken of himself with Stalin: my father would never have imagined that, bourgeois that he was, he said. He tore me off a strip for my hideous suit, it was definitely not the sort of thing one should wear on a visit to a head of state, he said. When I got back to Budapest I should call on Kecskés the tailor and tell him to make me a suit like those he was used to making for Peti Groza. And the men standing behind me who looked as if they didn't understand a word of Hungarian were writing down everything I said. I looked round to see if any of them cracked a grin, but they all stood there like door posts. As a starter we were given pancakes filled with so much caviar and cream that we couldn't face the main course. Afterwards we went to the Opera House. Groza also came with us. *Tosca* was on, with all manner of marvellous singers (the great Ştefănescu-Goangă took the role of Scarpia), and the Romanian text sounded just as Italian as the original libretto.

1 ■ Petru Groza (1884–1958), Prime Minister of Romania between 1945–52, when he was succeeded by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. President 1952–58. Born in Transylvania, he spoke perfect Hungarian. [All notes by the editor.]

2 ■ Ana Pauker (1894–1960), Romanian Communist politician who served as Foreign Minister between 1947–52. She was subsequently imprisoned and harrassed to the end of her life.

I said as much to Zsuzsa, who immediately fished out of her handbag a bilingual *Selected Poems* of Mihai Eminescu and gave it to me. I still often read it with enjoyment.

We were there for three days.

1956, Poland, with Józsa

A package tour within the scope of a so-called exchange drive for artists. As the Music Director of the Csokonai Theatre in Debrecen I was able to ask to be allowed to take my wife along. Even though it was stated on her confidential personal file (they also told her this) that she had got mixed up with a frivolous Bohemian circle of acquaintances (i.e. mine), she would be free to join me. Since it was the first time in her life that she had been abroad, she cried when the train passed the Czech border and she heard a foreign dog barking. We were held up for a long time, for no obvious reason, at Szob on the Hungarian–Slovak border and again at Zebrzidowice on the Czech–Polish border. In Warsaw we were guests at the artists' club. There was no interpreter, only a woman called Alicia, who translated everything into French. After dinner, though, a Hungarian student came along who showed us the sights of Warsaw, which consisted, before all else, the Palace of Culture built by the Soviet Union.

I had left my toothbrush behind in Budapest, and the student promised to obtain a new one for me. He was unable to, but then Alicia procured one, because she tagged along with us to the seaside so as to do the translating into French.

Two of my friends were in the group. There was Gábor Földes, chief director at the Győr Theatre, who shrewdly explained that Mátyás Rákosi's dismissal as the Party's First Secretary, which had happened shortly before (on 2 July 1956), would stand the Party in good stead, and that Ernő Gerő too would only be a temporary leader. Then it would be the turn of the outstanding youngsters. Földes would later on be hanged by those selfsame Kádárists. When I eventually left Hungary sixteen years later to settle in Switzerland and I cast around for my reasons for leaving, it was perhaps Földes's murder that was uppermost. The other friend was Mensáros[3]; he had been permitted to bring his young son along. Three months later I was talking politics with him in Debrecen. No one was more tolerant, more forthcoming or straighter than him. He got away with a prison term and banishment: much luckier than Földes, but then he wasn't a Communist in the first place.

It was at Międzyzdroje on the Baltic that I saw the sea for the first time. Only the hardier spirits went for a dip in the cold water, and they would speedily dive under blankets afterwards. There was a place called the Press Club where one

3 ■ László Mensáros (1926–93) Hungarian actor, one of the best of his generation. He was imprisoned in 1958–61 for his involvement in the 1956 Revolution and only allowed to play in a Budapest theatre again after 1964.

could read Western newspapers. That was inconceivable in Hungary at that time. It was there that I met the music critic Dankowski, who that October telephoned to me in Debrecen to ask what was up, whether there was any shooting, and should he send any food or soap. As it happened there was nothing happening in Debrecen, no shooting, and there was more than enough to eat. Soap matters were no cause for concern either; even the barrels of the guns on the tanks that were first heading east for Záhony, at the Hungarian–USSR border, and then again west for Budapest, were shining clean. [...]

To backtrack again, we spent a few hours in Warsaw. Mensáros sent his son out to the toy section of a department store with one hundred zlotys to spend, but Péter came back to say he had found nothing there. We concurred that it was worth travelling to Poland if only because it felt good to go home from there. [...]

June 1957, Vienna

I was a Party member from 1948 until 1956, from the age of twenty-one to the age of twenty-nine. I joined because the principle was, in principle, to my liking, but I found it easy to keep myself out of active politics because my Uncle Zoltán was locked up for being a spy for the Yugoslavs (later amended to the British), doing a stretch of seven years. As I was quite sure that he was not, I lost confidence in the regime soon enough. My impatience anyway made me unfit to stick out the meetings and tutorial sessions to the bitter end, whereas I never got bored playing *ulti*.[4] My status, as summed up by the theatre's Party secretary, as being a well-meaning, overly intellectual, not entirely reliable artistic type, suited me down to the ground. On October 24th, 1956 I wanted to travel up from Debrecen to Budapest, but as things turned out I didn't make the trip until December 3rd. By then the old Party had ceased to exist and I didn't apply to join the new one. When I noticed that the liberalization I had been hoping for was not coming about, it was too late to defect. I wanted to find out how much my position had been damaged by my not having rejoined the Party, so as a trial shot I applied for permission for an exit visa at the Ministry of Culture to travel to Vienna for five days. I said that I wanted to look around for new scores for the Debrecen operatic society, though in reality I had nothing at all in mind. I was granted the permission complete with the visa and $30 spending money with astonishing speed, and then I was immediately informed—even though it was meant to be a secret—that I would be travelling to the Avignon Festival three weeks from then. Up to that point, all I had heard about Avignon was that this was where the French antipopes had been in residence in the fourteenth century.

There is nothing to be said about the trip to Vienna, except perhaps that I was thirty years old to the day, and in my excitement at crossing the Iron Curtain I was unable to sleep at all the night before.

[...]

4 ■ A card game of the skat family.

July 1958, Toulouse

Being a young father, I thought it would be better not to extend my five-year contract at Debrecen, so I returned to my family in Budapest and to the State Opera House. A few days after I had resettled I took a phone call telling me that I was to supply the piano accompaniment for five Hungarian competitors who were taking part in the Toulouse Song Contest, given my knowledge of French (pretty weak actually); they pressed into my hands the group's funds, which meant the money for the hotel rooms and the living expenses for ten days. And six air tickets for Budapest–Brussels–Paris, six rail tickets for Paris–Toulouse–Marseilles–Genoa–Milan–Vienna–Budapest—so tortuous was the route that it seemed almost that they had booked it with me specially in mind, whereas in truth it was merely out of rank stupidity. I was warned that they had failed to obtain transit visas to cross Italy because (I swear I'm not making this up) the Italian ambassador in Budapest had gone off on a fishing trip (unauthorised) to Lake Balaton, and since he had no money on him the police had detained him at the police station while they checked his credentials. The Italian ambassador had taken umbrage (honestly, I'm not making this up) and was refusing to issue any visas for three days. I was given the task of getting the Italian consulate at Toulouse to stamp the visas in the passports, because the three days would be up by then. The Italians in Budapest promised that it would all be in order: it was not worth mentioning. A chap at the consulate in Toulouse said fine, I should go by the next day to see him, and would I mind obtaining for him two tickets to the closing concert. There were no tickets to be had, so there were no visas either. He produced from under his belly a cyclostyled sheet headed *"confidente"* and showed that he was unable to issue any visas because of the fishing incident. I told him that it had only been for three days, and that was long ago anyway. That may well be, he said, but he was still not going to issue them. A phone call to Budapest. Budapest sent the six train tickets to cover a return journey to Paris and six plane tickets from there to Budapest. By then, though, there were only three people who made use of the plane tickets.

One didn't because she had hopped it even before I picked up the return tickets at the Air France office: Judit (I don't recollect her family name) announced that I shouldn't bother bringing back a ticket for her as she was going to stay in France and get married. She shook hands and then went off with a smile. Two of the party, Alfonz Bartha[5] and I, didn't go because the next day the Hungarian ambassador was holding a birthday party and Bartha had been engaged to sing, me to accompany him. This unexpected offer meant that we were obliged to stay around for ten days in Paris, living at the Hungarian Institute and on a decent daily allowance, with the embassy picking up the bill. This made for a very pleasant ending for a trip which had not started off too well. [...]

The Hungarian group was rather successful at Toulouse, winning third and fourth place, which meant that the prize winners had their hotel bills paid for

5 ■ Alfonz Bartha (1929–), Hungarian tenor, after 1959 member of the Hungarian State Opera House.

retrospectively, while I had my entire travel expenses refunded because I agreed to accompany the Argentinean singers as well when their pianist was taken ill. We didn't even have to spend money on food because all meals came with the compliments of some master butcher who was an ardent opera fan. As a result we were rolling in money on our return to Paris, and out of his prize money Bartha purchased a fur coat for his sister and had this sewn as a (duty-free) lining into an ordinary raincoat. He felt rather hapless in the strange world of France until he came across a market where he could purchase the makings for a proper *lecsó,* which he would cook for himself in the Institute's tiny kitchen. I explored the region around Paris, including Chartres, the Grand Château in Chantilly and also the magnificent abbey church at St Benoît-sur-Loire, to which I have since paid two return visits.

Having spent all the money that I was legally allowed to spend, I was still left with a wad of francs, refunded living allowances and hotel expenses—more than it was permissible to take out of France in those days. I stuffed it all into a back pocket of my trousers and so broke French law for the benefit of the Hungarian state. Back in Budapest I informed the Institute for Cultural Relations that Judit had not come back with us. I was rebuked for not, as leader of the group, having reported it sooner, to which I said that I was not a group leader in any sense; I had merely been entrusted with the money and then slapped down on the table the wad of French francs along with receipts. That made them scratch their heads, because they had already written it off in the books, so what were they to do. I asked if it would have been better if I had stolen it. Umm well, they said, there was indeed something in that from an administrative point of view.

[...]

May–June 1960, Vienna

A quartet of Hungarian conductors—Gyula Borbély, Miklós Erdélyi, Ervin Lukács and myself—went at the state's expense to attend the Vienna Festwochen. It was a special thrill for me that Klemperer[6] appeared there with the London-based New

6 ■ Otto Klemperer (1885–1973) conductor, one of the greatest of his time. Highly eccentric and suffering from manic-depressive disorders all his life Klemperer had more than two decades of exile, professional difficulties and a recent debilitating illness behind him when he was invited by Aladár Tóth (1908–68), musicologist, music critic, and then director of the Hungarian State Opera House, to come to Budapest as permanent guest conductor. Once, arriving late to conduct *Così fan tutte,* Klemperer took over the off-stage band and left twenty-year-old Tamás Blum to conduct the opera for the first time in his career. (Peter Heyworth: *Otto Klemperer: His Life and Times. Volume 2 1933–1973.* Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 176.) In a fever of activity Klemperer conducted unforgettable opera and concert performances during his stint of three years in Budapest. As Klemperer recalled in an 1969 interview "I was glad to be able to conduct opera, which I hadn't done since 1933. [...] And then I had three good orchestras at my disposal. In 1933, when I had been in Budapest, I had found the sound of the strings of the concert orchestra quite exceptional. They were almost all pupils of Hubay and played in the same way. My three years in Budapest were very fruitful. I conducted an extraordinary number of concerts, and at the opera I did all the five main Mozart operas, *Tannhäuser, Lohengrin, Meistersinger, Fidelio, Rosenkavalier, Otello, Traviata, Hoffman* and a really unimportant work by Mussorgsky, *Sorotchintsy Fair.* [...] Tóth did everything in his power to make life agreeable for me. I have never had a director who had more feeling for art or human understanding." (Peter Heyworth, ed.: *Conversations with Klemperer,* London, Victor Gollanz Ltd, 1973, p. 80.)

Philharmonia Orchestra to conduct a cycle of all the Beethoven symphonies. Besides that, there were Bruno Walter and the Vienna Philharmonic, Fritz Reiner, again with the Viennese to the best of my recollection (the Verdi *Requiem*), and Karajan at the Opera House. We had no tickets for anything. I wasn't sure how Klemperer would react to me after eleven years, so I was somewhat apprehensive when I knocked on the door to his dressing room, but he couldn't have been nicer. He remembered everybody and even asked after my Uncle Zoltán, whom he had last seen at Aladár Tóth's home. It was touching how he handed over tickets for two as though it was the natural thing to do (I didn't dare ask for four, but somehow all of us managed to get in). To start with, they played the Second and Third Symphonies. And Borbély on his ticket and I swanked it among the presidents of state and world luminaries in the second row of the stalls. I was also present at the rehearsal for the Bruno Walter concert, as well as the concert itself. Klemperer too was there at the rehearsal and afterwards introduced me to Walter, declaring that he supposed it would make me happy. Sitting there at the table were Erika Mann and Klaus Pringsheim, Thomas Mann's conductor brother-in-law. At the concert itself an awkward young German chap stepped onto the podium and in the name of the whole German nation begged Walter's pardon for all the unpleasantness that the Nazis had done to Walter. It turned out that the young man was none other than Hans-Jochen Vogel, then the newly elected mayor of Munich and now the leader of West Germany's Social Democratic Party. Walter, an amiable smile on his face, paid him no attention. It was certainly the last time he was to conduct in Europe, maybe anywhere in his life. We also managed to gain admission to Reiner's rehearsal. Speaking English I told him that we were Hungarian conductors, at which he immediately switched to Hungarian, saying that we shouldn't take him to be the sort of ass that would forget his native tongue.

I had breakfast with Klemperer on the terrace of the Hotel Imperial. Elisabeth Schwarzkopf was hovering there, carrying a Sacher cake she had been given. Before, she had sung Richard Strauss's *Four Last Songs* under Walter. I wasn't taken with her, though I would never have dared to say so—the whole performance somehow seemed to move ethereally two flights higher than I was used to. I asked how old she could be. She's been a Countess for two years was Klemperer's tactful, shrewd and masterly reply. To put it another way, it was two years since she had sung the Countess rather than Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro* (she was forty-five).

When Klemperer asked on our behalf for two tickets to Karajan's *Rheingold* at the Opera House they thought that he himself would be coming, so when Borbély and I turned up to collect the tickets at the stage door, the porter phoned some number and a few minutes later a whole reception committee came down in the lift. The two of us just stood there with sheepish grins on our faces. One of the dinner-jacketed gentlemen then asked when the maestro would be arriving. I said that the maestro had a concert of his own a block away and he

had asked for the tickets for us. The committee made a hasty exit by the lift, and a few minutes later some lowly usher brought us tickets for two very poor seats.

[...]

April 1961, Brussels, Paris, London

Nostalgia brigades was what people called the small groups who would put on performances for Hungarian exiles on April 4th. I made up one such group with József Simándy[7] and Lili Németi[8]. The first stop was to be Brussels and we had to fly in via Zurich. I fell asleep at the airport of my future homeland, but the two singers thought that I was keeping an eye on the time, so as a result we almost missed the connecting flight. In Brussels we were put up at a frightfully posh place, with an embassy car taking us on excursions to Ghent and Bruges. I went back to those places twice during my Swiss years, so greatly did they appeal to me. Hardly anybody was at the concert. The next day we flew on to Paris. There the embassy had booked rooms for us at the Hotel California, and because the concert was so short and poorly received Simándy and I went to seek consolation in the hotel's bar. As we had already had quite a lot to drink at the reception following the concert, we proceeded to give those present in the bar the benefit of an extra programme in a manner totally unbefitting illustrious artists. The next morning on to London. The British customs officer managed, with a well-practised motion, to crack the bottle of apricot brandy that was in Lili Németi's bag, so that her evening dress and silver high-heels reeked of spirits and she herself was reduced to a nervous wreck. The concert was not until the next day, and here it was the ambassador himself who drove us out to see Cambridge, which he knew a lot about and was also able to explain very well. We had dinner that evening at his home. He took our lady colleague back by car, because Simándy and I chose to walk. After an hour we could stand it no longer and so in an appropriately dark corner we returned to the English paving stones what had been drunk from the ambassador's beer. Who should come along at that precise moment but an English bobby on his bicycle. He politely waited until we were through and then he asked us for our names. Hearing that we were foreigners, he enquired with a smirk if the country we were from happened to have urinals in the streets. In a fit of insolence, I riposted that it did indeed, but in London you had to pay to use them, and the only reason we were peeing on the pavement was because we didn't have a brass farthing between us. He pondered that and then said, fair enough, he would pass on our complaint to his superiors.

The next morning we were taken to the concert hall for a rehearsal. Everything there was different from Paris and Brussels, with the concert hall itself—Kingsley

7 ■ József Simándy (1906–1997), Hungarian tenor, leading singer at the Hungarian State Opera House.
8 ■ Lili Németi (1928–88), Hungarian soprano, member of the Hungarian State Opera House.

Hall—being fine, with a fine piano, showing that music is important in London. In the evening the hall was full as well, and we had a great success with an expanded programme. A former classmate from the Lutheran *Gimnázium,* Péter Gortvai, now a surgeon, came backstage to offer congratulations. I hadn't seen him for seventeen years. He took me off for a drink, then on to his room at the hospital since he happened to be on duty that night. He related that Klemperer was in London to work on a gramophone recording. The next day I called him up at the hotel where he always stayed. His daughter Lotte immediately proposed that we should meet. I went over that same morning and she ran me over to the octagonal Mormon church where the recording was taking place. Bach's *St Matthew Passion* was the work in question. Lotte straight away hit on the idea that if I was there anyway, why not stay a couple of days longer, so she put in a call to the well-disposed Hungarian ambassador to explain that her father had need of my services, on which basis I was allowed to stay on. That would have been fine, because Lotte gave me enough money to get by on and I again telephoned Erzsi Faragó, whom I had already met on the first day as I had brought her a package from Budapest. She had told me to feel free to stay with her any time, and she still said yes now that it was a very real need, so I moved into her home on Dyne Road in Kilburn for ten days. Now, the houses on Dyne Road, as on many London streets, all looked virtually identical, so if you forget the house number you have a job finding the right place. In the house there was a meter that had to be fed with money if you wanted hot water, which made me reflect that a doctor in Budapest (which Erzsi had been) would be living in greater comfort than she was now. It was an opinion not shared by her, however. It was from her that I heard the important statement that English food is no good, but in London it's especially no good. Much later I heard Dezső Ernster[9] say much the same about the weather in Zurich (it's not a place where you live for its climate).

Klemperer here, as ever, really deserves a chapter to himself. The first time that I went up to his hotel room he was just in the process of calling up an old acquaintance in Los Angeles, and he chatted away for a good half an hour. But then, as Lotte said, he had earned the money so he should be free to chuck it away on whatever he pleased. In the mornings I would sit there during the recording sessions for the *St Matthew Passion,* though naturally there was nothing that I had to do. Once I fetched a cup of tea for Christa Ludwig from the café across the road, and there was one occasion when I provided a piano accompaniment for a girl cellist who was auditioning. She actually invited me to go along that evening to a party with a bunch of very intelligent musicians. They all adored Klemperer, valuing his genius and being tolerant of his little quirks. It was an immense pleasure after all the rancour I had witnessed in Budapest.

9 ■ Dezső Ernster (1898–1981), celebrated Hungarian basso, in 1946–59 member of the New York Metropolitan Opera, in 1959–66 member of the Düsseldorf and Zurich Opera Houses.

Klemperer himself broadcast the news that Adolf Eichmann had been caught by the Israeli secret service in Argentina, but he had no interest in the fact that Gagarin had flown round the Earth at much the same time. The British newspapers were simultaneously alarmed and enthusiastic about how advanced Soviet technology was, but for Klemperer the "spaceman" was just a soldier, and space flight only served to bring the end of the world closer.

There was one concert that he gave with the New Philharmonia in the midst of this, and it was then that one could see how fit he was despite his outward appearance of an invalid. The rehearsal alone was superb. We lunched together with the soloist, Alan Civil, who was not only the soloist in Mozart's Horn Concerto but also taking his regular place as first desk in the horn section in the other works on programme (Mendelssohn, the incidental music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll*), which had been specifically chosen for their prominent horn solo passages—a "benefit performance", so to say, for one of the orchestra's members.

Whatever time I didn't spend with the Klemperers I wandered around the centre of London on my own. I didn't enter any museum or music shops, just gawped. On the Sunday, Erzsi Faragó drove me out to the city of St Albans; in the cathedral Haydn's 'Nelson' Mass was being performed. I also met up with Mátyás Sárközi, a distant relation, who was then working for the BBC World Service, having previously been a reporter for Radio Free Europe. He told me that the Hungarian authorities had their knife in him, so it would be better not to be seen too much together with him. We stayed inside the apartment. He knew London inside out and drew my attention to a great many of the sights. I was able to spend an hour with him. The next day the cultural attaché telephoned from the Hungarian embassy to the home number of Erzsi Faragó, a defector. He had a spare ticket for the England v. Scotland football match at Wembley Stadium. We met and he took me to it. Since the fans drank a tot of whisky after every goal, and England won 7:3, there were close to eighty thousand blotto fans leaving the parking lot by car at the end of the match. We went into a café to drink a cup of coffee while we waited for the crowds to clear. The match had been most enjoyable, my benefactor said, but the next time I should avoid calling on Mátyás Sárközi, an enemy of Hungary.

The plane on the return journey was very late. I had to wait at Amsterdam airport for a connecting flight, and there was also a stop in Prague. We got to Budapest's Ferihegy airport late in the evening, and I spotted Józsa and János behind the glass screen in the arrivals lounge, waiting with a friend of ours, who had a car and had undertaken to ferry them there. The customs officer found in my luggage what he thought was a suspicious jar of something, and he mistrustfully noted my explanation that it was trombone grease. It was the truth too, as Mr Flashinsky, a trombonist in the Philharmonia Orchestra was sending a jar of his own specially formulated grease for lubricating trombone slides for his Hungarian colleagues to try, as he naïvely believed that he could pick up orders

from them. The customs man carried on searching and came across a bag of a powder that Erzsi Faragó intended for her sister, who owned several cats that had fleas. So what's this, he asked, no doubt suspecting it was cocaine. I said it was a special flea powder for cats. That was the final straw for him.

It was not until they had finished a chemical analysis of the powder, at four o'clock in the morning, that I was allowed to go. My poor son, all of three and a half years old, had heroically kept himself awake and only dropped off to sleep in the car, much as he did when he had supper with us the other day and patiently listened to us throughout, only starting to snore in the car when I gave him a lift home, the only difference being that he is now thirty-three and a half. ❧

(To be continued)

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

Miklós Györffy

Innocence and Experience

Zsuzsa Takács: *A megtévesztő külsejű vendég* (The Guest of Misleading Appearance). Budapest, Magvető, 2007, 223 pp. • János Lackfi: *Halottnéző* (Calling on the Dead). Budapest, Noran, 2007, 228 pp. • Kriszta Bódis: *Artista* (Artiste). Pécs, Jelenkor, 2006, 310 pp.

Recently some of the finest of our women poets have made appearances as writers of fiction, with Zsuzsa Rakovszky the most prominent among them. After some twenty years of publishing only poetry she came out with two phenomenal novels and ever since, regrettably and hopefully only temporarily, has published hardly any verse. In 2006, after fifteen years of lyric poetry, Krisztina Tóth appeared with a collection of short stories entitled *Vonalkód* (Barcode; see her short story "Freed" in HQ 183). Now, at almost seventy years of age and more than thirty years after the publication of her first book of poetry, Zsuzsa Takács has also published her first book of short stories. She is by temperament a lyric poet, as a writer she cannot be pigeonholed in any school or trend. The principle themes of her poems (usually short) are the vicissitudes of love, death, the relationship with one's mother, the sufferings and torments of the soul, unexpected visions, bizarre dreams saturated with meaning, and a mystic, questioning Catholic faith in God. Subtly crafted and sophisticatedly feminine in their expression, her verse has always had epic strains, with a fragmented narrative structure concealing stories. Her short stories, in contrast, seem to unfold from lyrical images transposed into prose to add up to lyrical images.

After reading *The Guest of Misleading Appearance,* I could not remember a single clearly circumscribed, genuinely arresting short story, nor could I recount any stirring plot or conclusion in any of them. On the other hand, I could recall many of the arresting and distinct images that are characteristic of and peculiar to Takács; equally I could recall the plot twists, motifs and story fragments pervaded by a striking, haunting mood. An unusual sense of the volume as a whole lingers in my mind, a mixture of nightmarish dreams, the personal remembrances of someone who has lived through a tragic era, and variations on recurring themes.

My Autobiographies is the collection's sub-title, and the texts do have some strand or recurring element. The impression is of reading autobiographies of someone who was never really able to be a single person, but was perpetually compelled to take refuge in, or at times disappear entirely into different versions of her own life. Clearly these are roles played by the poet-narrator, constantly varying her personality. There are numerous affinities and interconnec-

Miklós Györffy
reviews new fiction for this journal.

tions between these biographies, in theme, motif and general mood. And the similarities in structure, narrative technique, tone and style are such as if each were being recounted by the same narrator, in the same or in a very similar voice, though each story is supposed to be coming from a different first-person narrator. The first piece opens, "This story didn't befall me, but I can only speak of it in the first person." The narrator is sometimes male, sometimes female, and the narrative generally spans a longer period of time, which is sometimes easily distinguished and sometimes merely incidental, a form of ambient sound: existence in Hungary over the past half-century.

It is at times difficult to decide whether this background is merely an incidental setting for human destinies or sufferings that find expression in the nightmares of the given character, or whether the individual crisis is linked to the historical context. (It is my impression that the latter is the case.) Yet if indeed there is some connection, what is it exactly? It is not easy to give an answer to this question these frequently enigmatic novellas raise. In "Playing with Fire", a Canadian-Hungarian speaks of her life, the turning point of which was her fleeing Hungary as a teenager in 1956. On her visits home she re-experiences the horror of her flight and the dreaded possibility of return. At the centre of these remembrances is a school friend, who had seemed a rival for a time until it had become clear that she was in love with her. Upon seeing two schoolboys kissing, she had understood what lay hidden within herself. On the outbreak of the Revolution she had escaped from the country, along with some two hundred thousand others. But she had also escaped from the version of herself that had frightened her. In Canada she became a respectable mother and wife. In the depths of her consciousness she is ashamed of her flight. "Would a more honourable death have awaited me had I stayed?" she asks herself in the end. Right at its turning point the story, perhaps the one that comes closest to developing into a rounded whole in the traditional sense, seems deliberately obscure; the reader must decide. Had this been a conscious, deliberate escape, or merely a way out that circumstances had happened to offer? All that is certain is that the protagonist flees with her elder sister; their mother, who was to follow them later, is shot at the border. The theme, or rather the story itself, is evidently of importance to Zsuzsa Takács—"Another Beginning" essentially deals with the same subject. Here, the attraction to the pretty girlfriend does not overstep the boundaries of ordinary adolescent infatuation, and it is completely unrelated to the escape plans of a fatherless family. The heroine, somewhat naively and childishly, simply wants her girlfriend to join them in the truck in place of her mother, who has had to stay behind temporarily. Nothing comes of this, of course. The mother, however, is shot at the border in this story as well, and the two orphaned children are welcomed into the free world with a dazzling show of compassion and banners. That the flight may have been a despairing fit is indicated here only by an interpolated image: on her last visit to her friend's place, she sees in the stairway a large, red tomcat with a kitten struggling between its claws, and her reaction is to thrash it with a broom. "I do not want to attribute any unusual significance to the scene, but this was the first step of my departure from the country, and from that moment in a sense I had already fled." The implication that a futile affection for a girlfriend or even the recognition of her sexual leanings could have been the motivation for her flight, with its historical underpinnings and life-long consequences, is a bold idea.

I am presuming, of course, that the heroines of these stories are ultimately escaping from themselves, but it is not always entirely clear who these selves are, why they have to escape, why their identities are uncertain and indistinct, and why they are tormented by a sense of guilt. Those of us who are of the same age, generation and homeland dimly suspect that they fled for the same reasons we ourselves fled, if not over the borders then into ourselves, into our ever narrower world; our recognition of this can add to the mystery and obscurity of the stories, to all that they leave unsaid, and help us to understand and appreciate them. No inquiry as to causes is conducted, nor is analysis offered. What is conjoined in them are the recollected visions of a vacillating frame of mind and the general mood of different protagonists. Often they waver on the border of dream and reality, and it is not always certain when or where they take place (or, indeed, if the when and where matter). The "action" in "The Mansion Park of Kammern" encompasses little more than a woman's return home from a swimming pool on a cold, misty winter day. The story begins with a nightmare (the third-person narrator, the only such in the volume, wants to cut a slice of bread, but the knife slips not into the loaf but into the waxy forehead of a stillborn infant), and we are immediately told that it "all takes place in a dream". However, what then comes to pass at the pool, under the hairdryer, on the tram, at the family doctor's, and finally what awaits her at home—in her apartment the figures she saw on the way "are behaving as if they were inspecting the premises"—is no less dreamlike, even if they are merely banal everyday impressions. "The Mansion Park of Kammern" is the title of a painting on the cover of a book seen in a bookshop window on the way between the pool and the apartment, a bookshop that happened to be going out of business that day. Another story, "A Headachy Day" is similar in spirit and structure. Here the first-person narrator is returning home from an award-giving ceremony, pops into a coffee house, feels unwell and is taken to hospital. All kinds of bizarre adventures befall her, one of which is the great disappointment she feels on being discharged. Almost all we know of her is what happens to her within the confines of the story and, at some point, even the absurd conjecture may be made that we are reading a satire on the healthcare system—which is of course not the case.

The narrator of the title story, "The Guest of Misleading Appearance", is an architect who invites some colleagues to dinner, among them the "structural engineer recently resettled from Switzerland," a bearded, stocky man who behaves aggressively. He returns after the others have left, continues to eat and then beats up his host, whose injuries are interpreted at the hospital as the result of a suicide attempt. Who is this "guest of misleading appearance"? A demon, who turns the protagonist against himself? But why from Switzerland, and why a structural engineer? Since Kafka, questions such as these have been asked of many writers. The archaeologist of "The Executioner's Daughter" thinks back on an alluring female colleague who, as the daughter of one of the "butchers" of 1956, enjoyed privileges in the Kádár era enabling her to be successful in her profession any real merit—a common occurrence in that period. She marries an old comrade-in-arms of her "butcher" father. In comparison to his old colleague, the first-person narrator always draws the short straw. Following the arrival of democracy, all trace of the woman is lost when she moves abroad, and the first-person narrator meets on the bus a man whom he recognizes as the detective who in March 1957 carried off his father. In fact it is not the detective, but

clearly his son. This conclusion (punchline?), though we may understand how it relates to the previous events, does not interconnect with them organically. It is an example of how in some of these stories the images, scenes, snippets of dreams and reality have an independent life, fulfilling their own narrative function and, while separately enthralling, of how they do not always merge into autonomous and consistent narrative unities. Oddly enough, with their breaks, their enigmas and what they leave unsaid, the shorter texts (in length closer to poems) are sometimes more poignant than the longer ones. In the longer stories readers may feel they have wandered into a labyrinth in which they have soon lost the thread. Again and again they have to turn back to retrieve it, which is not a burden, but rather an experience that offers new insights.

János Lackfi, born in 1971, has also made his mark as a poet and translator of poetry, and he too has turned to the novel. The cycle of thirteen chapters of *Calling on the Dead* may be in prose but the poet's methods and manner of seeing are clearly discernible. The branchings and variations on the theme are outlined by a first-person narrator describing his childhood; time doesn't pass and at the conclusion of the book we find ourselves essentially back where we started—at least if we don't consider as progress or development our becoming participants over the course of a genuinely enjoyable account of a clearly delimited situation in one life. Indeed why couldn't one consider a text that extends not in "length", but in "breadth", giving a cross-section of a state of affairs, a novel?

Obviously autobiographically inspired, the book is set in 1983 and tells of a twelve-year-old boy. He speaks about himself, his experiences in school, his teachers, his classmates, the pranks he plays with them, girls he is infatuated with (at times succesfully, at times not), his dog and dogs owned by others, his green belt suburb, his neighbours and parents, excursions and reveries. The subject matter is little more than provocatively and wilfully banal details; what is all important is the peculiarities of the narrative voice. Lackfi is a keen-eyed observer of this everyday world, of the stagnancy and pettiness of the Kádár era. That Lackfi succeeds in evoking this era authentically is due in no small part to the fact that nothing in the slightest bit unusual takes place around his hero, who can step beyond the horizon of the commonplace people of the suburb, the wretched children and the narrow-minded mentality of the school only in the reveries his reading inspires.

The real subject of Lackfi's novel is the language and the perspective which produces this grey and cramped world. The cunningly and wittily crafted narrative voice has two layers: the voice of the boy directly recounting events and the voice of the adult looking back on them. The two voices continuously intermingle, ironically mirroring one another. When the perspective is that of the boy, certain elements of the manner of speaking allude to this, while other elements hint at the adult depicting him with ironic aloofness:

> Then winter came, I took Bagi the homework because I missed her, and when the teacher asked, come, who will be so kind, the boys whistled out my name, it was pretty awkward, blushing ear to ear I nodded, just let it end already. In the street where Kriszti's family lives I swore to step only in other people's tracks in the snow. That's the best way to hide where I've been, that way I can melt into nightfall. On the steep street up there were just one or two uninterrupted tracks of footprints left, the most clumsy of them those of the man with the hat. Didn't much see the man with the hat in winter, clearly must have taken shelter somewhere

and wrought his plans. For a small guy he takes big strides forward, a fathom long, up the hill at that. Fearfully strong-legged man. Could only have gone to Bagi's, 'cos there are no more houses on the hill. Must be a regular visitor, sniffed out who my girlfriend is, planned how he could best squeeze me into a corner. He'll be sitting there on a chair, Bagi's mum, eyes red from crying, tied to another chair, he'll hold down the girl, pressing a sharp, curved knife to her throat, sit down, boy, I've got something to say to you, if her life is dear to you, don't try anything, 'cos I'll set her blood flowing straight away.

The man with the hat is a recurring ogre, but we know from the outset that it is only the boy who sees him as such, and only until it becomes clear to him that he is just a knife grinder who lives in a hovel in a nearby wood. These are the woods of Buda, where already in the 1980s many homeless were squatting.

At other times it is the perspective of the adult looking back that dominates, called to life by observations made in childhood:

> From our room one can clearly see when Laci, the neighbour, comes out into the garden, he carries a spade, looking around he warily drives it into the ground, then takes two steps back, scrutinizes it, then leisurely lights up. Cigarette in hand he adjusts the handle a bit, clearly not precisely vertical, steps back, inspects it with a wink, shaking his head adjusts it again, steps back, examines it, now must finally be content, cause he gazes for some time on his creation as he is, in swimming trunks, brown socks and shoes, slowly stroking his round belly.
>
> By the time his wife bursts into the garden, her hair full of curlers, Laci has assembled quite a little pile of butts at his foot while steadfastly guarding the spade. Sometimes he adjusts it, puts it in vertical...

The best parts of *Calling on the Dead* are those that sketch marvellously amusing portraits of the ordinary common man of that time as he tinkers and dabbles as carpenter, welder and concreter, before loping off to the nearby drinking establishment.

This is a captivatingly witty, entertaining book. There is no real plot, only a kaleidoscope of impressions, images, portraits, scenes and episodes. The text can be read as a collection of poems or a cycle of short stories. The reader can pick and choose from the parts that are more to his liking and skip others that come off less well. For me, the sections in which the narrator imagines himself as a character in such adolescent adventure novels as Soviet war novels or novels about American Indians and romantic historical novels struck me as a bit of flashy literary gymnastics. And I didn't quite know what to make of the concluding sentence, which (half spoken) suggests that the hero's father, who until then has appeared as little more than an episodic splash of colour, has hanged himself. Even if he perhaps had every reason to, this is nevertheless not the book in which he could do such a thing.

The escape artist is an unusual variety of circus artiste. The thirteen-year-old heroine of Kriszta Bódis's novel *Artista* (Artiste) is one such. "For me escape is life," she says. Ward of the state, nicknamed Artiste though more often referred to by her family name, Pinkler, she escapes from everyone with the skill and daring of a circus acrobat, from her father, her mother, her stepfather, the children's home and the Roma horse-dealers, where a young man offers to take her under his wing. She is thought even to have escaped from acrobat school, but then it turns out she never even went. She is gifted with rare acrobatic flair, and this ability kills her. Struck by the high-voltage current atop the pylon she climbs, she dies after days of agony on a waterbed, blinded, her arms amputated, in a coma.

Kriszta Bódis, born in 1967, is a writer, poet and a maker of documentary films, and this novel (her third book) brings together her two callings. *Artiste* takes place on two levels, as it were, which alternate chapter by chapter. One level is the sociologically credible documentary film: the texts of interviews recorded before and after the girl's death with those from whom she was trying to escape. These include her alcoholic, homeless father, at whose side Pinkler almost died of hunger as a child; her mother's brutal live-in companion, also an alcoholic, who loathes and drives away his stepdaughter; Johnny Boy, also in state care who is in love with her; the high-handed headmistress of the reform school; Uncle Dénes, the scatty, debauched teacher who dabbles in the arts and ostensibly sticks up for his charges but takes advantage of the girls, Pinkler among them and her drug-abusing girl-friend Mariann, etc. These characters are persuaded to speak by a young sociologist, Judit, who is investigating children's homes and the circumstances of Pinkler's death. We learn little about this Judit and her relationship to this world on the fringes of society. At most we discover from Johnny Boy's interviews that she is involved with him in a relationship that offers no prospects, and this knowledge is hardly useful. The interviews concern not only Pinkler. The characters speak both of themselves and one another, each in his or her own way; they provide us with fragmented, degenerate, obscene and often expressive versions (though at times caricatures) of living demotic speech.

The other plane of *Artiste* is comprised of film-like scenes mediated by an impersonal outsider. These chapters recount Pinkler's life, though how they are related to one another is not always clear, in time or in the information contained in the interviews. A certain amount of effort is needed to assemble the mosaic of the story out of the everyday horrors related, but it is an effort that is rewarded in the end. The documentary film-like objectification sometimes falters, and Kriszta Bódis at times—fortunately only rarely—becomes entangled in idiomatic twists, figures of speech and descriptions, but this lessens neither the force nor the value of the novel. On the whole it impresses with its gaunt authenticity, its linguistic masterfulness and its restrained sense of tragedy.

For *Artiste* is, its occasional roughness and mannered texture notwithstanding, a significant literary achievement. It is more than a sociological document or an objective survey of those driven to the margins of society who may plunge at any moment into oblivion. It is a story of a spindly girl who rises above her own frailty and her fate leaves a deep impression on the reader. ❧

Ivan Sanders

The Uncommon Denominator

Kati Marton: *The Great Escape: Nine Jews Who Fled Hitler and Changed the World.* New York, Simon & Schuster, 2006, 271 pp., illustrated.

Publishers and editors are probably right in claiming that a title can sometimes make or break a book. The full title of Kati Marton's new book is eye-catching, all right, and also incomplete and inaccurate. It could be argued that calling the nine men, whose story Kati Marton tells, Jewish rather than Hungarian makes the title sound more interesting. Except that what she demonstrates throughout is that for these men being Hungarian meant far more than being Jewish. In any case, what we end up feeling is that one designation is as essential as the other. As for the title's inaccuracy, not all of them actually fled their native country, and some departed long before Hitler's rise to power. Perhaps Marton chose a more general and inclusive title to suggest that these celebrated Hungarians, for all their uniqueness, were classical European wanderers, paragons of reinvention—true children of the twentieth century.

That all nine were born Jewish is one of the common denominators, at once obvious and problematic. Most of them would be surprised, even offended by the word Jewish in the title. Of course, by making that word the sole identifying tag, Marton may be deliberately provocative. One of the things that adds excitement and tension to her narrative is that she wants to get to the heart of the matter: Why is the issue of identity so much more problematic and complicated for Hungarian Jews than it is for Jews hailing from other countries? Why is their attitude so much more ambivalent, defensive, paradoxical, with barely acknowledged undercurrents of longing, shame and pride? Marton approaches the issue with curiosity and compassion. After all, she is not only a prominent American journalist and essayist, but a Hungarian Jew herself, who, born in Budapest after the catastrophe of 1944, was shielded by her parents from what had become for them a fatal legacy. Like many in her situation, she spent the first ten years of her life not knowing she was Jewish. If in the end Kati Marton doesn't solve the quandary, it's not for lack of trying. Maybe the problem is intractable; or maybe her own early conditioning and lingering inhibitions prevent her from getting to the bottom of it. The subject is never far from her mind, but her ambivalent feelings also seem to be close by.

Her main aim is to examine the lives and times of nine extraordinary men from the

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heart of Central Europe—three physicists (Leó Szilárd, Eugene Wigner, Edward Teller), two filmmakers (Alexander Korda, Michael Curtiz), two photographers (André Kertész, Robert Capa), one mathematician (John von Neumann), and one writer (Arthur Koestler)—who in their own way, in their chosen fields did change the world. But what Marton really wants to do is probe the secret of their success, discover the links between these men, and show what besides native gifts is behind their achievements, their drive, their ability to undergo change and yet remain singular, one of a kind. Marton has much to say about the importance of early twentieth-century Budapest, a brash and bustling city where most of the nine men came of age, and where most of them attended excellent secondary schools. She also dwells on what Weimar Germany had to offer later to the scientists (von Neumann, Wigner, Teller and Szilárd) and what Paris of the nineteen-twenties and thirties meant to the artists (Kertész and Capa). But she returns again and again to the notion that what these men did and how they lived can also be related to their Jewish background. On the one hand, Marton stresses that the subjects of her narrative grew up in a secular world, led secular lives, and that their beloved Budapest, in the waning years of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, was itself a secular city. As for their feelings about being Jewish, she implies that these were at best neutral. At the same time, she sees her subjects' flamboyance and bravado and overarching ambition as stemming from the insecurity and insatiability of people whose forbears had been oppressed and marginalized and who, for a brief moment early in the twentieth century, in a couple of friendly European cities, revelled in their freedom. Their life strategies—their preoccupation with outward appearance, for instance, with looking like a million dollars even when their pockets were empty—remind Marton of devices her own family resorted to at critical moments in their lives. She suggests that her famous Hungarians' choice of "modern", "international" professions also bespeaks the practicality and foresight of eternal, rootless wanderers. (The one writer among them, Arthur Koestler, disproved the widely held belief that devotees of the literary muses are bound to a native soil by their mother tongue—Koestler, as a writer, switched from Hungarian to German and then to English with apparent ease.)

What the portraits eventually reveal, however, is that underneath superficial similarities the nine men were very different. And this goes even for such things as the attention paid to physical appearance. John von Neumann did always look like an executive in his three-piece suits, and Alexander Korda, from Túrkeve, Hungary, dressed like a peer of the realm long before he became Sir Alexander in 1942; but someone like Leó Szilárd cared not a whit about his appearance and was noted for his crumpled coats and jackets. It is also not quite true that these men were essentially secular and had no understanding or appreciation of tradition. Michael Curtiz, who came from an orthodox Jewish background and whose observant mother joined him in America in the nineteen-thirties, had little problem accepting his Jewishness. Arthur Koestler's brief love affair with Zionism is well known. In 1948, both he and Robert Capa were in Tel Aviv to witness the birth of the Jewish state. "For the first time in his life," Marton writes, "Capa was in the company of Jews who did not need to camouflage that fact." John von Neumann's family, after his father's death in 1929, converted to Catholicism—"for the sake of convenience". But at the end of his life he tried in earnest to affirm his adopted faith. And Edward Teller, who came from a highly assimilated, secular family, in his old age embraced his Jewish self wholeheartedly.

Kati Marton is careful to point out that generally speaking, most of these men were conflicted. She quotes Michael Korda, Alexander's nephew, on the Korda brothers' feelings: "[B]eing Hungarian was challenge enough, you did not need to add Jewish on top of that... Alex's way of dealing with anti-Semitism was to pretend he hadn't noticed." John von Neumann was perhaps the most reticent on the subject, and when he did open up, in the years before World War Two, he was somber and prescient. Polish-born physicist Stanislaw Ulam remembers von Neumann telling him that the Jewish scientists and artists who emigrated to the West and became famous emerged from remote villages in the Carpathian Mountains, or their parents or grandparents had. "Johnny used to say that it was a coincidence of some cultural factors which he could not make precise: an external pressure on the whole society of this part of Central Europe, a feeling of extreme insecurity... and the necessity to produce the unusual or else face extinction." It would be fair to say that none of the men discussed here wanted to look or sound Jewish (though some well-known Americans and Britons, we learn, thought they did anyway). Because they were Hungarian Jews, Yiddish to them was a foreign language. The eminent French photographer, Henri Cartier-Bresson, a close friend of Robert Capa, told the author: "It did not occur to me that André [Capa] was Jewish. Chim [David Seymour, Polish-born photographer, another good friend], though not religious at all, carried the burden of being Jewish within him as a kind of sadness." André Kertész was also tight-lipped about his past. "The convoluted subject of his Jewish roots," Marton tells us, "had surfaced in 1946 when he learned the awful truth about the Hungarian Holocaust." A young photographer whom Kertész befriended toward the end of his life witnessed a heated scene between Kertész "and a religious Jew. With a Bible in hand, he was arguing with Kertész about not identifying himself as a Jew."

The great value of Kati Marton's approach is that she peers behind legends, simplifications and clichés such as "the father of the hydrogen bomb" (Teller), "the father of the computer" (von Neumann), "the world's greatest war photographer" (Capa), "author of the most influential book of the century" (Koestler), etc. She humanizes giants without diminishing their genius. Because hers is a journalistic narrative, its aim obviously is not to present a thoroughgoing analysis and appraisal of these men's lifework—although, understandably, she is more illuminating and knowledgeable on the artists' achievements than on those of the scientists. The reader also realizes along the way that Marton is especially fascinated by those of her Hungarians who were expansive, irrepressible, charismatic. (It is interesting to note that of the scientists, the only one to have been awarded a Nobel Prize was the decidedly uncharismatic, low-key Eugene Wigner.) Sooner or later we feel like asking: Isn't this list of "great escapees" in the final analysis an arbitrary one?[1] Besides the obvious, what did these men really have in common? The scientists of course knew each other well and worked together; as for the others, their paths

1 ■ The issue of arbitrariness comes up again in the book's Epilogue where the author reviews briefly the careers of three successful Hungarian Jews of a later generation—George Soros, Andy Grove and Nobel laureate Imre Kertész—who, she points out, also left their native country. I strongly disagree with the classification of Imre Kertész as an émigré. He may divide his time between Budapest and Berlin, but he remains a Hungarian writer in every sense. Only Hungarians on the far right see him as an outsider, and refer to him in Hungarian publications not as Kertész Imre but as Imre Kertész, implying that he is no longer a Hungarian but a foreigner.

occasionally crossed over the years, but other than that, there were no real ties to speak of. Attempts to link them up therefore seem forced. Having to tell the story of nine parallel lives in one continuous, interconnected, more or less chronological narrative is itself a tall order. At times the breaks and shifts make for suspense, but they can also be awkward, obviously retarding the narrative flow. There are long absences. André Kertész disappears for decades and shows up again, out of the blue as it were. Then there is the ultimate question: Did *all nine* of these men change the world? Did Michael Curtiz, the ultimate charmer and seducer and Hollywood pro, all of whose films have flashes of brilliance, but who wasn't a real auteur with a coherent body of works? Or is it only the retiring, quietly determined André Kertész about whom we could say (with a nod to Dostoevsky) that all modern photo artists climbed out from under his tripod? The only way to answer these questions is to decide first whether one ought to measure the ability to "change the world" by the durability of the achievement or by force of personality. In the case of the majority of Kati Marton's featured players, cultivating and perfecting a persona was their single greatest achievement.

Marton shows that all nine men in one way or another reinvented themselves after they left their homeland, and some had done it before they emigrated. In several cases we may speak of multiple transformations. (The scientists considered pre-Hitler Germany their second home, and Kertész and Capa had an emotional attachment to Paris to the end of their days.) Some, though by no means all nine, changed their names and did so more than once. Sándor Kellner became Sándor Korda, then Alexander Korda and finally Sir Alexander Korda. Manó Kaminer first turned into Mihály Kertész and then into Michael Curtiz. Endre Friedmann's name change was a one-time switch but a radical one—he became Robert Capa.[2] All of these émigrés eventually ended up in America or England, but what is surprising is how continental European—and yes, Hungarian—they all remained. Marton demonstrates again and again that their best friends were Hungarian; it was in the company of fellow countrymen and women that they could let their hair down. The world saw them as cosmopolitan polyglots, but in reality not all of them mastered the English language. Michael Curtiz's unique, fractured English became the stuff of Hollywood legend. (The famous scene in *Casablanca* in which two Central European refugees practise their English—"'What watch?' 'Ten watch.' 'Such much?'"—could be seen as a kind of self-parody.) Marton quotes from a wartime letter by Robert Capa indicating that the German army was finally weakening: "Now we are ketching [sic] them and hitting them hard." She also quotes from Laurence Olivier's eulogy delivered at the grave of Alexander Korda: "Though he never really mastered the English language, he improved it..." Not only didn't the émigrés give up their native tongue, they held on to Hungarian culture as well. In the case of Leó Szilárd, for example, the literary work that had a profound effect on his thinking, and remained a life-long inspiration, was Imre Madách's *The Tragedy of Man,* the most universal of Hungarian dramas, which, ironically enough, never really broke

2 ■ Kati Marton reports that Robert Capa invented his "American" name by combining the names of two celebrities: the actor Robert Taylor and the director Frank Capra. According to writer Ferenc Karinthy, however, he acquired the name Capa when he was still a cub reporter back in Budapest. Seeing him as a loudmouth busybody, with a cigarette always dangling from his lips, his friends nicknamed him Cápa, which is the Hungarian word for shark. (See Ferenc Karinthy, *Vége a világnak* [End of the World], Budapest, Pallas, 1988, p. 68.)

down the language barrier, and has not assumed its rightful place in the larger literary canon. And there is André Kertész who, late in life, told an American friend that if he wanted to understand him, he should read the poetry of Endre Ady.

In the closing pages of her book, Kati Marton notes: "For the past four years, my husband, Richard Holbrooke, has lived with ten Hungarians: myself and the nine figures who make up this narrative." *The Great Escape* is clearly based on a great deal of research, numerous interviews, an immersion in twentieth-century European and American history, and it is, above all, the result of a passionate, personal interest in her subject. Impressive evidence of the work done can be found in the back of the book: in voluminous notes and an extensive bibliography. It is the thoroughness of her research that makes the presence of a number of factual errors, slips and imprecisions somewhat surprising and disappointing. I will list only a few culture-related blemishes. Those flowers in Sándor Petőfi's poem "Szeptember végén" ("End of September") are *garden* and not *summer* flowers, and they bloom in the *valley,* not in the *garden*. True, the verse is quoted from memory by one of her interviewees; still, it wouldn't have taken much to double-check one of the most famous lines in Hungarian poetry, which every schoolchild in Hungary knows by heart. Or used to. Michael Curtiz's film *Noah's Ark* could not have premiered in 1929 in Budapest's Pushkin theatre. The cinema was then called Forum. (Only after World War Two did streets and squares and theatres begin to acquire Russian or Soviet names.) Budapest's Café New York, frequently referred to by the author, played a central role in the lives and dreams of several of her Hungarian heroes. Maybe that is the reason why the picture we see at the beginning of the book is of the Central Café, a less celebrated Budapest meeting place of people in the arts, and unmentioned in the narrative.

All this is nit-picking, of course, especially since few American readers would be bothered by such errors. Others, however, tend to remember even minor lapses, and nothing else. What's more important is that right to the end of her story, Kati Marton searches for the perfect way to sum up the uniqueness of the nine men's character and genius—their restlessness, their propensity for taking risks and living dangerously. She refers to the film *The Third Man,* produced by Alexander Korda, written by Graham Greene and starring Orson Welles in the role of Harry Lime, a "manipulative, magnetic rogue," as Marton puts it. At one point in the film Lime declares: "In Italy for thirty years under the Borgias, they had warfare, terror, murder, bloodshed. They produced Michelangelo, Leonardo and the Renaissance. In Switzerland, they had brotherly love, five hundred years of democracy, and they produced the cuckoo clock."

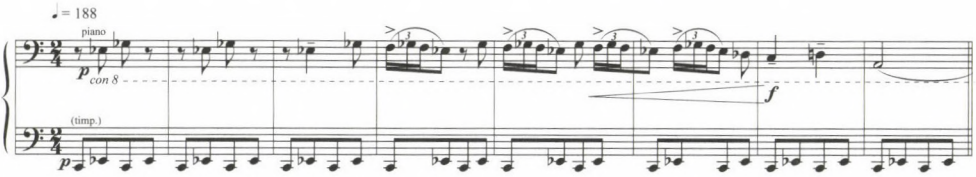
According to Alexander Korda's nephew, Michael, this is "pure Korda". It might have struck a responsive chord in the other eight Hungarians, too, as well as in the next generation of successful Hungarians abroad. Kati Marton must consider the speech very revealing—she quotes it twice in her book. ❧

László Vikárius

Bartók, Kodály and *Salome*

The Origins of a Bartókian "Hallmark"[1]

In an analysis of his Second Piano Concerto (1930/31), written as an introduction to a performance of the work in Lausanne in 1939, Béla Bartók underlines the fact that although the first and third movements are thematically related, the third also contains a "new theme": *"Ce qu'il faut encore observer c'est 1) l'unité du 1. et 3. mouvement, le 3. étant en effet une variation libre du 1.: il contient les mêmes sujets à l'exception d'un thème nouveau."*[2] Briefly characterising the forms of the Concerto's movements, Bartók's analytical remarks do not describe individual thematic ideas. Instead, each of the more significant themes is reproduced in musical examples and so is this new—exciting—musical idea, which draws heavily on the possibilities of a motif based on the minor–third interval (Ex. 1).



Example 1
Bartók, Piano Concerto No. 2, rondo theme of the third movement

Although a novelty in the context of the Second Piano Concerto, the theme sounds familiar to those versed in Bartók's music. It is a variation of a type which occurs

1 ■ This essay is a revised and specially adapted English version of Chapter 3.6.3. of *Modell és inspiráció Bartók zenei gondolkodásában* [Model and Inspiration in Bartók's Musical Thinking] (Pécs: Jelenkor, 1999), pp. 182–96. I am grateful to Klára Móricz, who thoroughly checked and revised an early version of my translation.

2 ■ "2. zongoraverseny" [2nd Piano Concerto], in *Bartók Béla írásai 1*, ed. Tibor Tallián (Budapest: Editio Musica, 1989), p. 213. For an English translation see *Béla Bartók Essays*, ed. Benjamin Suchoff (London: Faber & Faber, 1976), p. 419.

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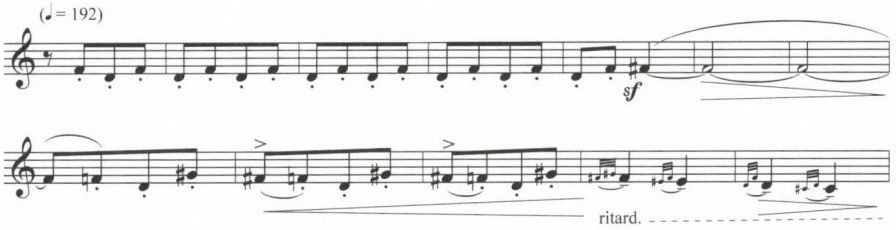
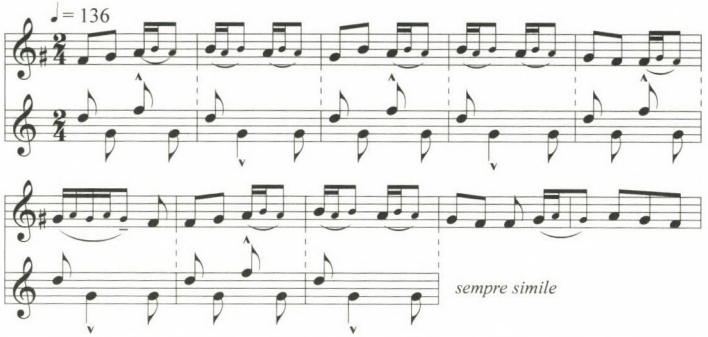
frequently in his other compositions.[3] One such starts the second, *Allegro molto capricioso,* movement of the Second String Quartet (Ex. 2).



Example 2
Bartók, String Quartet No. 2 (1915/17), main subject of the second movement

The Hungarian authority on the music of the East, János Kárpáti,[4] emphasises the "primitive folk roots" of this particular Bartók motif. He calls attention to the parallel between the theme from the Second Quartet and the "Arab Song" from the Forty-Four Duos for Two Violins, which Bartók based on a rural folk melody he had collected in Sidi Okba, Algeria in 1913 (Ex. 3). Incidentally, while the Second String Quartet was composed in the middle of the 1910s, relatively shortly after his Arab collecting trip, the composition of the Duos took place in early 1931, at a time when Bartók temporarily interrupted work on the Second Piano Concerto. Kárpáti detects further traces of Arab influence in other related Bartók themes (the fugato of the *Miraculous Mandarin*, the first subject in the fifth movement of the Fourth String Quartet), which recall particular scales of melodies in the Biskra collection.[5] These unusual scales often consist of augmented seconds and sometimes more than one adjacent minor second. Although the head motif of the fugue subject in the *Miraculous Mandarin* at Fig. 62 actually uses such a scale (F–G sharp–A–B flat–C sharp), the characteristic augmented second in related thematic ideas may be replaced by its enharmonic variant, the minor third. The theme from the Fourth String Quartet includes a central minor third (C sharp–D sharp–F sharp–G). In the final analysis,

3 ■ Ernő Lendvai pointed out the significance of the minor third at a deeper structural level. Several of his analytical tools, the "alpha chord," the "axis system" or his "model scale 1:2" (which is identical with the octatonic scale) emphasise the important role of the minor third interval. For a general overview in English of his theory, see his *Béla Bartók: An Analysis of His Music* (London: Kahn and Averill, 1971), pp. 1–16 for the axis system, pp. 42–47 for alpha chords, and on model 1:2, pp. 51–59. Occurences of the minor third motif in five compositions, including the rondo theme of the Second Piano Concerto, are shown in Ferenc Bónis, "Idézetek Bartók zenéjében" [Quotations in Bartók's Music], in id., *Hódolat Bartóknak és Kodálynak* [A Tribute to Bartók and Kodály] (Budapest: Püski, 1992), p. 96. The first version of Bónis's article, published in English, did not include the treatment of this "family" of related themes.
4 ■ János Kárpáti, "Bartók in North Africa: A Unique Fieldwork and Its Impact on His Music" in *Bartók Perspectives: Man, Composer, and Ethnomusicologist,* ed. Elliott Antokoletz, Benjamin Suchoff and Viktoria Fischer (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 171–84. Kárpáti's articles on the subject are all included in the recently published *Bartók and Arab Folk Music / Bartók és az arab népzene,* PC CD-ROM, ed. János Kárpáti (Budapest: Hungarian National Commission for UNESCO, European Folklore Institute, etc., 2006, EFI CD-3). The CD-ROM also contains a complete edition of all primary sources of Bartók's study of Arab folk music, the surviving recordings, transcriptions and scholarly articles.
5 ■ Cf. Kárpáti, *Bartók's Chamber Music* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1994), pp. 100–102.



Example 3
Introductory instrumental passage for gâșba *(flute) and* bănd*ir (drum) of an Arab folk piece (F 83a) collected in 1913 and transcribed by Bartók; he later arranged it as the "Arab Song," no. 42 in Forty-Four Duos (1931)*

however, Kárpáti's argument is based on Bartók's repeated assertions on the Arab folk-music influence in his compositions,[6] though what the composer underlined when making any specific reference to the type of influence in his style was the inherent chromaticism of Arab rural music.[7]

Kárpáti's interpretation of the origin of the minor-third motifs in Bartók's music, however, is not the only possible one. Zoltán Kodály intimated that this haunting Bartók melodic type has a concrete source, surprisingly pointing to a song by the nineteenth-century dilettante composer Elemér Szentirmay (1836–1908).[8] In a 1955 lecture, which addresses a rather underemphasised aspect of Bartók as a composer, his early attraction toward Hungarian urban popular songs as a possible source—a source he later decidedly denounced—Kodály writes:

> In 1906 when we published our first volume of folk music, the "20 Hungarian Folk Songs," we mutually criticised the other's selection. I had some reservations about the song that starts with the words "Utca, utca..." (Street, street...) because it was so different, not in form but in content, from the folk song types which were then known and its words were not folk-like either. Bartók clung to it. What he found most special about it were its repeated minor thirds plus its five-bar phrases, both unusual in a folk song. Since at that time I had not studied the music of the old-fashioned *népszínművek*[9] yet, it took some years to discover that the composer of the song was Elemér Szentirmay. The song was replaced in later editions[10] but Bartók's attraction to the repeated [minor] third never ceased. We find repeated thirds at every turn in his works. Their frequent occurrence must

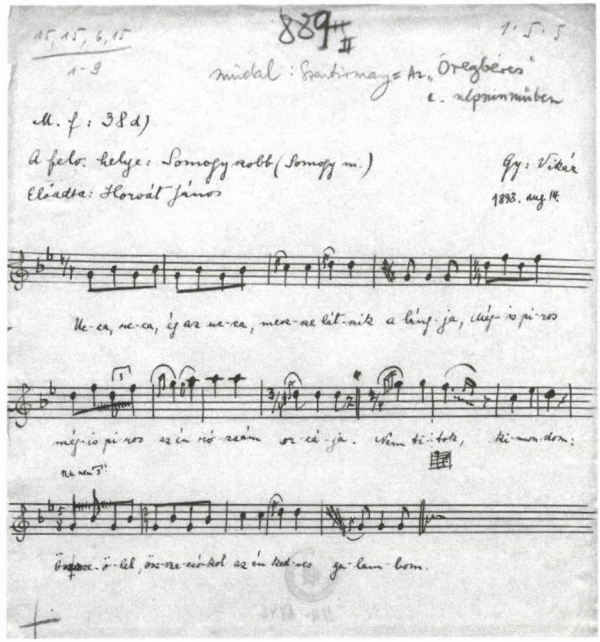
6 ■ See *ibid.*, p. 99.
7 ■ See, e.g., Bartók's reference to Arab influence in his "Harvard Lectures" (1943), *Essays*, pp. 377–79.
8 ■ Elemér Szentirmay, whose original name was János Németh, following an early career as a higher official became a successful composer of popular songs after 1865.
9 ■ The *népszínmű* [folk play] is the name of a once highly popular type of play, which flourished in Hungary in most of the nineteenth century. The production of such plays generally involved the performance (or interpolation) of known or newly composed popular songs. The genre was probably a descendent of certain types of Austrian *Singspiel* (similar to English ballad opera) of an expressedly national and folk-like character.
10■ The second, revised edition was actually first printed in 1933, and not in 1938 as generally believed, as recently demonstrated by Vera Lampert, see "A Bartók–Kodály Magyar népdalok második kiadása" [The second edition of Hungarian Folksongs by Bartók and Kodály], *Zenetudományi dolgozatok* 2003, ed. Pál Richter and Márta Bajcsay-Rudas (Budapest: MTA Zenetudományi Intézet, 2003), vol. 2, 375–84.

be more than an echo of the Szentirmay song. But it was obviously this song that instigated [the use of the minor third] since it is missing from earlier compositions. Later it appears so often and in so many ways and forms that we have to speak about a deeply rooted, instinctive attraction, which, eventually, became a hallmark of his musical style.[11]

Although Kárpáti is somewhat critical about Kodály's derivation, the two rival interpretations do not wholly and necessarily exclude each other: Kodály talks about Bartók's very early interest in a song he still considered genuine folk music in 1906, while Kárpáti demonstrates the significance of the composer's 1913 encounter with Arab folk music and its effect on his later works. What makes Kodály's line of thought particularly attractive, though, is that in pointing at the Szentirmay song, he proposes that Bartók's setting of "Ucca, ucca" was the first occasion he used minor thirds motivically in a composition.

However, could this tune and the resulting simple arrangement have had any lasting effect on Bartók's stylistic development? The following facsimiles compare Bartók's transcription[12] of Szentirmay's song recorded in a village by Béla Vikár (Facs. 1), and Bartók's arrangement of it for voice and piano, the original No. 5 of *Hungarian Folk Songs* (Facs. 2).[13]

Bartók's scholarly transcription survives as a master-sheet, actually a copy in his first wife Márta Ziegler's hand of his lost original with revisions and additions in his own hand. The master-sheet itself may

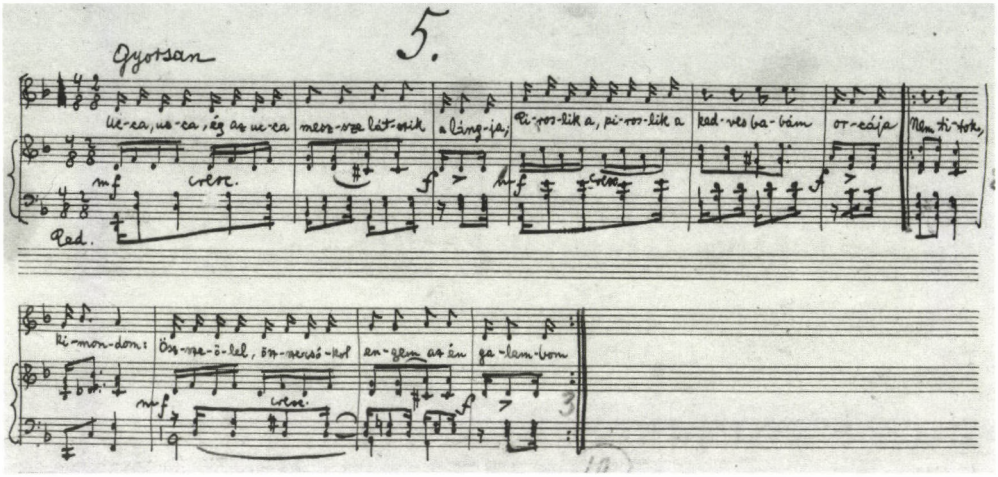


Facsimile 1
"Ucca, ucca": master sheet of the song in Márta Ziegler-Bartók's hand (Bartók System, BR 8746)

originate in the 1910s and contains later revisions, grace notes and the correction of exact rhythmical values. The revisions, however, cannot date from as late as the 1930s as by then Bartók consistently gave tempo indications and MM numbers. At the same time, the master-sheet also contains the final judgement about its spurious quality in Bartók's pencilled hand at top: "popular art song: Szentirmay" followed by the identification "= In the play *Öregbéres*," probably in György Kerényi's hand, written in blue crayon.

As the transcription shows, the original recording preserved many rhythmic nuances. Note especially the 5/8-bar at the

11 ■ Kodály, "Szentirmaytól Bartókig" [From Szentirmay to Bartók], Visszatekintés I–II: *Összegyűjtött írások, beszédek, nyilatkozatok* [Looking Back vols. 1–2: Collected Writings, Talks and Statements], ed. Ferenc Bónis, 3rd ed. (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó 1982), vol. 2, p. 464. (Translations are mine unless stated otherwise.) Kodály previously discussed the same idea in a sketchier way in "Bartók the Folklorist," *The Selected Writings of Zoltán Kodály,* trans. Lili Halápy and Fred Macnicol (Budapest: Corvina Press, 1974), p. 103.
12 ■ Cf. György Kerényi, *Szentirmay Elemér és a magyar népzene* [Elemér Szentirmay and Hungarian Folk Music] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1966), pp. 358–59.
13 ■ See Bartók and Kodály: *Hungarian Folksongs for Song with Piano.* Reprint of the original manuscript with commentaries by Denijs Dille (London: Boosey and Hawkes; Budapest: Editio Musica, 1970).



Facsimile 2
"Ucca, ucca": Bartók's arrangement of the song as no. 5 in the first edition of Hungarian Folksongs *(1906), jointly published with Zoltán Kodály*

beginning of the final line. Not surprisingly, in contrast to the transcribed folk song, Bartók's arrangement left out everything from the melody that reflected flexibility of performance in the original. In connection with this change, the tempo indication, *Gyorsan* (Fast), written emphatically in Hungarian instead of the usual Italian, as well as the uneven barring (two larger single bars followed by a witty shorter final bar in all the phrases except the third), heighten the excitement that is also characteristic of the original song. Interestingly, however, as the recent publication of the original recording shows, the tempo was not fast but moderate (starting at crotchet = 96) with excessive use of rubato, slowing down and accelerating the tempo (crotchet = 72–108), in fact very different from a usual peasant performance.[14] In the arrangement, furthermore, the syncopated accompaniment in the left hand and the many unusually detailed dynamic marks (mf, cresc., f and accent added to each phrase) further contribute to the effect of excitement. "Ucca, ucca" is also the only piece in the series where Bartók indicates pedalling.

We do not know the exact date of composition of the ten individual pieces which Bartók contributed to the *Twenty Hungarian Folksongs*. Most of the songs originate in Bartók's very recent collecting in the summer of 1906.[15] Yet there is some likelihood that the arrangement of "Ucca, ucca" could date from early 1906. As early as 14 March 1906 Bartók wrote a letter to Péter König, director of the municipal music school in Szeged (South Hungary) to solicit subscriptions for the publication he and Kodály planned to bring out in two separate volumes.[16] Almost simultaneously with Bartók's letter to König, the two

14 ■ The recording is included in the new edition of Vera Lampert's basic catalogue, *Népzene Bartók műveiben: A feldolgozott dallamok forrásjegyzéke* [Folk Music in Bartók's Works: A Source Catalogue of His Folksong Arrangements] (Budapest: Helikon, 2005), no. 8, of which an English edition is due to be published in 2007.

15 ■ Cf. Lampert, *Népzene Bartók műveiben,* 51–56.

16 ■ *Bartók Béla levelei* [Béla Bartók Letters], ed. János Demény (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1976), pp. 103–104.

composers signed an appeal "to the Hungarian public" advertising their undertaking.[17] Discussions about the details of the publication were still going on in the autumn of 1906. In his letter of 24 September to Bartók, Kodály suggests revisions to some of the arrangements.[18] On 10 September, Bartók related to his mother: "Kodály and I have been holding a conference for 3 days about the publication of the songs [...] We are writing a preface in which we tear the esteemed Hungarian public off a strip."[19] In a letter of 13 September to his future wife, Emma Gruber, Kodály confirmed Bartók's account: "We'll have a nice cover page, perfectly aggressive, shocking and provocative preface (do not worry though)—in short everything will be all right."[20] In the final publication, the notorious preface was dated 6 December 1906.[21]

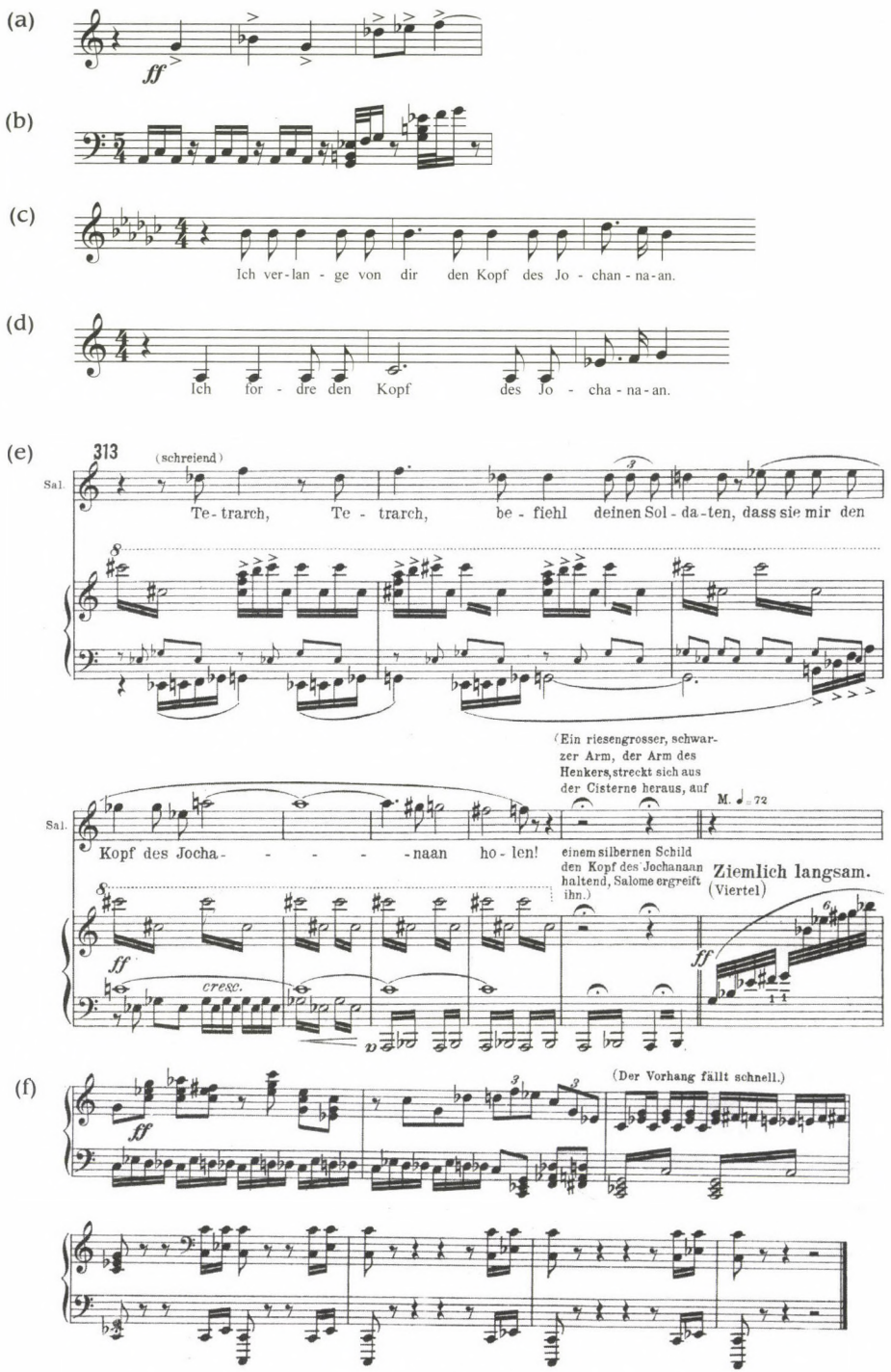
These documents, however, are silent about the conception and early history of the project. Bartók spent most of the second half of 1905 abroad and seems to have returned to Budapest only in early January 1906. The single event that might signal his future involvement in the publication was meeting Kodály on 4 January at the Grubers', where Kodály showed him his recent collection of folk songs.[22] Although he resumed his travels abroad within a few days, using Vienna as his base, he spent some days again in Budapest in February and mid-March, probably to discuss matters with Kodály, before leaving for Spain with the violinist prodigy Ferenc Vecsey (1893–1935), one of Jenő Hubay's young pupils.[23]

Thus the idea of publishing a series of Hungarian folksong arrangements may have arisen at Bartók and Kodály's discussion of Kodály's collection in early January. Yet it was not only folksong that occupied Bartók's musical imagination at that time. In a letter written on Christmas Eve 1905 to Emma Gruber, Bartók confided his unabated enthusiasm for Richard Strauss. Bartók exuberantly discusses his new discovery, *Salome:*

> I have vowed never to mention the Master in Budapest unless the opinion of the general public changes. My vow, however, does not prohibit expressing in writing the absolutely overwhelming effect *Salome* made on me. Last week I started to study the piano reduction—and I was unable to put the work aside before playing it completely through. Apart from *Zarathustra,* this is Strauss's most splendid work. At last, a new opera has been produced after Wagner! I truly hope that the piece is going to enjoy huge public success everywhere. What a great idea it was to choose a text exactly like this!
> You know it, don't you?[24]

Bartók's solemn tone bespeaks genuine admiration. For him the composer of

17 ■ The entire text of this document has been published by Dille in his Postscript to Bartók and Kodály, *Hungarian Folksongs,* p. 51. According to recent research by László Somfai, the songs were probably all composed in late summer since most of the songs were selected from Bartók's recent collection of July and August.
18 ■ *Kodály Zoltán levelei* [Zoltán Kodály Letters], ed. Dezső Legány (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1982), p. 22.
19 ■ *Bartók Béla családi levelei* [Béla Bartók's Family Correspondence], ed. Béla Bartók, Jr., with Adrienne Gombocz-Konkoly (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1981), p. 167.
20 ■ *Kodály Zoltán levelei,* p. 21.
21 ■ The printer's invoice is dated 20 December, see Bartók–Kodály, *Hungarian Folksongs,* p. 51.
22 ■ For this particular information, see Béla Bartók, Jr., *Apám életének krónikája* [The Chronicle of My Father's Life] (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1981), p. 78.
23 ■ For all these and further data, see Béla Bartók, Jr., *Apám életének krónikája,* pp. 74–81.
24 ■ Bartók's unpublished letter of 24 December 1905 to Emma Gruber written in Pozsony (Bratislava, Slovakia), Kodály Archives, Budapest (Ms mus. epist.—BB14), photocopy in the Budapest Bartók Archives.



Example 4a–f

Passages in Richard Strauss, Salome*: (a) from the "Dance of the Seven Veils," before* ***B****; (b) also from the "Dance," at* ***F****; (c) at* ***261****; (d) at* ***271****; (e) from* ***313****; (f) closing bars of the opera*

Zarathustra was thus transformed into the composer of *Salome,* and so he described him in an interview in 1918.[25] But what concerns us here is something more particular. For it is in *Salome* that we may hope to find some new clue for Bartók's interest in selecting "Ucca, ucca" for the 1906 *Hungarian Folk Songs*.

In the opera's musical dramaturgy, motifs employing the minor-third interval are of overriding importance. One of the leitmotivs, which, played on trumpets and trombones, first appears in the "Dance of the Seven Veils," involves a significant minor third (see Ex. 4a).[26] Out of this motif repeated minor thirds evolve within the dance itself (see Ex. 4b). But minor thirds can also be found elsewhere. During the opera, Salome expresses her request for Jochanaan's head eight times in all. On the second of these occasions, the minor third becomes prominent in her part (see Ex. 4c). Salome employs more and more frequently, and in a more and more pressing manner, the motif taken from the music of her dance, making it musically explicit that her earlier compliance with Herodes's request entitles her to have her wish fulfilled (see Ex. 4d). The E flat–G flat–E flat minor third receives prominent treatment while Jochanaan is being murdered. While Salome anxiously waits, the motif gradually permeates the musical texture until the music becomes reduced to a constant repetition of minor-third leaps (see Ex. 4e). A final gesture yet again involving the minor third is, however, preserved for the closing bars. At the end of the opera, the chromatic drum motif on the timpani is framed by a minor third interval, C and E flat. The piece itself ends with minor third leaps hammered out with gradually diminishing frequency (see Ex. 4f).

Thus, the minor third as a basic interval of leitmotivic significance connects the events in the opera from the "Dance of the Seven Veils" to Salome's death. It signals the relationship between erotic and perverted desire and, eventually, death. The rhythmic thinning out of the minor third leaps at the end of the opera might be seen as the musical representation of her slowing heartbeats as she dies. In hindsight, the ever more frequent repetition of the motif during the murder scene might also be interpreted as representing her own growing excitement.

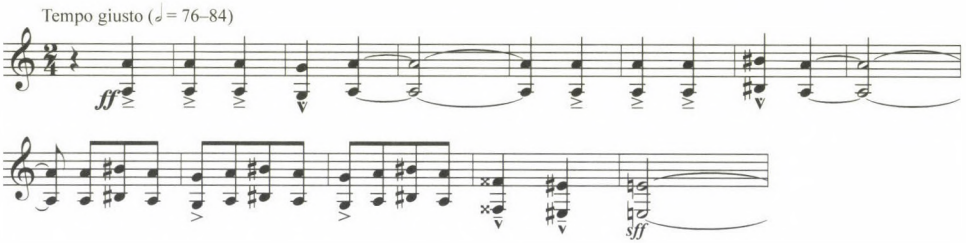
There remains little doubt that *Salome* was a milestone in Bartók's understanding of the expressive and emotional possibilities inherent in the recurring, even repetitive, use of minor thirds. The inspiration from Strauss would explain why Bartók, ignoring Kodály's reservations about the song's origin, so eagerly selected "Ucca, ucca", whose most important element is the repeated minor-third leap. Although the arrangement provided relatively modest compositional possibilities, this was the first time—as, I think, Kodály correctly pointed out—that he could experiment with this interval when making a number of decisions on tempo, character, tonality and dynamics.

Within a few years, minor thirds started to develop more specific emotional associations in Bartók. In a piano piece that has become the *locus classicus* of motor rhythm, *Allegro barbaro,* minor thirds appear involved in the musical representation of the "barbaric". The main theme of

25 ■ Ernő Kulinyi's interview, "Debussyről" [On Debussy], in *Beszélgetések Bartókkal: Nyilatkozatok, interjúk 1911–1945* [Bartók in Conversation: Statements and Interviews, 1911–1945], ed. András Wilheim (Budapest: Kijárat Kiadó, 2000), p. 10.

26 ■ The motif with its dramaturgical role as well as its connections with other thematic material in the opera is briefly discussed in Norman del Mar, *Richard Strauss: A Critical Commentary on His Life and Works,* 2 vols. (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1962), vol. 1, p. 262.

this emblematic composition (see Ex. 5), probably written in 1911 and left without an opus number,[27] has long been considered a possible candidate for "intertextual" references. The main notes constituting the theme can be interpreted as part of a pentatonic scale (G–A–C). Its first melodic gesture, the A repeated three times and



Example 5
The main theme of Bartók's Allegro barbaro

followed by a descending major second (G) that then returns to the main note, seems to be related to a central motif in Ravel's "Scarbo" from *Gaspard de la nuit* (1908).[28] The second, similarly "primitive" melodic gesture is exactly one of Bartók's early minor-third motifs. To be sure, it is spelt enharmonically as the augmented second A–B sharp. One of his reasons to do so was the contrasting harmonic background which included the C sharp. The notation of the *Allegro barbaro* theme is rather peculiar anyway. It is further questionable how far the barring helps to define the rhythmic character of the melody. Although there is certainly some asymmetry in its structure, the unchanging 2/4-time makes it appear more intricate than it actually is. Similarly, the notation of pitches also appears to be rather awkward, although the scale itself is simply a white-note diatonic one with the notes constituting the pentatonic scale prominent throughout. One may wonder whether these obviously deliberate oddities should not be interpreted as one of the composer's "half-serious, half-jesting procedures."[29] The piece's title, probably an allusion to the French critics referring to the "jeunes barbares hongrois" also suggests the possibility of a playful aspect.[30]

Whether serious or in jest, *Allegro barbaro* has become an important composition. And its minor third, the starting point of a type of strong musical gesture in later compositions,[31] can be associated with the minor third motif in *Salome*. In the

27 ■ According to László Somfai's recent research, the date of composition should remain open. The piece could have been composed in 1910 as well as in 1911. See "Why is a Bartók Thematic Catalog Sorely Needed?" in *Bartók and His World,* ed. Peter Laki (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 72–73.

28 ■ Cf. Bónis, "Quotations in Bartók's Music," *Studia Musicologica 5* (1963), pp. 355–82 (p. 372). I have analysed the musical relationship between the two motifs in some detail in my *Hasonlóságok és Kontrasztok: Bartók Ravel-hommage-a?* [Similarities and Contrasts: Bartók's Hommage à Ravel?], Zenetudományi dolgozatok 1995–1996 (Budapest: MTA Zenetudományi Intézet, 1997), pp. 261–63.

29 ■ See "Introduction to Béla Bartók Masterpieces for Piano," in *Essays,* pp. 432–3, where Bartók declared that his indication of four sharps and four flats for the right hand and the left hand, respectively, in his first Bagatelle was a "half-serious, half-jesting procedure."

30 ■ Dille, "L'Allegro barbaro de Bartók," in *id, Béla Bartók: Regard sur le passé,* ed. Yves Lenoir (Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut Supérieur d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'Art Collège Érasme, 1990), p. 207.

31 ■ Cf. the four different occurrences discussed in Bónis, "Quotations in Bartók's Music," p. 380.

continuation of the theme, the two motifs are combined and repeated with smaller note values. Since the repetition of the minor-third leaps with varying note values can also be found in Strauss's opera, Bartók's further development of the theme can also be linked to the Straussian prototype. As the closing segment of the theme, its only "new" element, a Phrygian descending cadence, is added.

The *Allegro barbaro* and *Salome*, however, have more in common than minor thirds. In fact, the barbaric character of Bartók's piano piece could have been inspired by the exotic Eastern tone of *Salome*. The underlying pulse in the *Allegro barbaro* is not unlike the fast, rhythmic introduction to the "Dance of the Seven Veils," music which is a typical example of Western musical exoticism. Even the contrast between the fast section and the *poco sostenuto* trio of the *Allegro barbaro* may bring to mind the contrast between the boisterous introduction and the following slow dance in *Salome*.

It is also conceivable that Bartók's collecting tour to Biskra in 1913, two years after the completion of *Allegro barbaro,* had something to do with his attraction to the barbaric. As the only folk-music collecting trip involving no national or regional interest, the Biskra collection was undoubtedly prompted by his search for music of primeval epochs in a non-European community.[32] His selection of Algeria may also be seen as a way to get in touch with French musical life.[33] A year after the trip, he tried to contact scholars in Paris, where he travelled and presented samples of his collection. The outbreak of the First World War jeopardised his hopes.[34] He later published a selection of his collection in two versions, one in Hungarian and one, in the prestigious *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft,* in German. On the other hand, however, it was probably still something of the traditional European fascination with exoticism that oriented him toward the study of the music of the Biskra region. Minor thirds in Bartók's compositions can easily be read as a reference to Arab folk music. Yet, the presence of an Arab influence does not exclude possible references to *Salome,* for in Bartók's music both evoke associations of the exotic. And perhaps this is also not mere chance. The Biskra trip took place in 1913, but his plan to undertake it can be traced back to a period that lies, again, surprisingly close to his encounter with *Salome*. According to the recollection of the poet and author Béla Balázs (originally Herbert Bauer), Bartók's interest in studying Arab music was aroused during his 1906 tour of Spain and Portugal, when he spent a few days on the African shore of the Mediterranean. Balázs in an open letter addressed to the composer on his sixtieth birthday, with a few obviously incorrect details but probably accurate in its general recall, describes what is Bartók's single documented reference to his musical impressions in Africa in 1906.

> Once I discovered an Arabic grammar book on your desk.
> "What, pray tell, is that?"

32 ■ It is interesting that at least two more composers who knew Bartók in later years also visited Biskra quite independently of one another: Szymanowki was there in 1914, a year after Bartók and Philip Heseltine (*alias* Peter Warlock) travelled there just before visiting Bartók in Hungary in 1921. Cf. Jim Samson, *The Music of Szymanowski* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1981), p. 75, and Barry Smith, *Peter Warlock. The Life of Philip Heseltine* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 181, respectively.

33 ■ See Bartók's two letters to Michel Dimitri Calvocoressi, in: Adrienne Gombocz and László Somfai, "Bartóks Briefe an Calvocoressi," *Studia Musicologica 24* (1982), pp. 199–202.

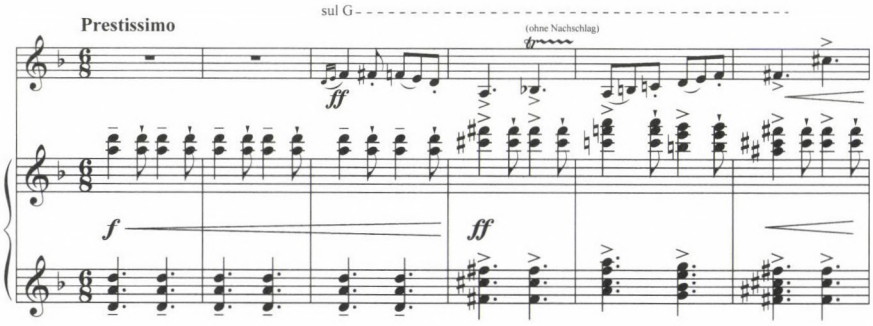
34 ■ Cf. Béla Bartók, Jr., *Apám életének krónikája,* pp. 140–41.

"I have to learn Arabic."
"You have to?"
"I have to, because I'm going to Africa."
"And why do you have to do that?"
"Because ten years ago, when I was still Ferenc Vecsey's piano accompanist, I travelled to Spain with him on tour, and I got to cross over to Africa for a day. There, in an Arab watering hole, I heard some Arabic songs that were very interesting. Since then I've been planning to look into this thing. But in order to understand folk songs, one has to understand the language of the lyrics."[35]

At the end of this piece, Balázs suggests that his visit to Bartók took place in the same year as the Biskra trip, i.e., 1913. The earliest evidence of the composer's plan to study Arabic for his research comes from a letter written two years earlier. Writing from Paris to his wife on 22 July 1911, Bartók mentions his newly purchased French–Arab dictionary and a *Méthode pour l'étude de l'arabe parlé* by L. Machuel. He also copies Arab letters and an Arab word with pronunciation in Latin transcription. Directly following this, he describes the colourful international bustle of the Parisian Boulevards. Among the various peoples whose members he enumerates non-Europeans are prominent, many "foppish" Blacks (whom he calls "Saracens"), "three turbaned and stout Turkish pashas" and a "real" Chinese gentleman.[36]

As briefly discussed above, Kárpáti finds specific reference to Arab music in another Bartók composition with minor thirds, the Scherzo theme of the Second String Quartet. This unusual melody presents F side by side with F sharp, which results in a scale that Kárpáti relates to characteristic scales underlying melodies in Bartók's Arab collection.[37]

Yet Arab music is probably not the only model for Bartók's rushing movement with its emphatic minor mode spiced with the characteristic contrast between F and F sharp. Max Reger's harmonically daring C major Sonata for Violin and Piano, one of the compositions played privately by Bartók and Stefi Geyer in 1907, may have been another source of inspiration. In the second movement of the four-movement composition, which is also a Scherzo in D minor just like Bartók's string quartet movement, the violin, accompanied by the piano's open fifths in 6/8 time and in relatively high register, plays a theme that outlines (D)–F–F sharp–F–D as its main notes (see Ex. 6).



Example 6
Max Reger, Sonata for Violin and Piano in C major, beginning of the second movement

35 ■ Béla Balázs, "From a Distant Land, to a Distant Land: On the Occasion of Béla Bartók's Sixtieth Birthday," trans. Balázs Dibuz, in *Bartók and His World,* p. 267.
36 ■ See *Bartók Béla családi levelei,* p. 209.
37 ■ Kárpáti, *Bartók's Chamber Music,* p. 100.

The close similarities in tonality, character and melody indicate that Reger's theme may have played an important part in the shaping of the memorable first subject in Bartók's Scherzo. There is, however, a further element in Reger's theme which reinforces its possible significance for Bartók's thinking. It also features a descent to the fourth below the tonic, and so it could have been a model for the third, not yet identified element in the main theme of *Allegro barbaro.*

The descent to the fourth below the main note (or "tonic") will acquire further importance if we now return to our initial example, the rondo theme of the Second Piano Concerto. At a second glance, this "single new theme" in the Finale appears to be like the theme of *Allegro barbaro*. Both the circling around the minor third and the descending motion, which ends in a downward leap of a fourth, can be associated with the theme of the piano piece. The only significant difference is a semitone shift in the rondo theme, which separates its two basic constituents.

That the final descending fourth leap proves to be an integral part of the idea reinforces the possible relevance of the Reger theme to that of the *Allegro barbaro.* The tonal shift, or in Kárpáti's terminology "mistuning",[38] which appears as something new, turns the theme into a revised, tonally more complex version of the earlier idea. On the other hand, the relationship between the theme and its harmonic background is again similar in both compositions. To express the situation in a simplified way, the *Allegro barbaro* has an A Aeolian theme with F sharp minor accompaniment,[39] while the central note, i.e. the lower note of the minor third, in the rondo theme is E flat and the accompaniment is in C minor. In both cases, Bartók employs third related keys typical of Reger's style, exemplified especially in the D minor Prestissimo. Only Bartók employed the harmonies belonging to contrastive tonal areas quasi telescoped. The possible derivation of both motivic and harmonic aspects of these compositional ideas, which proved to be especially fertile for Bartók's work, may explain one of the reasons why Reger's music was so important for Bartók's development during his formative years.[40]

E flat and C also seem, however, to be related to *Salome*. In the murder scene, the thirds appeared in E flat minor and the final repeated minor third leaps at the end of the opera were in C minor. In the rondo theme of his Piano Concerto, Bartók again seems to present both tonalities simultaneously, which, since Bartók had absolute pitch, may not have happened by sheer coincidence. Musical logic may explain the accompanying C minor. The E flat–G flat of the piano theme, however, can be heard as recalling *Salome's* equivalent minor thirds.

The repeated minor third, our main musical concern in this essay, is of course no more than a rough thematic idea that receives partly varying treatment in the three examples taken from Bartók's *Allegro barbaro,* Second String Quartet and Second

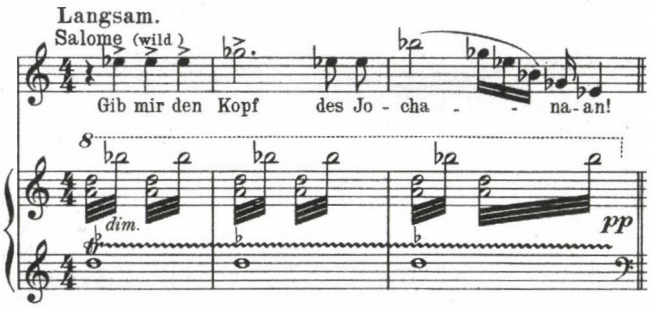
38 ■ For a summary of Kárpáti's theory, see his "Perfect and Mistuned Structures in Bartók's Music," *Studia Musicologica,* 35/3–4 (1995), pp. 365–80.

39 ■ Cf. József Ujfalussy's partially different interpretation, "Az Allegro barbaro harmóniai alapgondolata és Bartók hangsorai" [The Underlying Harmonic Idea in Allegro barbaro and Bartók's Scales], in *Magyar zenetörténeti tanulmányok: Szabolcsi Bence 70. születésnapjára* [Studies on Hungarian Music History: For Bence Szabolcsi on his seventieth birthday], ed. Ferenc Bónis (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1969), pp. 323–31.

40 ■ Cf. Günter Weiss, *Die frühe Schaffensentwicklung Béla Bartóks* (Erlangen and Nürnberg: Friedrich-Alexander-Universität, 1970), p. 504, note 181.

Piano Concerto. While similar basic processes can be detected in the way he sets this minor third within a scale, Bartók achieves a new level of harmonic and rhythmic complexity in the rondo variant of the Piano Concerto. Here he introduces tonally and metrically contrasting moments by unexpected shifts. He constructs strophic-like closed forms out of the initial phrases, which exemplifies a further development of the original motivic idea. The appearance of strophic, or stanza, forms in Bartók's themes can easily be explained by the model of folk music, especially Hungarian folk music in general, in which four-line stanza forms prevail. Since, however, he used the minor-third motif first in his arrangement of "Ucca, ucca", he may have been inspired specifically by it to build stanza-like forms out of this motivic idea in his modernistic, "original" compositions. Thus, Kodály was again right to point at Szentirmay's song as an inspiration for the development of a compositional thought. Strauss's use of variants of the minor third motif as leitmotiv or exciting effect did not provide Bartók with any direct formal model. This formal deviation from the assumed prototype can be regarded as part of the process of integration. This is one of the reasons why, from early on, Bartók's use of the idea appears to be something more than simple "borrowing" from Strauss. Another reason is perhaps that the idea resurfaced so often and in so many forms. This is exactly what Kodály expressed when he stated that the minor thirds "became a hallmark of [Bartók's] style." Their remarkable generative force seems to have guaranteed that the "appropriation" of the idea succeeded.

Other, stylistically less significant, elements found their way from Strauss's *Salome*, and partly *Elektra*, into Bartók's only opera, *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*. The best-known leitmotiv, Judith's "Kékszakállú" ("Bluebeard") motif, seems to carry strong associations with motifs sung when names (especially Jochanaan's name) are uttered in *Salome* (see Ex. 7).



Example 7
Strauss, Salome, *before* ***298***

The trill in the last example, an effect that appears also in *Elektra,* must have served as an important model for shaping the central, ever-recurring "Blood motif" in Bartók's opera. These parallels between stylistic elements in Strauss's operas and Bartók's music confirm the hypothesis that *Salome* was indeed one of the main inspirations prompting Bartók to enrich his vocabulary with the minor third as a basic interval for thematic ideas and gestures.

It is interesting that in his discussion of Bartók's predilection for the minor third, Kodály does not appear to have realized its possible connection with Strauss. Given his

rather unsympathetic view of Strauss's music, one will not be surprised that he should have hesitated to consider Strauss as a model for such a crucial stylistic element in Bartók's music as the minor third motifs turned out to be. Kodály himself became acquainted with *Salome* in early 1907, little more than a year after Bartók. The opera, which inspired enthusiastic exuberance from Bartók in late 1905, did not seem to touch Kodály's heart at all. This is how he reported his new experience in Berlin to the same Emma Gruber:

> Yesterday: *Salome*. Interesting, interesting (in particular: it is not so overorchestrated, somewhat more refined) often boring, empty, sometimes annoying, almost always sophisticated, a series of "little effects" without any grand effect. After it I don't feel anything special: whether you've come from drinking, or from anywhere or from *Sal[ome]* makes no difference. Although I do listen to Str[auss] with the interest of an explorer; I always want to discover new sources of pleasure for myself.[42]

And yet, Kodály did make the connection between Bartók's minor third and Strauss's opera. On a piece of paper bearing notes for his above-quoted lecture, "Szentirmaytól Bartókig" (From Szentirmay to Bartók), he scribbled: "Salome's Dance, Cheremis Song!"[43] Kodály was particularly interested in the folk music of the Cheremis (Mari) people, whose language is Finno-Ugric and who have had historical connections with Turkish peoples. In both of these respects, the Cheremis have been seen as akin to Hungarians. Since the two peoples could not have had cultural links for more than a thousand years, any discovered affinities between their respective folk music traditions promise historical insights of immense significance. Although Bartók was familiar with selected early recordings of Cheremis songs, more systematic research was only carried out after his death. Significantly, in the final text of his lecture, Kodály completely suppressed any reference to Strauss's music. This is how he "elaborated" the sketchy note:

> Szentirmay's song remains alone in both his, as well as the whole folk and folk-like popular repertory of songs. We find no more than one or two similar melodic germs, and even if one occurs, it is no more than a detail of secondary importance. We find something comparable [to Bartók's use] only in a Cheremis song, but neither Szentirmay nor Bartók could know that.[44]

Kodály confined his discussion to songs and obviously decided not to consider any other possible source. In view of his aesthetic ideas, the supression of the Strauss association seems to be intentional. For Kodály, Szentirmay was a more acceptable "model" than Strauss. Yet Bartók's unusual attraction to Szentirmay's song also suggests that the stylistic background for his minor-third based motifs had an earlier and deeper source, which we, and Kodály, should identify as Strauss's *Salome*. ❧

42 ■ Kodály's letter of 5 January 1907 to Emma Gruber, *Kodály Zoltán levelei*, p. 31.
43 ■ Kodály, *Magyar zene, magyar nyelv, magyar vers* [Hungarian Music, Hungarian Language, Hungarian Poetry], ed. Lajos Vargyas (Budapest, Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1993), p. 56.
44 ■ Kodály, *Visszatekintés*, vol. 2, p. 464.

Vera Lampert

The Lure of Africa: Béla Bartók's Journey to Biskra

Bartók and Arab Folk Music. Budapest Hungarian National Commission for Unesco, 2006, PC CD-ROM.

Compared to his Hungarian, Slovak and Romanian folk music collections, Béla Bartók's Arab collection is small, consisting of about two hundred melodies. Its significance, however, is disproportionately greater than its size, since this was the first collection of Arab folk music to be recorded with a phonograph at rural locations by an experienced scholar.

It may come as a surprise to learn that Bartók, a European composer and an expert in the folk music of Eastern Europe, had an interest in Arab music. Yet as Bartók developed as an ethnomusicologist, the emergence of the idea of collecting folk music on another continent might not be entirely unexpected. From 1905, Bartók was busy collecting the folk music of Hungary, recording and transcribing hundreds of Hungarian, Slovak and Romanian songs. As he fashioned his analytical tools, aimed at facilitating comparisons, he strove to widen his horizon, inquiring into developments elsewhere in the field. Through a colleague he became acquainted with the work of Erich von Hornbostel, who published studies on comparative musicology *(vergleichende Musikwissenschaft)*, on the significance of the phonograph for this new discipline and on a number of non-European folk musics, such as Japanese, Hindi, American Indian, Indonesian and Tunisian. Bartók must have been pleased with the similarities between these endeavours and his own. In January 1912, he published an essay of his own on comparative music folklore and, around this time, adumbrated a plan to extend his research beyond Hungary's borders. He wrote in his autobiography in 1911: "I think I won't restrict [my scholarly work] to Hungary; maybe it will be granted to me to reach further, to more exotic and entirely unexplored territories." In the summer of the same year, while in Paris, Bartók began the preparations for a field trip to collect Arab folk music in Africa: he searched for already existing collections; he probably investigated the choices of an appropriate location, and purchased an Arab-French dictionary and an Arab phrase-book.

Vera Lampert

was on the staff of the Budapest Bartók Archives between 1969 and 1978. Since 1983 she has been a Music Catalog Librarian at Brandeis University. Her book on the sources of Bartók's folk song arrangements was published in Hungarian in 1980 and 2005; its English version is expected to appear later this year.

As yet we have no direct evidence to show that Bartók had had a chance to read all of Hornbostel's articles by 1911. All we know is that he wrote his letter of introduction to Hornbostel on May 22, 1912, mentioning his familiarity with some of the German scholar's work. Yet it is tempting to consider Hornbostel's example as a major inspiration for Bartók's plan to collect folk music in North Africa; all the more so, since one of the melodies (no. 5) in Hornbostel's article on Tunisian folk songs bears some resemblance to the opening motif of one of Bartók's best known piano pieces, *Allegro barbaro,* which was also composed in 1911. Nevertheless, Bartók himself spoke about a different motive when explaining to a friend why he wanted to collect Arab folk music: a desire to follow up on an earlier musical experience in North Africa. Bartók's adventurous nature and his constant quest for novelty must also have considerably contributed to his decision to collect folk music outside his own continent.

Bartók was an eager traveller throughout his life. At a time when commercial flying was still in its infancy, and travel a more circuitous and time-consuming business, he journeyed extensively in Europe, visited North America twice before settling there, collected folk music in Anatolia, and visited the African continent on three different occasions. During the summers when he was free of his teaching obligations, Bartók usually took a vacation in one or another European country: Austria, Italy, Switzerland, France and once in Norway. Most of his travelling, however, was related to his piano performances and collecting of folk music.

It was an extension of an early engagement as a pianist that made it possible for Bartók, then twenty-five, to visit Africa for the first time: after completing a three-week concert tour in the Iberian peninsula with the violinist Ferenc Vecsey in the spring of 1906, he bought a train ticket valid for two thousand kilometers and extended his stay for several weeks, traveling to and fro in Spain, Portugal and Italy, and ventured as far as Morocco, where he spent three days in Tangier. It was there, during this short visit, that he heard some intriguing music in a coffee house that, as he said later, egged him on to go back for a longer stay in North Africa.

But why Biskra? If Bartók had considered revisiting Morocco at all, he was soon forced to change his mind with the advent of the Agadir crisis, just when he headed for Paris to gather information for his African trip. On July 1st, the arrival of a German warship at the port of Agadir sparked off international tension and foreshadowed the conflicts of the First World War. Thus Algeria must have seemed a better destination. Moreover, as János Kárpáti suggested in his studies of Bartók's African collecting tour, Bartók probably envisioned following Hornbostel, who had studied Tunisian music. Opting for Algeria, Bartók could have expected to find something akin, but at an unexplored location.

According to the recollections of Bartók's first wife, Márta Ziegler, who accompanied him on his African collecting trip, Bartók selected Biskra as the destination on the recommendation of his 1909 Baedeker, which described it as a place having a relatively pleasant climate. Biskra, a large oasis some three or four miles long and a half mile wide, with an immense number of palm trees and plenty of water, is at the edge of the Sahara desert, and it was also the terminal station of the north-south railway. Bartók hoped to find genuine folk material there and in a few other oases in the vicinity. In other words, Biskra had the promise of relatively easy access and yet some unbeaten paths for research.

Indeed, by the first decade of the twentieth century, Biskra had become a fashionable spot for winter vacations.

According to a review of a 1903 German travel book *(Nach der Oase Tugurt in der Wüste Sahara),* the area was "visited by more and more tourists every year". A British publication of the same year bears the inviting title *Beautiful Biskra, "The Queen of the Desert".* In 1906, another German guide, entitled simply *Biskra,* was advertised as a book that gives vivid impressions of "the famous oasis, health resort and center of date palms, where many tourists now get a glimpse of the Sahara." Still another review of a guide (*Biskra, Sid-Okba and the Desert,* 1910) asserted that "the ease and rapidity of travel in Algeria so far as the railway extends is remarkable."[1] Presumably Bartók had a chance to leaf through some of these travel-books; while in Paris making preparations for his trip he complained to his wife: "It is a pity that North Africa has become so popular a destination for visitors. This is why guides are made."

During the nineteenth century, North Africa was an extremely popular destination for writers, artists and musicians in search of exotic flavour. There was a whole school of painters, numbering in their hundreds, who were commonly referred to as the Orientalists (the Hungarian Gyula Tornai was one of them). Their realistic, sumptuous style was popular for a while but had gone out of favour by the end of the century, and is being rediscovered and newly appreciated only recently.[2] During the first two decades of the twentieth century, North African landscapes and ambience again became an important inspiration for artists, playing a remarkable role in the evolution of abstract painting. Wassily Kandinsky visited Tunis in the winter of 1904–1905, Paul Klee and August Macke in 1914. Henri Matisse toured Algeria in 1906 and remembered Biskra as "a superb oasis, a lovely and fresh thing in the middle of the desert, with a great deal of water that snaked through the palm trees, through the gardens, with their very green leaves, which is somewhat astonishing when one comes through the desert." One of Matisse's seminal works, heralding his new, sculptural style, the *Blue Nude,* is subtitled *Souvenir of Biskra.*[3]

Whatever the reason for visiting these lands, no one missed the musical experience. Klee even noted in his journal a melody performed by a "blind singer and his boy beating the drum" with the comment that the rhythm would stay with him forever.[4]

The following passage is from André Gide's journal from 1896, written during one of his many visits to Biskra:

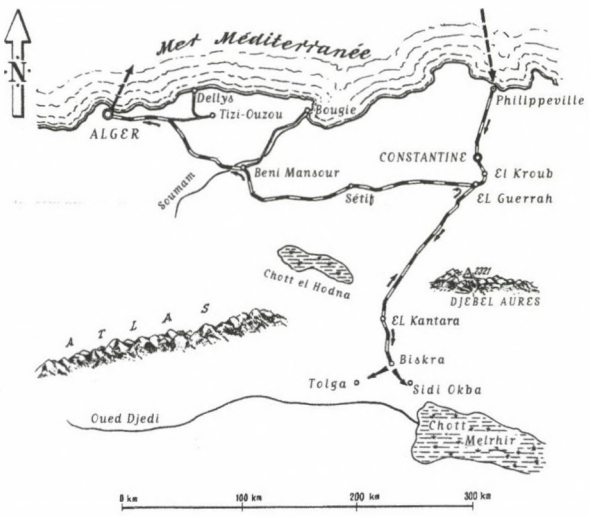
> ... they execute real compositions of rhythm: uneven rhythm, with strange staccato syncopations, which rouses one to madness and sets one's flesh a-quiver. These are the musicians who play at funeral, festive and religious ceremonies; I have seen them in cemeteries, sustaining the delirium of the paid mourners; in a mosque at Kairouan, inflaming the mystic madness of the Aïssaouas; I have seen them beating the time for the dance of sticks and the sacred dances in the little mosque of Sidi-Maleck...[5]

Musicians also visited Biskra, before and after Bartók did, although not for the same purpose. The British composer, Philip Heseltine thought "the effects of light and

1 ■ These reviews are to be found in the JSTOR database.
2 ■ Lynne Thornton: *The Orientalists: Painter-Travellers, 1828–1908.* Paris: ACR International, 1983.
3 ■ Jack Flam: *Matisse in The Cone Collection: The Poetics of Vision.* The Baltimore Museum of Art, 2001, p. 40.
4 ■ *The Diaries of Paul Klee, 1898–1918,* edited by Felix Klee. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964, p. 293.
5 ■ André Gide: *Amyntas,* translated by Villiers David. London: The Bodley Head, 1958, p. 29.

colours" wonderful but found the dancing of the Ouled-Naïl women "to the strains of a hideously strident tin-oboe and various kind of tom-tom" revolting.[6] His compatriot, Gustav Holst, who went to Algeria to find relief for an ailment in 1908, was more favourably impressed. In his symphonic piece, *Beni Mora* (1909–1910), also called *Oriental Suite,* he used some melodies he had sketched in his notebook during his visit. The finale of the piece is subtitled *In the Street of the Ouled Naïls,* where a brief motif which Holst had heard performed by an instrumentalist for several hours is repeated 163 times.[7] The Ouled Naïls were of course the famous courtesans, forbidden to leave their street but for whom Bartók obtained permission to have recordings made of their singing in the hotel he was staying. Karol Szymanowski also spent some time in Biskra during his Mediterranean tour in 1914, and some of his compositions reflect his impressions.

Bartók's journey to Biskra, of course, was not a vacation. His was a working journey: he carried with him a phonograph, a music notebook and boxes of wax cylinders to record the music of the area. The timing of his visit (he arrived around the 10th of June) was also at odds with the season of the *hiverneurs,* the pleasant weather being over by May. Either because he wanted to avoid the crowds of tourists, or because he could not take on a longer trip during the winter months, Bartók chose to go there in the summer. He was warned about the extreme climate in this season by one of his acquaintances who helped him in the preparations for his trip, but since he preferred warm weather in general, Bartók was confident that he would not be hampered by it. It proved to be otherwise; Bartók grossly overestimated his stamina. He prepared for an extensive trip—his train ticket vas valid from June 5 to September 3—but, to his great disappointment, he could not tolerate the extreme heat for more than two weeks. He came down with a fever and had to rush back to Algiers to find a doctor. Nevertheless, during those two weeks he succeeded in recording at four locations more than two hundred melodies on 118 phonograph cylinders. He wanted to return the following year, and again in 1915, to continue his research, but for several reasons, these plans never materialized.



Map showing Bartók's tour in the Biskra region (drawn by Béla Bartók Jr.).

In 1914, Bartók inquired about the possibilities of depositing his collection in a Parisian institution and he also tried to find a French forum to publish his findings. But then the war broke out, France and Austria-Hungary were belligerents and the collection had to be put aside. It was only three years later that the first part of Bartók's study, "A Biskra-vidéki arabok népzenéje" (Arab Folk Music from the Biskra District), was published in the

6 ■ Barry Smith: *Peter Warlock: The Life of Philip Heseltine.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 180.
7 ■ From Christopher Mowat's liner notes to the CD, Holst: *Orchestral Works* (Naxos 8.553696).

Hungarian periodical *Szimfónia,* which foundered before the second part could be printed. Bartók then prepared a German version for the *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft,* where it appeared in 1920.

When working on this study, Bartók made transcriptions from a large part of the recorded material but used only 57 melodies to illustrate his observations. This was the extent to which his collection was known until recently. Of the actual sound material, nothing was available until 1965, when Denijs Dille published five pieces, to accompany the recollections of Márta Ziegler, on a 45 rpm seven-inch record in the second issue of *Documenta Bartókiana.* László Somfai, former head of the Budapest Bartók Archives, began preparations to publish the existing documents related to Bartók's Arab collection during the 1970s. As part of the preparations, preservation tapes were made from about half of the cylinders. Somfai solicited the participation of the Algerian ethnomusicologist Mehenna Mahfoufi, who examined each recording and commented on their physical condition and the musical material they contain. This work provides the foundation of the new CD-ROM product, which was created with the assistance of several organizations: the UNESCO, the European Folklore Institute, the Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the Hungarian Ministry of Cultural Heritage, the Bartók Jubilee 2006 and the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

János Kárpáti, editor, László Vikárius, co-editor and István Pávai, technical editor, created something on a much larger scale than would have been possible through the traditional medium of a book and long playing record: they published on a single CD-ROM the entire recorded Biskra collection with all the relevant printed, manuscript and pictorial material. In addition, Bartók's study, "Arab Folk Music in the Biskra District", can be accessed, along with two other writings of his that document his involvement with the first Congress of Arab Music, held in Cairo in 1932. A selection from Bartók's correspondence completes the written documents. Considerable space is devoted to studies appraising Bartók's work on Arab folk music and there are a series of tracks illustrating the influence of Arab music on Bartók's compositions. Finally, some pictorial material related to Bartók's trips to North Africa is included.

The main menu is in English and Hungarian. Most of the documents, however, are published only in their original languages. One exception is the first item on the navigation frame, the editor's Preface which outlines the history of Bartók's visits to Africa and his work on Arab folk music, and describes the CD's contents.

In the first major section, *Bartók's Studies,* his article "Arab Folk Music in the Biskra District" is presented in several versions and languages. Besides the original Hungarian version, the somewhat different German version is presented twice: in its edited version and in a facsimile of the original publication. French, English and Hungarian translations are provided for this German version. The original Hungarian version, of which only the first part was published in Bartók's lifetime, is here in its recently published full version, completed from Bartók's manuscript.

Except for the facsimile, all the other versions went through ingenious editing to profit from the potential of digital media. The texts are provided with hyperlinks to the notes and carefully labelled whether they are Bartók's or the editors'. Through another welcome editorial intervention, the notes to the musical examples now appear next to the music to which they refer. All these extra features make the texts ever so much easier to read than the printed versions. In addition, there are hyperlinks

to the sound tracks of the recordings, if the musical examples happen to represent a recording from a surviving cylinder. To be able to hear the music when reading about it, by just clicking on the link, enhances one's understanding and enjoyment of this study tremendously.

Bartók's two other studies having relevance to Arab music were written for and about the 1932 Congress of Arab Music in Cairo. The invitation for Bartók to participate at the congress might have originated from Robert Lachmann, initiator of the *Gesellschaft zur Erforschung der Musik des Orients* (1930) and editor of the society's journal, *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Musikwissenschaft,* where Bartók's report on the Cairo conference was published. Lachmann headed the Phonogram Commission charged with recording music at the Congress of Arab Music; this was the committee on which Bartók also served. One of the documents included in this section of Bartók's studies is a draft of recommendations on several issues in preserving and disseminating Arab music. The draft, written in French, was first published by Denijs Dille in the fourth volume of *Documenta Bartókiana* with a German translation. Here only the original French text is presented with Dille's German commentaries. The second essay, written and published in German, appeared with other reports under the title "Zum Kongress für Arabische Musik—Kairo, 1932". Recalling the performance of an outstanding group of Iraqi musicians, in this article Bartók drew a connection for the first time between a certain ancient type of song that Ukrainians call *dumy* and songs he heard from Romanian peasants and in North Africa. (Because of a copying mistake, this crucial sentence unfortunately is incomplete on the CD-ROM.) The essay is presented here in the original German, but readers of English and Hungarian may want to know that this study is available elsewhere in both English and Hungarian.[8]

The core of the CD-ROM is the second section, *Bartók's Phonograph Recordings and Autograph Transcriptions:* tracks of the surviving phonograph cylinders, accompanied by the notes from Bartók's small music notebook that he used on the field trip, the draft transcriptions he made at home from the recordings and the fair copies of the latter, the so-called "master sheets" that served further analysis and systematisation. Compiling and matching this large and diverse material must have presented a considerable challenge. Vikárius, head of the Budapest Bartók Archives, wrote in his study on the sources of Bartók's Arab collection (see further below):

> What has been attempted here is to put together scattered pieces of what at first appears to be a real jigsaw puzzle. Although a large amount of sources has been preserved from Bartók's Arab collection, they are unfortunately far from complete and very often either only the sound recording or only the transcription survives. This has made the identification of the existing recordings difficult, especially because of a few misplacements, as in the few cases when the boxes contained the wrong cylinder.

But everything fits together wonderfully. A large spreadsheet, starting with the list of all the 118 cylinder numbers, shows which recordings survived, where the corresponding notes are in the field book, where the first transcriptions can be found, the existence of the master sheets and their copies, and finally the (differing) numbers of the musical examples in the two published versions of Bartók's study. Occasional notes appear in the extreme

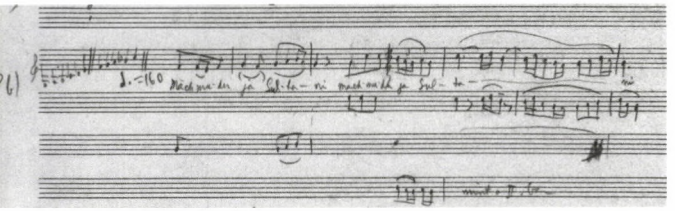
8 ■ In *Béla Bartók Essays,* ed. Benjamin Suchoff. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976, and in *Bartók Béla összegyűjtött írásai,* I., ed. András Szőllősy. Budapest, Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, 1966.

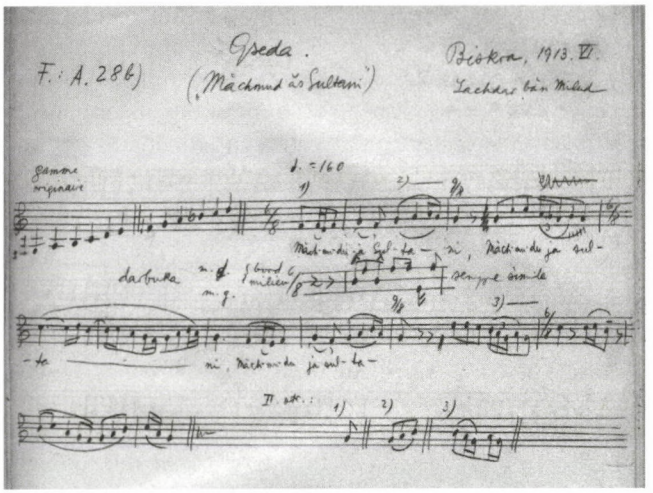
right column. The colour coding of the rows shows at a glance if a recording is preserved or not, if the surviving recording has a corresponding transcription or not, and if there is a transcription belonging to a lost recording. All in all, 96 cylinders are extant, and fortunately, most of the lost recordings were transcribed by Bartók. Thus, in one form or another, almost the entire Arab collection has been preserved. This comprehensive publication now makes it available for study and, indeed, its real purport can be fully assessed for the first time. Why Bartók skipped some of the recordings when he made the transcriptions, or why he chose certain melodies over others to illustrate his study, are questions that might also be investigated. Finally, this publication offers an unparalleled opportunity to the community of Bartók scholars and ethnomusicologists to study the entire process of Bartók's working method in minute detail.

Every item on the table denoting a recording or manuscript is provided with a hyperlink. Clicking on the number of an existing phonograph cylinder starts the music, while a click on the pages of the field book, on the fascicle of first transcriptions, or on the numbers of the master sheets produces a facsimile. Documents that belong together are displayed on a single sheet so that they can be studied at once without going back to the spreadsheet. The only caveat is that clicking on the manuscript sources or scrolling down to them takes a few seconds, just enough to miss the beginning of the recording, accessible from the top of the page. All the available information about the recording—place, genre, the name of performers and instruments—are also provided. I have two minor observations about the data on the spreadsheet. One concerns the recording of cylinder no. 83a where no master sheet is quoted. Indeed, there is no separate master sheet for this melody but Bartók's transcription appears on the first copy of the master sheet containing the melody of cylinder no. 10b. I also noticed that, while some recordings are identified as scales in the "Remarks" column, at one such recording (no. 64b) this identification was accidentally left out.

From Bartók's Correspondence is the title given to the next group of documents on the CD-ROM. The full texts of sixteen letters, and excerpts from seven others, relevant to Bartók's involvement with Arab music are quoted. They are listed in a table, itemised by sender, date, addressee and language; the text of the chosen item can be accessed by clicking on a little envelope icon. From these letters, one can follow the stages of Bartók's preparations for the journey to Biskra, one can read the rather laconic messages he sent to a few acquaintances from the trip, one can witness his later preoccupation with the collection, and finally, one can be amused by the colourful reports Bartók sent to his family from the Cairo congress. There are only two fragments I would have added to this selection: they have nothing to do with music but give a personal touch to the data on Bartók's African trips. One is a sentence from the letter to Ion Buşiţia, sent on July 12, 1918, where Bartók recalls memorable mule rides in the desert; the other, to Jenő Takács, written on May 8, 1932, where Bartók describes his adventures upon arriving in Egypt.

The letters are provided only in their original language, most of them in Hungarian and a few in German or French. (There is one letter, however, that was quoted from the 1976 Hungarian-language publication of Bartók's letters, therefore quoted in Hungarian, although Bartók wrote it, to Ion Bianu, on May 16, 1913, in German. Even the note, referring to the translation from the German original, is taken over from the 1976 publication.) Since there are no different versions for the English and Hungarian language users, the





Qseda, In praise of Măchmud ăs Sultani renowned Marabout of Tolga (voice, darbuka). First transcription and a copy of master sheet from original cylinder 28/b.

editors opted to provide the notes to the letters in their original language. There are some efforts to coordinate certain data, such as the serial numbers and page numbers which appear in English (No. x or x. p.—though p. should precede the number). However, the supplied dates are, surprisingly, always in Hungarian. The annotations on the letters could have been made sensitive to the language of the navigation. That would also have made it possible to refer the readers to available translations. As it is now, at the end of one of Bartók's French letters (to Calvocoressi), a bracketed note refers to a Hungarian translation, but while this might be welcome information to the Hungarian readers, it makes little sense for the English readers. For them, no similar references are provided, albeit several of the letters written and quoted here in the original Hungarian have English translations in *Béla Bartók Letters*, ed. by János Demény (New York: St. Martin Press, 1971), notably three letters addressed to Géza Vilmos Zágon (April, May 3, and June 19, 1913), one to Kálmán d'Isoz (June 19, 1913) and one to Ion Bîrlea (October 1913). All the Hungarian letters coming from *Documenta Bartókiana* have, of course, German translations.

The section of *Related Studies* contains seven essays providing information about Bartók's contribution to the study of Arab folk music. Márta Ziegler's recollections come first. Persuaded by Denijs Dille, and using letters sent to her family, she reconstructed many important (and amusing) details about their trip to Algeria. Léo-Louis Barbès, who translated Bartók's study "Arab Folk Music in the Biskra District" into French, was the first expert to provide an appreciation and some critical observations about that work. János Kárpáti has made several studies of Bartók's Arab connections and has himself collected folk music in North Africa. In his two studies here, one in French, the other in English, he traces the preparations that lead to Bartók's trip to Biskra, evaluates the significance of its results and demonstrates the influences of Arab music in Bartók's compositions. Both studies are provided with hyperlinks to the actual sound of the musical examples that refer to Bartók's Arab collection and his compositions. Tibor Kneif's essay completes the series of reprinted articles in the CD-ROM.

There are two further studies that, apparently, have never been printed before:

Mehenna Mahfoufi's "Bartók's Research in Algeria" and László Vikárius's "Primary Musical Documents about Bartók's Folk Music Collecting Trip to Algeria". Mahfoufi, as noted above, had had early access to a large portion of the sound material of Bartók's Biskra collection. He has expanded and completed a paper delivered at a conference in 1994 expressly for the CD-ROM. This is an exhaustive study, beyond my expertise to fully evaluate, in which the author gives a broad overview of earlier research on Algerian music, comments on Bartók's method of collection, transcription, and classification, and analyses the music itself in its many fine points. There are two tables attached to the study: the first contains remarks on the sound material Mahfoufi had had access to on tapes (here László Vikárius provided a very helpful concordance to the cylinder numbers, since the tapes had their own, different, numbering); and the second, commenting on the entire sound material of the CD-ROM. Mahfoufi's remarks in the first table concern the performers, the instruments, the duration of the recording, the musical quality of the performance and the technical quality of the recording, and observations, ranging from the present dissemination of a melody, about the genre, instrument or the words of vocal melodies. The second chart also lists the singers and instrumentalists, along with various observations and the beginning of the words of the vocal melodies.

László Vikárius's study on the sources of Bartók's Arab collection was written to accompany and explain the most important contents of this publication: the primary documents of Bartók's Arab folk music collection. Hence this study has its own versions in the English and Hungarian part of the CD-ROM. To introduce the reader to Bartók's work as a collector of folk music, Vikárius outlines the entire process, from field work to transcriptions of the recordings and the different types of master sheets, that is, the fair copies either Bartók himself or his wife prepared from the drafts. Hyperlinks are provided to every type of document. The study calls attention to the exceptional features of the Arab collection: it was the first among Bartók's collections that was recorded in its entirety and it was the only one Bartók did not completely transcribe from the recordings. Vikárius also gives an account of the history of the collection, its present (divided) whereabouts, the process of the preparation for publication, and finally, he explains the construction of the table, described above, where the sources can be accessed.

There is one substantial study of Bartók's Arab collection which is only mentioned on the CD-ROM: Mehdi Trabelsi's dissertation, *La musique populaire arabe dans l'oeuvre de Béla Bartók* (Lille, 2002). The editors did not have access to this work at the time of compiling the CD-ROM and it would have been impractical to include it because of its great length. Nevertheless, it has some important contributions which should be mentioned here, namely the transcription of all the melodies that were at the author's disposal on the tapes made from the cylinders before the entire material was digitised. Trabelsi transcribed all the 75 melodies that were not included in Bartók's article, apparently unaware of the fact that Bartók himself transcribed twenty-five of the unpublished melodies. Consequently, those twenty-five pieces are now available in two different transcriptions that may invite a comparison and examination of their differences. The rest of Trabelsi's transcriptions, fifty melodies, have never been notated before. Another of Trabelsi's contribution of great value to Bartók scholarship is the full transcription of the words of the vocal melodies along with a French translation.

About thirty-five minutes of excerpts from Bartók's works form another section of the CD-ROM: *Compositions Influenced by*

Arab Music. This part lends an entirely different dimension to the CD: the world of Bartók the composer. As János Kárpáti's studies point out, the intricate rhythmic patterns, the chromatic scales, narrow-range motives and the colour of the instruments Bartók encountered in Algeria, left their mark on his music. Bartók himself indicated the influence of Arab music in some of his compositions but their number can convincingly be expanded on stylistic grounds. Excerpts or full movements from nine compositions are featured on the CD, starting with the "Arab song" from the *Forty-Four Duos,* the only piece in which Bartók arranged an actual melody from the Biskra collection. The rest of the selections are comprised of movements from two string quartets, two piano concertos, two piano pieces, one orchestral piece and excerpts from Bartók's pantomime, *The Miraculous Mandarin.* They are listed in chronological order, the dates ranging from 1916 to 1939. As mentioned above, most of these musical excerpts can be accessed from Kárpáti's studies as well. The performers are prominent Hungarian musicians (except the Chicago Symphony orchestra in *The Miraculous Mandarin*), Sir Georg Solti, Zoltán Kocsis, the Takács Quartet, and the Budapest Festival Orchestra with conductor Iván Fischer.

A Picture Gallery is the last group of documents on the CD-ROM: photographs of Bartók and his wife, Márta Ziegler from 1912, a map of the region they visited in Africa (drawn by their son, Béla Jr., to illustrate his mother's recollections of the trip), facsimiles of the documents Bartók acquired from the authorities in order to facilitate his work, such as the letters of recommendation from the Governor General of Algeria and the Captain Chenin, the French commandant to the Biskra region, and the permission to take the Ouled-Naïl women to the Bartóks' hotel. Excellent photographs of the instruments Bartók encountered during his trip have been acquired from the collection of the Hungarian Museum of Ethnography, Budapest: three wind instruments (the *žăŭáq, gáşba,* and *yeita*), a string instrument *(gombri),* and two drums (the *darbuka* and *băndir*). It would be interesting to know their provenance, since only one of them, the gáşba, originates from Bartók's own collection. Finally, two photographs taken in 1932 on excursions to the Egyptian pyramids and the desert complete the Picture Gallery.

The editors have to be commended for their painstaking assembly of the material and for recruiting a devoted team to bring this ambitious project to fruition. In its completeness of the primary sources, it is without precedent. It is true that some of Bartók's folk music collections have already been made public completely in one way or the other: the recordings Bartók made in Anatolia in 1936 were digitally processed and published on a double audio CD in 1996. But this represents only one aspect of the collection: the sound. Conversely, the master sheets of the so-called Bartók System, which are available on the Internet, are only part of the manuscript sources that belong to Bartók's Hungarian collection. The unique aggregation of all types of primary sources in the present CD-ROM raises hope that we will have similar publications of Bartók's other collections in the near future. Digitisation of Bartók's other field books is already under way and the time when the corresponding recordings may be accessed and linked to the transcriptions, whether on a CD-ROM or the Internet, should not be too far off.

As far as the sound material is concerned, the significance of this publication can hardly be overrated. Close to four hours of recordings are now accessible. Even though Bartók considered them as only part of a larger, incomplete work, they represent a considerable body of material that offers a

rare insight into the past, into the musical world of a region as it was nearly a hundred years ago and hardly studied ever since. Are some of these melodies still known today, and if so, how much have they changed? This CD-ROM might encourage such enquiry and inspire new research. As for the present, a quick search for new musical material from Biskra yielded only one item from the region, entitled *Algeria: The Diwan of Biskra,* a CD published in France in 1996 (Ocora C 560088) that contains seventy minutes of music recorded at a ceremony in Biskra.

In the Preface, the user is reminded somewhat apologetically that these recordings were made in the earliest days of recording technology. Nevertheless, several of them ring with the freshness and vivacity of a recent performance, which makes them enjoyable for both the scholar and the layman. István Németh's excellent work in restoring and digitalising the material deserves special praise.

Given the large amount and the variegated nature of the published material, it is hardly surprising that some blemishes remain. Some more proof-reading might have eliminated the occasional flaws in the texts. The English translations are, in most cases, very good. I found only a few instances where the translation is off the mark: two of them are in the Preface where Bartók's report "Zum Kongress für Arabische Musik" is mentioned as an address and lecture, implying that it was written for or during the congress. Kárpáti's original Hungarian text, of course, does not have this implication. The title of the report, given in brackets on the first page of the chapter "Bartók's Studies" would also be more correct as "At" (instead of "To") the Congress of Arab Music. Another quite mistaken English rendition that raises a smile is the caption to the facsimile of the permit Bartók received to record the singing of some courtesans in his hotel: "Permission to rescue young women (prostitutes) from the Ouled-Naïls district."

All these are, however, negligible when laid beside the wealth of information and the ease of navigation in this product. Considering the great diversity of topics, it comes as a pleasant surprise how quickly each and every item can be reached. Thanks to the straightforward layout, orientation is easy and there is a search box provided to make locating names and subjects effortless.

In December 2000, the American Folklife Center organised a symposium at the Library of Congress with the title "Folk Heritage Collections in Crisis". Participants agreed that the task of the keepers of such collections is clear: they have to transfer the material into the digital domain. Wax cylinders, now a hundred or so years old, are among the most vulnerable items in heritage collections and their salvage is one of the most urgent tasks. According to one participant, the other crucial key to preservation is the distribution of the material. Bartók himself was solicitous about both the preservation and distribution of his collections. It was worry about the preservation of the wax cylinders that prompted him initially to establish contact with the Berlin Phonograph Archives, where copies that are more wear-resistant could be produced from the originals. Bartók also kept an eye on the development of recording technology and as more sophisticated equipment became available, he advocated its use. His indefatigable work in distributing his collections is well-known through his numerous publications. With this CD-ROM, its editors have met the current requirements for the care of precious collections and, at the same time, have acted in the very spirit of the Bartókian ideal. ❧

Paul Griffiths

Passion and Aftershock

György Kurtág—The Matchstick Man/Péter Eötvös—The Seventh Door. Directed by Judit Kele, Idéale Audience, Juxtapositions™, 9DS16
György Kurtág: *Complete Choral Works*, Hänssler Classics CD 93.174

A score is only one element in the transmission of music. There are also traditions of performing, and of listening. And then there are things that can only come from the composer but cannot be written down—things that the composer may urgently want to communicate but has no written language for, or things that will emerge perhaps unknowingly in two words, in the wave of an arm, in a phrase of hoarse song. Especially when a work is new, the composer will have spent far longer with it than anyone else, in many respects will know it far better, and may well have more to impart than can be conveyed in a score. This is why any performer tackling a work by a living composer will want to go to the source. And it is why films documenting composers have a special value.

Happily, two fine hour-long documentaries on Hungarian composers—György Kurtág and Péter Eötvös—have been made available on DVD in the excellent Juxtapositions series released by Idéale Audience (9DS16). The two films were both made by the Hungarian-French director Judit Kele in the mid-1990s, and they are similar in shape, interleaving scenes of the subject in action with archive material and shots from interviews with distinguished colleagues. Tribute to Kurtág's stature comes from György Ligeti and from some of the performers with whom he has been closely associated: Zoltán Kocsis, Adrienne Csengery, Ildikó Monyok. Eötvös is warmly praised by Miklós Perényi, Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen among others, and it is Boulez who gives this film its title of *The Seventh Door,* remarking, of Eötvös's reserve and with reference to Bartók's opera, that everyone has a 'secret garden' hidden behind a door that must remain forever closed—though art, by implication, begins to make this locked door a little transparent.

Kele's use of historical mementos—photographs of the composers as boys and young men, film of Eötvös in his early 20s taking part in a rehearsal of Stockhausen's *Mikrophonie I*—suggest that the secret garden is one that has remained untouched, perhaps from the beginning, in perpetual summer florescence. Kurtág might agree. He insists that he knows nothing about music, but that from time to time someone who does know bursts through from within him and vanishes again. Eötvös shows how a piece he wrote

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as a teenager, *Kozmosz* for piano, became the model for new compositions more than three decades afterwards. Both Kurtág and Eötvös were late starters, becoming much more productive around the age of fifty. Perhaps they had to wait—and work—to gain some insight into what lay behind that seventh door.

The title of the Kurtág film, *The Matchstick Man,* alludes to the story he has recounted of his treatment, when he was a young man in Paris, by the psychoanalyst Marianne Stein, who had him begin to rediscover his creativity by putting matchsticks together. This was an enduring lesson. "It's possible to make music with practically nothing," he says here, "practically without material, quite simply, because something is happening which transforms nothing into movement." The film allows us to see and hear that happening, as he works with performers on a great range of pieces—with Claudio Abbado and the Berlin Philharmonic on *Stele,* or with Csengery on a tiny song ('Farewell').

Kurtág says almost nothing about his past (Ligeti does a bit), and the film's evocations of that past are unnecessary (as is the director's arrival as a dramatic character in one episode). What vigorously engages Kurtág is the present, and in particular the present of coaching performers. In the hour of this film he looks by far the happiest during three or four minutes when he is guiding—with words, gestures and vocalizations—two young players in Schubert's 'Arpeggione' Sonata. "I understand music really only if I teach it," he says immediately afterwards. And one may guess that this is true even when that music is his own. Rehearsal is a process in which all participants—the composer and the performers—are in the dark, trying to enlighten themselves and each other.

In contrast with Kurtág, so intense and photogenic, Eötvös is a man of half-lights, and *The Seventh Door* risks losing him among his manifold activities: conducting Liszt in Budapest and London or at work on his own music, with its unsettling range from humour (a recomposition of Gesualdo madrigal poems) to sonorous richness and even grandeur. Near its end, though, the film begins to make sense of its subject. "The essence of passion escapes me," Eötvös says, and the words seem at once extraordinary (we have just witnessed a scene from the composer's Chekhov opera *Three Sisters*) and telling. The essence of passion is Kurtág's business. Eötvös is here to collect the puzzling aftershocks.

But beyond anything these two composers say, or sing, their sheer physical presence may be most helpful to those who want to understand their music a little better, whether performers or listeners. Eötvös is forever being found walking the streets of Budapest, a stranger in his own city. Kurtág is found in one sequence out in a wintry landscape with his wife Márta, his arm across her shoulders, as on the soundtrack we hear them playing his arrangement of the sinfonia from Bach's 'Actus tragicus'. The music's determined tempo is exactly that of the human couple; they seem to be pacing it out, living its poignancy and its steadfastness.

One branch of Kurtág's output absent from the film, his choral music, is finely presented by the SWR Vokalensemble Stuttgart under Marcus Creed on a recent record (Hänssler Classics CD 93.174), with a great range of dynamics and colours, and precision tuning. The three groups of settings were begun almost simultaneously, during the years 1979–81, but one of them, *Songs of Despair and Sorrow,* took a lot longer than the others to develop, perhaps because it is on a quite different scale. *Omaggio a Luigi Nono* (to poems in Russian, four of the six being by the composer's frequent collaborator at the

time, Rimma Dalos) and *Eight Choruses to Poems by Dezső Tandori* are made up of instants, down to under a minute and not exceeding two and a half. The seven *Songs of Despair and Sorrow* are much bigger; the biggest is almost as long as the whole of *Omaggio a Luigi Nono,* whose six utterances are over in nine minutes, and the whole cycle runs to twenty-two minutes—longer than the other two works together. There is the difference, too, that the Nono and Tandori sets are unaccompanied, whereas *Despair and Sorrow* carries the weight of ensembles of accordions, brass, strings, keyboards and percussion, for a total of twenty-eight players, however sparingly deployed.

The extra size of *Despair and Sorrow,* vertical and horizontal, may make this the most effective of the three in live performance, though by the same token the work is not going to be performed very often. It will always be a special piece—a history of a century of Russian suffering (the poems, again in Russian, are all this time by Russians, from Lermontov, who also led off the Nono cycle, to Tsvetayeva) and also a requiem of contemporary aloneness and disquiet.

As much as in his more abundant and better known solo settings, Kurtág time and again seizes the words into graphic musical images. The first foot of the Lermontov piece that opens *Despair and Sorrow*—'So weary', as it is translated in the booklet, matching the rhythm of the Russian—is given a rise and fall that conveys abject weariness, and that remains almost omnipresent. (Being so much longer, these songs tend to make more use of unifying themes, chords or atmospheres.) The static harmonies given to Akhmatova's 'Crucifixion' sound like the gazes the poem is talking about, how we can look at Mary Magdalen and St. John but must turn our eyes from Christ's mother.

It is the same in the two unaccompanied sets—but all three works also use features special to the choral medium: the aura of liturgy, already mentioned, and aspects more of substance than tradition, such as the simple facts that words can more naturally be repeated, in different vocal parts, or that men and women can have their separate say (or sing). A striking example of male-female antiphony comes in the tiny third number of *Omaggio a Luigi Nono,* where the first phrase ('Love for a month') is sung by the women, with reference to the opening of *Tristan,* the second phrase ('Suffering for years') is done similarly by the men, and just the third ('And so everything is past') involves both. Or there is the extraordinary 'Prince H. standing before his stepfather' from the Tandori group, which is a recitative for the tenors (uncanny the effect of a soliloquy delivered chorally) with accompaniment from the rest of the choir.

Also worth mentioning, besides such feats of expression, is the beauty of so many of Kurtág's word-sized melodies and his chords. The poems are lit—or they shine from within. ❧

Tamás Koltai

Music and Drama

Crisis at the Opera

The last five or six years at the Hungarian State Opera House have been stormy. As at opera houses the world over, money has been tight. To make things worse, the tenures of intendants and music directors have been short and affected by the tide of electoral fortune and political shifts. That also happens elsewhere but in Hungary today, there are theatre managers (and actors, singers, boxers, lorry drivers, civil servants, constitutional judges etc.) who are known to side with the government party or the opposition, be it of the left or right. This in itself would be grotesque enough, if such entities as a classic left or right, and their traditional ideologies, still existed here. What does exist in their stead is a deeply divided polity and a politicized appointment system. On several occasions in the Hungarian State Opera's recent history, management shuffles have conformed with the results of parliamentary elections, one case being that of a chief intendant set aside by one government only to be reinstated four years later when the opposition came to power. The conductor, György Győriványi Ráth, was lured back home from abroad and, after a few months as chief musical director, was replaced as "unsuitable" almost as soon as a Socialist-Liberal coalition was returned in 2002. In this particular case the charge was not entirely off the mark, which just goes to show, much though many deny it, that artistic as well as political considerations have played a part in the gathering crisis.

For the fact is that Hungary's operatic culture, despite its distinctive traditions, is currently in crisis. And not just over the past five or six years, or even since the introduction of parliamentary democracy after 1989, but for much longer—almost half a century. That is insofar as the course of this crisis can be tied to precise dates.

The nature of the crisis is equally hard to pin down categorically. The causes partly involve personalities—vanity, power games, jealousies, intrigues—just as in any other comparable institution the world over. Conflicts often assume ideological and aesthetic guises so as not to look quite so transparent. Difficult though it may be to unravel the crux of the matter, it is still worth taking the trouble.

It will probably repay us to go back to the very beginnings.

The current home of the Opera, that is its main venue, was inaugurated in 1884, but the history of opera performances in Hungary goes back much further. The first

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to be documented were mounted by German and Italian troupes in aristocratic mansions from 1677 onwards. About a century later, Joseph Haydn was *Kapellmeister* and composer for the princely line of the Esterházys, premiering a string of works in the superb theatre built on the grounds of the Palace of Eszterháza. With the growth of middle-class audiences in the final third of the eighteenth century, a permanent German-speaking theatre company was established in Pest; in 1784 the company began a continuous run of opera presentations with a work by Salieri. By 1812 the German Theatre of Pest opened the doors of an auditorium seating three thousand, which was filled only for performances given by foreign (usually Viennese) companies. Performances in the Hungarian language began in 1791, and the Hungarian Theatre of Pest was built in 1837, putting on its very first opera, Rossini's *Barber of Seville*, in the same year. From 1840 it changed its name to the National Theatre of Pest, but continued to perform both plays and operas, with the young Ferenc Erkel as its musical driving force. Erkel remains to this day Hungary's best known opera composer, with his *Bánk bán* and *László Hunyadi* still permanent features of the repertoire in Budapest. Over a ten-year period, Erkel conducted works by all the best known composers—not just Rossini, but Bellini, Weber, Auber, Donizetti, Mozart and, above all, Verdi, virtually all of whose works Erkel put on the bill. The only composer discriminated against was Wagner, whose works he loathed. That could be said to mark the beginnings of Hungarian subjectivism in matters of operatic taste, and it accounts for *Lohengrin* being the first Wagner opera to be put on—in 1866. (The first act of that opera—could it have been by way of compensation?—was part of the bill at the gala opening of the Opera House in 1884.)

Since the National Theatre soon proved too constrictive an environment to support both theatre and opera in tandem, a competition was announced for the design of a separate building for opera. Despite an impressive number of international entries, including one from Ferdinand Fellner (half of the famous theatre-designing duo with Hermann Helmer), the winner by almost unanimous acclaim was Miklós Ybl. Amid the usual difficulties (cost overruns of 50 per cent, scaling back, etc.), construction took nine years from the laying of the foundation stone in 1875. The results, though, were imposing, both grandiose and graceful, and somewhat reminiscent of the Paris Opéra Garnier at least in respect of the interior (the main staircase), while the stage technology was reckoned to be the most up-to-date in the Europe of that time. The glittering gala opening, in the presence of Emperor Franz Joseph himself, was marred by an incident in which an outside crowd, impatient to get a view of the splendid interior, swept aside the police cordon and broke into the foyer.

Before long the repertoire ran to 37 operas and seven ballets. The social, economic and cultural upswing that followed the Compromise of 1867 with Austria was a boom period for the arts in general, the opera included. Yet it was not long before cracks began to show, with the old-style management and company turning out to be inadequate to sustain such a large repertoire, not having enough of anything, whether it be good singers or money, with an unsuitable music director as Erkel was 74 by the time of the opening.

A way out was finally found: the twenty-eight-year-old Gustav Mahler was asked to take on the post of *Generalmusikdirektor*. It is hard to think of any bolder or more enlightened decision although even he was not spared the "force of destiny", as it were. Between 1888–91 Mahler did, however, usher in a golden age, inviting many

outstanding singers and musicians to Budapest, and it was here that Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* found its first success. Mahler was also the first person to schedule *Das Rheingold,* the "prelude" to Wagner's *Ring of the Niebelungs,* and also *Die Walküre,* the first part proper of the tetralogy. The only reason that the other two works were not performed was lack of time since Mahler, not to put too fine a point on it, was forced out of his position. Whether through jealousy, vanity or intrigue, Mahler was one "foreigner" too many for middlebrow domestic opera buffs and lower-calibre careerists, as Hungarian-born Arthur Nikitsch had been during his short stint in 1892–94, who mounted *Manon Lescaut* and invited Puccini to coach the performers for *Madame Butterfly* and *La fanciulla del West.*

Skimming briskly through events, some triumphs, and also blunders can be listed. Thus, the Budapest Opera was where two of Bartók's stage works—the pantomime ballet *The Wooden Prince* (1917) and the opera *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* (1918)—received their premières, while his second pantomime ballet, *The Miraculous Mandarin* (written in 1919), was plagued with censorship problems in Hungary as well as in Cologne—whose burgomeister, the future chancellor Konrad Adenauer, banned the work immediately after its very first performance there in late November 1926. It ended up being properly performed only in 1945 in Hungary. As far as major conductors go, there was never any shortage of them, from the days of Egisto Tango (1913–19) to Sergio Failoni (1928–48), from Otto Klemperer (1947–50) to Lamberto Gardelli (1959–66; 1974–79). Nor should one forget János Ferencsik (1907–1984), who may have achieved international standing in different circumstances. It would take too much space to list the outstanding singers of the Budapest company; in fact, a number of them failed to gain international recognition during the Fifties because they were not allowed to travel to the West—so, paradoxically, the Iron Curtain helped to sustain musical standards at home. From the Sixties onwards no obstacles were placed in the way of artists accepting engagements abroad. It was around then that Éva Marton concluded that her talents were not being recognised in her native country and she entered a string of contracts with German opera houses, where she soon rose to prominence. That was symptomatic of the start of the decline of opera in Hungary, or rather it might have been, if anyone had bothered to pay attention. That was when the real troubles began, or began to manifest themselves.

A tangle of issues are at stake here. Essentially from the Sixties onwards, opera embarked on a complex evolution in which, along with new musical approaches—for instance, a return to the Urtext versions of works as composers originally conceived them and before they were meddled with—an equally large revolution occurred in the staging of works. Over recent decades a number of quite outstanding productions have emerged, linked in the first place to directors like Walter Felsenstein and, later, Wieland Wagner's innovative presentations for Bayreuth. Opera as theatre in its turn raised questions of fidelity to a composer's original intentions. This new perspective triggered disputes, with some people starting to mutter about the despotism of directors (a complaint that has still not entirely disappeared), but the polemics in themselves had a very productive side, as tends to happen in the arts. Or at least where people are receptive, but then that was not the case in Hungary, insulated both from the European mainstream and its tributaries, and bogged down in attitudes that may once have been seen as setting a magnificent standard but had become fixed into dogmatic conservatism.

What that meant in practice was that for a good two decades stage directors who were the exponents of psychological realism—one thinks first and foremost of the ingenious Kálmán Nádasdy and that ever-inventive set and costume designer, Gusztáv Oláh—were allowed to regard their personal styles as the answer to everything (Nádasdy was also director of the Opera House company for a period). From the 1960s onwards, any innovative spirit was stripped away, bit by bit, but what was worse, standards of professionalism declined, too, and not just in the province of the producer but also in routine operatic matters, by which I mean orchestral and stage rehearsals, the permanent maintenance work that any production requires, involving the operations of a whole string of workshops, and much else besides. Nádasdy had been one of the most impressive teachers around through the nigh-legendary lectures that he gave at the Academy of Dramatic Arts. Still he failed to bring on pupils. The Opera House grew lazy and sloppy in its habits. Cultural policy at the time was anyway fixated on measurable results, which required for instance a constant expansion of the number of works in the permanent repertoire (there were times when as many as 70 works were kept on the go). One glaring example of the conservatism that crept in has been Nádasdy's production of *La Bohème,* which was revelatory when new, in the Fifties, but to still play it "intact" today on the grounds that it is a piece of theatre history is ridiculous. How can a production be kept intact if, for one thing, it is in part obsolete, and for another, it no longer has the director's personal touch with the performers being asked to "step into" an uninspired convention? Theatre as museum piece per se is of little interest, and its justification is debatable even when it is a deliberate reconstruction, the product of a stylistic experiment accomplished by fresh ensemble work.

A striking example of megalomaniac aspiration of another kind was the decision taken in 1951 to link to the Opera House an edifice that had been built in 1911 and was known as the Popular Opera. This had an auditorium for 2,400 spectators, which had regularly been used for opera and during the Fifties opera was virtually all that it was used for. Two years later it was rechristened as the Erkel Theatre, and from then on it took over a slab of the Opera House repertoire. The thinking behind this decision is not easy to grasp as, if only on account of its sheer size, it was certainly not suitable for "chamber" pieces and although it tended to fulfil the function of a venue for lighter-weight "folk" operas, this was not so well-defined a character as to prevent the frequent swapping of items that were in the repertoire (and in the same production) between the two buildings. That made very little sense, except to eat up huge amounts of money. It might happen, for instance, that a big-name guest would object to appearing at the rather louche Erkel and so a production would be switched to the Opera House just to accommodate that wish.

Meanwhile, with two auditoria for opera, Budapest to this day does not have a small venue, and this has been at the cost of Baroque and contemporary works, even though these are well known to get the backs up a section of the public and therefore artists. Incredible though it may seem, the Hungarian State Opera House has not staged any opera by Handel for more than three decades, while György Ligeti's masterly *Le Grand Macabre* has only received two performances—several years ago and within the ambit of the Budapest Spring Festival, in a theatre that was hired for the occasion. Using a joint management for the two houses rules out the possibility of healthy competition, which, with the withering of Hungary's once-flourishing provincial companies, is now non-existent.

The State Opera House has thus become a totalitarian ruler—a cumbersome, monolithic, immovable primordial being. Even the fact that its antediluvian hydraulic stage eventually became dysfunctional, forcing the Opera House to close its doors for renovations back in 1980, has done nothing to change this. It speaks volumes that more was spent on the re-gilding of the auditorium than on the modern electro-mechanical scene-moving machinery, which was ordered from an East German firm at a price below "Western" quotations (it soon broke down). The Erkel Theatre has been closed since the middle of June of this year as the building has been declared unsafe. At the time of writing, nothing resembling a coherent plan for its future has been put forward. There are vague promises of rebuilding the Erkel and its continuance as part of the Opera House "in some form", but then nobody, apart from the newly appointed Director-General, believes that for a second. Indeed this is not desirable as it would only sustain an unhealthy monopoly over the country's opera.

It would be wrong to give the impression that nothing good has happened during the past half century. There have been some exceptional performances and premières of numerous new operas by Hungarian composers which have made it to stagings in other countries, too. Among the latter have been, for example, Emil Petrovics's *C'est la guerre* and Sándor Szokolay's *Blood Wedding*. In recalling those achievements, however, sight should not be lost of the fact that the majority of performances that have taken place within Ybl's elegant palace have been aimed at upholding the fuddy-duddy tastes of its audience, and in turn the audience is dedicated to holding the opera management of the day fast in the trap of serving traditionalism. On the rare occasions that the management takes one of its bolder decisions, the hostile reception which greets it (a small-scale scandal in other words) petrifies them and forces them to curl up and take cover again for another lengthy period. Yuri Lubimov's production of *Don Giovanni* (1982) was an interpretation that got to the heart of the work, but its unconventionality shocked many and encountered opposition. Another guest, Katharina Wagner, set her *Lohengrin* (2004) into the time when East Europe was settling accounts with Communism, during its transition to democracy; her radical reinterpretation caused such an outcry that the production was hastily withdrawn. A whole string of examples from other countries are testimony to the fact that steady persistence will succeed in steadily wearing down the public's resistance, remoulding its taste and broadening the camp of those who are open to new approaches. In fact, one doesn't even have to travel outside Hungary. The international festival of opera held every summer in Miskolc, which mainly features opera companies from the former Eastern bloc, always has productions that wrestle successfully with innovative approaches.

This reviewer can only keep hoping. For the past few months the Hungarian State Opera House has been under new management, and their wares will be on offer from the 2008–2009 season. The Intendant is the internationally renowned conductor Ádám Fischer, who has performed at some of the world's leading opera houses, from Bayreuth to Salzburg. The artistic director is Balázs Kovalik, who gained his directorial experience in Germany and has staged many excellent productions, the best of them being with young casts, some of them still at music academies. An example was the marathon in which, on two occasions, the three Mozart operas with librettos by Da Ponte (*The Marriage of Figaro, Così fan tutte* and *Don Giovanni*) were performed on one day with virtuoso immediacy and in a

way that speaks to today's tastes—probably the most significant operatic event in Hungary in recent years. Kovalik has already mounted several productions for the Opera House, too. His *Turandot,* although it was left within its traditional setting, was innovative, as was the *Onegin* that he took to the Miskolc Festival. He has also staged Britten's *Peter Grimes* (brilliantly) and Stravinsky's *The Turn of the Screw* (in the latter both performers and audience were seated on a closed stage). He was able to throw new light on Bartók's *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* through avant-garde elements, and it was in his masterly production that Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre* was rammed down the throats of the audience—sadly just twice.

The most talented directors, as a rule, come from a theatre background. Sándor Zsótér has memorably staged Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* Zemlinsky's *The Dwarf* and Schönberg's *Erwartung,* the first for the National Theatre at Szeged, the latter two in the Budapest Opera House. Róbert Alföldi, on the other hand, brought Gounod's *Faust* to Szeged in a profane modern-day setting in a performance that was also broadcast by the Mezzo television channel.

As for how the Kovalik-Fischer team will pan out in the Ybl Palace there are well-founded hopes for the future. It is ironic that these two appointees did garner their most recent successes in other venues: Kovalik's aforementioned Mozart marathon was performed in the studio space of a multicultural complex, while Fischer has embarked on a collaborative venture with the Palace of the Arts, billed as "Wagner in Budapest", which is due to continue for several years. In 2006, he conducted *Parsifal* under this banner, while this year it was the turn for the first two parts of the *Ring* tetralogy, with the whole cycle to be heard and seen next year—"seen" because although the performances take place in the Palace's recently built and acoustically superb concert hall, the productions are being semi-staged in a rather eye-catching "multimedia" presentation, the work of Hartmut Schörghofer. Given that the singers are top-drawer performers, several of whom can boast of appearances at Bayreuth (indeed the stagings refer to Bayreuth in their externalities), the results have been remarkable and of an extraordinarily high quality. Fischer and Kovalik will thus have to compete with standards they themselves have set. ❧

ANDREA FELVÉGI

Tomasz Konieczny and Linda Watson in the Palace of Arts production of Die Walküre.

Erzsébet Bori

Two Films, One Case

Norbert Komenczi: *Daráló (Grinder)*
Elemér Ragályi: *Nincs kegyelem (No Mercy)*

One notorious case taken up by the Ethnic Minorities Legal Defence Bureau in recent years was that of Dénes Pusoma. After a long struggle through the legal system, his action for false imprisonment was brought to a successful conclusion—but only in the sense that "the operation was successful but the patient died." By the time the Constitutional Court overturned several provisions of the law under which his claim had been denied, Pusoma had died.

He was a young and very poor Roma who lived in the village of Ivád in hilly northern Hungary. His home was a mud-brick shanty and he scraped a living doing casual labour. In March 1994 an elderly local woman was murdered, and the police, without hesitation, decided they had found a perfect suspect. Despite his protests of innocence, despite the lack of credible evidence, he was arrested and charged. The prosecution's star witness was a severely mentally handicapped woman, and the key piece of evidence was a sample of scent (collected under circumstances that were never clarified) that police tracker dogs identified. The police broke every rule in the book, written and unwritten, and simply ignored any factors or clues that did not fit their scenario. For them the case became so much a matter of prestige that they harried Pusoma's cellmate into obtaining a verbal confession from him when he was in his sixth month behind bars. The prosecution and the court had the opportunity, not taken, to check and crosscheck the police's work. Essentially, the entire criminal justice system had failed. The counsel appointed to defend Dénes Pusoma only met his "client" at the trial, and if he had ever read the trial documents, he failed to notice the blatant inconsistencies in the prosecution's case; he even failed to tell his client that he had a right of appeal. (The lack of an appeal was later used as an argument for rejecting the claim for compensation.)

Dénes Pusoma, on the evidence of the court transcripts, did not understand what was happening to him: all along he simply waited for those he deemed wiser than himself to come to their senses and let him go home. Instead he was placed on a conveyor belt that kept moving on smoothly and unchecked; when it stopped he had been turned into a convicted felon. He would have waited out his six-year prison sentence nice and quietly, too, had it not been that, by some miracle, the police found the real culprit a year and a half later. Even then it took another three months

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before Dénes Pusoma, having spent a total of 26 months incarcerated, was released.

This is where investigative journalists and Elemér Magyar, the 'Gypsies' lawyer' from the Ethnic Minorities Legal Defence Bureau, entered the picture. Magyar undertook to present Dénes Pusoma's case to the court and to the public (he subsequently wrote a documentary play about it). The naïve and functionally illiterate young Roma thought for a short while that he'd had a lucky break and was onto a winner. He daydreamed about buying a little house, a small car, a power tool for odd-jobbing with and even some Mozart LPs. His lawyer did urge him to be patient but, in retrospect, it is clear that even before his troubles started Dénes had been a disturbed young man. However, even someone much stronger than him would have had difficulty in coming to terms with what he had undergone at the hands of the police and courts, with the years he had spent in prison all the while knowing he was innocent, with his unexpected release, with media fame and with the prospect of receiving fabulous damages—actually 2.6 million forints (just over €10,000). As the affair wore on, Elemér Magyar found himself up against the resistance of the authorities who were protecting one another's backs and hiding behind a clause in a 1973 statute. Dénes Pusoma sold his shanty and squandered the proceeds (that wasn't hard, only around €400), moved into the cemetery in order to "get used to the place", then three days later hanged himself in a nearby wood. That was ten years ago, in 1997. In 2003 the Constitutional Court annulled the regulation that had contributed to his death as being incompatible with a state founded on the rule of law.

So much for the bare facts, which are laid out logically and in full by Norbert Komenczi's film. *Grinder* is much more than a simple documentary, however. We can only feel anger at the spectacle of a dysfunctional system that denies justice by taking refuge behind the letter of an outdated law, and the damage this does to the supposedly sacrosanct principle of equality before the law. We are inevitably forced to reflect on how many more people have gone through the grinder in cases far less serious than this, which were thus settled even more swiftly and unscrupulously. There is no cast-iron proof that Dénes Pusoma was at a further disadvantage through being a Roma; something similar could happen to anyone poor, uneducated and vulnerable, Roma or non-Roma. Add pre-judice to disadvantage, however, and the situation becomes catastrophic. *Grinder* is fashioned as a tautly-structured drama, so taut that the standard one hour seems to pass in a flash. The director and his cinematographer, István Dala, have taken great pains over the pictorial world: their use of a winding road leading to the village, which serves both as a metaphor and to bridge scenes, hits absolutely the right note. The film's greatest strengths, though, lie in its people and the editing of them, their statements backing up or counterpointing one another all the way through, to build the story into a rounded whole. The journalist and the lawyer take the lead, articulating the case with expert knowledge; relatives and acquaintances supply personal details, while two of the villagers, Uncle Béla and Auntie Manci, dramatically charge the story through their patterns of emotional identification or rejection. Auntie Manci, guided by deep-rooted racial prejudice, remains unshakably convinced to the present day of Dénes's guilt, and she is every bit as biased as the police were in her selection of facts and motives to suit her views. In sharp contrast is wise, unflappable, warm-hearted Uncle Béla; it is he who restores one's faith in humanity, and it is through his words that the film provides such a cathartic experience.

There is a parable here from which those working in the judicial system might have

done well to learn. It could have given sense and dignity to Dénes Pusoma's sad life and death if everyone concerned had taken the case sufficiently to heart to ensure that this would never happen again. What is a gross miscarriage of justice, however, has had no consequences: no inquiry has taken place, no one has been held responsible—despite the fact that, within just a few years, two more cases have come to light involving similarly grave miscarriages of justice. In both cases, the suspects were again Roma and the charge was, again, murder. In one, the Gán brothers were held in custody for fifteen months on suspicion of committing murder for gain; in the other, the Burkas, father and son, served almost six years of a prison sentence. Inquiries have again been dispensed with, though at least—maybe not entirely unconnected with the ground-breaking case of Dénes Pusoma—the victims have in the end, albeit not without difficulty, received some financial redress.

Although *Grinder* has garnered plaudits and prizes, it has reached relatively few cinema-goers. But the story attracted the attention of Elemér Ragályi. The Pusoma case has been turned into a feature film by him, based on Elemér Magyar's above-mentioned docu-drama. Ragályi's *No Mercy* is able to provide a valid diagnosis because it does not seek to make scapegoats of specific individuals, nor does it find the explanation in the malice or prejudice of the investigating police officers or the judge. It finds it in how the Hungarian police service operates—a system that Komenczi aptly called "the grinder". Both films present the spectacle of a horrifyingly soulless machine. The in-built checks and balances have failed in succession, each of the protagonists—the accused, his cell-mate, the policeman, the defence lawyer, the judge—twists and turns in the runaway machine, which now moves solely according to its own rules.

Behind them lurk systemic faults which are exacerbated by the fact that those who are supposed to be serving justice are unwilling to confront the failures in this and comparable cases. The police and the Public Prosecution Office are protesting to the present day that they did not set a foot wrong, and that Dénes Pusoma caused his own downfall by displaying "deceptive behaviour". Ragályi, while reconstructing the events with documentary truthfulness, deploys all the devices of the feature film—wonderful acting, atmospheric camera work, dream sequences—to make unfamiliar situations and figures something that viewers can experience directly. Emotionally unstable, not exactly sharp-witted or saintly, the young Roma is an unlikely movie hero. Yet, as portrayed by Gábor Nagypál, he is nevertheless able to arouse our affection and compassion. The makers of the film, to their great credit, have studiously avoided all the clichés of prison and courtroom dramas. In one scene Dénes watches an episode in the American TV series *Petrocelli* in which the lawyer pulls out all the stops to secure his innocent client's release. This is something Dénes himself can only dream about. It is no coincidence that the director has a background as a superb cameraman: here, with his own son, Márton Ragályi, behind the camera, he is able to create a powerful pictorial world, beautifully highpointed by the music at exceptionally dramatic points in the story.

No Mercy is more than an important new film. Following its premiere, something long awaited actually came to pass: the court that was proceeding on the Pusoma case finally ordered an inquiry into what lessons could be learnt from the affair. And it was decided that lay assessors from minority (i.e. Roma) groups were to be brought into the work of local magistrate's courts. ❧

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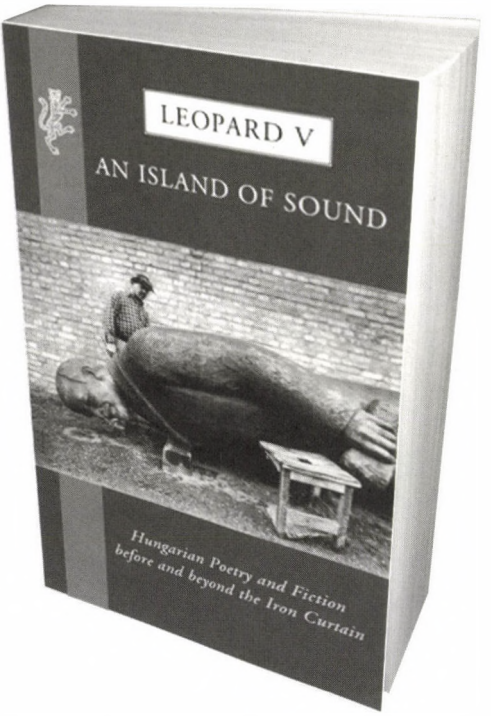

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The shape is captivating: from a roundish base rises a crested superstructure, almost like the helmet of the Spanish Conquistadors, with symmetric protrusions on each side. The most important feature of the graceful "Gömböc" (or "Gomboc" as it will inevitably be called in English) is that it is self-righting. For a short time it is possible to balance it on its unstable point o equilibrium, i.e. the top, but it takes only the slightest breath of wind, a fleck o dust, or an uneven table, to restore it to its upright stance.

From **Turtles, Eggs and the "Gömböc"** *by Zoltán Barotányi, pp. 43–47.*